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**Family Stories : oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Metawai- Indonesia**

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**Citation**

Tulius, J. (2012, December 11). *Family Stories : oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Metawai- Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20262>

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**Author:** Tulus, Juniator

**Title:** Family stories : oral tradition, memories of the past, and contemporary conflicts over land in Mentawai - Indonesia

**Issue Date:** 2012-12-11

## Family Stories





# Family Stories

Oral Tradition, Memories of the Past, and Contemporary  
Conflicts over Land in Mentawai – Indonesia

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. P.F. van der Heijden,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
te verdedigen op dinsdag 11 december 2012  
klokke 10.00 uur

door

JUNIATOR TULIUS

Geboren te Muara Siberut in 1975

## **Promotiecommissie**

### ***Promotores:***

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Prof. dr. G.A. Persoon

### ***Overige leden:***

Prof. dr. J.J. Fox (Australian National University)

Prof. dr. D.E.F. Henley

Prof. dr. Patricia Spyer

This book is dedicated to:

Teu Monika Tenna Sanene (my father's mother)

Teu Agustinus Salakkau (my mother's father) and

Teu Jaasa Satoko (my late grandfather's brother in kinship)

One by one passed away in three different periods of fieldwork while I was away from them.

ISBN 978-94-6203-160-9

Cover photo: © Juniator Tulus (2004)

Teu Jaasa Satoko telling his family story in the hamlet of Sarabua,  
Saliguma village on Siberut Island in December 2004

Layout: Sjoukje Rienks, Amsterdam

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## Acknowledgments

This research could not have been accomplished without financial and administrative support from several institutions and groups of people. Therefore, I would like to thank the Maatschappij voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek in de Tropen (Treub-Maatschappij), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the former Research School for Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), which has been replaced by Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), and the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University for institutional and financial support of my research.

I also express my gratitude to the provincial government of West Sumatra and the governmental district of Mentawai Archipelago for permitting me to carry out fieldwork in the region. I am very grateful for the hospitality offered by Prof. Dr. Imran Manan of the University of Negeri Padang, who supervised me with great effort while I was in Indonesia doing fieldwork. I thank Rita DeCoursey for correcting the English of the book. My gratitude also goes to Sjoukje Rienks for editing the manuscript.

Furthermore, this research could not have been accomplished without the help of many individuals who guided me during fieldwork. I therefore would like to express my gratitude to the Mentawaians who kindly told me their family stories and showed me their nice villages and natural surroundings. I had a great time while visiting all those villages of the Mentawai Archipelago with my two cousins, Agustinus Jhon Satoko and Jamaludin Sageileppa in Siberut, and my father Eugenius Nangi Satoko who patiently accompanied me while visiting particular places in the west coast of Mentawai Islands. Moreover, I would like to thank a few people in Siberut, namely Samuel Gultom, Tengtati Siribetug, Hendrikus Napitupulu, and their families for their hospitality. I also thank Koen Meyers for our great time while working together on Siberut for the Siberut Biosphere Reserve programme of UNESCO – Jakarta Office. In Sipora, my gratitude is for the family of Heike and Panulis Saguntung, and Maruli Samongilailai, and in Pagai to Hendri Simanjuntak and his wife.

I am deeply grateful to my mother Maria Porman Salakkau, who took care of my travelling kit, especially a mosquito net, every time I set out to do fieldwork. I am grateful to my brothers, sisters and cousins living in Padang who always keep me informed about current developments in Mentawai. I specially thank Myrna Eindhoven and her parents, Mathijs W. Eindhoven and Anna Breedvelt for their great support while I was writing this book. I am happy to have my Mentawaians relatives in the Netherlands: Aurelius Yan, Herman Satoinong and their families who always make me feel at home. Many thanks are

also addressed to friends of Pencak Silat Merpati Putih in the Netherlands and some friends namely Liesbeth Ouwehand, Supriyono and his wife Ani Supriyono who encouraged me finishing this book.

## **A note on the use of Mentawai language**

Mentawai communities have been isolated in valleys and islands for relatively long time. Due to headhunting traditions and other socio-cultural reasons, Mentawaians did not frequently travelled through places. Therefore, they speak in different vernaculars. On Siberut, eleven dialects are spoken by Mentawaians and Sipora and Pagai are categorised into two additional dialects. Since 1900s, the Dutch colonials have prohibited headhunting practices and the Sakalagat communities residing in Pagai island were the first Mentawaian community that had been converted to be Protestants.

Protestant missionaries from Germany translated the Bible from German into Mentawaian and the Sakalagat dialect had been chosen to be the language of the Bible. Missionaries distributed copies of Sakalagat Bible through the Mentawai islands. A clear impact of distributing the Bible is that the majority of Mentawai people can communicate and understand each other by making use of the Sakalagat dialect. Although the majority of Mentawai people have been reading the Sakalagat Bible, the local dialects keep alive significantly.

For this research, I use several Mentawaian terms. I do not use a particular dialect therefore. The words used are understood and recognised by the majority of Mentawai people. However, the way of how to write the words for this research is adjusted to the orthography suggested by linguists, for example by Karl-Heinz (1989) as Mentawaians do not have a written tradition.



# 1

## Introduction

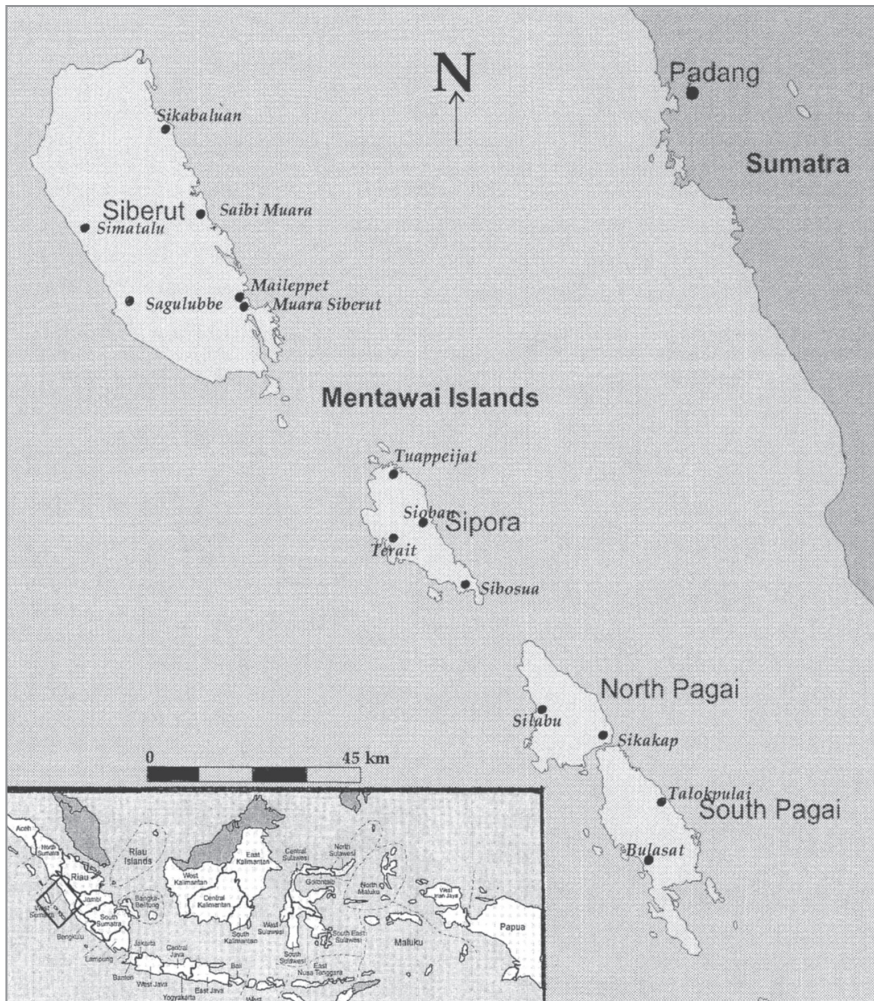
### 1.1 Research objectives and questions

This book is about Mentawai family stories. These stories tell about past events that have affected the life of Mentawai kin groups. The family stories convey how Mentawai kin groups expanded. The earliest ancestors of the kin groups left their places of origin in the Mentawai Islands due to conflicts of one kind or another. These initial kin groups migrated in different directions. During their migrations, the ancestors inhabited different places and claimed land in all these places as their own. They migrated and kept claiming land until every plot of land in Mentawai belonged to one or another kin group.

The Mentawai Islands comprise 6,011 square kilometres and were inhabited by 76,421 people in 2010<sup>1</sup> (see Map 1.1). Most of the past events told in the family stories are about the growth of the kin groups, their migratory movements and inhabitation of places, plots of land claimed, and social conflicts that affected the kin groups' lives. One category of past events that still affect the lives of current kin groups is conflicts over land. Conflicts over land not only occurred in the past, but also take place in the present. If we look at the total size of the Mentawai Islands and the total number of people living on the islands, we would conclude that land is still abundant in Mentawai. It works out to 13 people per square kilometre of land. One would therefore not expect to find serious conflicts about having or using land. When conflicts over land occur, family stories play an essential role in resolving the problems.

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1 [www.bps.go.id/hasilSP2010/sumbar/1300.pdf](http://www.bps.go.id/hasilSP2010/sumbar/1300.pdf), accessed on 20 August 2011.



**Map 1.1** The Mentawai Islands off the west coast of Sumatra<sup>2</sup>

In general, this study examines what I call family stories. Family stories are a kind of oral narratives that constitute the major carrier of Mentawai culture. Mentawaians do not practise any written tradition. They maintain their cultural values in the form of oral narratives. Mentawaians tell certain stories and transmit these stories in their family through the generations. Some oral narratives consist of general information and belong to all Mentawai communities. Mentawaians regard their oral narratives as important sources for understanding their cultural circumstances. Some oral narratives belong to particular kin groups, as they convey features of those kin groups. Such oral

<sup>2</sup> The map is based on maps found on: [nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Mentawai\\_Islands\\_Map.png](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Mentawai_Islands_Map.png) and [www.indonesiamatters.com/images/indonesia-map.gif](http://www.indonesiamatters.com/images/indonesia-map.gif). The last access was in December 2010.



narratives are the family stories of a Mentawai kin group, and they characterize and identify the kin group.

By means of family stories, Mentawai kin groups remember crucial agreements made by their ancestors in dealing with other kin groups, for instance regarding land. They also remember important words that serve as evidence that they share a family relationship with other kin groups living in other places on the Mentawai Islands. Such oral narratives pertain to historical matters and they are therefore an important element of the Mentawai oral tradition. So, the general aim of this study is to examine the role of oral narratives in the lives of Mentawaians living in the Mentawai Islands.

Stories about landownership in Mentawai often cover a long period of time. A plot of land usually belongs to a kin group or a few related kin groups. Ownership of a kin group's land is transmitted from one generation to the next within the kin group. However, land, as a whole or partly, can be sold or bestowed. Ownership of a plot of land can also be exchanged or surrendered from one kin group to another as payment for a social transaction like bride price. In order to protect their land, kin groups usually live on their land and maintain it. However, due to the early migrations, not all plots of land are situated in the current place of residence of the kin group. Over the course of many years, kin groups moved to find new places, sometimes leaving claimed land unattended and unmaintained. By moving away, the migrating kin groups become separated geographically from their unattended and unmaintained ancestral lands.

Most ancestral lands, therefore, are located in places far away from where the kin group currently live. A plot of ancestral land may thus be claimed and reclaimed by other kin groups that have migrated more recently from their initial place of origin. In the course of time, landownership in Mentawai has become uncertain. In the past decade, some people are in need of a plot of land where they can build a house and open a garden. Sometimes, people in Mentawai simply see a plot of land as a source of income, which they can sell and earn money out of. This situation has caused several conflicts in Mentawai.

When there is a conflict over a plot of land, the two opposing kin groups (or sometimes more) participate in a series of meetings in order to resolve the problems. One or more individuals are asked by the disputing kin groups to mediate the meetings. In these meetings, the kin groups rely to a large degree on oral narratives, especially family stories telling about the kin group's ownership of the contested land. Sometimes, witnesses from other kin groups are present at the meetings in order to give their oral testimony. The witnesses are expected to tell their family stories in order to endorse the claim of a particular kin group to the contested land. The process of resolving the conflicts makes use of the kin groups' family stories. So, my specific aim in this thesis is to look

at the role of family stories in the context of resolving current conflicts over ancestral land in the Mentawai Islands.

In this study I am concerned with three aspects, as follows: characteristics of oral narratives and the transmitting of knowledge of cultural values, memories of early migratory movements and the inhabitation of places, and traditional landownership and current discourses of land tenure. The understanding of these three aspects is meant to answer the central research question: *how and to what extent are oral narratives, more specifically family stories, used in dealing with current questions about places of origin, the identity of the kin groups, and the current discourse of land and land rights in Mentawai society?*

In order to answer the question, I specifically posed several questions to people during fieldwork. Do current Mentawaians know the initial place where their ancestors started to live in Mentawai? To what extent are issues of origins relevant to their current interests in claiming a plot of ancestral land? How do current Mentawaians perceive past conflicts experienced by their ancestors, the conflicts that forced the ancestors to leave their initial place? What is the relevance of past conflicts to the present situation? Why do current Mentawaians dispute rights to land if there is still a lot of land available in Mentawai? How are they able to prove their claims to a particular plot of land if their ancestors left the place long ago and they themselves have never been there? What strategies are used to win a conflict over land? How do they preserve the content of their stories over the generations? What do they think of the existence of different versions of the same story?

This study relies on oral narratives, especially family stories, as a major source of information, just as Mentawaians themselves have relied on family stories to explain how they have been living in the Mentawai Islands and how they expanded and separated into different kin groups genealogically and geographically. However, family stories not only contain information on Mentawai kin groups, but also on other past events that have affected the lives of the kin groups. Family stories as a category of oral narratives have significantly coloured Mentawai oral tradition and Mentawaians' lives.

## 1.2 Theoretical framework

Oral tradition is very important to communities that do not culturally practice a written tradition. Even among communities with a written tradition, oral tradition still plays an essential role as a source of early information before information was documented into written accounts. Oral tradition consists of various types of oral narratives that have several elements, marking differences between types of oral narratives. Scholars of oral tradition therefore categorize oral narratives into particular genres.

In this theoretical section, I specifically examine the concept of family story in order to reveal its significance and characteristics. I look to see which category family stories may best fit into, according to definitions by other scholars. My discussion of family stories is included as part of the discussion of oral tradition and oral narratives because some elements of oral tradition and oral narratives are also characteristics of the family story.

Most categories of oral narratives described in the scholarly literature have to do with stories that belong to a whole community (or village). In Mentawai, there is a category of oral narratives that do not seem to fit into categories previously defined by other researchers, namely what I call 'family stories'. Family stories differ from other oral narratives in being associated with one particular kin group – rather than with the whole village (in which several kin groups usually live side by side). Family stories may serve to emphasize what is special about this kin group and its history. Furthermore, family stories in Mentawai form a historical record of land claims made by that kin group. Because no existing category of oral narratives was available, I have coined the term 'family story' to refer to this category of oral narratives.

Performance or the act of narrating; performers and storytellers; and listeners or audience are some of the elements of oral tradition that I examine. Thereafter, I look at functions, roles and issues of versions in oral narratives, especially as applied to the family story. Later, I evaluate the content of family stories and consider motifs and themes. At the end of this discussion, I treat the power of collective and individual memory. Maurice Halbwachs wrote an important study of memory under the title of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1952). (An English translation by Lewis A. Coser was published in 1992.) I use some ideas discussed by Halbwachs to understand collective memory. But first, I look at terms used by scholars to distinguish several genres of oral narratives; in this way we can arrive at the position of the family story in existing scholarship on oral tradition. By understanding the concept of oral tradition, I can define the concept of the family story.

### ***Oral traditions, oral narratives, and family stories***

Jan Vansina has studied oral traditions from communities in several parts of the globe. Along with the results of his research, Vansina states:

Oral traditions are historical sources of a special nature. Their special nature derives from the fact that they are 'unwritten' sources couched in a form suitable for oral transmission, and that their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings (Vansina, 1973: 1).

By 'oral traditions', Vansina means to include 'reported statements' in the form of verbal testimonies (Vansina, 1973: 19). To my point of view, reported statements of verbal testimonies are the same as oral narratives. And the sustain-

ability of oral significance indeed relies on memories of certain individuals (leaders of groups) and particular groups of people (several elders of groups or community).

In her book, Finnegan (1992: 5-17; 142-157) mentions several genres of oral tradition: mythical stories or mythical tales, poems, riddles, folktales, fairytales, fables, legends, mantras, norms and other kinds of verbal arts. Surveying the large scholarly literature on the scope, methodology and history of folklore, Finnegan (1992: 11) notes that the term 'folklore' is often used by scholars of oral tradition to refer to stories, narratives, poetry, song, riddles, and proverbs collected from different communities. However, stories come in a wide variety and they comprise different meanings. Therefore, the term 'folklore', at least to me, does not obviously convey historical matters that are important events for family or community.

Scholars of oral tradition specify the historical occurrences that have affected a family or community with a particular term. Sometimes, the term 'narrative' is used to refer to several categories of oral tradition. Finnegan (1992: 39) uses the term 'narrative' to accommodate all stories of human beings. Narrative includes stories that are present at all times, in all places and in all societies as exemplified in *South Pacific Oral traditions* by Finnegan and Orbell (1995).

In order to describe narratives, Edward M. Bruner (1986b) mentions their key elements, which are story, discourse, and telling:

The *story* is the abstract sequence of events, systematically related, the syntagmatic structure. *Discourse* is the text in which the story is manifested, the statement in a particular medium such as a novel, myth, lecture, film conversation, or whatever. *Telling* is the action, the act of narrating, the communicative process that produces the story in discourse (Bruner, 1986b: 145).

With the element of *story*, we are informed about events that are described structurally and systematically so that we fully understand how the events occurred and what they can tell us. With the element of *discourse*, the abstract sequence of events is manifested in structured texts in a particular medium. Structured texts of the abstract sequence of events are categorized into particular types of stories. With the element of *telling*, the act of narrating means to perform. By the performance of telling a story, we communicate the sequence of events to the audience in particular ways in particular circumstances. However, storytelling may not be politicized in order to maintain the imperative clarity of liturgical language and performance (Ernst, 1999: 88). In telling, a storyteller has particular gestures while giving his speech or narrating his story. Rubin (1995: 114) analyzes McNeill's system (1987) in seeing gestures as iconic and holistic rather than arbitrary. Gestures by McNeill are seen as a window through which to view speech production. For instance, in one exam-

ple, a gesture of holding and throwing a spear to illustrate how a person shoots his enemy in headhunting raid while a storyteller narrates his headhunting story in which moment he is not holding the spear at all. So, 'narrative' is the common term referring to oral accounts, and some of those oral accounts contain historical information about families.

However, the term 'narrative' still needs to be specified in order to point out a specific importance of Mentawai family stories. The word 'oral' is sometimes needed to distinguish particular narratives that relate an event orally and the word 'historical' is used to emphasize events that have occurred in the past. These historical events are perceived by family members or members of a community as important occurrences. Therefore, they need to preserve them by continuing to tell stories about the events.

The historical significance told in narratives is simply the history of the family or community. Scholars of oral tradition employ the term 'oral historical narrative' to designate stories that recount crucial past events and are transmitted orally through generations. After all, different genres of oral narratives to some extent specify particular elements of oral tradition, and those genres in common sense are similar: they communicate verbal structured ideas of something that happened in the past.

Among the approaches used in the study of oral tradition, local people's perspective on perceiving their particular circumstances is used to appraise the local situation. The importance of this approach is considered by Basso (1996), who finds out that the Western Apache people of Cibecue have different narratives that each have a different historical significance and therefore they have different 'historical tales'. By using different terms to define different narratives of oral tradition, Basso tries to understand the life of local people with reference to the local people's perspective in seeing themselves through the context of his research and the place where the local people live (see also other examples in *Sense of Place* edited by Feld & Basso, 1996).

Basso (1996: 48) follows the classification made by Apache people, with the intention of getting closer to an interpretation of native claims about the symbolic importance of geographical features and personalized relationships that individuals may have with them. An important native claim is about events that have occurred in the past but have significance to comprise their 'history'. The medium that is used to maintain such information is called a 'historical tale'. As some historical tales concern a particular family, they are defined as 'family historical tales' and the discourse of tales is about family history.

The Mentawai family story conveys information about the past and about the identity of the family or kin group to whom the story belongs. So, I use the phrase 'oral tradition' to group together different genres of oral narratives. For the different structured statements or the abstract sequence of events, I use the term 'oral narratives'. In order to express 'oral historical significances' of family

or kin group, I use the term 'family story', telling about past events that have affected a family or kin group. In the next section, I aim to characterize features of the family story.

***Performance, performers, and audiences***

In terms of performance, Mentawai family stories differ from other oral narratives in which moment they are told. Oral narratives that are appropriate for communal audiences can be told in public or in the presence of different groups of people. Mythical tales, legends and historical narratives, which pertain to a community, are mostly told by members of the community in a variety of circumstances. There is almost no secret hidden from community members because those narratives belong to the community.

It is slightly different in the case of family stories, which are told in specific circumstances. A common moment to do so is at family gatherings. Most social gatherings take place during rituals and ceremonials. Family members often come together when one of their members passes away. After the burial ceremony, family members gather and listen to stories about the dead person and about other events concerning their family or kin group. Or, they tell a story when a new baby is born to the family and extended family members come to celebrate the birth. This also applies to other ritual rites because particular family stories relate to particular stages of life.

Sometimes, a specific story is only told in the presence of a few adult individuals of a family in order to protect the content of the story. Therefore, people make use of a moment when they are working in the garden because there are only a few people. Or they tell the story while resting in the middle of the night at home after other members are asleep. Sometimes, a story is only told from a particular individual to other particular individuals. In fact, part of the content of family stories can only be told to a limited group of people in order to maintain the secret part of the content. Furthermore, a family story belongs exclusively to a family or several related families that share the same ancestors. Due to their content, family stories have a limited audience as well as a limited number of storytellers who can tell them. Even among family members, there are particular stories that can only be listened to by a particular group of family members. Young family members are allowed to listen to the stories telling about the heroic actions of their ancestors in defending their family. However, when family stories tell about events concerning matters for adults – social conflicts like assault, headhunting, and abuse done by adults – young people are forbidden to listen to the stories.

Due to limited opportunities for listening to particular family stories, there need to be storytellers or performers who can tell the stories. Members of a kin group or community regard their family stories as an important way to preserve their historical events. Therefore, particular individuals are assigned to take the responsibility for preserving the stories. Older married men are

seen as mature enough to carry out this task, and other members trust them, because older relatives are presumed to know more and better than younger members of the family.

A family leader and a few married adults can also tell the family stories, and they select a few new adults to replace them when they get older. They transmit certain family stories before they pass away. It usually happens when they realize they are getting weak and old and soon will pass away. So, they transmit not only the family stories but also the status of family storytellers.

Nevertheless, members of the family, kin group or community realize that not all older members are capable of bearing this responsibility. Therefore, among the mature members, there are some individuals who have strong characteristics for leading the rest of the family. They are usually the ones assigned to be fully responsible for the task. Mature leaders must have a good memory to remember details of past events. And they must be good at telling the stories in such a way that other family members can easily understand the content. Elder members of a family or kin group have the capacity to remember the common familial past in their own manner, attributing the memory to their family or kin group.

### ***Functions and roles of family stories***

The explanations of oral tradition and oral narratives described by Finnegan and Vansina as well as historical tales mentioned by Basso characterize the functions of family stories in connection with historical events. Like other oral narratives, a family story functions to maintain the historical values of past events of a family or kin group. The family story is not a myth or legend, although some parts of it may sound mythical as described by a few scholars in *Sacred Narrative: readings in the theory of myth* edited by Alan Dundes (1984). The past events told in a family story construct and reconstruct the group's identity, and the materiality of place and landscape in structured words. *The Anthropology of Landscape: perspectives on place and space* edited by Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995) and *The Anthropology of Space and Place: locating culture* edited by Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) give several examples of people's strong connection to the place and space where they live. Local people's view of their landscape reflects their connection to their ancestral land and ancestors. They express their connection by means of telling narratives of landscape. Or they sing a song as happened in Malaysian rainforest communities (see Roseman, 1998).

Like other kinds of oral narratives, the functions and meanings of a family story differ from one society to another. Brigitte Boenisch-Brednich (2002) tries to understand why people attach importance to narratives. She writes: 'One could probably say that narratives are so important for everyday life, for persons, for groups and for nations because they give a comforting assurance about our existence' (Boenisch-Brednich, 2002: 75). I find her argument inter-



esting. To my point of view, this purpose is one of the meanings and functions of the family story. The stories explain about our existence.

Another supportive argument about the function of family stories is found in the research done by Basso (1996: 40), who argues that oral narratives have the power to establish enduring bonds between individuals and features of the natural landscape, as he illustrates with his research among Western Apache in North America. A similar assumption is voiced by Elizabeth Tonkin (1992). According to her research in Africa, Tonkin writes:

Oral accounts no less than written ones can be means of comment and reflection, in which different pasts are conceptualised, and, often, contradiction and failure are admitted. Historical narratives are also not just historical in the identity-forming sense; they can serve many ends, and be aesthetic elaborations, philosophical or religious discourses; by the same token ways of representing pastness include genres that can be indigenously distinguished from 'history' (Tonkin, 1992: 130-131).

So, a family story like other (oral) narratives tells about how a kin group exists and expresses their understanding of what has taken place in their collective lives.

### ***Content of family stories***

Vansina (1973: 156) says that tales concerning family history deal with the past history of lineages. He therefore states: 'Very often these family tales are no more than the outgrowths of genealogies. They explain why two branches of a family have separated and no longer live together' (Vansina, 1973: 156). Vansina's tales concerning family history indeed convey information of how a family expands into several families or kin groups. Moreover, Vansina states, 'family histories also often contain traditions of migrations from other villages, or localities usually not very distant'. Such family tales, according to Vansina (1962: 156-157), 'are often still more useful as checks on official resources, whether these consist of general or local traditions, or as checks on the history of migrations'. Regarding the explanation, Vansina's tales concerning family history of lineages seem similar to the family stories that I investigate in this study. The tales are family stories in terms of content.

However, a family story not only tells about genealogy but also gives detailed information about family expansions and family ownership of particular communal properties. Besides, a family story contains family members' knowledge of land and the natural surroundings where they live or have lived in the past. A family story also tells about daily activities of ancestors of the family. A family story sometimes includes a list of place-names. Place-names are important to particular communities. Rosaldo finds among the Ilongot community how important the narration of place-names is in an elaborate



story. He writes: 'Ilongots claim that listening to the place-names where somebody walked is just as much a story (and indeed can not be omitted from any true story) as a more fully elaborate narrative' (Rosaldo, 1986: 106).

In storytelling, place-names are recollected by imagining the places and recollecting the particular events that have occurred in those places. I have observed that members of a family or community actually illustrate figuratively the appearance of the place they are describing. By doing so, people operate a mental map to imagine their historical land and its current situation. An interesting example of this matter is given by Gold and Gujar (1997) in their research finding in Rajasthan. In the process of telling the story of a place, local people image as if they were standing or sitting at a particular spot. The recollection of place-names is usually closely related to the recollection of ancestral migratory movements. A place-name has the function of enabling listeners to picture the site based on its name.

According to Fox (1996), an important element of a family story is to define the origins of the family. The story of origin is not a mythical narrative or the story of origin that has been assimilated with the idea that has been adopted from other cultures, for instance from Christianity with its Bible. The story of Adam and Eve is currently quite common to influence the story of origin of local communities. As exemplified by Fox (1983: 15; 23) in his study on the island of Roti, the Rotinese community assimilates Biblical knowledge to their own culture, creating in the process a distinctive traditional culture. The assimilation of Christian cultural values to the local tradition does not only occur in the island of Roti but also in other communities that have been converted to be Christians. The majority of Mentawaians are Christians. I sometimes heard them telling me about the origin of Adam and Eve as the beginning of their existence. However, this kind of story of origin is not part of the content of family story that I investigate in this study.

In order to specifically look at the origin of different kin groups, I focus on specific family stories of origin. Fox assumes: 'Conceptions of ancestry are invariably important but rarely is ancestry alone a sufficient and exclusive criterion for defining origin. Recourse to notions of place is also critical in identifying persons and groups, and thus tracing origins' (Fox, 1996: 5). The family stories that tell about the origin of different kin groups are more relevant to be considered as historical narratives and also relevant to the study of family stories.

In this, the notion of genealogy is the basic concept for understanding the expansion of a family. Therefore, the notion of genealogy cannot be set apart from the notion of topogeny, as a family does not expand in one place but members of a family migrate to several different places. Accordingly, Fox introduces the notion of topogeny, which is 'the recitation of an ordered sequence of place names' (Fox, 1997: 8). Fox sees a topogeny as analogous to the

recitation of a genealogy (Fox 1997: 91). Both consist of an ordered succession of names. A topogeny can be seen as a means to order and transmit social knowledge. Both topogeny and genealogy are relevant for recollecting the migratory movements of the Mentawai ancestors. The ancestors passed through different places. The ancestors migrating from one place to other places are not always the same person.

As illustrated in family stories, the process of migration is usually carried out by several ancestors. Therefore, a list with different names of migrating ancestors is also part of the content of a family story. A storyteller has to systematically recollect the ancestors' names in order not to forget important events that have affected the family. Different plots of ancestral land are mentioned in the family story, and the place of origin from where the family commenced to expand, and current related kin groups are recollecting properly.

### *Versions and themes of family stories*

Many traditional and modern communities are still practising oral tradition. Some oral narratives belong to a community generally and some oral narratives belong solely to a particular family (or kin group). Members of communities and families are all concerned with the importance of oral narratives. They do not want the narratives to fade away from their knowledge, because most family narratives that recount significant events are historical to them. Particular oral narratives characterize the identity of families and communities. Therefore, traditional communities and families make an effort to maintain their particular oral narratives in order not to lose their identity.

A storyteller tells the stories to one or more individuals chosen to transmit the stories to the next generation. They narrate the stories to the next individuals who are chosen by talent or based on a particular social status. After passing through several generations, a family story or story of an important event that occurred in the community can be told by several individuals. Those individuals eventually tell slightly different versions of the same story. It is because words in family stories cannot be chosen for their exact sense or implication. Each storyteller has a particular way of telling a story and a storyteller's knowledge may have effect on words that they use to narrate their story. Storytellers' knowledge may affect word choices and they are aware of general themes of the story. The themes are important to be noticed and included in their storytelling.

Sometimes, a storyteller repeats the same word of action carried out by a main character told in a story. For instance, the storyteller narrates that the main character walked, walked, walked, and walked in order to be at a place, instead of telling that the main character walked for two or three days. The repetition of the same word indicates the duration of an action as well as attracting the attention of audience as the repetition of the same word is uttered in different tones.

One storyteller may focus on heroic actions of the important characters of the story. Another storyteller may concentrate on chronological acts done by the characters in the story. Another storyteller recounts occurrences like a particular conflict affecting the family or community. Although storytellers certainly narrate differing versions of the same story, they are concerned with keeping the important themes. What are considered the most important themes of a story regarding a family can be slightly different from those of a story regarding a community.

For a story regarding a family (kin group), ancestors' names, the place of origin, the family's communal properties, and the expansion of the initial family into several families are important themes. For a story about a community, several themes need to be told, including the place where the community lives and the names of the different groups of people that have built the community. In particular cases, other kin groups that do not have connection to a family story of a particular kin group are still able to tell the kin group's story. However, other kin groups do not fully recollect the details told in the story. General information is mostly mentioned during the telling while details are unknown. In another case, two different kin groups do not share the same origins and do not have any family connection but they can tell the same story. Due to migration, the groups have ever lived in the same place. A family story that initially belongs to a kin group has been heard and adopted by other kin groups. The other kin groups change slightly the story and later claim it as their family story.

Other kin groups sometimes slightly change the story by adding hilarious themes. The kin group's family story is not historical anymore. It is just an entertaining narrative to other kin groups. To other kin groups, the kin group's story does not have historical meanings and no specific reference of genealogy. To the kin group, the story is significant to be maintained and transmitted to the next generations as it provides important features of the kin group. This commonly happens in different communities.

James J. Fox (1979) finds out in his research the example of where a story is regarded as historical genealogy by a kin group and less significant or having another meaning by the other kin groups in the island of Roti situated in the southernmost of the Indonesian archipelago. The Rotinese community regards the story telling about a chronology of genealogy by reference to a particular ancestor. Fox writes that a particular genealogy is a direct uninterrupted series of names. "Any genealogy is an ordered succession of names beginning with the name of an apical ancestor and proceeding in a direct line to the name of the father of the person for whom the genealogy is intended" (Fox, 1979: 17). In this case, Fox additionally assumes "The authenticity of a particular narrative is assured if that narrative is told by the elder (or elders) who, within a lineage or clan, is considered to be the rightful (senior) descendant of the ancestor whose deeds are recounted" (Fox, 1979: 18). This means

the historical account of genealogy has particular significance to the clan (I use 'kin group' expressing a number of people living in a place because they share the same genealogical and social ties). Other narrators who are not descendants of the kin group may not easily tell this genealogy.

Social changes that have taken place within the community are another theme. Sometimes, a specific theme of a story regarding a community can be part of the content of a family story, as the family plays an important role within the community. So, there may be a variety of reasons for telling a story. Nevertheless, the general themes of the story cannot be omitted when the story is told. Themes of the story make it easier for storytellers to structure their story.

Members of a family or community can easily recognize themes of a story about particular events that have affected the family or community. The important themes of the story of an event are preserved and transmitted to following generations. Thompson (2000) assumes that they keep remembering key words. The current generation attempts to memorize what has been heard or learned from the previous generation. The nature of human memory plays a crucial role in the preservation of these historical matters. How do the memories of human beings preserve the past? This question brings me to look at the research done by Mary Margaret Steedly (1993) in North Sumatra among Bak Karo communities. To quote Steedly:

Memory is never private property and experience is never a simple matter in this overinhabited terrain; voices are always multiple, fragmented, interrupted, possessed by the memories of other people's experience. The transfer and transcription of historical experience – in names, monuments, genealogies; in collective fantasy and in the regulated social intercourse of everyday life; in law, property, and desire; in stories inhaled with the common air of a shared place or time – is the moment through which subjectivity is produced (Steedly, 1993: 22).

In short, the memories of human beings are collective and social, delimited by particular groups of people, spaces, places, and times. Halbwachs (1992: 53) calls this 'the framework of collective memory', which confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other. Furthermore Halbwachs writes 'The collective framework of memory is the result or sum or combination of individual recollections of many members of the same society.' Thus, as Coser writes, '[collective] memory needs continuous feeding from collective sources and is sustained by social and moral props' (Coser 1992: 34). Collective memory manifests itself in the traditions of families and different social groups.

### *Transmission and memory*

Memory plays an important role in preserving past events. The interconnections of memory, cognition and past events help people to understand about themselves. Language allows us to reconstruct our past and storytelling allows us to be familiar with the past events at every moment.

Speaking of memory and oral tradition, Carsten (1995) looks at the case of certain Southeast Asian peoples who have been represented as afflicted by 'structural amnesia' or 'genealogical amnesia', forgetting who their ancestors were. Referring to the Malaysian island of Langkawi, Carsten (1995: 319) writes that people from other parts of Southeast Asia had come to Langkawi for a variety of reasons. They currently affirm themselves as Langkawi people, instead of seeing themselves as coming from Sumatra, Singapore, or Malaysia. According to Carsten, new generations of migrants in Langkawi are not interested in maintaining their initial origins in order to be acknowledged politically as Langkawi inhabitants. Consequently, 'there is no systematic attempt to maintain tradition or memories of ancestors who have come from elsewhere' (Carsten, 1995: 320). In this case, they not only created kinship through a social and political context, but also established a newly created shared identity (Carsten 1995: 318: 329-330; see also Geertz and Geertz 1964 for a Balinese context of 'genealogical amnesia').

However, the question is how far the communities are able to reduce the memory of their past if they have a strong connection to their ancestors and ancestral culture. With reference to the Rotinese, Fox (1980: 65) states 'By reducing the memory of the past events to the merest anecdote, a rich oral tradition is able to embellish ancestral action in accordance with the needs of members of kin groups that suit present circumstances.' In order to explain this phenomenon, I follow the idea of Halbwachs (1992: 172) that forgetting almost always results from a distraction, which is often explained by the disappearance of frameworks of memory or a part of them, either because people's attention is no longer able to focus on them or because it is focused somewhere else. So, the issue of forgetting is political.

Instead of forgetting, most people try to remember the important events of their past. Davis and Starn argue that 'one's memory of any given situation is multiform and that its many forms are situated in place and time from the perspective of the present' (1989: 2). People refer to particular places and moments that may remind them of certain occurrences and they convey those matters in storytelling. Davis and Starn (1989: 5) note that people remember events that occurred in the recent past, which were experienced by themselves, as well as events in the 'old past', which have been undergone by their ancestors. I see this as historical representations in places and time through the power of recollecting the past experience of different family generations. Seeing this, I agree with Fentress and Wickham (1992) that family stories are mnemonic devices for bringing past events to the present. Family stories rep-

resent the high potential of human consciousness of past events. This is one of the characteristics of stories: to manifest cognitive functions of human beings (Rubin, 1995: 302-303).

Cultural objects are not to be categorized as part of oral tradition. However, a lot of objects serve to remind people of something. Particular objects are made for particular events and the events have their stories. Communal objects are important to a community because objects refresh people's memory of particular past events. Objects and events become arranged in people's thought in order to remind them about the chronological order of events and the names and meanings of the objects themselves and the events, all of which contribute to their identity.

Hoskins (1998: 9) notes, objects can be invested with great significance, in both the collective representation of the past and the individual storing of biographical memory. Cultural objects are mnemonic devices. Hoskins (1998: 3) states that particular objects may clearly expose which kin groups are perceived as sharing the same relationship ancestrally, and which kin groups are perceived as 'other'. So cultural objects may help people to remember their relatives. Past occurrences can be materialized in the present in the form of historical accounts, cultural objects, and storytelling.

### 1.3 Research methods

My research included a period of study of the literature and three periods of fieldwork. At the stage of study of the literature, information about Mentawai was explored in published and unpublished documents. Most of the published documents were found in Leiden University Library and in the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in the Netherlands. Most of the unpublished documents, such as government reports, local statistics produced by government agencies, and private research enterprises, were gathered in Indonesia. I also took the opportunity given by Professor Reimar Schefold to look through his private collection of stories gathered during his fieldwork in Mentawai between 1963 and 1976.

I closely inspected maps of the Mentawai Islands drawn in 1930-1934 by the Dutch colonial government, found in the collection of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam. Place-names and topographical features mentioned on those maps helped me locate settlements at that time. I found clues to changes in place-names and the significance of the changes to the current situation in Mentawai. Place-names mentioned in family stories are noted on maps showing the geographical expansion of Mentawai ancestors in Chapter 9.

### 1.3.1 Fieldwork

I spent three periods doing fieldwork in Siberut, Sipora, South Pagai, and North Pagai. The first visit, for six weeks in 2002, was to investigate general aspects of ancestral stories. For eight months in 2004 I conducted the main fieldwork, collecting family stories from selected Mentawai kin groups. Most of the stories are ones that give information on early migratory movements, the splitting up of initial kin groups, and the occupation of various places in the Mentawai archipelago. During the last period of fieldwork, for three months in 2006, I focused on conflicts over ancestral and private lands.

Before conducting fieldwork, I was already familiar with particular family stories that tell that the first people of the Mentawai Islands lived in Siberut in a valley called Simatalu. According to these stories, the first settlers departed from a place of origin on Siberut and moved south over the island. They first inhabited Siberut, and most of the groups remained in Siberut while a few families pioneered and moved on to the island of Sipora. The majority of the kin groups migrating to Sipora stayed there, while a few moved further, to the Pagai Islands. Even after these groups had occupied the Pagai Islands, the waves of migration did not stop. Some of the families residing in Siberut later followed the path of their relatives who had left to settle in Sipora and Pagai. Sometimes, though that happened rarely, families that had gone to live in Sipora or Pagai returned to Siberut to visit their relatives. Those residing in Siberut were pleased to find out what had happened in Sipora and Pagai, owing to the return of their migrating relatives.

After studying these stories illustrating the course of migration towards the south, I eventually started focusing on Sipora. The geographical position of Sipora in between Siberut and Pagai was an ideal place to start the fieldwork as well as to assess Mentawaians' memory of the past and find out whether Mentawaians would remember or forget their origins. I hoped that kin groups in Sipora would inform me about their ancestors and the location of their ancestral lands. Based on the information gathered on Sipora, I selected several kin groups of Mentawaians. I then attempted to reconstruct the family relationships that may exist among these kin groups. I asked members of the kin groups I had selected to advise me on which individuals or storytellers I should get in touch with in order to get information about their ancestors' migratory movements.

After getting information from these individuals, I went on to locate other groups that might have links to these kin groups. After exploring Sipora, I returned to Siberut in order to trace the information mentioned in the kin groups' stories. I started by investigating villages in the southern part of the island. Thereafter, I gradually explored the middle part of Siberut before eventually reaching the northern part of the island. I ended my exploration in villages on the west coast of the island. After completing my fieldwork in Siberut,



I went to the Pagai Islands, where I spent several weeks exploring the main villages of North and South Pagai.

### 1.3.2 Data collection

I had a certain familiarity with villages of the Mentawai Islands because of my travels over the islands while carrying out research for my bachelor's degree in 1999. I got in touch with different kin groups easily, as they knew me as a Mentawaian. In order to interpret cultural values and stories told in different dialects, I relied on my knowledge and experience as a Mentawaian. My training as an anthropologist allowed me to make use of different approaches in the process of data collection. I explained my background and made contact with informants several times so that they became better acquainted with me. This created more understanding among us. I relied on particular methods suggested by scholars such as Bruner (1986b) and Bernard (1994). Bruner specifically suggests:

First we tell the people why we are there, what information we are seeking, and how we intend to use the data. In the second telling we take this verbal and visual information and process it, committing it to writing in our field diaries. (Bruner, 1986b: 147-8)

By following such guidelines, I was able to gather a lot of significant oral accounts.

While gathering information from Mentawaians, scholar-informant relationships frequently shifted to friendship between us as fellow Mentawaians. However, I had to be aware of what I was recording. I kept my attention focused on the goals of the interview. Nevertheless, because of my being Mentawaian, information was gathered more easily. The interview was the most important technique in collecting my data. Following a few suggestions by Bernard (1994: 208-215), I did not make structured questionnaires but prepared a few major questions that guided me in interviewing my informants.

Most informants were above fifty years of age. Some informants were literate, as they had attended primary school for a few years when they were young. The rest were absolutely illiterate, especially those above seventy years of age. Those who were illiterate usually did not know exactly when they were born. To indicate approximately when they were born, some informants referred to the times when Dutch colonists or Japanese soldiers were still occupying the Mentawai Islands, or they recounted an event at the time of their birth, according to what their parents told them later.

Whether literate and illiterate, the key informants had a variety of occupations, and included a retired head of a governmental village, a retired policeman, a schoolteacher, a government official, a kin group leader, a sub-district



employee, a shaman, a church elder, and a head of household. I carefully noted whether informants did or did not once visit their place of origin. A small number of informants had visited their places of origins once or twice in order to visit relatives and become familiar with ancestral places. However, many informants had never visited their place of origin. This point is crucial for my research. If my informant has never been to his place of origin, yet the family story he tells is very similar to the family story told by his distant relatives in that place of origin (and he has never met those relatives), then the story is more likely to be reliable, or to contain accurate information. If, on the other hand, my informant has visited his relatives and heard their stories, the chance is great that the story he tells will be influenced by the stories he heard from his relatives.

My fieldwork was not one long success story, however. I occasionally came across difficulties in collecting information. Sometimes I figured out that informants had not frankly informed me about what I needed to know. I had hoped that my informants would tell me particular details like names of victims or kin groups killed by their ancestors during headhunting raids. Such information was not easy to get. As an anthropologist, I sometimes observed significant changes in their tone of voice and their body language while telling me a story; I took this to signify that they were hiding something from me. Edward M. Bruner has commented on such nonverbal sources of knowledge (1986a: 4): 'By experience we mean not just sense data, cognition [...] but also feelings and expectations.' My fieldwork experience taught me that it is very important to pay attention to body language and changes in tone of voice.

As another example of this, some Mentawaians residing in Sipora and Pagai did not forthrightly tell me their family stories, as they knew I was a Mentawaian from Siberut. I fully understood that they might be suspicious about me in telling me their family stories. They saw me as a Mentawaian from another kin group and from another island of Mentawai. Instead of answering my questions, they sometimes told me insignificant stories. This showed their unwillingness to tell me important stories. I recognized the meaning of such behaviour because I had experienced it in other circumstances. Nevertheless, one thing I did not forget in such situations was the essential thing that Briggs writes about in his book on focusing and how to ask about difficult and sensitive issues (Briggs, 1986). He suggests that the researcher sometimes has to break the boundaries separating the researcher from the informants. I followed the suggestion in my research by speaking the local dialect and respecting my informants like my own grandfather, uncle, sister or brother while talking to them. Eventually, they accepted me and told their family stories to me.

An informant's voice and attitude frequently changed when visitors interrupted our conversation. Moreover, my informants did not really want to tell me their story if they were not really sure that their information would be used

properly for my research study instead of for my own personal interest (for example to acquire land rights for myself). Informants mostly took some time to explore whether they could trust me. They carried out their own research on me before responding to my research questions.

After interviewing, the majority of them were grateful to receive a small gift for their time. They did not regard it as payment for what they had told me, but regarded it as accepting a gift from 'a new friend'. A few informants were eager to endow me with their hospitality and they insisted on doing that for free because I was carrying out research on Mentawai. For them, such research is essential in the effort to sustain Mentawai culture. In fact, very few people have spent time researching the historical aspects of Mentawaians.

### 1.3.3 Data analysis

The process of collecting data is dissimilar to the process of presenting data. Although I began my research in Sipora, my interpretation of data began with accounts gathered from Siberut island and further to Sipora and Pagai. I thus followed the migratory movements of the majority of Mentawaians as told in their family stories. All stories were transcribed directly in the Mentawai language, as they were recorded, and translated by me into English. Sometimes, I added some explanation of circumstances occurring during the interview. This helped me to understand particular cultural contexts while the storytellers narrated their stories. In fact, a cultural context can be easily recognised by noticing community's daily activities. However, particular cultural values need to be approached in certain ways in order to fully grasp their meanings. Even though, the ways do not always cover the whole aspects of culture of a community. By reading *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Geertz (1973), I realize that 'Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete' (Geertz, 1973: 29). Nevertheless, I try to closely bring the meaning of particular Mentawai culture to the scholarly discussion of oral literature.

For the safekeeping of secrets of the families that allowed me to record their stories, particular details of their stories such as the exact boundaries of plots of ancestral land and information on headhunting raids are not revealed clearly. Some individual names of ancestors are also hidden, as some particular cases of headhunting raids involving the families' ancestors are still open. In fact, some kin groups whose ancestors were victims of headhunting raids still keep the memory of those events, even though the headhunting tradition was ended several generations ago. Someday in the future, these families will ask kin groups that killed their ancestors for payment (compensation) for the deaths.

Stories are analysed in order to find out their main themes. Those themes include migratory movements of the ancestral families and kin groups' own-

ership of plots of ancestral land. In relation with the migratory movements, I provide maps, based on the family stories.

## 1.4 Organization of the book

The book is divided into three parts and each part comprises three chapters. The first part provides discusses social organization and Mentawaians' cultural values with specific regard to land and family stories. In Chapter 2 I describe geographical features of the places where the research was carried out. The ethnography of Mentawaians is important to the present in order to be acquainted with their socio-cultural characteristics that make their culture different to other cultures of island populations off the west coast of Sumatra (Persoon and Ossewijer, 2002). This matter is examined in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 I focus on stories telling about the origins of the first inhabitants of Mentawai, to find out how Mentawaians think of their origins and how their origins may be linked to where their ancestral lands are located. Mentawaians consider their plots of ancestral land important, carrying a lot of meanings. To Mentawaians, their ancestral lands are material in the sense that they can physically return to the land where their ancestors commenced the life of their kin group. Their ancestral lands are also abstract when they imagine the place and its surroundings by listening to stories about their ancestors. In the three chapters of the second part, I focus on family stories telling about the geographical and genealogical expansion of several Mentawai kin groups. I present and examine several versions of three selected family stories of past occurrences: the mango story, the pig story, and the wild boar story. The three stories share certain themes. They all describe conflicts that pushed a kin group to move away from its initial place in order to seek new dwelling-places. Some of these migrating kin groups passed through several dwelling-places before eventually settling down permanently. The stories also describe the plots of land occupied (in the past) and claimed by the kin groups. Another function of the stories is to explain or document how new kin groups came into existence. They all started from a handful of initial kin groups.

Nevertheless, each story contains information that differentiates it from the other stories. The mango story shows the agricultural aspect of Mentawai culture. This story is analysed in Chapter 7 together with other stories and oral narratives of Mentawaians. The pig story speaks of animal husbandry in Mentawai and also exemplifies the process of migration and separation of families of a kin group, which is looked at in more detail in Chapter 9. The wild boar story in Chapter 7 portrays the process of hunting in the traditional situation. The story is used in Chapter 10 in the discussion of current conflicts over land. In the discussion of family stories in Chapter 8, I identify themes and characteristics of each of the three main stories. The process of migration and sep-

aration of kin groups is the subject of Chapter 9, and is relevant for claims made to particular plots of land. Current conflicts over rights to particular plots of land are described and examined in Chapter 10, where two cases are discussed at length. One case represents the traditional situation and the other represents the current situation, where the government intervened in the land conflict by changing the location of a traditional settlement and by mobilizing groups of people living in the interior of one of the islands in order to occupy a government village. While discussing the current conflicts, I also show how family stories are used to help a kin group win the conflict. The conclusion presents some answers to the main research question and correlates empirical and theoretical discussion with the research findings.



# Part One



Part One describes the Mentawai archipelago, its inhabitants and their social organization and culture. Several places occupied by Mentawaiian ancestors in the early migrations are noted, as well as the names of those places. Population growth and genealogical and social groups are discussed. I also explain the traditional customs of Mentawaians, including their economy. Kinship is the centre of social organization, and traditional land rights are scrutinized. Both social organization and land rights are based on kin groups. Some kin groups believe they have the same origin. In order to understand the notion of origin I evaluate several stories of origin.



# 2

## Characteristics of the islands and of Mentawaians

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe characteristics of the four largest islands of the Mentawai archipelago – Siberut, Sipora, and North and South Pagai (see Map 1.1 in Chapter 1) – where my research was carried out. Research findings by Schefold (1979, 1988, 1989a,) and Nooy-Palm (1968) on traditional situations in Mentawai are useful for their extensive descriptions of traditional dwellings and the kinship system of Mentawaians. Descriptions of historical developments and governmental aspects of the islands are provided by Loeb (1928) and Persoon (1994).

Next I discuss factors that may have caused the population of Mentawai to fluctuate, or more precisely that may explain why Mentawai's population has increased so slowly. I will not re-evaluate historical accounts of the Mentawai Islands and their population prior to 1985, as Persoon and Schefold (1985), Schefold (1988), Mess (1870; 1881), Wirz (1929/30), and Reeves (1999) have discussed these in detail. Only a few accounts of social, economic and political developments in Mentawai are considered for comparison purposes. Place-names are discussed to show how important a place-name in Mentawai is.

Subsequently, I look at traditional settlements and social organization of Mentawaians, which contribute to the identities of Mentawai communities. Kinship is a major aspect, with the classification of social groups. I deal with the notion of kinship in Mentawai by looking at marriage and its role in social alliances between two or more kin groups. Kin groups also play a significant role in arrangements having to do with possession of communal heritage, such as land. This leads to a discussion of who may or may not claim rights of ownership to communal properties.

## 2.2 Mentawai Islands

The Mentawai Islands constitute a small archipelago situated about 100 kilometres off the western coast of Sumatra (see Map 1.1). Mentawai, currently the official name of the archipelago and its inhabitants, consists of four large islands – Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, and South Pagai – along with about 40 smaller islands. It has had various other names since Dutch explorers led by Vornelis Pietersz discovered this archipelago in the seventeenth century (Coronese 1986). The archipelago has a total landmass of 6,011 square kilometres. It is covered with tropical rainforest with high biodiversity. On the islands, large numbers of endemic species of flora and fauna are found, signifying evolutionary development separate from that of Sumatra and other islands of Indonesia. These circumstances fascinate biologists, geologists, anthropologists, and other scientists who come to study them. The results of this work are listed in the bibliography by Suzuki (1958); see also Roth (1985) and Persoon, Scheffold, de Roos and Marschall (2002).

According to a research report by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), during the Pleistocene Epoch (roughly the period from one million years ago to 10,000 years ago), the sea level in Southeast Asia was some 200 metres lower than it is today, and Sumatra was connected with Java, Borneo and mainland Southeast Asia. This allowed for a relatively free interchange of animal species and accounts for the general similarity in the fauna of the three major Sunda Shelf islands (Sumatra, Java, and Borneo) (WWF, 1980: 3). During the early Pleistocene, the Mentawai archipelago was part of the mainland of Sumatra. However, the Mentawai Islands appear to have been separated from Sumatra at least since the mid-Pleistocene and to have been essentially an oceanic archipelago for about 500,000 years, such that their flora and fauna have evolved in isolation from the dynamic evolutionary events on Sumatra and the rest of the Sunda Shelf (WWF, 1980: 3).

Verstappen (1973, as quoted in WWF, 1980: 3) suggests that the Mentawai Islands may have been uplifted at a different time from such islands as Nias and Enggano. The hills and ridges of the Mentawai Islands are all about the same height. In some areas of the Mentawai Islands are sedimentary beds that have been turned or uplifted, some of them tilted as much as 90 degrees. The hills rise steeply, almost without transition. This has resulted in a very complex drainage pattern on the islands. The major rivers separate each island into a number of river basins (Verstappen, 1973).

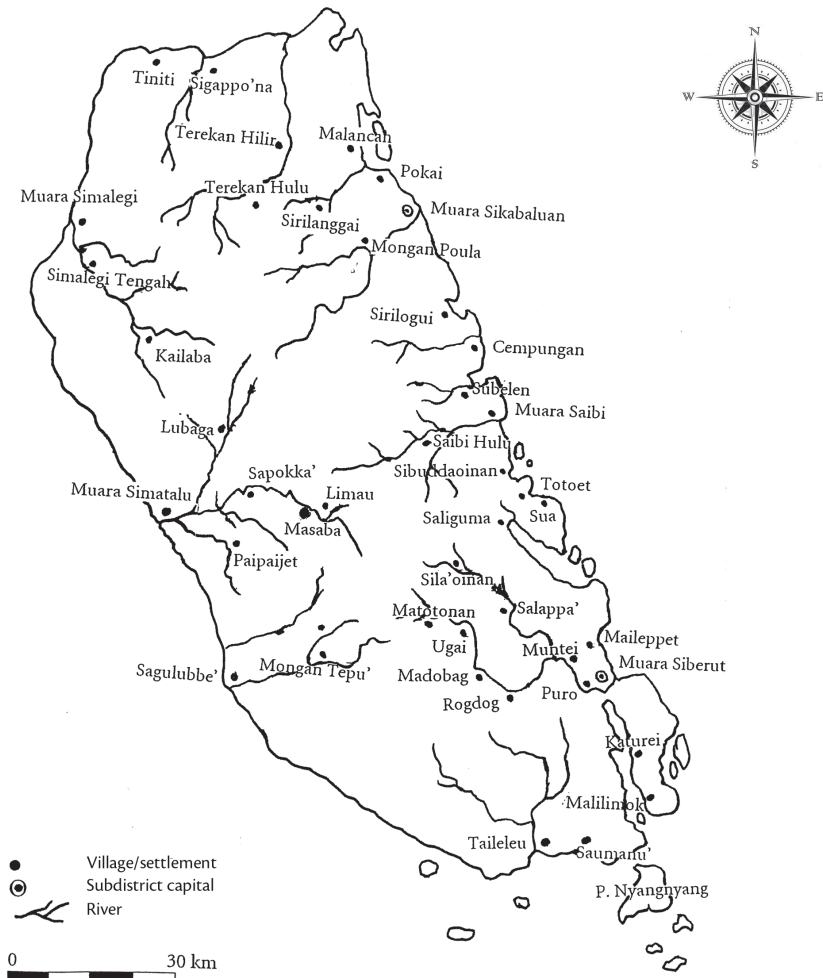
### 2.2.1 Siberut

Siberut has a total landmass of 3,838 square kilometres. Geographically, Siberut is a sedimentary island, dominated by shale, silts, and marls of relatively young age, and covered by tropical rainforests. When it rains, there is



‘an extremely high rate of normal erosion, resulting in the development of a strongly dissected, rugged landscape, with many rivers and streams and few flat-topped hills’ (WWF, 1980: 5). I assume the other islands of Mentawai suffer from a similarly high rate of erosion.

The major rivers ramble down to the lowlands separated by complicated systems of watercourses. When they reach the lowlands, they grow and level out, soon becoming larger streams and later joining to become a river. The larger rivers are 30 to 40 metres wide. The high rainfall on the non-resistant soils means that all rivers carry very heavy silt loads during rains. On Map 2.1,



Map 2.1 Siberut<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The map is courtesy of Karl-Heinz (1989a: 93). He uses it for showing Mentawai dialects geographically.

the rivers are roughly sketched and it can be seen how the rivers separate the landmass of the island into several river basins and valleys (see also WWF, 1980: 5). There are at least eleven major rivers on Siberut, and each of them has dozens of smaller watercourses. Every major river has a name and the name is usually used as the name of the river valley as well as the name for a group or community living in that valley. Several small rivers are not identified by name. Rivers not only separate the land into valleys, but also divide Mentawai communities who speak different dialects. The Simatalu people, for instance, speak the Simatalu dialect, which is different to the dialect spoken by the Simalegi people and other communities in other valleys on the same island. The dialects are all related, together forming the Mentawai language.

Persoon and Osseweijer (2002: 234) clearly note these distinctive features in a comparative study of the island societies off the west coast of Sumatra. I also observed that Mentawaians differentiate themselves by decorating their bodies with different tattoo motifs, depending on the valley they come from (see Mernit, 2003).

In the seventeenth century, Dutch sailors under Vornelis Pietersz 'discovered' the Mentawai Islands. In 1600, the islands were called Nassau after the Dutch royal family. However, there is no information whether the Dutch sailors stayed on the four islands. It seems that they visited Pagai irregularly by means of sailboats until 1620. They did not stay at Pagai either, so they did not have an official residence on the islands. After 1620, Dutch sailors rarely visited Mentawai. In 1663 Wouter Schouten noted in his diary the names of the Mentawai Islands. The names were taken from a map published in 1606 by the Portuguese, among whom Siberut was known as Mintaon Island (Coronese, 1986: 20; Schefold, 1988: 97). It seems that Portuguese sailors had sailed along the coastline of the Mentawai Islands but did not come on shore there.

Afterwards, John Crisp from the British East India Company situated in Bengkulu visited the Mentawai Islands several times in 1792. In 1799, John Crisp published the first important account about Mentawai, but he only mentioned Pagai. He described the geographical situation and cultural characteristics of people living in Pagai. He had not much to say about Siberut. In 1825, the Dutch officially colonized the Mentawai Islands and Siberut was called Groot Fortuine. In 1849 the Dutch opened an administrative office in Pagai in order to impede British attempts to colonize the islands again. In 1905, the Dutch opened a police station on Siberut. After the Dutch occupation was over in 1945, the name Groot Fortuine was no longer used. Instead, the largest island of Mentawai was officially named Siberut.

Scholars like Wirz (1929/30: 133-5) and Coronese (1986:11) attempted to find out why the island was called Siberut. They examined the etymology of Sabirut, which is formed from the words *sa* (group of people) and *birut* (rat). People's behaviour living in the southern part of Siberut perhaps had a rat-like character. Or perhaps the name meant 'a group of people living on an island

with a lot of rats'. Which one of these meanings gave Siberut its name remains unclear.

Administratively, Siberut was formerly divided into two sub-districts (*kecamatan*), North Siberut and South Siberut, with ten governmental villages under the supervision of each sub-district. However, in 2006 the island was divided into five sub-districts. This has indirectly affected the status of traditional settlements. Soon after the official approval of the five new sub-districts in Siberut, the traditional settlements or hamlets were recognized as governmental villages. Individual houses scattered at irregular distances along a riverbank (rather than being grouped together in a settlement) are the last traditional dwelling-places in Siberut.

### 2.2.2 Sipora

Sipora is situated between Siberut and Pagai. It is smaller but has higher peaks than the other islands (the highest peak is about 450 metres). Its landmass is 651 square kilometres. This island has more than twenty villages. Increasing population has had the effect of opening new villages on the island. And, villages change quite rapidly because of developments. This also occurs on other Mentawai Islands. It seems to me that community members recently have wanted to change their villages from a traditional situation to modern circumstances. In Map 2.2<sup>3</sup>, I indicate the main villages I visited during fieldwork on Sipora. Besides those villages, there are several small settlements not included on the map.

Historically, a Dutch VOC boat called 'Vlissingen' came across this island on its way to the East Indies. On the boat 160 people had died from an epidemic, while others were very ill. The survivors had good hope as the boat approached the island. Therefore, the island was later called Goe-Fortuyn, meaning Good Luck (see Van Beukering, 1947: 31; Schefold, 1988: 97). The island was at one time called Kobou (Volz, 1909 as quoted in Coronese, 1986: 10; Schefold, 1988: 73), a name also used on topographical maps made in Batavia in 1934.

According to the Sipora people, the island had a crater filled with saltwater located on higher ground, from which a putrid odour rose. The putrid odour and saltwater crater were called Kobou. Therefore, the island was called Kobou. In particular villages of Sipora, inhabitants were accordingly called Sakobou, a word meaning a group of people living near a crater. Coronese surmises that Volz misunderstood the meaning of *kobou*, understanding it to indicate there were ancestral connections between the Kubu people in Sumatra and the Mentawai people in Sipora (Coronese, 1986: 11; see also Persoon, 1994: 135 for an account of the Kubu people).

3 The original drawing of this map is taken from *Reproductiebedrijf Topografische dienst. Weltevreden* (1930) and I re-drew it in order to show some villages that I visited during fieldwork in 2002 and 2004.



Map 2.2 Sipora

Some informants told me about the origin of the name Sipora, saying it was invented by Sumatran merchants who came to the island to get various kinds of rattan. The Sumatran merchants did not speak any Mentawai. Because they could not speak the Mentawai language properly, the Sumatran merchants mispronounced words spoken by Mentawaians. One settlement on the island was called Siubat, where rattans were gathered in front of a family's house (*sapou*). Many Siubat villagers referred to the place where rattans were piling up by saying the word *sapou-ra*, literally meaning 'their house'. By repeatedly mentioning the place-name where the rattans were gathered, this word *sapou-ra* modified by Sumatran merchants to Sipora is currently used as the name of the Sipora island. So, the Sumatran merchants mistakenly used this word for the name of the island.

Another explanation of the name of the island I got from Schefold. Mentawaians in Sipora once told to Schefold about the origin of the name of Sipora

where he visited the island during his fieldwork in the late 1960s. In an attempt to explain the etymology of the name Sipora, Schefold (personal communication) suggested that it might have originated from the word *porak* (land). It is possible that the first people to migrate to this island considered it a newly found land. Perhaps for that reason, the first settlers called this island Sipora. Indeed, while I was collecting family stories, the term *porak siappo* for 'found land' was frequently used to refer to this island and land claimed by the Mentawaians in Sipora was also called *porak siappo*. And the people who found the land were called *siappo porak* (land finders). Later this was shortened to Sipora, because only people who found the land settled on the island. In daily conversation, Mentawaians living on Sipora call themselves Sakalelegat (meaning 'a group of people remains at the place').

During fieldwork, I noticed that Mentawaians frequently made use of the etymology of place-names, while talking about a settlement and its name. It seems to me that the cultural function of etymologizing place-names is very important to Mentawaians. By remembering and repeating the etymology, they may recollect the reasons a settlement was originally given a particular name. Moreover, place-names help people remember particular events of how the first inhabitants arrived at the place and commenced their life there. Place-names may indicate how groups of people commenced to populate a particular area. By recollecting a place-name, Mentawaians remember what their ancestors experienced and what important events took place there. One example turned up during fieldwork in Sipora. Local people told about the first settlement in Sipora, during early ancestral migrations, which was called Goiso'oinan, 'place with small water' (see Map 2.2). When I investigated the area, there was indeed a small shallow river such that canoes could not go further inland than about a hundred metres.

Due to this circumstance, Mentawaians sought another place to settle that is currently named Saureinu. The river at this settlement was relatively wide and deep. Therefore, it was called Bat Simakeru, 'deep-river place'. After a lot of groups of people settled at this place, others decided to move away to seek other places to the south. As a variety of groups of people dwelled there, people residing nearby starting coming there to find themselves potential partners for marriage (*urei*). Because this village provided potential partners, it was called Saureinu, 'group of potential marriage partners'.

After Saureinu, other groups of people settled in a place called Simatorai Monga, meaning a place where mangrove roots emerge to the surface above the seawater at a river mouth. Later this name changed to Sioban, because there was just one old man who could stand to stay there. The other people had all moved away because they were afraid of evil spirits that had disturbed them while staying there. These people moved to Sibagau and other smaller settlements in the southern part of the island on the east coast.

On the west coast of Sipora, there are several settlements. People began to build a traditional dwelling in Mabelepaddegat, 'place where bows and arrows were lost' (bows and the sharpened tips of arrows are made out of the hard bark of a palm tree called *paddegat*). This name was used for this place because people experienced terrible trouble when they tried to get to shore. Their canoes turned upside down because of big waves, and their bow and arrows for hunting were lost. Later, people shortened Mabelepaddegat to Mapaddegat in order to confuse newcomers or enemies during headhunting raids. This change brought about a new interpretation of the place-name, because Mapaddegat means 'place with many palm trees (*paddegat*)'. In fact, palm trees were not numerous at all in this settlement.

After occupying Mapaddegat, Mentawaians moved further south and eventually arrived at a place called Simabetumonga, meaning 'river mouth with rough sea'. This place-name describes the real situation. In particular months (between April and October), the sea is rough and the river mouth is difficult to enter by canoe. However, in other months (between November and March) the sea is relatively calm, and the river mouth can be entered easily. A bit further to the south was a place called Berisirimanua (in short, Berimanua), meaning 'place without people'. The last place on Sipora that was settled during the early migrations was called Beriulou, 'place without snakes'.

Because I myself come from Siberut, I initially misunderstood the meaning of place-names like Berisirimanua and Beriulou. In Siberut, a place-name usually has a straightforward meaning. In Siberut the word *beri* means 'many'. A place located in the north of Siberut was called Berisigep because a lot of ants (*sigep*) were found in the area. Therefore, I first thought that Beriulou on Sipora meant a place with a lot of snakes (*ulou*). The place-name successfully misled me. *Beri* on Sipora turns out to mean 'unlikely' or 'none'. The residents of those places informed me that the place-names were purposely given in order to confuse and keep away other people who might want to come there.

In the early migrations, the migrants sought unpopulated and safe places. By giving the places undesirable names like Simabetumonga, Berisirimanua, and Beriulou, the residents hoped that other people would pass by the place. The place-names were intended to give a negative impression to other people. The residents hoped that other people would seek another place if they knew that the place had a river mouth with rough sea (Simabetumonga), or that many people (Berisirimanua) inhabited the place, or that a lot of snakes (Beriulou) were found in the place.

Administratively, Sioban is the capital of the sub-district (*pusat kecamatan*) of Sipora. Besides Sioban, there are a number of important villages on Sipora such as Saureinu, Berimanua, and Sibagau with a significant population. There is also a small village called Tuappeijat, which initially was not really important. According to ancestral stories this settlement was the place where people from Siberut stopped for awhile when they came to visit Sipora,

as well as when returning to Siberut. Therefore, this place got named Tuappeijat, 'place to take a rest'. But this situation changed in 1999, when the political climate changed in Mentawai, and Mentawai was made a new district of West Sumatra province, separate from its former administrative district of Padang Pariaman. It follows that Tuappeijat eventually became the district capital of the Mentawai Islands and it currently becomes a much larger village.

### 2.2.3 North and South Pagai

The total landmass of North Pagai and South Pagai is 1,521 square kilometres. A strait about 500 metres wide divides the two islands. The name of these islands, Pagai, is apparently derived from the Mentawai word *paagai*, 'recognize'. This word may refer to a situation where two or more people recognized each other (Nooy-Palm, 1968). In 1600, Dutch explorers arrived at these islands and named them Nassau. While the name Nassau was still in use by the Dutch, Pagai was the name used among Mentawaians and migrants from Sumatra. Some reports by early scholars mention the islands by the name Pageh or Pagai. In Pagai, most Mentawaians call themselves Sakalagan, meaning 'inhabitants of the village' (Nooy-Palm, 1968: 159).

In Pagai, Mentawaians prefer living in villages at some distance from the sub-district capital, called Sikakap (see Map 2.3<sup>4</sup>). Migrants from Sumatra, Nias and Java mostly reside in Sikakap. This situation is also seen in other sub-districts of the Mentawai Islands, even though the capital of a sub-district is the centre for economy, information, transportation, and governmental services. Mentawaians prefer to live among themselves in villages where they have more access to natural resources and extensive land. Furthermore, they feel insecure in the capital, especially if they have to compete with migrants economically and in social and political matters. They visit the sub-district capital only for a particular reason, like visiting their children who are pursuing higher education, or purchasing goods to supply basic needs. Otherwise, they pass through the capital only when they want to travel to Sumatra.

Developments on the Pagai islands, influenced by the Protestant church since 1901, the Indonesian government since 1945, and logging companies since the 1970s, have changed social circumstances significantly. Therefore, outsiders, mostly government employees and migrants from Sumatra, frequently assume that the Pagai islands are more developed (*maju*) economically and socio-culturally than Sipora and Siberut. People on the Pagai islands frequently say that their traditional lifestyle has vanished, as has happened on Sipora. They say that Mentawai traditional culture today can only be found in some particular areas of Siberut.

4 This map is based on Nooy-Palm (1968: 156). I adapted it to indicate the villages I visited for my research and other place-names mentioned in this book.



Map 2.3 North and South Pagai



## 2.3 Population growth in Mentawai

The Mentawai archipelago is inhabited predominantly by an ethnic group called Mentawai. The origins of this group are unknown. Nevertheless, a few scholars like Van Beukering (1947), Nooy-Palm (1968) and Schefold, (1988, 1989) have tried to figure out where traditional Mentawaians originally came from. These scholars speculate that Mentawaians might be descended from an initial family connected with a group of people in Sumatra, or else from inhabitants of the neighbouring island of Nias. Schefold (1989) writes his special article about the prehistory of Mentawai archipelago and its inhabitants.

I do not re-examine the origins of Mentawaians by looking at their material culture, physical appearance, or language, as these approaches have been discussed thoroughly by scholars like Van Beukering (1947), Nooy-Palm (1968) and Schefold, (1988, 1989a). Instead, I examine several previously collected stories of origin of Mentawaians. When asked to explain their origins, Mentawaians tell stories. A handful of scholars have collected such stories; however, these stories of origin of Mentawaians have not been examined thoroughly. I therefore take the opportunity to examine them extensively by comparing them one to another. I collected stories of origin as well, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

According to the central bureau of statistics of Mentawai district (Badan Pusat Statistik or BPS), 65,765 people inhabited the Mentawai archipelago in 2000 (BPS, 2002: 14). Mentawaians constitute about eighty percent of the total population. The rest are recent migrants from Sumatra, Java and a small number from other islands of Indonesia. A few foreign missionaries dwell in Mentawai, too. Most of the migrants from Sumatra and Java live in the four sub-district capitals (*ibu kota kecamatan*) of the Mentawai Islands. Most Mentawaians prefer to live in traditional settlements and villages far from the capital. From 1945, the islands and people of Mentawai are politically part of Indonesia, falling under West Sumatra province. Administratively, the Mentawai Islands until 1999 were part of Padang Pariaman district, which is on the mainland of Sumatra.

Population of Mentawai is much less than that of Nias, with more than 400,000 inhabitants, and Bali, with more than three million. All three islands have about the same landmass. Nooy-Palm, a Dutch anthropologist, suggests that the slow growth of Mentawai's population (see Table 2.1) might be caused by the incidence of malaria (Nooy-Palm, 1968: 160-165). Besides malaria, records of governmental and private clinics show that cholera, tuberculosis, and other diseases have had an impact on population growth. Catholic missionaries informed me that of about 300 inhabitants in Paipajet, a village situated on the west coast of Siberut, dozens of them died from cholera in 1974. Another illness that significantly decreased the Mentawai population is smallpox. Mentawaians call this disease *gutgut* (see also Schefold, 1988: 69). We have records of death caused by diseases, but records of death caused by natural disasters are absent.

**Table 2.1** Population figures of the Mentawai Islands

| <b>Date and source of data</b>                                                    | <b>Siberut</b> | <b>Sipora</b> | <b>N&amp;S Pagai</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Late 18th century (Marsden, quoted in Nooy-Palm, 1968: 160)                       | –              | –             | 1,400 people         |
| 1855 (Von Rosenberg, 1855, quoted in Nooy-Palm, 1968: 160)                        | 7,090 people   | 1,450 people  | 2,550 people         |
| 1930 (Volkstelling, 1930, quoted in Nooy-Palm, 1968: 160)                         | 9,268 people   | 3,892 people  | 4,940 people         |
| 1966 (Nooy-Palm, 1968: 162-3)                                                     | –              | 4,616 people  | 7,523 people         |
| 1991 (Kantor Pembantu Gubernur Sumatra Barat, 1991, quoted in Persoon, 1994: 300) | 23,600 people  | 8,700 people  | 15,200 people        |
| 2002 (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) Kabupaten Kep. Mentawai, 2002)                  | 28,780 people  | 13,121 people | 23,864 people        |

I have identified some place-names and cultivated plots located in coastal areas that are far from current villages and are currently unpopulated. This may indicate that some Mentawai families inhabited coastal areas before settling the interior of the islands. Some mythical stories of Mentawaians mention the rise of seawater due to natural quakes. Such natural disasters as tsunamis might have forced traditional Mentawaians to settle in the interior of the islands. In the last four decades, the government has opened villages in coastal areas and some people have returned to live near the older settlements. The majority of governmental villages were not opened at the locations of old settlements.

Natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and landslides are potential causes of the loss of human life (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 1999). Such disasters might once have taken place in Mentawai as well. Dutch scientists recorded a series of giant earthquakes in the Mentawai Islands causing massive tsunamis that affected the west coast of Sumatra in 1797 and 1833. There is no information on how many people died in Mentawai due to the 1797 and 1833 earthquakes, but certainly a number of people died in Padang and Bengkulu. Findings in the past decade by seismographic researchers from the California Institute of Sciences and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences reveal that a series of massive earthquakes occurred in Mentawai, especially in Siberut, about four hundred years ago (see Natawidjaja et al., 2006). Unfortunately, numbers of deaths are unknown. More recently, a series of earthquakes occurred in Aceh in 2004, in Mentawai in 2007, and in Padang in 2009. Only a small number of people died, but for a small community like Mentawai, the number is quite significant.

Certain traditions and customs of Mentawaians may explain why the population grew slowly, and sometimes even decreased. An obvious example of customs and practices hindering the growth of the population is headhunting raids, a notorious and feared practice among many Southeast Asian communities (see Rosaldo, 1980; Hoskins, 1996). A headhunting raid involves rituals of sacred obligations, exalts masculine virtues, celebrates and protects village property, and glorifies village tradition (George, 1991; 1996).

In Mentawai, headhunting raids were carried out primarily on Siberut (Schefold, 2007). The Dutch colonial government brought headhunting practices in Mentawai to an end after occupying Siberut island and setting up a military station in Saibi Muara in 1905. A few years later, the military station was moved to Muara Siberut, due to lack of water in Saibi Muara. The Mentawaians immediately stopped practising headhunting. However, the headhunting ritual itself is still practised. Instead of hunting human heads, monkeys and other wild animals in the forest are chosen to replace human heads.

Another custom keeping down population growth might be the tradition of Mentawaians to refrain from having sexual relations during a taboo period, in order to bring luck and avoid the death of family members (see Loeb, 1929a). In addition, marriage at a young age – thirteen years for boys, after menstruation for girls – was frequent in Mentawai. This is still the case in areas like Simatalu and Rereiket on Siberut island. Consequently, a lot of babies and young mothers die during childbirth. A survey I carried out in the Rereiket area in 1999 revealed that three of ten children died at birth and another three to four died before the age of five.

In the past, Mentawaians fully relied on services offered by shamans and medicine men; however, they did not heal every kind of illness. Currently, modern medical services are available in the main governmental villages. However, for Mentawaians living in the interior, it is hard to get medical services. Ill people that cannot be cured by shamans or herbalists often die, as happened while I researched among the community living in Sagulubbe village, an upriver place, in 1998 (see Masjum, 1999).

Protestant missionaries came to Mentawai in 1901, Muslim organizations introduced Islam in 1950, and the Catholic church arrived in 1954. These missionaries not only came to convert traditional Mentawaians to their religions, but they also introduced formal education and (Western) medical care (Nooy-Palm, 1968:162; Sihombing, 1979; Caissutti and Cambielli, 1985: 107-115; Coronese, 1985; Schefold, 1988: 68; Persoon, 1994: 234, 300; Abidin, 1997). The Indonesian government began to regard Mentawai as part of the country in the 1950s by assigning official representatives to the islands.

In the 1970s, the Indonesian government began to view Mentawai as a place where forests could be logged in order to earn national and provincial revenues. Using those revenues, the government tried to open up and improve the geographically isolated and 'primitive' living conditions of Mentawaians.

The government attempted to improve infrastructure and social services in Mentawai by setting up formal schooling, medical care, and other governmental services (Persoon, 1994: 227; 2003: 254-5). All these efforts have had direct and indirect impacts on the quality of people's lives and on population figures.

## 2.4 Traditional dwelling-places

Mentawaians are egalitarians. No one is higher in rank than others. Traditional Mentawaians live in *uma*. The term *uma* is used for a communal house as well as for a group of people descended from the same ancestor living in a particular place. In a later section, I discuss *uma* as a social group.

As a building, an *uma* has several functions. It is the place where members of a kin group live together, where they store their communal treasures such as shamanic objects and other material objects that bring members of the group together, and where they have social gatherings at which communal rituals are performed. The size of an *uma* is 10 to 15 metres in width and 20 to 25 metres in length (see Schefold, 1988: 106-108 for details on the construction of an *uma*). Rivers are the major pathways for transporting goods and moving easily from one place to another by dugout canoe. Therefore, Mentawaians traditionally built their *uma* houses on a riverbank, at irregular distances from each other (Schefold, 2001: 361). Some communal houses are bigger than others. The size of the building depends on the number of family members. Persoon estimates that a group living in one *uma* might consist of up to eighty family members and be composed of ten to fifteen nuclear families (Persoon, 1994: 281).

Kin groups residing in different valleys and islands of Mentawai had different sizes and forms of *uma* houses. Some *uma* were erected with the floor high off the ground in order to prevent attacks by enemies and wild animals. Some *uma* were made with a saddleback roof (see Schefold, 2003). Other *uma* were built with the ridge of the roof completely horizontal.

Variation in this housing model is also seen in the space between the house roof and the floor (see Schefold, 1988: 106 for further discussion of house construction and other meanings of *uma*; see Persoon, 1994: 277-285 on the changing significance of *uma* due to the government's resettlement programme). The size of the house and the place the house is built represent the identity of a kin group. This is one way Mentawaians form their communal identity. For instance, one kin group with a big (*beu*) house (*uma*) who all live together in the house was named Taibeu-uma, meaning a group of people with a big house. One house was erected near a graveyard (*ratei*) and the kin group living in it was called Tasiriratei.

Some *uma* had a *kerebau*, a tie beam, supporting the upper construction, while many other *uma* were without *kerebau*. Because of having a house with a

tie beam, making it different from other houses, one kin group was called Sakerebau (see Story 8 in Chapter 5), meaning a group of people whose house has a *kerebau*. A unique construction feature of an *uma* thus represents the identity of its owners. Through their name, the owners of an *uma* declare themselves the owners of the unique house construction.

In the vicinity of an *uma*, people built a hut where they could process sago to make sago flour. They built a house for storing canoes. They erected some small houses (*sapou* or *lalep*) for nuclear families, widows, and young individuals. This complex of buildings is surrounded by several gardens planted with coconut and sago palms, fruit trees, taros and other edible plants. Such a complex of gardens is called *puumaijat*. In the vicinity of the *puumaijat* is a forested area where people might go hunting for wild animals like monkeys, wild boars, and deer. People also use this forest to gather building materials, wild foods, and medicinal plants. Small pathways connect the houses with places where people usually go for their daily tasks. These paths supplement the use of canoes, which serve as the main means of transportation in Mentawai.

The whole complex – of buildings and gardens and adjoining forest – is the territory of a kin group and represents the identity of the group and its authority. In many cases, *sibakkat porak* (landowners) take the initiative to open a settlement on their land. In this case, the landowners possess both the land and the settlement, and are thus known as *sibakkat pulaggaijat* (owners of the settlement). In some settlements, newcomers (*sitoi*, a term for recent Mentawaiian migrants, and *sasareu*, a term for non-Mentawaiian migrants from far away) may be allowed to live together with the landowners for any of several reasons.

First of all, newcomers may be allowed to live together with landowners in the same dwelling-place because they are seen as potential marriage partners (Mentawaians practise kin group exogamy). Second, newcomers might be perceived as potential members of an alliance. By means of newcomers' support, landowners could more easily defend their place and their families from an attack by headhunters from other villages. However, this does not mean newcomers can take the initiative to open their own settlement; they should first ask permission from the landowners. In case of permission being granted, the newcomers only have the right to use the land but not to possess it. If at some time in the future the landowners want to use it themselves, then the newcomers have to return the land to its owners.

As a kin group grows larger, a few nuclear families commonly decide to move out of the *uma* to small family houses, called *sapou* or *lalep*. It is an additional space, separate from the *uma*, so that a family may live apart from other members of the kin group. Such small family houses are called *pulaleman* (from the root *lalep*). One nuclear family is called *sangalalep*. Living separately from the communal group does not break up family relationships. One of the functions

of *uma* is to bring together family members of a kin group living in the vicinity of *puumaijat* in rituals and ceremonials. When the kin group performs rituals and other communal activities, the nuclear families living in the small houses are usually invited to join the other kin group members in the *uma*. A major ritual should be performed in the *uma* in the presence of all kin group members. A small ritual may be performed in a *sapou* by a nuclear family (see Wawman, 1997; 1999).

In the vicinity of the *uma* may also be found a *rusuk*, a hut where young unmarried people may spend their leisure time. This *rusuk* might also be used temporarily as a dwelling in case of too many people living in the *uma*. In some cases, older widows used to stay in this kind of hut. There, they could manage their own needs while contributing something to the needs of the *uma*. Ideally speaking, an *uma* in Siberut should have a separate *rusuk* for young unmarried females, and a separate *rusuk* for young males.

In Sipora and Pagai, a *rusuk* is more often meant for a young family to live in. In Sipora and Pagai the custom is to keep the *uma* pure. When there is a newly married couple, therefore, the preference is to have this couple stay outside the *uma* in a separate dwelling (*rusuk*). When the young couple are ready to move into the *rusuk*, tradition requires the male to observe a three-week taboo period. Because it may be inconvenient for the young man himself to observe this taboo period, the father of the young man usually takes on this responsibility of his married son until the married son can do that by himself after first being taught by his father what he should and should not do. During the taboo period, the father avoids eating particular fruits and roasted or uncooked food. He eats just one full meal a day at a particular time (Loeb, 1929a; Nooy-Palm, 1968; Schefold, 1973).

I came across a similar situation in Simatalu (Siberut) in 1999 when I accompanied a British team producing a documentary titled *The House of Spirits* for Discovery Channel (Wawman, 1999). A father had to replace his just-married son in carrying out a taboo period for his son's newly built *sapou*. The father realized that his son was not ready to undertake the three-week taboo period. He was not allowed to eat uncooked food. He was not allowed to have sexual intercourse with his wife. He was forbidden to slaughter animals. Above all, he ate only once a day until the taboo period of three weeks was completed.

Mentawaians traditionally expanded a *pulaggaijat* (hamlet) by adding a few more houses in the kin group's territory. If an area was populated by just one kin group, it would be recognized as that group's hamlet. By using the kin group's name, it was easy to recognize, for instance *pulaggaijatda Samongilailai* (Samongilailai hamlet). A *pulaggaijat* is a complex of dwelling-places where families with the same genealogical ties lived together. The term *pu-*



*laggaijat* does not include the extensive area of forest that a kin group typically claims as ancestral land for its own use.

A lot of Mentawai family stories tell of a variety of conflicts that had been the main factors forcing early families to move from one place to another. Parties involved in conflicts tended to avoid each other in every respect. The departing party went to look for a new place to live, so that they could stay totally out of sight of their fellow kin group members or members of another kin group with which they were at odds. Early families gradually moved out in multiple directions. Then, as other families came after them, early migrants moved further away, in order to avoid their relatives who came after them. This became a common pattern of migratory movements.

In the course of migration, Mentawaians passed through a large area. This consequently led to Mentawaians occupying land to build dwelling-places (*pulaggaijat*) as well as having access to extensive ancestral land, because they claimed all the land they passed through. On recently claimed land, migrating people constructed new dwellings. Eventually, there might be several hamlets (*pulaggaijat*) in one valley or one territory. A *pulaggaijat* usually has no political function whatsoever, nor does it have prominent leaders, although the presence of experienced family elders to guide family members in carrying out traditional customs is indispensable. Broadly speaking, the *pulaggaijat* strongly correlates with a kin group's ancestral claim to a particular plot of land surrounding their *pulaggaijat*. When several kin groups live in hamlets next to each other in the same valley, some of the communally used land in the valley may come to be claimed by different kin groups.

Hills and rivers divide the islands into valleys. In each valley there are several *pulaggaijat* or hamlets. Each valley has a main river. The name of the river is used as the name of the valley as well as the name for the group of people dwelling in that valley. Mentawaians are thus distinguished geographically according to the valley where they live. Additionally, I observed that traditional tattoo motifs serve to differentiate among different groups of Mentawaians, with each valley having its own characteristic tattoo design (see also Greenaway and Oliver, 2001; Gregg, 2010). Some motifs, besides differentiating Mentawaians who live in different valleys, also indicate a person's gender and status.

Moreover, the dialects spoken by Mentawaians in different valleys are distinctive (Pampus, 1989a). Simatalu, for instance, is currently used as the name of a Mentawai dialect. A large number of people living in the Simatalu valley speak a dialect called *ngangan Samatalu*. These people are called Samatalu (people of the valley of the Simatalu river). But Samatalu actually consists of several different kin groups, dwelling in hamlets situated along the main river of Simatalu. Simatalu valley is an ancestral domain for several kin groups that initially dwelled there. It includes forests, pasture, residential, agricultural, and other types of communally owned land including hunting grounds, burial grounds, worship areas, bodies of water, minerals and other natural resources,

to which all members of a kin group traditionally have access. Such land is held under a claim of ownership by a particular kin group from the time of their ancestors continuously down to the present.

## 2.5 Mentawai kinship

In addition to its meaning as a building, *uma* is also used to mean a genealogical group of people, or kin group living in particular place. According to Schefold (2001: 361), the word *uma* in Mentawai refers to a group of about ten nuclear families. A nuclear family is called *lalep* and may consist of several individuals (father, mother, sons, daughters, and sometimes one or more widows). An *uma* as a genealogical group, or more precisely 'a local patrilineal group' (Schefold, 2002), has expanded from an initial nuclear family of ancestors. This initial nuclear family of ancestors may refer to the first inhabitants of that particular place, or refer to the ancestors that had formed the initial kin group when the group lived in the place of origin. Sometimes an *uma* in a particular place has a genealogical bond with a few other *umas* dwelling in other places. The genealogical bond of kin groups living in separate places is called *muntogat* and exists because the kin groups share the same initial ancestors and ancestral land whence those initial ancestors commenced to spread out.

During my fieldwork I noticed that *uma* is the basic term for kin group as commonly used on Siberut (see also Schefold, 1988). However, on Sipora and Pagai the word *uma* is rarely mentioned. On these islands, *muntogat* is the most popular term for kin group (see also Nooy-Palm, 1968). On Siberut, on the contrary, the term *muntogat* is not really used to signify a kin group, although the term is used when people discuss relationships with other kin groups sharing the same ancestral family. In order to examine kinship and the concepts of *uma* and *muntogat*, I take an example from a kin group called Samongilailai (see Chart 2.1).

According to its family stories, the Samongilailai kin group formerly had an *uma* house located on the riverbank called Mongilailai, situated in the valley of the Simatalu river on Siberut island, from which their *kin-name* was initially created. The house was called *uma(nda)* Samongilailai (Samongilailai house). The house was erected on the land of the Samongilailai. All members of the Samongilailai kin group lived together in one house at that time. This illustrates that the word *uma* refers to a building as well as to a genealogically related group of people (see also Kruyt, 1923: 10).



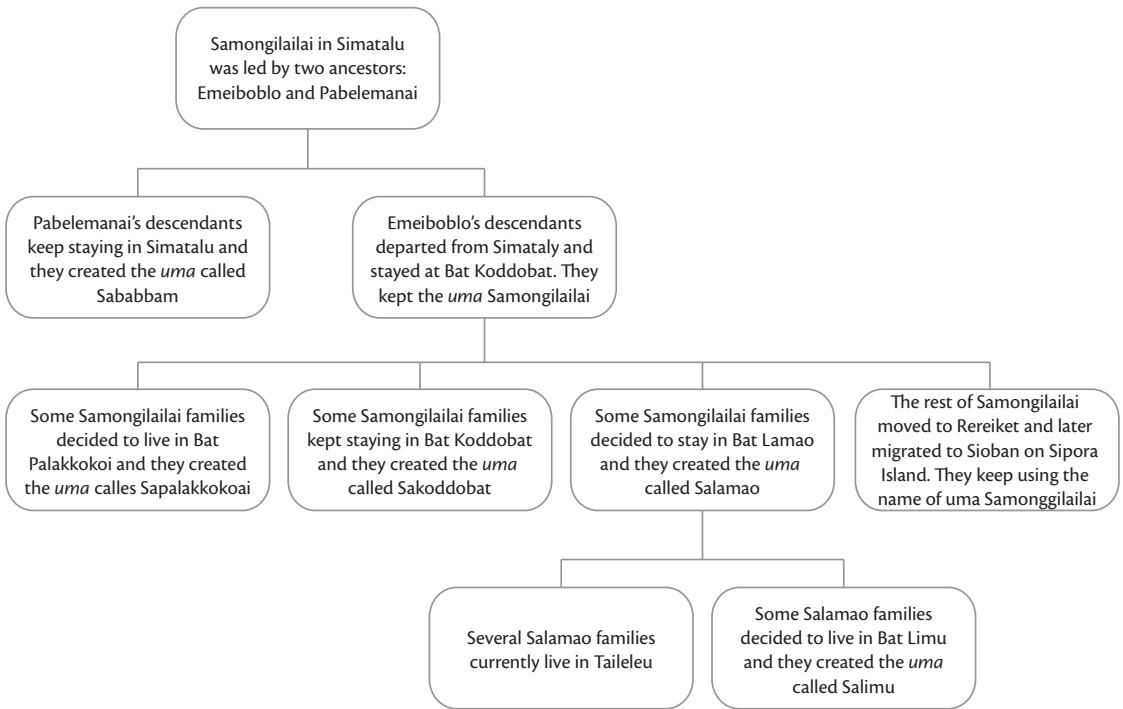


Chart 2.1 Samongilailai descendants as a social group

In the case of the Samongilailai kin group, Emeiboblo together with his brother Pabelemanai are the ancestors of the kin group. Most Samongilailai were not able to recollect any names of ancestors other than Emeiboblo and Pabelemanai, so they always consider these two individuals as the earliest forebears of their group. In the course of expansion, Emeiboblo's descendants expanded in number and moved away to different places. Several *uma* thus emerged in separate places. Most of those *uma* were given new names, being named after the place where they lived at that time. For instance, there are Sakoddobat (group of people on the riverbank of the Koddobat river), Salamao (group of people on the riverbank of the Lamao river), and Sapalakkokoi (group of people on the riverbank of the Palakkokoai river). Afterwards, Salimu (group of people on the riverbank of the Limu river) separated from the Salamao kin group after the latter group had moved to a place called Taileleu.

All those sub-groups of the original Samongilailai kin group occupied separate places in the Mentawai Islands, and those places were claimed as the property of one or another new sub-group of Samongilailai. The new kin groups have thus new plots of land in new places. The ancestral land located at the place of origin in Simatalu, however, was still claimed by all of the groups (at least by all of the groups whose family stories still contained this information). The emergence of new groups of Samongilailai did not necessarily erase

the existence of Samongilailai as a kin group itself. In fact, some family members still use the name Samongilailai and like other relatives, the Samongilailai also migrated to different places. Most of the Samongilailai sub-groups reside in the southern part of the Mentawai Islands, especially in Sipora and Pagai. So, we can find Samongilailai<sup>5</sup> living in different places of the Mentawai Islands. Pabelemanai's current descendants, which were originally part of Samongilailai, remained in Simatalu, although they changed their kin-name to Sababbam (a group of people who often killed other people). All current descendants of the kin groups that descended from the initial Samongilailai family regard Emeiboblo and Pabelemanai as their founding fathers (*punute-teu*).

The genealogical relationship among the related *uma* of Samongilailai creates a family network called *muntogat*. *Muntogat* is derived from *mu(n)* meaning 'to have or to possess' and *toga(t)* meaning 'child'. So, *muntogat* means 'the descendants of (an ancestor)' (Nooy-Palm, 1968). All Samongilailai members, even though they have different *uma* names and different places of residence, are seen as one big group of related descendants or one *muntogat*<sup>6</sup>, which is the Samongilailai *muntogat*, owing to the fact that they descended from one initial ancestral family led by Emeiboblo and Pabelemanai.

In Sipora and Pagai, people are quite familiar with the term *uma* as a communal house and as the group of people living in it. However, people living in an *uma* may not necessarily all be related to one to another genealogically. Families from different kin groups sometimes share the same *uma* building; in such a case, the term *parurukat uma* (gathering of different kin groups) is used in Sipora and Pagai to refer to all the people living together in one building. The kinship term that people in Sipora and Pagai are most familiar with is *muntogat*, which refers to the relationship among several groups that share the same ancestor.

As Nooy-Palm (1968) explains, *muntogat* is the term popularly used by Mentawaians residing in Sipora and Pagai which is similar in meaning to what Mentawaians in Siberut call *uma*. *Muntogat* refers to an ancestor, more precisely to origins (an ancestor and a place of origin). The term *muntogat* is less commonly used in Siberut to mean kin group, because the term *uma* is used instead. In Siberut the term *muntogat* does not necessarily encompass the idea of a dwelling-place, as the term *uma* is used for that. *Muntogat* is used to indicate the family relationship existing among descendants of related kin groups

5 Samongilailai has migrated to different places of the Mentawai Islands. Like other kin groups, we can find two or three Samongilailai families living in a place and other four or five Samongilailai families living in another place. Samongilailai living in those different places contains about 30 up to 40 families or about 200 individuals.

6 One *muntogat* may contain six up to ten different kin names and they are living in separate places of the Mentawai Islands. One *muntogat* may contain more than 100 families or more than 700 individuals.

currently living in separate dwelling-places. So, *muntogat* is the term for two or more related descent groups that share the same origins.

Besides *uma* and *muntogat*, most contemporary Mentawaians have started to identify their kin groups using the term *suku* like *suku Samongilailai*. *Suku* is an Indonesian word, an abbreviated form of the phrase *suku bangsa*. We may translate *suku bangsa* into English as 'ethnic group' (see Vermeulen and Govers, 1994). This term is also used by the Indonesian government to refer to any one of more than three hundred Indonesian ethnic groups. Each of Indonesia's ethnic groups is designated by such terms as *suku bangsa Jawa* (Javanese people), *suku bangsa Dayak*, (Dayak people), and *suku bangsa Mentawai* (Mentawai people).

In Mentawai *suku* is defined slightly differently. Mentawaians use the term *suku* for a kin group instead of an ethnic group. Apparently, this tendency was instigated by the arrival of migrants, especially Minangkabau from the Sumatra mainland. Minangkabau traditionally use the term *suku* as well to refer to kin groups, for example *suku Caniago*, *suku Tanjung*, and *suku Sikumbang*. Minangkabau is matrilineal and *suku* is used to term the matrilineal descent group (see von Benda-Beckmann, 2001; 2004; Biezeveld, 2002).

This term has a similar meaning to the term *marga* used by the Batak people of North Sumatra (Situmorang, 1993). The Batak people are patrilineal and use *marga* to term their patrilineal descent groups. The Batak people like the Mentawaians are patrilineal; however, the Mentawaians currently use *suku* as a synonym of *uma* and *muntogat* since 1950s government officials from Minangkabau origins have influenced administrative matters like grouping the Mentawaians by using the term *suku* in Mentawai. In fact, the Mentawai Islands are part of West Sumatra province.

Mentawaians' tendency to use *suku* to identify their kin groups is obviously instigated by the current developments in Mentawai. In the last five decades, *uma* as a symbol of the unity of a kin group and a centre of rituals has been replaced by small houses built in the government villages and churches and mosques have replaced the ritual functions of *uma*. The government forces the Mentawaians to leave their traditional settlements and move to government villages. *Uma* as the central unit of Mentawaian kin groups slowly but surely diminishes in number and decreases in function in Mentawaian society. Different kin groups identify themselves in different *suku* rather than in *uma* or *muntogat*.

What, then, does the term *suku* mean to Mentawai people? It refers to kin group with several families living in the nuclear family houses of a government village. This *suku* also refers a genealogical network of several kin groups living in different places using the same kin group's name. The same term is also used to refer to differently named but related kin groups dwelling in separate places.

And today, communal possessions like ancestral lands are also called *porak suku* (communal land) instead of *porak uma* or *porak muntogat*. The ownership of *porak suku* is the same as *porak uma* (local kin group's land) and *porak muntogat* (genealogically related kin groups' ancestral land). In order to distinguish between *porak suku* as *porak uma* and *porak suku* as *porak muntogat*, someone has to notice the location of land, the size of land, the historical matters of the land, and a number of families or kin groups claiming to have rights to the land.

## 2.6 Social alliances

Social alliances – especially what I refer to in this book as kin groups – are important in Mentawai, and marriages are a common means to create them. Mentawaians have a marriage custom of kin exogamy. That means a person cannot wed a member of his own family or kin group. Therefore, it is compulsory to look for a potential partner outside of one's kin group. It is considered a great achievement if one finds a partner from a neighbouring valley. Mentawaians have a patrilineal descent system. This means the existence of a kin group depends on the presence of male members, because it is the male members who are responsible for upholding and continuing a kin group's identity. Rights to ancestral properties like land are always handed down to male members.

A social alliance can be established through marriage. A marriage between members of two different kin groups can strengthen the family relationship between kin groups residing in the same valley or in two separate valleys. A young couple that get married cannot formally carry out their wedding ceremony without agreement between the two kin groups to which they belong. Parents of the young couple have to negotiate about the bride-price to be paid and the day when the wedding ceremony will be performed. After these matters have been agreed, bride-receiving families celebrate the wedding without the attendance of the bride-giving family, according to Mentawai wedding customs.

Before undergoing a traditional wedding ceremony, two unrelated kin groups should first negotiate the bride-price, or *alat toga*. The amount of the bride-price in Mentawai varies over time and place. In the past, land was the most valuable object as a bride-price, besides planted trees like durian trees and coconut palms, gardens, and other valuable things (e.g. pigs, chickens, sago palms, and metal objects such as cooking pots, machetes, axes and woks). Such land was called *porak alat toga* (land for bride-price). The bride's family, if receiving land as part of the bride-price, acquires ownership of the land and the land can be used by all members of the bride's kin group. The size of land given as bride-price varies. It might be as large as a hectare. Sometimes, a plot of land has already been planted. Other times it is just land with natural forest.

But a family would not surrender all of their land as bride-price, only a small part of it. Just as the bride-giving kin group receives a plot of land and other objects agreed in the negotiation, the bride-receiving kin group receives the so-called *ibat pangureijat*, 'wedding meals'.

In the past, traditional Mentawaians deliberated seriously on the proper time to hold a wedding ceremony. They considered what would be a good position of the moon. They considered wet and dry seasons, fruit and fish seasons. By selecting an auspicious time for the ceremony, they wished to ensure that the young couple would become a good family and have children that would bring happiness and good luck. It was felt that the young couple would enjoy health and prosperity if they chose the right time to get married. At present, contemporary Mentawaians follow the European calendar and a Christian tradition for weddings. For Christian Mentawaians, the best time to hold a wedding is considered to be Sunday, Christmas, or another Christian celebration. Similarly, Muslim Mentawaians consult Islamic tradition for an appropriate time for a wedding. Not only is the Islamic tradition followed of being wedded by an imam (an Islamic religious leader) in a mosque, but the preference is to wed a Muslim Mentawain as an ideal marriage partner. Although Mentawaians have been converted to world religions like Islam and Christianity, there are still families that like to hold two different wedding ceremonies, one according to the traditional Mentawai wedding ritual and the other according to the tradition of a world religion. This custom of having two different ceremonies is most frequently practised by Mentawai Catholics.

During a traditional wedding ceremony, one or two persons should take the position as father of the bride, who has the responsibility to prepare the wedding meals that will be delivered to the bride-receiving kin group. It is possible that a prominent member of the kin group will take on the role of preparing the wedding meals if the father of the bride has passed away. Such a person is called *sipangurei*, meaning 'someone in charge of organizing a wedding ceremony'. The wedding meals are delivered at the same time the bride departs to join her future husband's kin group. After a very short moment of meeting, the bride's family immediately return to their home, leaving the bride to her husband. But a week after the wedding, the young married couple may visit the bride's kin group. This visit is made without the presence of other members of the bridegroom's kin group.

After the wedding, the bride lives together with her husband's kin group. She gives birth to sons and daughters who will carry their father's kin group name and rights, and identify with their father's kin group. In case of divorce, the woman is expected to return to her family, but the relationship between the two kin groups will be disturbed by the divorce. The woman returns without bringing her children, only her personal belongings. In case her husband dies, she will return to her kin group, and the relationship between the two kin groups will remain harmonious, the children remaining with the father's kin

group. If she dies of natural causes, her personal belongings will be returned to her original family, and the relationship between her family and her husband's family will remain in harmony.

Another possible occurrence in a marriage is that a wife might be mistreated by her husband. In this case, she may freely return to her kin group or voluntarily remain with her husband and take care of her children. However, her kin group will not remain silent. Her family will request a compensation payment for the husband's violent behaviour. A pig might be an appropriate payment, the so-called *ute* (head). If a wife dies due to her husband's brutality towards her, her kin group will request her husband's kin group to give them a plot of land as compensation.

Besides marriage, another way to strengthen a social alliance between families is an adoption. *Sinappit* is the term for an individual who has been adopted by another kin group. *Sinappit* are recognized and acknowledged as members of the adopting group (Schefold, 1988: 52, 220). Therefore, a *sinappit* will not use his or her original kin group name anymore. She or he will use the name of the adopting kin group.

*Sinappit* have the same rights to land and natural resources belonging to the kin group with which they live (that is, the adopting family). However, if *sinappit* decide to return to their initial kin group, they have to give up the possessions they have acquired while living with the adopting group. In case of hostility or making an unacceptable mistake in the group, a *sinappit* has to leave the adopting group without being allowed to take along any possessions. Sometimes the initial kin group from which the *sinappit* came would like to have them back; in this case the initial kin group has to pay back the *lulut pangurau* (costs of raising them) to the adopting kin group. The amount of those costs is negotiated and agreed by the two parties. *Sinappit* may voluntarily return to their kin group at any time.

*Siripo* is another kind of relationship between two individuals. It is a close relationship. After a *siripo* relationship between two individuals from different kin groups is established, their families may be involved in the new relationship too. They respect each other deeply. It is like a 'nephew and maternal uncle' relationship. In the traditional relationship between a nephew and his maternal uncle, whatever the nephew needs from his maternal uncle, he may get it easily and for free, and the nephew will do likewise if his maternal uncle needs something from him. This also characterizes the relationship of two individuals in a *siripo* relationship. What an uncle and a nephew may not do that two *siripo* may do is to create a new kin group. Traditionally, if a nephew does not have a kin group anymore, he may join his maternal uncle's kin group. In the case of a *siripo* relationship, if the two friends decide to build an alliance, then both individuals stop using their initial kin-group names. Instead, the two of them create a new kin group with a new name.

An example of *siripo* happened to a Siriratei family and a family of Chinese migrants. Both merged to create a new kin group called Satoko. Before that happened, the Chinese family had bought a plot of land in Saibi Muara, where its members could plant coconut palms and build a big house, and the house looked like a Malay shop (*toko*). The Chinese family invited a Siriratei family to join with them to create a new kin group called Satoko (from the word *toko*). Members of the new Satoko kin group that originated from Siriratei did not lose their rights to their ancestral Siriratei lands even though they were now part of the new Satoko kin group. This particular case is discussed further in Chapter 10.

By describing these social matters of Mentawaians, I aim to give some background for recent social changes and their impact on landownership and land use in Mentawai. In this chapter, I have briefly described the geographical characteristics of the Mentawai Islands. Mentawaians carefully considered the geographical characteristics of valleys, rivers, and other topographical features prior to settling a place. The features of that place also play an important role in their family stories.

Furthermore, I have described the population of the Mentawai Islands with special focus on kin groups and social alliances. *Uma* is the most common term used for kin group. Another important term is *muntogat*, which refers to the genealogical tie among related kin groups residing in separate places. Within a *muntogat*, related Mentawaians regard each other as having the same ancestor and homeland. So, such groups are united by having the same origins. However, social alliances are not always based on genealogical ties but can also originate in an intimate friendship or adoption, two ways in which individuals can join another kin group or start a new group. Together they create a kin group and regard each other as family. Due to contemporary developments in Mentawai, *suku* has been replacing the traditional terms of kinship. This also gives other meanings to the social structures of Mentawai communities.

To understand kin groups in Mentawai, not only genealogical ties need to be considered but also landownership and what is told about land in family stories. Through landownership, one group of related people is divided from others. Kin groups have particular ideas, emotions, and other communal properties, and land is one of several elements that bring people together.





# 3

## Social and cultural features of Mentawaians

### 3.1 Introduction

Mentawaians do not have a specific orthography or written language, as they have only a spoken language; they do not have any writing tradition (see Pampus, 1989b). The main term currently used by Mentawaians when they speak of either general cultural practices or a particular tradition is *arat*. This was not a Mentawai term originally, however. It was adapted from the Indonesian word *adat*, which in the Indonesian language has a meaning similar to ‘custom’.

Mentawaians called their traditional belief system *sabulungan*. Government officials and missionaries wanted a way to refer to different religions, including the traditional belief system. They therefore added the word *arat* (the local pronunciation of *adat*) to *sabulungan*. The term *adat* or *arat* was introduced in the 1950s, when the government officials and the missionaries needed a word for ‘religion’. Since the 1950s, *arat sabulungan* is the term used for the traditional belief system of Mentawai, contrasting with such other terms as *arat Islam*, *arat Protestan*, and *arat Katolik*.

In this chapter on *arat*, I focus on Mentawaians’ concepts of customary land rights and their views on the traditional economy. I believe that customary land rights and the traditional economy of Mentawaians are closely related to the current land conflicts in Mentawai. To begin the discussion, I look at the traditional background of *arat*. Afterward, I briefly describe the arrival of world religions in Mentawai, because a person’s religious beliefs may influence that person’s behaviour in resolving conflicts. The last issue I discuss in this chapter is the traditional lifestyle. I point out how Mentawaians perceive and value their natural resources and ancestral land.

### 3.2 Historical background of *arat*

Before the term *arat* became popular in Mentawai, Mentawaians used the word *punen*, which means ‘activity’. The word has a similar meaning to ‘festivity’, ‘ceremony’, or ‘ritual’, and has to do with a set of activities that should be done. In the context of rituals, *punen* is specifically called *lia*. *Lia* is the term for a ritual social gathering in communal rituals or ceremonies. In the course of time, the word *punen* was replaced by *arat*. However, *arat* has broad and multiple meanings.

In the common understanding of Mentawaians, *arat* encompasses such matters as rules, norms, customs, and manners. It covers ownership of communal properties and people’s daily life. To some extent, *arat* may include beliefs and ideology. As the term *arat* became popular to refer to Mentawai cultural practices, *punen* was more frequently associated with religious ceremonies in churches, mosques, and public festivities. *Punen* is more specific in meaning and *arat* more general.

*Arat* encompasses rules that compel members of the community to behave in the proper way according to established customs. It governs the way social systems in a community are supposed to work. It may be said that *arat* is a kind of pattern for social conduct. *Arat* may be classified into several categories, namely *arat pangureijat* (marriage customs), *arat pulaggaijat* or *arat laggai* (norms regulating social cohesion in a village or settlement), *arat punen* (ritual order), and *arat pubakkanan ka porak sabba ka mone* (management of landownership and land tenure).

In addition, Mentawaians use the term *arat* to refer to individuals with a particular talent. If someone frequently demonstrates an ability that other people in the community are not so good at, that person is perceived as special. Her or his talent is referred to as *arat tubu* (*arat* = custom or habit, *tubu* = body). However, *arat tubu* (or, in another dialect, *galai tubu*) can be applied to both positive and negative behaviours. It has a positive connotation when *arat tubu* (or *galai tubu*) is used to refer to someone’s skill in producing something useful for oneself or for the community. Most Mentawaians, because of long practice, are talented at carving artistic figures or making fine tools like paddles, canoes, baskets, shrimp traps, and other household objects: they have *arat tubu*. However, *arat tubu* has a negative connotation when used to refer to someone whose habitual actions are destructive for the community.

In a very different sense, the term *arat* is used to designate the religions introduced by missionaries to Mentawai. Soon after declaring independence in 1945, the state of Indonesia recognized five world religions. In 1998, Confucianism was acknowledged as the sixth religion in Indonesia. However, only three religions – Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism – were introduced to Mentawai from outside. In Mentawai these three world religions were called *arat puaranan* (see Sihombing, 1979; Coronese, 1986: 38). Protestantism (*arat*

*Protestan*) was introduced in 1901, Islam (*arat Islam*) was introduced in 1950 and Catholicism (*arat Katolik*) was introduced in 1955 (see Caissutti and Cambielli, 1985; Karangan and Yunus, 1985; Abidin, 1997). There is no Hinduism or Buddhism in Mentawai.

The majority of Mentawaians who adhere to one of these world religions do not practise their new religion exclusively. While adopting some of the principles and values of the world religions, groups of Mentawaians still practise their traditional belief system. While believing in Jesus, for instance, a lot of Mentawai Catholics also believe in the power of spirits of their ancestors and other spirits living in the spiritual world. These Mentawaians routinely engage in traditional rituals on particular occasions. On Sunday or Friday, Mentawaians regularly visit a church or mosque. Before looking at the world religions, I first explain the Mentawai traditional belief system and its growth.

### 3.2.1 Traditional belief system

The traditional belief system is known in Mentawai today as *arat sabulungan*. The Mentawai did not formerly have a particular term for their belief system. The church and the local government created this term to differentiate between *arat puaranan* (any or all of the world religions) and *arat sabulungan* (traditional beliefs). By doing so, the government and local churches could more easily forbid Mentawaians practising *arat sabulungan*. This word is formed from *sa* and *bulungan*. *Sa* is a plural unity of something. The root of *bulungan* is *bulu*, meaning ‘to offer’. *Bulungan* is understood as a group of unknown spirits. *Sabulungan* is thus a group of spirits, to which a special offering (*buluat*) is given. So, *arat sabulungan* is the belief focused on the existence of spirits. Through various different rituals, human beings can come into contact with spirits.

Indonesian scholars who have studied the Mentawai culture give different definitions for *sabulungan*. They interpret *bulungan* as if it were based on the root *bulug*, meaning ‘leaf’. They mistakenly assume therefore that *sabulungan* is a belief system based upon the power of leaves that mediate the sacred connection between Mentawaians and supernatural beings (see Sihombing, 1979; Rudito, 1993; 1999). In the view of these scholars, Mentawaians believe in a particular kind of leaves rather than in spirits. I will not discuss the spirits of Mentawai, as they have been sufficiently discussed by scholars such as Loeb (1929a) and Nooy-Palm (1968) for Sipora and Pagai islands, and Schefold (1973; 1988) for Siberut. I nonetheless highlight a few points of the traditional belief system that are relevant to land conflicts.

According to their traditional beliefs, Mentawaians acknowledge two worlds: the visible natural world and the invisible spiritual world. The natural world is the domain of people, animals, plants, rivers, mountains, sea, stones, and corals – concrete things that exist in this world. The natural world is what

people see on earth. The spiritual world is perceived as the domain of spirits. It is the invisible side of the human world. Mentawaians believe that the two worlds are not separate. In visible and touchable water, for instance, exists unseen and untouchable water. Mentawaians assume that ordinary human vision is not able to see the spiritual world. The only way to see it is through ritual and by using the transcendental vision of shamans (*tai kerei*).

Spirits may reside underground, in the sea, the sky, in rivers, forests, hills, and even in natural objects such as a large stone or tree. Mentawaians are familiar with *taikabaga* (chthonic spirits), *taikabagatkoat* (sea spirits), *taikaleleu* (forest spirits), *taikapata* or *taikamanua* (sky or celestial spirits), *sikameinan* (crocodile spirits living in rivers), and *pito'* (spirits staying in graveyards). The existence of spirits everywhere is also illustrated in mythical stories such as the stories of *balubalu* and of the origin of the durian fruit (Schefold, 1988: 70-80). Everything on this earth and in the universe has what is called *simagere*. This is an essence for living beings. It defines their natural quality. It may be translated in English as soul, although 'soul' does not have exactly the same meaning as *simagere*. It signals movements of living beings. Animals, plants and humans all have *simagere*. Because of having *simagere*, humans, plants and animals actively move, and they grow bigger until they reach a certain size.

In addition to *simagere*, there is another element called *ketsat*, which characterizes living beings like humans, animals, and plants. *Ketsat* may be translated as 'spirit'. Both *simagere* and *ketsat* produce a sort of energetic radiation called *bajou*. It may have both harmful and useful consequences for human beings. Upon death, the human soul (*simagere*) and spirit (*ketsat*) return to the spiritual world. They are then called *ukkui* or *kalimeu* (spirits of the dead). Human spirits are also known as *sanitu* (ghost of human death). Ordinary people may be in touch with the spiritual world when they come across a weird experience on a particular occasion, but they are not able to meet any spirits. A shaman, in contrast, may take a spiritual journey through ritual in order to communicate with spirits. This happens in trance. Mentawaians carry out a particular sacrifice in order to call their ancestors' spirits to participate in a family ceremony.

In mythical narratives Mentawaians tell about a group of human beings separated into two groups by a particular ritual in order to explain the existence of the invisible spiritual world. One group remained in the natural world while the other disappeared to an invisible domain. Thereafter, the disappeared group never returned to the natural world. The only way that both groups can meet each other again is through rituals. *Sabulungan* is used to refer to all the spirits in the invisible world, some of whom are deceased human beings (*ukkui*); the rest of these spirits are spirits of water, forest, and so on.

Thereafter, death is seen as a way to get into the invisible spiritual world. Mentawaians believe that a dead person's spirit is a living spirit in the spiritual world. Mentawaians believe that human spirits never die. Both soul and spirit

continue to live in the spiritual world after the death of the body. To bring the domain of human spirits into simple human understanding, Mentawaians call the spiritual world *beu laggai* (big settlement). It can be thought of as a human settlement, associated with a sacred place, but is invisible. Mentawaians living in the coastal area of the valley of Saibi Samukop believe that the hill called Silagilagi is the place where their *beu laggai* is located. But it is not the hill itself that is the *beu laggai*; the hill simply marks the location of the invisible settlement.

Besides human spirits and other spirits in the invisible spiritual world, Mentawaians are familiar with the supernatural essence called *ulaumanua*. *Ulaumanua*'s domain is anywhere, even beyond the universe, therefore it was named *ulaumanua*: *ulau* (outside or light) and *manua* (sky). *Ulaumanua* is, to some extent, understood as a powerful light. This element does not have a particular personality. However, Mentawaians believe that it has power over everything in the spiritual world and the natural world. To Mentawaians, *ulaumanua*'s influence in human life is quite clear, even though it is difficult to describe. Living beings on earth are taken care of by this supernatural being. Mentawaians believe that when someone dies of natural causes, *ulaumanua* is the cause of death. *Ulaumanua* is assumed to be the only spirit that can sustain or terminate the life of humans, animals, and plants. So, *ulaumanua* is the spirit that takes good care of people and things living in the spiritual world and the natural world.

Mentawaians communicate indirectly with *ulaumanua* and other spirits through the spirits of those who have died, or *ukkui*. According to my findings, Mentawaians sacrifice domesticated animals and take some parts of sacrificed animals as an offering for the spirits. In order to please the spirits present at rituals, Mentawaians decorate their houses, themselves, and their offerings with colourful flowers and particular ritual leaves called *katsaila*. By presenting a *buluat* (offering) consisting of an egg, piece of pork, taro, banana, and other food decorated with flowers and *katsaila* leaves on a wooden plate, Mentawaians hope that their ancestors' spirits in the spiritual world may be present at their ceremonies. Through rituals, wishes for health, prosperity and fortune are addressed to the ancestral spirits. In this manner, ancestors' spirits may transmit family prayers through *sabulungan* to *ulaumanua* in the hope that the requests of the living people will be fulfilled.

Results of the offering may not be seen instantly. However, people might notice the results over time, by being aware of remaining healthy, or in their success in catching animals while hunting, or family members being far from troubles. Such good fortune may accordingly be viewed as an affirmation of successful prayers. Mentawaians practise their traditional beliefs through rituals and daily activities. Mentawaians show respect for what they meet in nature. If they want to extract natural products, they first address an apology to the spirits in order to show their respect, so that the spirits of the products and the spirits that take care of the products will not harm them. Mentawaians

sometimes perform a ritual in order to bring a land conflict to an end. In that situation, they swear upon their ancestors' spirits. If they swear upon a lie, the spirits will punish them by bringing them misfortune. They may even die, if *ulaumanua* decides to punish them severely.

In family rituals, the *rimata*, an appointed leader of a kin group, together with a prominent shaman (*si kerei*), usually guides his relatives. The *rimata* is a social leader but may not necessarily be a senior shaman, as there are very few senior shamans in a kin group. Some shamans (*tai kerei*) of the family help a *rimata* to carry out the ritual. In addition, *simata'* – ordinary members of the kin group – should all take on some part of the ritual. Some of the tasks of the *simata'* are to beat the drums, to sacrifice pigs and chickens, and to prepare the meals. In daily life, a shaman and a *rimata* are similar to other members of the kin group with regard to accomplishing common tasks such as producing and gathering food, clearing gardens, and raising animals.

### **3.2.2 World religions in Mentawai**

Protestant missionaries from Germany arrived on the Pagai islands in 1901, invited by the Dutch colonial officials who were already there. A few years later they expanded the Protestant religion to Sipora and Siberut. In order to expand the religion, Protestant missionaries gradually prohibited the traditional belief system, which was centred around shamanic activities. A few decades after the arrival of Protestantism, Islamic merchants from Sumatra introduced Islam to Mentawai in 1954, and Italian missionaries introduced Catholicism in the same year. This became the official record about the arrival of these religions (Coronese, 1986: 29). However, according to unpublished sources referred to by Karangan and Yunus (1985: 116) and Abidin (1997: 39), Islam had been in Mentawai as early as 1935. And Catholicism had been introduced to Mentawai in 1917 by European missionaries (Caisutti and Cambielli, 1985: 107).

When Soekarno was president of Indonesia (1945-1966), the Indonesian government made efforts to unite the diverse Indonesian ethnic groups into one Indonesian nation (Anderson, 2002). Indonesian youth had actually promoted this idea in 1928. They declared that they acknowledged one land, one nation, and one language of Indonesia by signing the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge). In order to arrive at a 'modern' Indonesian culture, everyone was asked to follow the Naskah Proklamasi (declaration of independence), Pancasila (five fundamental principles), Undang-undang Dasar 1945 (Indonesian constitution of 1945), the state motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), Undang-undang Negara (state laws), and *Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara* (general policies of the Indonesian state) (Sihombing, 1979; Coronese, 1986; Schefold, 1988).

The process of Indonesian unification had a significant effect in Mentawai in 1954. It began with the *Rapat Tiga Agama* ('three religions meeting' – Prot-

estantism, Islam and traditional belief system) in the Mentawai Islands, organized by representatives of government, military and police. The meeting came up with some crucial decisions. Mentawaians had to choose one of Indonesia's five officially acknowledged religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism). Mentawaians therefore were not allowed to practise their traditional beliefs anymore. Each person was required to accept one of the five religions within three months after the meeting.

The provincial government of West Sumatra, with the help of local police officers, commenced to destroy Mentawai's material culture, and prohibited Mentawaians practising their traditional culture. By so doing, 'primitive' images of Mentawaians could be abolished and the 'new Indonesian culture' would be accepted. Accordingly, the government together with the military and local police gradually forced Mentawaians to dwell in government-established villages (see chapter 5 of Persoon, 1994 for clear examples of the social changes entailed by this). In this way, Mentawaians' social structures were destroyed and replaced with a new social structure made by the established religious organizations and local government bodies.

The process of eradicating Mentawai traditional culture occurred during the 1950s through the 1980s. It was instigated when President Soekarno (1945-1967) was in power, and continued during the rule of President Soeharto (1967-1998). Consequently, Mentawaians in Pagai and Sipora lost significant characteristics of their traditional culture. In Siberut, a similar thing happened. Kin groups who had been living communally in *uma* houses were separated into nuclear families and each family got a small house in a government-established village through the resettlement programmes of the Social Department of Indonesia. The majority of families were forced to live in such single-family houses. A lot of families, however, later returned to the places where they once lived.

Some groups of people in upriver places escaped from the government by moving deeper into the interior of the island when the government tried to relocate them. They did so in order to prevent their traditional culture from being destroyed by the government and the churches. The Sakuddei kin group confronted the government by totally rejecting being modernized. They departed from Rereiket and moved to the interior of Sagulubbe (see Schefold, 1988; Persoon, 1994: 270-276). There, they continued their traditional way of life and represent a particular image of Mentawaians that now seems exotic and archaic (Reeves, 1999; Bakker, 2007).

What happened to people in the past is still remembered today, even though it occurred several decades ago. Mentawaians clearly described the terrible occurrence when they were asked what happened at that time. The story of Aman Laulau Manai told in Lindsay's book titled *Mentawai Shaman: Keeper of the rainforest* is one example of this. Other examples are the description of traditional culture given by Schefold (1992) and the story of the Sakud-



dei kin group in the documentary made by Franceschi (1999), as well as the story of Aman Maom in Benedict Allen (2000: 37) and in the documentary about the last of the medicine men produced by Salam (2000). Mentawaians vividly expressed their sorrow at losing their culture and how disappointed and angry they were at the Indonesian government.

The Protestant church in Mentawai endorsed the Indonesian government's policies. The policies were used to promote the interests of the church. Some policies are still followed by the Protestant church in Mentawai. If someone has been baptized into a Protestant church, for instance, but still engages in traditional practices, for example asking a shaman for medical aid, she or he will be excluded from the Protestant community and from the Protestant church. If such a family wants to join the Protestant community again, the family has to undertake all over again the learning process of being a good Protestant. Afterwards, the family may be officially accepted again in the Protestant community.

Muslim efforts focused on converting as many Mentawaians as possible to Islam. The total number of adherents signifies the number of those in the Islamic community in Mentawai receiving aid from Islamic organizations in West Sumatra province and Jakarta (Abidin, 1997). However, the strength of Islamic beliefs among Mentawaians is relatively low. Samples taken from Matotonan, Saliguma and Sarausau, which are villages of Siberut where Islam has won more converts than in other villages, indicate that Mentawai Muslims still constantly practise the traditional belief system in their daily lives. While having officially converted to Islam, for example, these Mentawaians still eat pork, which is forbidden by Islam.

Moreover, they are irregular in their practice of *sholat*, praying five times a day. They do not adhere to the fasting period of Ramadhan nor can they read and understand Arabic, the language of the Koran. When their relatives celebrate a traditional ritual and they are invited, they fully participate with their relatives in the ritual, including eating pork. When Idul Fitri, a major Islamic festivity, is celebrated, Mentawai Muslims residing in interior villages of the islands go to the capital of the sub-district to receive such materials as new clothing. These materials are distributed free of charge by the provincial government of West Sumatra and the central government of Jakarta to poor Islamic people (*fakir miskin*). To sum up, Mentawai Muslims have limited knowledge of Islam, and they still strongly adhere to traditional practices.

Catholic missionaries have done something a bit different in Mentawai, even though the end result is similar. The Catholic church in Mentawai allows Mentawaians to carry on their traditional rituals as far as those rituals do not conflict with the major dogma recognized by Catholicism. The process of absorbing Mentawai culture in the Catholic church has been called inculturation (Caisutti and Cambielli, 1985: 110-112; Coronese, 1986: 34). An obvi-



ous example of this inculturation is seen when Italian missionaries and diocesan priests serve mass. They use a head-decoration while serving mass in the church. The head-decoration is similar to head-decorations used by Mentawai shamans in Mentawai traditional rituals. Moreover, other items of Mentawai material culture are allowed to embellish ceremonies in the Catholic church. By doing so, the missionaries have been trying to bring Catholicism close to Mentawaians in the hope that Mentawaians will accept and practice Catholicism in their daily lives.

Protestantism has expanded widely in the past three decades in Mentawai, especially in Sipora and Pagai. Protestant churches have been built in almost every village. Currently about fifty percent of Mentawaians are Protestants. Mentawai these days has the image of being Protestant. In the past three decades, Mentawaians have managed their churches independently by forming the Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai (GKPM, Mentawai Protestant Church Community), now separate from the Batak Church Communities in North Sumatra (HKBP, Huria Kristen Batak Protestan), from where German missionaries commenced the mission when they introduced Protestantism in Mentawai.

This significant achievement of the Protestant mission was reached by totally prohibiting Protestant Mentawaians from practising their traditional beliefs. The Protestant church in Mentawai excluded members if they kept practising traditional beliefs, for instance by seeking help for illness from a Mentawai shaman (*si kerei*). However, the church does allow them to ask for help from ordinary medicine men (*simata' siagailaggek*), who have knowledge of medicinal plants without using particular rituals to cure the ill (Tulius, 2000).

A striking aspect of Mentawai culture today is the diversity of religious beliefs practised in Mentawai. People's beliefs may have a lot of influence in the process of taking a decision on crucial matters. However, it is not the only aspect. Other aspects also affect the social life and culture of Mentawaians. One of these is customary land rights, which is a major focus of this book. Customs related to land rights are called *arat pubakkanan ka porak sabba ka mone*, which can be described as traditional knowledge of how people can manage and maintain a plot of land. This set of customs directs people in managing their rights so that they may profit from their land without arguing with one another. And, how they may find resolution if they get involved in a conflict over landownership. To become familiar with traditional landownership in Mentawai, I describe a few aspects of it in the next section.

### 3.3 Landownership

According to family stories, the early migratory movements occurred in Mentawai when only a small number of people inhabited the Mentawai Islands. Extensive areas of land were unoccupied and unclaimed. There were multiple options and directions to migrate. The early Mentawaians claimed an extensive range of territory simply by passing through it and making paths through forests, crossing rivers, moving further over hills and even sailing over islands. In order to mark the claimed plots, people chopped down trees (land claimed in this way is called *saggri*, 'chopping trees'). Sometimes they cleared the forest while passing through; land claimed in this way is called *siau*, 'clearing forest'. People left marks on the area they passed through, which is called *batik* (marking a territory). Mentawaians refer to such topographical features as rivers, slopes, mountaintops, and entire hills to clearly delineate their claimed territory.

Generally speaking, Mentawaians assume some elements of wilderness will remain to be used communally, rather than being owned by one individual or another. Such wilderness can be divided into the following natural elements. *Sopak* (small river), *bat oinan* (big river), *onaja* (swampy area), *suksuk* (flat natural surface), *tinambu* (small hill), and *leleu* (big hill). One kin group's territory may have all of those natural elements while others may have only some of those elements. So, not every kin group's territory possesses the same natural elements. Mentawai kin groups dwell in different parts of the Mentawai Islands, and the natural surroundings are not the same from one place to another.

When it came time to name a particular territory, they often named the place by referring to its surrounding natural characteristics. For example, a place near Cempungan is called Simombuk (place with a lot of bamboos); people named it by referring to the most common plant growing in the area, which was *ombuk* (bamboo). Or, they used some feature of the landscape, such as a place called Simabiluk (wavy watercourse) in the valley of the Saibi Samukop river. Another option was to name a place by a common human activity done in that place, such as Pasakiat (trading place). Or a place might be named after a particular event, usually a special experience, so that they can remember not only the place but also what happened at the place, such as Silogau (bloody place). Silogau is a place where people from Simatalu and Saibi Samukop once killed each other. A lot of places called by particular names do not exist on official maps but in people's memories and in family stories. We might say that those places are located in 'people's land'.

After claiming a plot of land while migrating, whether the migration was self-initiated or because of conflicts, some early Mentawai kin groups did not stay permanently on their newly claimed land. As related in many family stories, while part of the families remained on the newly claimed territory, other

families left for new places elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands. The early migrating families kept moving until they found an ideal place to live, where a deep river full of water was available in order that canoes might travel it easily and where their enemies might not easily reach them so that they might live in peace. Even though they settled in the last place of their migration, the places claimed earlier were not forgotten. Eventually, each plot of land in the Mentawai Islands acquired its own landlord. Ownership of these lands is captured in family stories. And only members of the kin group are familiar with the detailed content of the stories of their own kin group.

If a plot of land was claimed that did not belong to any other group, it is traditionally called *porak sinese* in Siberut (Schefold, 1988: 93) and *porak siappo* by most people in Sipora and Pagai. Claimed lands in general are called *porak sisaggri* (land marked by chopping branches of trees), *porak sibatik* (land marked by cutting trees off at irregular distances) and *porak sisiau* (land marked by clearing trees and passing through). By marking the land, Mentawaians let other people know that the plot of land had been claimed so that other people who arrived later at the place could not claim it anymore. The people who claimed the land declared themselves to be *sibakkat porak* (land-owners). In order to strengthen their claims, Mentawaians cleared and then planted recently owned places with a variety of fruit-bearing trees. A large number of durian trees (*Durino zibethinus*) and other fruit trees like *peigu* (jackfruit: *Artocarpus heterophyllus*), *abbangan* (mango: *Mangifera indica*), *babaet* (rambutan: *Nephelium lappaceum*) were planted on the land. Planted land is called *mone* (land planted with durian).

A small group of people might have possession of a small valley; more often, a valley belongs to more than one kin group. In that case, they had to divide their claim to the valley clearly. They referred to the small rivers of the valley and different types of vegetation to mark the borders of their land. The exact size of a plot of land that a kin group claimed was not measured. However, it was important to agree clearly on the borders of each other's plots of land in order to avoid conflict. Agreements about the borders and positions of each other's lands are recorded in family stories.

When they once had agreed about the borders, it was important to correctly remember them. They then had to maintain the borders properly. Changing the borders due to failure of recollecting them properly might result in a hostile conflict between two or more groups that share the same borders. When members of a group recollect the place-name of their ancestral land, they may instantly also recollect the kin groups with which their ancestral land shares the same borders. According to custom, a kin group is not allowed to go beyond the borders of their own land in order to get what they need for their daily lives, unless the landowners of that land have allowed them to do so. Members of other kin groups therefore have to ask permission in advance before extracting natural resources situated on the land of a kin group.

Besides finding and claiming it, people may have acquired possession of a plot of land because of a particular tradition like headhunting, which was practised at that time. Before the Dutch colonial government ended the headhunting practice in Mentawai in the early 1900s, Mentawaians purposely sought people's heads living in other villages in order to complete a particular ritual. In the West, headhunting raids represent the most feared images of cruel practices of Mentawai communities (Schefold, 2007) as well as of certain other Southeast Asian peoples (see Hoskins, 1996).

People practised headhunting for different purposes (Schefold, 2007: 480-482). Mentawaians underwent serious preparation through a special ritual before conducting a headhunting raid. In brief, a small group of people, consisting of five to ten adults with particular skills, went to a selected destination. They were led by a vision, which they received through a ritual called *labbra*, which is the ritual during which the hunters decided where to go and what to expect during the raid. In case of a successful raid, the hunters brought the victim's head, hands and legs, and after returning home closed with a ritual called *pasilepa* or *mulepa* ('ending'). During this ritual, people in Mentawai had to observe several taboos (see Kruyt, 1923; 1924; Wirz, 1929/30; Schefold, 1988: 89-91: 231-6, for a Mentawai example; and Rosaldo, 1980; and George, 1996 for other Southeast Asian examples).

After successfully bringing home the victim's head, hands and legs, the hunters were aware that they would be hunted in return, especially when the victim's family found out who had assassinated their family member. If the hunter families knew in advance that the victim's family was about to take revenge, the hunters might send a few people of the other kin group as messengers in order to transmit a message to the victim's family asking them not to carry out the revenge. The hunters usually offered something for not taking revenge. In this case, a plot of land was an appropriate offer. Such a plot of land was called *porak segseg logau*, meaning, 'land for preventing bloodshed'. If both groups agreed upon the proposal, there would be no warfare. It is here that the headhunting tradition has a strong correlation with land ownership.

Quite often, the identity of the hunters remained unknown until one day the victim's family found out for sure which kin group had killed their relative. If the hunters did not want to surrender a piece of their land to the victim's family, they also had the option of compensating for their conduct by offering four pigs. In that case, four kinds of payment should be done. Descendants of the first person who had killed the victim should pay the *ute* ('head') by giving a large pig as compensation for the victim's head. Descendants of the second person who participated in killing the victim should pay a penalty called *pep-ple*, referring to the machetes used to kill the victim. Descendants of the third killer should pay the *sereming*, a price or penalty referring to spears. And descendants of the last person in the hunting party should pay the *liat uma*, the penalty for killing a member of a kin group. Each penalty required a pig.

Sometimes, Mentawaians went headhunting in a group of seven to ten people. Nevertheless, only four payments were mandated. And if one person alone was responsible for the killing in a headhunting raid, then his descendants would pay four pigs of different sizes to the victim's kin group. This was done in order to reconcile the relationship between the two kin groups. Normally, the remaining kin-group members would be delighted to help their relatives pay the penalties. After years passed, both the victim's kin group and the hunters' kin group came together for a peace festival (*abat*), 'which would create a fraternal bond between the groups involved' (Schefold, 2007: 487). This tradition ended in the early 1900s.

Because of headhunting practices, many Mentawai families moved away from their initial homeland in order to avoid being assassinated. In some cases the members of the kin group remaining in the initial settlement were not numerous enough, and they welcomed families from other, unrelated kin groups to come live in that area. They built their houses close to each other and defended the settlement together. This established a relation of friendship among different kin groups, called *parurukat uma* (united groups), in short, *pauma*. When two or more kin groups live in the same settlement, each group keeps the membership and rights of their own kin group. Even though they are able to share food, assistance, and protection in case of trouble, the cooperation of several kin groups in one settlement does not merge their status or the rights of the different groups. If one kin group is recognized as the owner of a plot of land, that group remains the landowner. The other groups who came to live in the settlement were acknowledged as *tai toi*, which means 'outsiders', or as *sarauma*, which simply means 'another kin group'. If a group decided to look for another place to live, it could do so freely.

In order to secure their status at a place, newcomers or outsiders usually bought a plot of land for their own homesteads (*uma*) rather than depending on the kindness of the landowner. In many cases, land could be bought in exchange for pigs, woks, cooking pots, axes and other valuable objects. Such a plot of land is not very large, but large enough to build a communal house and huts, to raise pigs and chickens, to grow edible plants, and to gather forest products that people need for everyday use. When buying a small plot of land today, Mentawaians can offer the landowners pigs and chickens, and currently a certain amount of money like 500,000 rupiahs (about 45 Euros) per hectare. Ancestors of the Sakuddei kin group living in the upriver place of Sagulubbe called Bat Kuddei purchased a plot of land in exchange for several pigs and chickens, to use for their homestead (personal conversation with Schefold, 2006). Another example is taken from a Chinese family that migrated to Saibi Muara. Ancestors of the family surrendered three pigs to the landowners in order to gain ownership of a 20-hectare plot of land in the early 1900s. Land acquired in this way is called *porak sinaki*.

I have explained above about the marriage system. Marriage is another means by which a kin group may acquire possession of a plot of land. Mentawaians often use a plot of land as a bride price (*porak alat toga*). After the married couple pass away at the end of their lives, their sons may visit their maternal relatives. They have to find a person who acted as *sipangurei* (in charge of organizing a wedding ceremony) at their late mother's wedding. The *sipangurei*, if he is still alive, can offer a plot of land to the sons of the deceased mother. This kind of land is called *mane*. If the *sipangurei* has passed away, the deceased mother's sons have to look for the sons of the *sipangurei* to see if they can get their *mane* from them. This land is called *porak mane* (land representing the deceased). *Mane* is not always in the form of a plot of land. It may take the form of valuable objects, domesticated animals, or planted trees that may be used as the representation of the dead mother. Such objects will be given by the mother's relative who acted as *sipangurei* at her wedding. All sons of the dead mother have the same rights to cultivate or use this *mane* land. No single one of the deceased mother's sons or grandsons may claim the land for himself alone. All sons of the deceased mother collectively own this kind of land. In addition, a family may get a plot of land as payment for an act of misconduct. People's deeds are not always under control. In order to diminish destructive and disturbing behaviour, Mentawaians made social rules. The rules are called *arat laggai*, which encourage people to stay in touch, communicate and behave in accordance with the expectations of most members of a community. In Mentawai, there is accordingly a set of punishments called *tulou*. These can be applied to someone who behaves wrongly in the community. Sexual abuse and cruel assaults can be categorized as serious social misconduct. In the past, one would be required to surrender a plot of land as payment for a mistake of this kind. Two types of serious mistakes are *tulou pakaila* (sexual abuse) and *tulou kisi* (assault). Land given as payment for such misconduct was called *porak tulou*. Specifically, such plots of land are known as *porak tulou pakaila* (land for sexual humiliation) and *porak tulou kisi* (land for assault). Such are the different ways that Mentawaians may acquire rights to land. The size of such a plot of land is usually small, and it will normally be located in the ancestral lands of a different kin group (the one paying the penalty). Therefore, the borders need to be clearly defined among the groups.

Some kin groups live in the interior while others live in coastal areas near the mouth of a river. Wherever Mentawaians decide to dwell, access to a river is a significant criterion in deciding to stay at a particular place. This means that Mentawaians infrequently settle far from rivers. It is considered ideal to live on a riverbank because people can easily transport goods and reach places by means of canoe. Another preferred characteristic of a river is that it is located in between hilly areas. Mentawaians customarily hunt animals like monkeys, deer or wild boars, and areas situated between hills and riverbanks are ideal



for hunting deer and wild boars, while hilly places are ideal for hunting monkeys. Forested hills provide Mentawaians with necessary natural resources like building materials and foodstuffs. Therefore, people intensely defend their claims to a particular plot of land. By having a large plot of land, people ensure their access to natural resources, and eliminate the need to compete with other groups of people for those resources.

Because early migrants had already claimed most of the land area of Mentawai, later migrants could claim or buy only small plots of land. There are some groups of people who did not have any land at all. This means that some groups of Mentawaians possessed a large amount of land while others had no land. Kin groups who possess land are called *sibakkat porak*, and they freely extract resources from the surrounding natural ('wilderness') area. Meanwhile, kin groups without land of their own may obtain permission to make use of other people's land; these people are called *sikokop*, literally translated as 'eaters'.

If they left for other places, landowners of a particular place might hand over the maintenance of their land to some of their relatives. If they did not have any relative that wanted to take care of the land, they might ask a reliable neighbouring group. Such a group of neighbours is also seen as *sikokop*. They are free to extract anything they want from the land and use it in any way, but they absolutely may not possess or sell the land. Nothing changes regarding the ownership of the land. Those taking care of the land may not make use of the land as payments of fines or bride prices. If the appointed neighbours would like to do so, they must inform the owners first and wait to get their permission. Sometimes, the kin group that was asked to take care of another group's land would receive rights to a small plot of land as compensation.

Rights to communal properties are passed down from male ancestors to male offspring. They may not ignore or deny any of the offspring in taking advantage of the land. If they would like to sell the land, profits of selling the land should be shared equally among all male members. Mentawaians consider the ownership of a plot of land to be based on a prominent person who first claimed that land. All descendants of the original owner have the same rights to the use of that land. In a simple way, I can explain this by taking the example of the Samongilailai kin group (Chart 2.1 in Chapter 2). All male descendants of Samongilailai have the same rights to their ancestral land located in the homeland in Simatalu. It is called *porak punuteteu* (ancestral land), or *porak muntogat* (inherited land). In fact, this land belongs to descendants of several related kin groups, because all of them were descended from the same ancestor, the one who originally claimed the land. As the term for kin group in Mentawai has slowly been changing from *uma* and *muntogat* to *suku* in the last five decades, Mentawaians also designate their ancestral land as *porak suku*.

A few new kin groups like Salamao, Salimu, and Sapalakkokoai in Taileleu came into existence from the splitting up of the Samongilailai kin group in the course of migratory movements. Ancestors of each of those groups claimed a plot of land for their own. Or, they may have bought a plot of land or received it as payment of a fine from another kin group. Samongilailai members that stayed in Sipora or elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands may not simply claim Salamao's land in Taileleu, even though the two kin groups are related. However, if the Salamao kin group vanished for some reason, Samongilailai kin-group members in Sipora would take over rights to Salamao's land, and other kin groups in Taileleu would not be eligible to claim the land.

Every married man has an equal voice in deciding the status or uses of the kin group's communal properties. However, the voices of young males and females among the relatives are not often listened to. In fact, young males and females are always assigned a smaller share of the profits of communal properties. Children of married women may benefit from both their kin group on the paternal side and from their kin group on the maternal side. In Sipora and Pagai the situation is quite common that nephews and nieces benefit from their maternal uncle's land (*monen kamaman*). They do not otherwise have an obvious right to their maternal kin group's land. In Mentawai, female members of a kin group do not customarily have clear rights to their kin group's communal properties. In unusual cases, a woman may receive a plot of land as a gift, but the original owner retains his rights to the land until he dies. The rights to the land may then be passed down to the woman's son.

Some small plots of land do not belong to a kin group but may be owned by a nuclear family. Such plots of land are called *porak mane* (land representing the deceased) or *porak tulou* (payment of fines), and are considered *porak sangauma* (land belonging to one family). This kind of land also has its own story, apart from the general story of ancestral land, dividing people into those who are and are not included in possessing the plot of land. Taking the family story into account, other groups of families that share the same genealogical ties may not claim the plot of land. Sometimes, the plot of land is very small in size, only enough for one house. Therefore, the male children of the original owner usually keep the land for the purpose it had when first bought. If it was a house for a family, it should continue to be used for that purpose, instead of dividing rights to it among several male descendants.

This shows us that a particular family of a kin group sometimes owns rights to more plots of land than the rest of the kin group, if the family has specifically received a plot of land from another Mentawai kin group as payment of a penalty, a bride price or compensation. In fact, the family may even possess exclusive rights to a particular plot of land because the land was given to them as compensation for a particular misdeed done to the family by another group. The following generations of that family may keep their ownership to that plot



of land. They may freely decide if they would like to sell the land to other people. Or currently, they can surrender standing woods on the land to timber companies, as is happening at this moment in several places in the Mentawai Islands. In this way Mentawaians may gain profit from their land in a short period of time.

Due to different social arrangements involving land, landownership is a very complex issue in Mentawai. A kin group may live far from its land; however its rights to land remain unchanged. Planted trees like durian and other fruit trees serve as evidence of the landownership of the kin group. And the family stories are sources of information explaining the attachment of the kin group to particular plots of land.

I have briefly discussed how Mentawaians possess land and resources. This says something about their economy. Mentawaians traditionally rely on the natural resources of their land. They often cultivate the land too, planting a variety of crops. These days in Mentawai, people do not always depend on land and natural resources. Some people seek other ways of making a living. I explain that in the next section.

### 3.4 The economy of Mentawai

Traditionally, Mentawaians extracted most of their daily needs from the natural surroundings. They relied on domesticated pigs and chickens for livestock. Mentawaians in the interior of the islands went hunting and those who lived in the coastal areas went fishing in order to supplement their daily diet. They planted diverse crops, namely bananas, taro, coconut, cassava, and sweet potatoes, besides consuming sago. Sago was the staple food for people residing on Siberut, while bananas and taro were the staple food for people living on Sipora and Pagai. In addition, they gathered certain vegetables and other edible foods in the forest. Mentawaians cook their food by boiling, steaming and baking. Some particular foods are eaten raw as well.

The government has made a variety of efforts to change the lifestyle of Mentawaians from traditional to modern. One government programme is to change Mentawaians' diet by promoting rice as the staple food for 'modern people'. In order to be modern, Mentawaians should eat rice instead of sago or taro. Due to the absence of rice cultivation in Mentawai, the local government suggested that Mentawaians plant rice on unused plots of land near settlements. In the 1970s, Mentawaians residing in government-established villages began to cultivate rice (Persoon, 1992). In the course of time, sago as the staple food on Siberut has been replaced by rice. Now, twenty years later, Mentawaians in the coastal areas and in government villages really depend on rice, while sago has remained the staple food for people still living a traditional lifestyle in upriver settlements.

Ironically, as Mentawaians began to get accustomed to rice, they also stopped planting it. Persoon (1992) assumes that Mentawaians were not able to cope with the intense attention required to take care of rice-fields and to control pests attacking rice crops, and that they were not experienced enough to deal with Mentawai's unpredictable dry and wet seasons. Consequently, a lot of rice fields have been left uncultivated. As most Mentawaians have become accustomed to eating rice, they now depend on the import of about 50,000 kilograms of rice from Padang every week. A Minangkabau merchant in Muara Siberut imports about 10,000 kilograms of rice from Padang every week in order to supply the needs of local buyers, who are mostly Mentawaians. This man is not the only rice merchant in Muara Siberut. There are several others who sell rice in the sub-district of Muara Siberut. A few families who own a plot of land have sold their land for rice.

Besides rice, Mentawaians also depend on other imported goods such as sugar, tobacco, salt, cigarettes, and other consumer products that are all imported from Padang. Cellular phones of different types and brands, motor-bikes, and satellite dishes for television are all products that are changing the lifestyle of a new generation of Mentawaians. In order to afford those things, Mentawaians produce and sell copra (the dried flesh of coconut), rattan, and such other products as nutmeg and cloves, or they distil the oil of the patchouli plant (*Pogostemon cablin*). The history of cash crops in Mentawai began only in the 1970s. New cash crops like cacao have been introduced to Mentawai. However, Mentawaians are never in a position to set the prices of these products. Mentawaians lack knowledge about how to maintain a consistently high quality of their products, which would give them a better bargaining position in dealing with local buyers and traders (Persoon, 1985: 71-80). Local buyers and traders from Padang can therefore easily manipulate the price of a product.

In the past two decades, more and more educated Mentawaians have found jobs in private companies, non-governmental organizations, and the government of Mentawai Archipelago District, thus earning a monthly salary. Many plots of land in Mentawai have been affected by this current situation where a lot of people seek other jobs instead of farming. One consequence is that many plots of land are left uncultivated and neglected. Even many of the young people in each village without any steady occupation are unwilling to work on the land. Oddly, such young people are mostly keen to gain fast cash. Instead of working in the fields, they prefer to sell the land to logging companies or to private buyers. The younger people first persuade the older generation in their kin group to sell their land for instant cash. Luckily, not all those of the older generation are easily manipulated by the younger generation. The older generation also learned something from mistakes of other groups that had sold their land to logging or private buyers. Kin groups who sold their land have been in a difficult situation recently because they cannot cultivate their land anymore

nor do they cultivate other people's land. Meanwhile, their money is spent soon after they receive it, leaving them without any means to earn a living.

Currently, many plots of land located in the capitals of sub-districts such as Sikabalan, Muara Siberut, Tuappeijat, Sioban and Sikakap are now in the hands of Sumatran and Javanese migrants, and a number of hectares are used for government buildings. There are also a lot of Mentawaians who have migrated to other places in the Mentawai Islands and bought a plot of land from local landowners.

Many plots of land located outside of government villages (*desa*) are being exploited by logging companies, as the companies have obtained a concession from the government to log off the area. However, the companies may not immediately carry out the deforestation. First they have to negotiate with the landowners. The landowners receive a certain amount of money as compensation. This money is divided among the family members that have rights to the land.

However, surrendering a plot of land to logging companies or local buyers does not occur easily. When one kin group considers surrendering a plot of land, other kin groups try to stop them. These other groups claim to have the same rights to the land as the group that wants to sell it. It seems to happen often that a plot of land is claimed by two or more kin groups. This may occur due to the indistinct status of the ownership of the plot of land. Debates among the groups about the land may take days, weeks, even months. Moreover, it is not enough to discuss the problem among themselves. People of other kin groups who are familiar with that plot of land are asked to present their testimony too. Local authorities are asked to witness the meetings.

Mentawaians make use of different ways to win a land conflict, for instance by telling family stories about their ownership of the disputed land. The other way is to present a riddle or tricky question related to the status of the land and then wait for an answer from their opponents. If the opponents cannot solve the riddle or question, they may be seen as not having rights to the land. The riddle or question is used like a 'code'. For instance, a conflict occurred in Saibi Muara where two different kin groups disputed the ownership of a plot of land. After meeting for several days, one group posed a question to the other, asking the name and sex of a person known to have been killed on that plot of land. The other group did not know the name and sex of the person killed. Therefore, the group that asked the question won the case.

### 3.5 Concluding remarks

*Arat* is an essential term for the ethnography of Mentawai. *Arat* embraces cultural values, social customs, ritual practices and other religious aspects. The repetition of daily activities in order to materialize ideas in behaviours and

cultural objects is regarded as *arat* as well. The current changes taking place in Mentawai have an impact on *arat*. Mentawaians have voluntarily adjusted some of their cultural values so that they are compatible with changes introduced or imposed by outsiders and governments. Even if Mentawaians do not want to change, the government or other outsiders often force them to change. Some groups of Mentawaians accept and practise new values. Others cannot accept the changes and continue to practise their traditional culture. Rejection of changes is usually shown by people literally moving away to a place where they can continue their traditional lifestyle. In some Mentawai communities, the arrival of change is accepted. While practising many aspects of their traditional culture, new values are adopted as well. In the course of time, the changes are accepted and integrated in the traditional culture. Mentawaians currently combine customs from their own culture and customs introduced from outside.

These changes affect the attitude of Mentawaians toward their culture and toward specific traditions like oral tradition. Therefore, changes in *arat* are expressed not only in material culture, behaviours and ritual performances, but also in narratives like family stories, as we will see in the following chapters.

# 4

## Stories about the origins of the inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands

### 4.1 Introduction

Historical accounts of Mentawai people have been produced by Europeans since John Crisp wrote an account of the inhabitants of a Mentawai island called Poggy (Pagai) in 1799. European anthropologists, linguists and historians have made efforts to answer the question of where the ancestors of the present-day inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands came from. They examined cultural characteristics of Mentawaians and features of the language. They examined people's physical appearance as well (van Beukering, 1947). Most of these scholars concluded that the ancestors of today's Mentawaians came from Sumatra, either directly or indirectly, via Nias (Schefold 1989a). Mentawaians are assumed by scholars to be descended from Austronesian communities that migrated from Formosa (Taiwan) to Sumatra, arriving in Mentawai about 2000 years ago (Bellwood 1995).

Limited attention has been paid to stories told by the Mentawaians about their origins, even though European scholars have gathered the stories and discuss some of them. These stories of origins probably do not solve the question of the origins of the early inhabitants of Mentawai Islands. They do not contain a history, strictly speaking, of the Mentawaians. However, the stories may provide historical elements that can be used to understand aspects of the origins of the Mentawaians. I look at them in order to find out significant elements of the origins of Mentawaians.

I do not mean to survey the prehistory or history of the Mentawaians in this chapter, but rather to figure out some historical matters of the origins of the Mentawaians that are described by the Mentawaians in their stories about the origins of the early population of Mentawai Islands. I want to find out what the Mentawaians themselves think of their origins. To this end I deal with several stories of origin.

A study on Austronesian societies edited by James J. Fox and Clifford Sather (1996) provides extensive comparative perspectives for understanding origin structures and systems of precedence. An article by Fox (1995) focusing on the concept of origin and the way it is designated in a large number of Austronesian languages provides a perspective that may help to understand the origins of the Mentawaians. I will use this perspective in order to understand what current inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands say about their origins. On the other hand, ideas of origins found in Mentawai can contribute to the comparative study of Austronesian societies.

I consider the stories transcribed by several earlier scholars, who collected a number of stories of origin told by Mentawaians. Some of these stories describe the arrival of the first inhabitants of Mentawai. Some stories tell of the arrival of Malay people from Sumatra who later merged with local Mentawai communities. Other stories narrate the arrival of people from Nias who merged with the first inhabitants of the islands. Through the generations, it gets difficult to distinguish people who came first, from those who came later; the majority of the current inhabitants are all recognized as Mentawaians.

James J. Fox points out crucial elements in identifying the origins of persons or groups. 'Conceptions of ancestry are invariably important but rarely is ancestry alone a sufficient and exclusive criterion for defining origin. Recourse to notions of place is also critical in identifying persons and groups, and thus tracing origins' (1996: 5). Fox furthermore argues that alliance, defined in the broad sense of relations of persons and groups to one another, is also an important element in defining origins. Together, all of these notions imply an attitude towards the past: the past is knowable, knowledge of the past is of value, what happened in the past has set a pattern for the present, and it is essential to have access to the past in order to make sense of the present (Fox 1996: 5). In the Mentawai case, stories of origin collected from different kin groups are useful for determining where the ancestors of the majority of inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands came from. However, stories of origin of the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands, as recounted by particular individuals, may not necessarily explain the origins of those individuals themselves. Their stories about Mentawai origins do not always speak of their own origins. The stories just give an idea of the first place inhabited by the first arrival in Mentawai.

Nonetheless, after analysing the stories of origin, a place of origin of ancestors of the majority of the current inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands can be suggested. This place then becomes the starting point for tracing the course of migration of the ancestors of the current inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. It so happens that in Mentawai, migratory movements are marked by plots of ancestral land claimed by the ancestors of the current inhabitants, and therefore to the validity of present-day claims to these plots of land. However, the descendants of these ancestors dispute ownership to some of these plots of

land. That is why it is important to Mentawaians themselves to determine the place of origin of current inhabitants' ancestors.

I begin by examining stories collected previously by several scholars. After that, I analyse stories collected during my own fieldwork. I divide the stories into several periods. Some stories were collected between 1842 and 1930. Other stories were collected between 1960 and 1991, and I recorded a number of additional stories myself, after 2000. I examine the stories in order to identify a place of origin, on the one hand, but I also compare the stories to each other to see what features they share.

## 4.2 Stories of origin gathered between 1842 and 1930

In this section I examine stories collected in the period 1842–1930. These stories were collected by Morris (1900), Neumann (1909), Hansen (1915), Kruyt (1923, 1924), Loeb (1929b) and Wirz (1929–30). Some of the stories have been re-edited and republished by Bruno Spina (1981). I start this section by looking at Neumann's report published in 1909. Neumann did not collect the story himself. He discovered a report dated 1842, which records a legend about Muko-muko people arriving at the Pagai islands by means of a raft.

### 4.2.1 Neumann's report

The assistant resident of Bengkulu wrote a report<sup>7</sup> on 17 November 1842. The report contains information on the origins of the Mentawaians residing on the Pagai islands. The report intrigued Neumann because it records a myth or legend shedding light on the origins of the contemporary Mentawaians residing on the Pagai islands. Neumann quotes the legend in his report titled *De Mentawai-eilanden* (1909) as follows:

In overoude tijden gebeurde het eens, dat twee personen, een man en eene vrouw van Kataun, door den sultan van Moko Moko wegens het plegen van ongeoorloofde gemeenschap zwaar beboet warden. De boete niet kunnende betalen werden zij door den sultan en zijne rijksgroten veroordeeld, om beiden op een bamboezen vlot gezet en aan de golven prijs gegeven te worden. Dit gebeurde. Na zeven dagen zonder eten en drinken op zee rondgezworven te hebben, kwamen zij op de Poggie eilanden en werden de stamouders der volgende geslachten. (Neumann 1909: 196)

<sup>7</sup> Neumann gives the archival number 795/535 without mentioning the name of the archive it was found in.



This story may be translated into English as follows:

A long time ago, it happened that two persons, a man and a woman of Kataun, were punished by the sultan of Moko Moko [spelled today Muko-muko] because they had had an unlawful sexual relationship. The sultan required them to pay a certain amount of money as a fine for their misbehaviour. They did not have enough money to pay the sultan, so the sultan and his followers condemned them to be put on a bamboo raft in the ocean. This was done, and they began to drift on the waves. After seven days on sea without food or drink, they arrived on the Poggie [Pagai] islands and became the ancestors of the following generations.

Neumann does not mention whether the assistant resident of Bengkulu recorded the story from Mentawaians dwelling on the Pagai islands or from Malay people living in Bengkulu. Nonetheless, the legend as quoted by Neumann tells of the existence of an ancestral connection between two different groups of people: those residing in Pagai in Mentawai and those residing in Muko-muko in Bengkulu, Sumatra.

Regarding the connection between these two different groups, Mentawaians on the Pagai islands in recent times also told a legend about Minuang, which is a local name for a huge tree, and Manyang, a local name for a giant eagle (see Spina, 1980: 17-18). The legend in Spina's book says that the giant eagle stayed on top of a tree that was standing in Pagai and fed himself by eating people in Sumatra. The legend does not mention the exact place in Sumatra from where the people had come in order to kill the giant eagle.

During my fieldwork, the same legend was told to me by the people who proclaim to be descendants of the ancestors from Muko-muko in Bengkulu. In their stories, the huge tree shaded Bengkulu in the afternoons, as the sun began to sink towards the horizon. Pagai is located to the west of Sumatra off the coast. People in Bengkulu got curious about the shadow and wanted to find out where the tree was located. Besides, they wanted to find out where the eagle lived. When people from Muko-muko arrived at the Pagai islands, other groups of people from Siberut had already occupied the Pagai islands, with the same curiosity. As recounted in the legend of Minuang and Manyang, people from Siberut and Muko-muko worked together to cut down the tree where the eagle was sitting. After the huge tree fell, the giant eagle flew away towards Sumatra, where it died. One group of Muko-muko people returned to Bengkulu, while another group stayed in Pagai.

In fact, I came across a lot of Mentawaians in Pagai, Sipora, and the southern part of Siberut who claimed to be descended from a group of people who were originally from Muko-muko. The majority of them use this story to explain their arrival on Pagai. Their ancestors began a life in Pagai, and afterwards some families moved to Sipora and Siberut. Martinus Obet Salamanang

and his family are an example of a family who moved from Pagai to Siberut. Martinus Obet Salamanang, when interviewed by Schefold in 1967, stated that his ancestors came from Muko-muko. When I met Martinus in the 1980s, he was like other Mentawaians. He spoke Mentawai and had the kin-name Salamanang. Unfortunately, he had no tattoos; perhaps the government had prohibited him from being tattooed. Moreover, his ancestors did not come from Simatalu on Siberut. His ancestors had arrived on the Pagai islands several generations ago. His family actually is one of many Muko-muko families that have come to live in Mentawai, who are currently perceived as belonging to the Mentawai community.

#### 4.2.2 Morris's collection

Max Morris had the opportunity to visit the island called *si Kobo* (currently known as Sipora) in 1897 in order to study the Mentawai language under the supervision of Alfred Maass. He also wanted to study the dialects spoken in Siberut and Pagai. He gathered a lot of stories in Sioban on the island of Sipora. Transcriptions of his findings are included in his book titled *Die Mentawai-Sprache* (1900). Examining his transcriptions, I observe that the dialect resembles the dialect spoken today in the southern part of Siberut, not the dialect spoken today on Sipora. When I was in Sipora in 2004, I recognised another dialect spoken in there. It was not the same dialect in the storytexts gathered by Morris. I therefore conclude that Morris recorded the stories of a Mentawai community that had a linguistic connection with the Mentawaians living in the southern part of Siberut, in Katurei Bay and Taileleu.

His findings include a number of stories. Two of Morris's transcriptions are stories of origin of people living in Siberut and Sipora. The first story, here translated into English, is as follows:

A group of people lived in the sky. They created this earth, trees, houses, fish, grass, and everything [on earth]. Afterwards, they created human beings: a man and a woman. Then the people [in the sky] came down to earth and brought two dogs: a male and a female. The sky people saw the two persons. 'If you remain just as you are now, both of you will not expand.' The dogs mated. 'You have to see how dogs mate; you have to do like that in order to expand your numbers.' That was what the people of the sky said to the two persons. After that, the two people on earth began to bring life to a son, afterwards to a daughter. The children grew up and they married each other. Then the new couple had children as well. Thereafter, many people were on this earth. Crocodiles taught people how to make a canoe. The canoe was given a sail. Many people got into the canoe and sailed. When the canoe arrived at various places, some remained there. They arrived first at Taileleu [in Siberut], after-

wards they arrived at Sabirut [Muara Siberut]. Then our families expanded on this island. (Morris 1900: 54-55)<sup>8</sup>

The second story is about the migration of people in Siberut to Sipora. This group of people is regarded as the first group in Sipora, as they arrived there without meeting other people. The story goes like this:

From Sabirut we moved here [to Sioban on the island of Sipora]. We opened a settlement and had gardens so that we could grow bananas, coconuts, and fruits. Thereafter many people died because they had been shot by demons: female and male demons. Shamans killed the demons. Then people went to get drinking water. Demons attacked them. Many people died; two people stayed alive: a woman and a man. When the Barau people sailed to Sabirut, the two people joined the Barau. Afterwards, people returned to this place [Sioban in Sipora] and populated it. Our ancestors lived in this place. One of our ancestors was called *si Obat* [sic] [Ubat = white-haired man, meaning an old man]. The name of our ancestor was *si Obat*, the name which our ancestors [later] used to identify the place. The place-name means 'the old white-haired man's place'. (Morris 1900: 55-56)

These stories are similar to what Hansen gathered in Pagai (see next section). To his knowledge, it was Malay people from Sumatra who told the story. It seems that, after occupying Siberut and Sipora, they moved to the Pagai islands. Current descendants of these people told the same story to Hansen, and it has similar features to the story collected by Morris. In Morris's stories, it is not really clear where the first human beings had lived before sailing to Mentawai. Nonetheless, the stories say that the first sailors arrived at a place called Tailleleu (in the southern part of Siberut island) and settled in the valley of Sabirut. These people, after expanding their numbers in Siberut, moved to Sioban on Sipora island.

#### 4.2.3 Hansen's account

The story collected by Max Morris (the first of the two stories in the previous section) resembles a story collected by J.F.K. Hansen. Hansen was a Dutch marine commander in Pagai for ten months in 1911 and 1912. During his stay, he gained knowledge of Mentawaians and their culture and recorded his observations in a book titled *De groep Noord en Zuid Pageh van de Mentawai-Eilanden* (1915). Hansen's book presents several stories, and one of these stories is simi-

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<sup>8</sup> This story in Morris 1900 is given in Mentawai and German. The English version is my translation.

lar to Morris's story. I will not quote the entire story here, but note some points that make Hansen's story dissimilar to Morris's.

In Hansen's collection, there were sky spirits that had created an island called Sumatra. So, Sumatra was the first place created, and the place where the first people lived. Crocodiles taught the people to make canoes. The people then used the canoes with sails to reach Siberoet (Siberut). A number of these people remained in Siberut while others returned to Sumatra. Then, the story tells about the journey of people in Siberut to Pageh (Pagai islands), where they went to find a large bird called Manyang, which had eaten many people in Siberut. In order to get rid of the bird, people made smoke under the tree where the bird stayed. This did not work to get rid of the bird, however.

Hansen's story subsequently tells that a group of people stayed in Pageh while another group returned to Siberut. Afterwards, people in Pageh went to Sumatra, asking for help. People from Sumatra came to Pageh to help kill the bird. They found the bird in a nest on the top of the tree, and put themselves to work cutting the tree down. When people cut the tree during the daytime, it grew again at night. Therefore, they cut it day and night. Eventually the tree fell; the bird flew away towards Sumatra, where it died.

Hansen (1915: 193) notes several points about this narrative: 1) the first people lived in Sumatra, and they did not know how to make canoes. They also did not know of the existence of the Mentawai Islands; 2) after they learned how to make canoes, they began their journey to Mentawai; 3) at that time no other people inhabited the island of Siberut, nor were the islands of Pagai inhabited. Thus it was only people from Sumatra who populated the islands; 4) after people first arrived on the islands, they travelled frequently between Sumatra and Mentawai; 5) people at that time knew and were familiar with metals and clothes, but as the supply of these materials decreased, people's skills in using them also declined. People then made use of loincloths and bows and arrows; 6) afterwards, people became accustomed to travelling frequently between Sumatra, Siberut and Pagai.

#### 4.2.4 Kruyt's report

Another scholar who paid attention to stories of origin is Albert C. Kruyt. He was a teacher and a missionary. Kruyt visited the Pagai islands for two months only (February and March 1921), but he gathered a lot of information at the places where the majority of people had been converted to Christianity, and he included information provided by O. Werkmann, who was also a missionary. Mentawaians who had converted to Christianity were willing to tell him a lot of stories. In his report titled *Een bezoek aan de Mentawei-eilanden* (1924), Kruyt presents a story. The detailed story is as follows:

According to a story already well known long ago among people on the islands of Sakalagan [Pagai islands], there were two big canoes (*kinapat*), fully occupied by men; they sailed (*mulajo*) leaving Padang for elsewhere in a westward direction. Prior to departure, they prepared two things to be used as tools that would be recognizable whenever they would meet elsewhere someday. For this purpose, they took with them giant clam<sup>9</sup> shells (*pelebu*) and a whetstone (*asaan*). Each canoe had to bring one half of the tridacna shells and one half of the equally divided whetstone. Afterwards, they left according to the initial plan, going in a westward direction from Sumatra.

After being apart for quite some time, it was a long time before they met again; hence, they did not recognize each other anymore. They met again near the islands of Mentawai; all of the men in each canoe prepared for shooting by using guns. They fired their guns from one canoe to another, but none of the people were injured or killed. They began wondering why no one had been injured. They then took their tools, and their part of the giant clam shell. Both parties shouted to each other, 'Do you have the other part of this shell?' They answered, 'Yes!' And again, 'Do you have a part of this whetstone?' People on both canoes all together said, 'Yes!' 'Come closer and let us match up the shells and the whetstone in order to ensure that we are the same.'

Thus, they came closer and put together the shells and the whetstone. The two parts fitted perfectly. They then realized why they could not shoot each other: because they were members of one family. Thereafter, one canoe returned to Padang and another canoe attempted to move towards the island of Siberut. Before the separation between them occurred, people who wanted to go to Siberut island requested rice seeds and clothes from their relatives who wanted to return to Padang. But the group who wanted to go to Padang said, 'If we give you the rice seeds and clothes, we are afraid that you all will never return to us.' The people from Padang who went to Siberut indeed never returned to Padang. This is the reason why on the Mentawai Islands no rice and clothes were available. On the island of Sakalagan (Pagai islands), people still remember that rice and clothes had had to be imported from Padang for the past three generations. That [importing of rice and clothes] would thus have started about 1850. (Kruyt 1924: 33)

This story shares many features with the stories gathered by Morris and Hansen. The story tells that the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands departed from their initial home in Padang (the capital city of West Sumatra). They arrived at Siberut by means of sailing canoes. However, the story does not describe the course of migration from Siberut to Sipora and further to Pagai, although Kruyt had gathered the story among Mentawaians residing in Pagai. This story was gathered in 1921 and the storyteller had made a little variation

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9 Sometimes it is called tridacna.

in the story, by mentioning guns instead of bows and arrows. It is possible that the Dutch who came with guns to Mentawai in the early 1900s had influenced this story. What is important about the story is the information about where the first Mentawaians came from and where they arrived. It is clearly mentioned that the inhabitants departed from Sumatra and arrived in Siberut. Current inhabitants in Pagai from whom the story was recorded might have an ancestral link to those Sumatran sailors.

#### 4.2.5 Loeb's and Wirz's descriptions

Edwin M. Loeb published *Mentawai Myths* (1929b), a book containing a number of stories. Loeb collected the stories together with a German missionary known as Minister Börger. A few Batak people from North Sumatra who were sent to teach Mentawaians on the Pagai islands helped Loeb and Börger to collect the stories. Eight of the stories in Loeb's *Mentawai Myths* are similar to Karl Simanjuntak's handwritten stories collected in 1914. He was one of several Batak teachers who worked for a Protestant missionary at that time. Unfortunately, there is no story in Loeb's publication that tells about the origins of the first Mentawaians. But there are several stories narrating the transformation of animals into humans or the reverse, signifying the origins of something (see Loeb 1929b). This tells us that the Mentawaians also have a sort of mythical stories of origin, which, unlike what I call family stories, do not indicate links with people living today. Schefold (1989b) has extensively discussed this issue in his article on myths and the gender perspective.

The last group of early collected stories of Mentawai origins I examined is by Paul Wirz. Wirz studied the work of Maass (1899) and Kruyt (1924). He visited Siberut in 1926 and stayed there for a short time. Wirz wrote a report of his visit, *Het eiland Sabiroet en zijn bewoners* (1929-30). In the report, he writes about the origins of the first settlers in the place called Simatalu in the northwestern part of Siberut. Based on stories collected from Mentawaians, Wirz concludes that the first settlers arrived at a coastal area of Siberut by means of canoe, but the stories do not indicate where those settlers came from. The arrival of the first settlers was followed by several waves of migration. The migratory movements at that time were of people who lived on the Batu islands, situated among the southern islands of Nias (see Wirz 1929-30: 135). However, Wirz does not present stories of the origins of Mentawaians. He just describes how people arrived at Siberut and how they expanded in number. The first settlers became the forebears of the majority of the current Mentawai population residing in the northern part of Siberut, and some of these people moved further south in the Mentawai archipelago.

### 4.3 Stories of origin gathered between 1960 and 1991

Herman Sihombing is one of the scholars who gathered stories of origin in the Mentawai Islands between 1960 and 1991. One story he collected is about a person called Aman Tawe. However, Sihombing is not the only scholar interested in this story. Versions of the same story have also been studied by Hetty Nooy-Palm (1968), Reimar Schefold (an unpublished story he collected in 1969), and Stefano Coronese (1986). This story was apparently quite popular among Mentawaians; however, only a few kin groups claim to be descendants of the man in this story. The other kin groups claim to have originated from other ancestors, as described in the stories above (see section 2) and in the story below of a pregnant woman drifting on a raft. I examine the story of Aman Tawe to find out where the first settlers of the Mentawai Islands arrived and even to find out where the first settlers embarked.

#### 4.3.1 Sihombing's narrative collection

Herman Sihombing, a scholar of law at Andalas University in Padang, carried out fieldwork in Sipora and Pagai in 1960. He was interested in the social life and cultural values of Mentawaians. He also gathered stories from Mentawaians, one of which tells about the origins of a man called Aman Tawe (meaning the father of Tawe, in the Mentawai language). Several groups of Mentawaians in Sipora and Pagai regard Aman Tawe as their forefather. Sihombing's research findings were published in 1979 under the title *Mentawai*, from which I quote in my own translation the following story of Mentawai origins.

- 1 Long ago, a Nias person called Ama [Sihombing uses this spelling] Tawe went to the southern part of Nias island to fish. Unfortunately, Ama Tawe's canoe was hit by rough waves; therefore he arrived at Matalu [in the west-central part of Siberut], at the river mouth of Simatalu. He found many sago palms and taros flourishing. Sago palms and taros grew there naturally. Near to those sago palms and taros, he made a hut. His living conditions in Simatalu were much better than in Nias because of the convenient availability of natural resources like sago palms and taros. He made quite a big canoe in order to fetch his wife and their only child in Nias. The child was called Tawe. When Ama Tawe returned to Simatalu together with his wife and child, several other people came along with the family in the same canoe. This small group of people created a Mentawai community. In order to identify the community, they named themselves and the islands where they lived by making use of Ama Tawe's name. Because of this, part of the current Mentawaians believe that they came from Simatalu and are descendants of those people from Nias.



- 2 The generations of Nias migrants in Simatalu expanded. Then, two siblings (a brother and a sister) had sexual relations so that the sister got pregnant. Consequently, the father of the two siblings and other villagers decided to exile them. After years floating on a raft, the two siblings arrived at Sipora island. Several families went after the siblings because they missed them. The families thus searched for the siblings. The families wanted to live together with the siblings. The families [that wanted to look for the siblings] split up into two groups. One group by means of a raft followed the eastern coastline, while another group followed the western coastline of the islands in a southerly direction. In order to be able to recognize one another later, these two groups were requested to bring half of a whetstone with them to Simatalu as a sign to identify each other. They thus began to depart [from Simatalu] going southwards. After years passed, they did not find the two siblings in Sipora. Therefore, they went beyond Sipora and finally arrived at the Pagai islands. The two groups came across each other at a place called Talu Pulai. They [the two groups] did not recognize each other anymore. They began to shoot at each other. But nobody was injured or killed. They then remembered that they had brought half of a whetstone. They joined each other's whetstones and saw that the two pieces fit together. Afterwards, they built a settlement in Talu Pulai. There they planted coconut trees as a *kelapa peringatan*, or symbol of making peace with each other. (Sihombing 1979: 17-19; translation by JT, 2005)

The above story tells of the arrival of Aman Tawe in Simatalu on Siberut island. He departed from Nias. The natural surroundings and natural resources were better in Simatalu than in Nias, and for this reason Aman Tawe and his family decided to live in Simatalu. The first families were created and they identified themselves as descendants of Aman Tawe. The storyteller believed that the people carrying Aman Tawe's name became the original inhabitants of Mentawai, the name of the majority of the current population in the archipelago. The next passage is about the course of migratory movements by Aman Tawe's offspring from Simatalu to the southern islands of Sipora and Pagai. This part of the story tells of the connection between the people's place of origin in Simatalu on Siberut and a current settlement called Talu Pulai on the Pagai islands.

Hetty Nooy-Palm, a Dutch anthropologist, was interested in the story of Aman Tawe and discussed it as well. She did fieldwork in Sipora and the Pagai islands in the early 1960s and collected a version of the story that is very similar to Sihombing's transcription. When Nooy-Palm asked her Mentawaian informants where they came from, they told her the story of Aman Tawe in order to explain their origins. The same story was referred to when explaining the origin of the islands and the origin of the name Mentawai. The name belonged

to a man called Aman Tawe who came from Nias (Nooy-Palm 1968:165-6). This person was thus seen as their forefather.

Schefold encountered the same case when visiting Sipora in 1969, where he met Jonas Samongilailai and recorded a story of Aman Tawe told by him. Schefold and I listened to the tape of the story. In general, the story is similar in content to the story (the first part) collected by Herman Sihombing. Stefano Coronese (1986: 12-13) collected a story similar to the stories studied by Sihombing, Nooy-Palm, and Schefold, when he did fieldwork in Mentawai in the 1980s. This part I also heard when I gathered stories of origin of Mentawaians in Siberut in 2002, stories telling that Aman Tawe was from Nias and lived in Simatalu. I think the story and the people who told me the story are unrelated. The Mentawaians who told me the story of Aman Tawe did not claim to be descendants of Aman Tawe. But they did claim that their ancestors came from Simatalu; however, they were not descendants of Aman Tawe. They mentioned other names whenever referring to their ancestors, who had come from Nias prior to inhabiting Simatalu or adjacent places on Siberut. So, particular Mentawai kin groups definitely believe that their ancestors embarked from Nias before dwelling on Siberut and other Mentawai islands.

The story of Aman Tawe is not the only story telling about the origins of Mentawaians to be collected between 1960 and 1991. Another story is about a pregnant woman drifting on a raft and later marrying her own son. Reimar Schefold is the first scholar to have gathered and published this story. The woman's name is unknown. Perhaps the Mentawai storyteller did not mention her name when Schefold first collected the story. The woman was just identified by her pregnant status. Nonetheless, several Mentawai kin groups believe that she is their first ancestor.

I examine Schefold's story of the pregnant woman in order to figure out the location where the woman began her life on Siberut. I also note some similarities of the story to others that I gathered during fieldwork, as some of the stories indicate other places where the woman arrived.

#### **4.3.2 Schefold's narrative collection**

Reimar Schefold was the first anthropologist to take the story of a pregnant woman drifting on a raft into account, when he began his research in Mentawai in 1967. He considers other stories of origin of Mentawaians, like the story of Aman Tawe. Schefold examines the story of the pregnant woman drifting on a raft in order to identify where the first Mentawaians came from. The story is discussed in his books, namely in *Speelgoed voor de zielen: Kunst en cultuur van de Mentawai-eilanden* (1979: 19), *Lia: Das Grosse Ritual auf den Mentawai-Inseln* (1988: 79), an article titled 'The origins of the woman on the raft: on the prehistory of the Mentawaians', (1989a: 2), and *Mainan Bagi Roh:*

*Kebudayaan Mentawai* (1991: 22). In his books, Schefold does not present the full story. Instead, he gives a synopsis of it, as follows:

The first humans on Siberut lived in Simatalu in the west part of the island. There was an unknown time [when] a girl and a dog together on a raft landed, nobody knew from where [they had come]. The girl had been expelled by her brother out of shame, because she had had sexual relations with the dog, and out of it she got pregnant. In Simatalu, she gave birth to a son. When he grew up, he wanted to search for a woman; the mother gave him a ring from her finger and ordered him to find a girl that this ring would fit. The son roved about the whole island and met nobody, until after a long time wandering he met his mother again. They did not recognize each other anymore, and the ring fitted. From this couple, the first Mentawaian was born. (Translation from German (Schefold 1988: 79) by JT, 2005; see Schefold 1979: 17; 1989a: 2; 1991: 22 for a similar version of the story)

In order to become familiar with the full version, Schefold and I listened together to the whole story recorded in 1969 as told by Nikodemus Siritoitet, a Mentawai police officer, in Muara Siberut on Siberut island. Schefold allowed me to transcribe the story and use it for finding out about the origins of Mentawaians. Nikodemus's story is as follows:

### Story 1

This is a story about the first woman. The narrative goes like this. At the time she arrived on this island of Siberut, there were no other people yet; no people were living on the island of Siberut. According to this story, a woman arrived here because other people sent her away drifting on a raft. We do not know where she came from. According to this narrative told by older people (*sikeb-bukat*) in Mentawai, she had been drifting away on a raft. People did that to her because she made a mistake. Her mistake was that she broke a custom of her community. A lot of people [of her community] like her brothers, parents, relatives and everybody got angry with her and decided to expel her from the community. They put her on a raft, thus they sent her away. She began to drift, drift, drift, drift, drift, drift.

Her actual mistake was that she had sexual relations with someone. No one knew who the man was. Because of the sexual relations, she got pregnant. Therefore, the other family members felt ashamed. They thus decided to send her away. They actually wanted to send her to death at that moment. However, the mercy of her brothers saved her life. They [her brothers] set her adrift by means of a raft. Thus she drifted, drifted, drifted away until she arrived at the area called Simatalu. The precise place where she lived is unknown, and the only place that was heard by most people was Simatalu.

She stayed in Simatalu through the course of time until she gave birth to a son. Then she took care of him, raised him, and the son grew, grew, grew until he turned into an adult. Thereafter, the time came for the mother to ask her son to search for a wife. '*Ta'ina* [poor child], go and search for my *taliku* [daughter-in-law].' The son replied, 'Who is she, the daughter-in-law I should find?' The mother said, 'Here is my ring and you must look for her around this place, around this island; when you find one you have to fit this ring to her finger, but if the ring does not fit, you must not stop seeking for her yet.'

Thus, the son took the ring from his mother and his adventures began. He wandered around the island; he wandered, wandered, wandered around many places. This continued for days and nights, months, and maybe years until he had wandered over the whole island. We could say here that it was many years, because after that when he stumbled upon his mother again he did not recognize her anymore. When they met again, the mother greeted him. 'Where do you want to go?' The son replied, 'I am looking for a woman to be my wife.' And the mother asked another question, 'What does she look like, the woman you are searching for to be your wife?' The son answered her, 'Here is the ring once given by my mother to me. If this ring fits her finger she will become my wife. So, if you are willing, you can try to fit this ring. If it fits your finger, you can become my wife.' Thus, she fitted the ring on her finger and it indeed fitted. He was surprised. '*Tikai!* [a word expressing amazement] It fits on your finger. Now you must become my wife.' So they became husband and wife.

But the woman knew who the man was. He was her own son, but she did not speak up about it. She kept the secret in order to fulfil the message. After that, they lived together for an unknown time and they had children, but we [current Mentawaians] do not know how many people they produced and who they are now.

We do not know the origins of this woman. Maybe she came from Nias, or Batak [the predominant ethnic group of North Sumatra]. Her origins remain unclear to me up to this very moment. So this story ends here. [Nikodemus Siritoitet narrated this story to Schefold in Muara Siberut in 1969.]

The story told by Nikodemus has several features that we can indeed find in Schefold's synopsis. What is important to me is the identification of the place where the woman first arrived on the Mentawai Islands, which was at Simatalu on Siberut. However, her origins before arriving in Mentawai are unknown to this storyteller. However, Simatalu, where the woman arrived, is uncertain as well, because during fieldwork I gathered the same story from several Mentawai storytellers mentioning other places. We look at these other versions of the story in the next section.

#### 4.4 Stories of origin collected between 2002 and 2006

In 2002, I visited Simatalu, hoping to meet someone who could tell me the story of the pregnant woman and the story of Aman Tawe. It appeared that nobody was familiar with these stories. I then decided to visit a neighbouring village called Sirisura, where I met Tengtiti Siribetug, a 60-year-old man who once provided Schefold with great hospitality and socio-cultural information and was Schefold's best friend during his fieldwork in Mentawai (Schefold 1988: 50). Tengtiti narrated the story of the pregnant woman to me:

##### Story 2

'So... long ago, on the island of Siberut, there were no inhabitants. Other people have told me that one person arrived first. That person first lived in Nias, more precisely on the island of Tello. The person was a woman. She got pregnant without anyone knowing who her husband was. Because of being ashamed, the family members of the pregnant woman became angry and they nearly assassinated her.

She felt humiliated by the fact that she had become pregnant from an unknown husband. Hence, she made a raft in order to go away from her family. The raft was made out of bamboo and wood. She rode the raft. From the island of Tello, she was able to see the island of Siberut. She thought she would leave Tello and go to the island of Siberut. She rode, rode, rode... rode on the top of the waves... rode, rode, and finally arrived at the beach in Simalegi [northwestern Siberut].

She walked onto the land; beforehand, she had pushed her raft out to sea. She stayed in Simalegi. She stayed, stayed, stayed until she gave birth to a son. She took care of her son. The son grew up; then the mother thought about how to expand their numbers. 'You are my son, we should search around these places, and we should search for other people and for land.' The mother went on to say, 'Take this ring, my ring. When you meet a woman, fit this ring to her finger and if it fits, you should take the woman as my daughter-in-law (*taliku-ku*).'

Following what his mother said, the son then left to search for a wife. He brought the ring along. He walked around this island. He walked around, walked around, around beaches, around rivers and hills, and after an unknown number of years of wandering, he again met his mother. The son did not recognize his mother anymore because of the long time that had passed.

He took the ring and asked her to try it on. 'Fit the ring on your finger,' he said to her. When she did as he asked, the ring fitted properly. 'Because the ring fits your finger, you are my wife,' he said to the woman. The woman was his mother. The mother did not remember what she had once said to him. Or perhaps she did not want to remind her son; therefore they got married. Afterwards, people in Siberut began to expand.' (narrated by Tengtiti Siribetug, 60 years old, in Sirisura, in 2002)

This story is indeed slightly different from previous versions. According to Tengatiti, the woman drifted from Tello island near Nias and arrived at Simalegi instead of Simatalu. In this story, the place of origin of the woman is mentioned. However, this place-name is seldom heard from other storytellers. During fieldwork in Mentawai, I came across other storytellers telling me versions similar to the story told by Nikodemus. They referred to Simatalu as the place where the woman arrived. I do not repeat these stories here due to their similarity. I am, however, going to present another two stories in order to show some specific places the woman may have come from.

The next story was recorded in 2002 from Teu Roime Tatubeket, a 70-year-old man living in Pokai, a village located in the northern part of Siberut. The interview took place in the house of one of Teu Roime's relatives, where he usually spends his leisure time. His seven relatives gathered in the house listened to our conversation. Teu Roime's story is as follows:

### Story 3

I had heard this story from other people who told me that we [Mentawaians] probably came from Nias long ago. But I have recently heard from other people who told me that we perhaps were part of Minangkabau. To me, it is not important whether we came originally from Nias or Minangkabau. The story of our initial ancestors goes the way I heard it, and I am going to narrate it to you. It was a woman in a community. She got pregnant; they [her relatives and neighbours] did not know her husband. They looked for the man who had made her pregnant, but they did not find anyone. She did not want to speak about the man. According to a customary rule (*arat*, Indonesian *adat*) in the community, the pregnant woman was sentenced to death. But they did not kill her; they decided instead to set her adrift in a box on a raft. A man in the community felt pity for her; he helped her by putting her belongings and the box onto the raft. He also supplied her with food and some kinds of crops. The raft was washed away to sea.

Meanwhile, shortly afterwards, she arrived on the shore of the place called Simatalu on the island of Siberut. She did not recognize the place; she began her life in this area. After some time, she gave birth to a son. In the course of time, the son grew up to be a young man. 'If we stay here by ourselves, we will never expand,' the mother thought. Therefore, the mother requested her son to go away. 'Look for a wife in order to expand our numbers,' she said to her son. 'This is my ring; take it with you. When you search for a woman, then search for her, search for her, search for her until you meet someone like me; you must fit this ring on her finger.' She added, 'If the ring fits her finger, then you must take her as your wife.' She handed the ring to her son. After that the son wandered around the island. He wandered, wandered, wandered, wandered. We do not know how many days, how many months and years. He did not meet anyone else, until finally he came across his own mother.

He remembered what his mother had once told him. He repeated the words and put the ring to her finger. Auspiciously, the ring fitted her finger. The mother knew and recognized the momentous event. Unfortunately, the son did not recognize the woman, who was actually his own mother. He married her, his own mother. They became a family. Since then the numbers of our population have been expanding. (narrated by Teu Roime Tatubeken, 70 years old, in 2002 in Pokai)

To this storyteller, the pregnant woman's origins – whether she came from Nias or Minangkabau – was unimportant. Nonetheless, he mentioned that a man helped her before she left her homeland. She stayed in the box on a raft while drifting. The pregnant woman arrived at a place called Simatalu. This place became the place of origin of today's Mentawaians.

However, another storyteller said that the woman arrived elsewhere, near Simatalu. That storyteller was Eugenius Nangi Satoko, a 59-year-old man, who lives in Saibi Muara on Siberut. He had heard the story from people residing in Simalegi. When he was young in the 1970s, this man had frequently visited three areas on the west coast and northern parts of Siberut – Paipajet, Simatalu and Simalegi. He spent a few months in Paipajet, travelled around Simatalu, and eventually settled in Simalegi. The Simalegi people told him the story of a pregnant woman, as follows:

#### Story 4

Somewhere in Nias a woman got pregnant, but most people did not know the man who made her pregnant. According to the customary law [Indonesian *adat*] of the community [in which the woman lived], a woman who got pregnant from an unknown husband had to be sentenced to death. Because of her father's mercy, the woman was set adrift on a raft, a raft made out of two sago palms.

She arrived at a place called Lebbekeu, a place people in Simalegi called Lebbaseu, located on the west coast of Simatalu. While staying there she gave birth to a son. When her son grew to be a young man, the mother gave him a ring. The mother asked him to walk around the area. If the son met a man, he should consider the man as his own brother; however, if he met a woman, he should take the woman as his wife.

So the son walked around the area. From the coast in Lebbekeu he took a shortcut over the hills to arrive at the river Simatalu. Then he followed the river downstream to the mouth of the river. In the meantime, his mother walked along the beach to the mouth of the river Simatalu as well, and then followed the same river upstream on which her son was travelling downriver. After some time, we do not know how many years, the son turned into a man. Later, he met his mother again in Bat Matalu [the main river basin of Simatalu]. When



they met, the son remembered what his mother had told him to do if he met a woman.

The mother knew who the man was because of the ring on his finger. Shortly thereafter, they got married and lived in Simatalu. Since then, the number of people on the island has been expanding. Currently, [here Eujenius gives his own interpretation of the story] every kin group anywhere in the Mentawai islands always refers to Simatalu as their place of origin. When asked about the beginnings of their inhabitation in Mentawai, Mentawaians always mention Simatalu, because the first ancestral family inhabited a place in Simatalu. Simatalu [as the place of origin] is seen in a lot of stories telling about initial dispersals, such as the stories of *sipeu* (mango fruit) or *sibela siberi* (wild boars). People who have these stories always mention Simatalu as the place from where they first came. (narrated by Eujenius Nangi Satoko, 59 years old, in Saibi Muara, in 2002)

Like other narrators of the story of the pregnant woman, Eujenius Nangi Satoko also states that the woman departed from Nias. Her community sentenced her to death for her mistake of getting pregnant without knowing who the man was. However, her life was saved due to her father's mercy. He decided to set her adrift on a raft instead of killing her. This storyteller states that the woman arrived on the west coast of Siberut, at a place called Lebbekeu, near Simatalu. She gave birth to a son and he grew up. She sent her son to find someone in the area. He did not find a man to be his brother, nor did he find another woman to be his ideal wife. He met his own mother in the upriver place of Simatalu. This place became the settlement of the first family on Siberut.

## 4.5 Concluding remarks

By looking at details of the stories discussed in this chapter, I conclude that the stories collected between 1960 and 1991 do not have connections with the stories collected between 1842 and 1930. When I carried out fieldwork in 2002, 2004, and 2006, I did not meet storytellers who could tell me stories of origin similar to the stories collected in 1842–1930. Instead, the stories of origin I gathered were similar to the stories collected between 1960 and 1991. What I want to focus on here is: where the first settlers on Mentawai came from, how they came, and what was the first place in Mentawai they are said to have lived. Most stories collected between 1842 and 1930 talk about the arrival of Sumatran people on Siberut and Pagai. However, Sipora is not mentioned in the stories as the destination of the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. According to Kruyt's report (1924), the stories of origin of inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands collected by scholars between 1842 and 1930 tell how groups of Malay people came to live in Mentawai. These Malay people came directly

from Sumatra, more precisely from Padang. Another group also embarked from Sumatra but from another place: Muko-muko in Bengkulu. In the literature between 1930 and 1960, I did not find stories of origin of the Mentawaians. It seems that scholars did not gather any stories of Mentawai origins during this period.

Stories of origin collected between 1960 and 1991 contain information about the arrival of individuals from Nias island. They were a man and a pregnant woman. In the story of Aman Tawe, the first settler is called Aman Tawe. In some versions, a man was washed away from Nias and stranded in Siberut alone. In other versions he arrived with his son or his family and neighbours, but the neighbours returned to Nias. One story tells that the man fetched his family in his homeland before he began a new life on Siberut. Sometimes I come across Mentawaians telling me that Aman Tawe and his family first settled on the island and their neighbours later came to look for them. The neighbours unfortunately did not arrive at the place where Aman Tawe had arrived. It appears that Aman Tawe's new life on Siberut was the beginning of the current Mentawai population.

A different narrative of the origins of the Mentawai people is the story of the pregnant woman. Her miserable life of getting pregnant without a husband had forced her to leave her homeland in Nias. She was safely stranded in one of several places mentioned, Simatalu or Lebbekeu or Simalegi, where her new life began. She gave birth to a son to whom she later got married. They became the ancestors of several kin groups of current Mentawai inhabitants.

Like the stories collected between 1842 and 1930, Sipora is not mentioned in stories gathered between 1960 and 1990 as the first place the first migrants lived. Sipora appears to have been populated by groups of people living in Siberut, who originated from people who had come from Sumatra or Nias. Moreover, Sipora was also inhabited by groups of people whose ancestors had once come from Muko-muko. These groups merged with other groups who also lived in Mentawai. Collectively they created the current ethnic group of Mentawaians.

These stories of origin tell us that current Mentawaians may originate from different ancestors who departed from various places, like Sumatra and Nias. These ancestors did not arrive at the same place on Siberut. As described by Wirz (1929-30), after the arrival of the first settlers, there were several more waves of migration by other groups of people, with the new migrants arriving at different places on Siberut. After examining the stories I agree with Wirz. The stories mention dissimilar places of origin, that is, dissimilar places of first settlement, such as Simatalu, Lebbekeu, Simalegi and Berisigep in the northern part of Siberut, and Muara Siberut and Taileleu in southern Siberut, as well as the Pagai islands.

What I conclude after looking through all the stories of origin is that I agree with Schefold (1988; 1989a) when he says that the first inhabitants of the

Mentawai Islands came ‘directly or indirectly (via Nias)’ from Sumatra. Nevertheless, I am aware of the probability of a situation where several groups of early settlers did not arrive at and occupy one and the same place on Siberut, because they moved to Mentawai in different waves of migration and arrived at several separate places on Siberut (and possibly the Pagai islands). If one group arrived at an unpopulated place, they might see themselves as the first inhabitants of the islands, not realizing that there were already settlements elsewhere in the islands. In fact, we do not know precisely when, where, and who came first to Mentawai.

The stories of origin of the early inhabitants of Mentawai Islands do not indicate any time of arrival of the early inhabitants. The stories are not reliable as historical sources. However, a lot of information in them can be used to understand the past of the early inhabitants of Mentawai Islands. By analysing family stories of origin, we may conclude that the current Mentawaians were formed from diverse groups who came to live in the Mentawai Islands from various places of origin. This resembles the situation of the Cook Island population as described by Siikala: ‘The origin narratives which at the same time tell about the migration of the original ancestors from the mythical homeland to the present day islands and give their genealogies, create the qualitatively separate island populations’ (Siikala, 1996: 45).

My main concern in this chapter is with current Mentawaians’ ideas about their ancestors and ancestral places in order to understand their genealogical link to ancestral plots of land and the ties existing among related families residing in separate places in the Mentawai Islands. This may help explain the fact that not all kin groups claim the same ancestral domain and ancestral land: it may be because the way they perceive their stories of origin leads them to believe they are not descended from the same ancestors as other groups. I explain this matter further in the following chapters, as I examine family stories about long-ago conflicts that caused migration from places of origin to the Mentawai Islands, and about how the Mentawaians discovered and claimed certain plots of land. Out of the several places of origin mentioned in the family stories, I focus on Simatalu, as it relates to the land conflict I discuss later in this book.



# Part Two



In Part Two, I present three kinds of family stories gathered from different kin groups. Two of these kin groups are related ancestrally while the other does not share any ancestral links. All three kin groups nevertheless believe that their ancestors originally lived in Simatalu. Some of the kin groups are directly involved in current land conflicts. Other kin groups are not involved in the conflicts; however, their family stories tell about migratory movements and their stories illustrate features of Mentawaian family stories. Each family story conveys a particular theme, such as dishonesty, humiliation or self-esteem. The three stories are the story of *sipeu* (story of mangoes), the story of *sakkoko* (story of a pig) and the story of *siberi* (story of wild boars). Each story is discussed in one of the three upcoming chapters. All the stories are relevant to the location of the place of origin and the identity of the kin group. The three stories each narrate an initial conflict that caused the early migration of a few Mentawaian families. A significant consequence of the departure of these families was the separation of members of the initial group thereby a few families existed in separate places and created new kin-groups. In addition, each of those stories illustrates particular aspects of Mentawai culture. The story of *sipeu* for instance describes about planting, growing and harvesting crops or plants. Meanwhile, the story of *sakkoko* speaks of another aspect such as animal husbandry and the story of *siberi* depicts a hunting activity in the forest. Besides, the stories of *sipeu* emphasize an idea of equality in sharing meals, which is very important for the Mentawaians. The stories of *sakkoko* illustrate the process of migratory actions and the separation of Mentawai families. The stories of *siberi* are specifically used to support the groundwork of the current land conflicts.



# 5

## The mango story

### 5.1 Introduction

Descendants of particular kin groups in Mentawai believe that their ancestors once had a harsh conflict about harvesting the fruits of a mango tree. During my fieldwork, I collected several versions of the mango story, from different kin groups. According to the story, the mango tree belonged to a particular kin group. All families of that group therefore had equal rights to the fruits of the tree. However, one person took advantage and took the biggest fruits for himself. The other family members were angry because the person had secretly exchanged the smaller fruits of his own share for larger fruits meant for other members of the family. He took the biggest fruits and left the small ones for others. This behaviour increased tension among the kin group. Because of this conflict, many of them began to move away from the homeland and they split into several new kin groups.

A similar description of the mango story is reported by Schefold (1988: 93). Schefold regards the mango incident as an example of events that had forced Mentawai ancestors to leave the valley of Simatalu. The description of the mango story in Schefold's book is short, and it involves two mango trees rather than just one. Furthermore, it does not tell about the further migratory movements of those ancestors and the places they passed through. Schefold's synopsis of the mango incident is thus different to stories I collected during my fieldwork. Before turning to the mango stories I collected, I would like to mention a few points about the mango story and how mangos naturally grow.

The mango story has themes similar to the two other main stories discussed in this book, the pig story (Chapter 6) and the wild boar story (Chapter 7). However, the mango story differs from the other two. The mango story does not clearly establish the identity of the ancestors of the kin group involved in the initial conflict over mango fruits. It focuses on telling about the rights to the fruits of the tree, which may be seen as representing the agricultural aspect

of Mentawai culture. This story is often told by other kin groups even though it does not belong to their own group. It relates a noteworthy past event and is a story that is easy to remember.

I regard the mango story as important for understanding the role of family stories in Mentawai communities. This story is a good example of how Mentawaians treat their family stories, and the family stories of other kin groups. In Chapter 8 I analyse the themes of the mango story and the similarity of the mango story to the pig story and the wild boar story.

In the following section, I present botanical information on mangos. Thereafter, I present several storytellers' versions of the mango story. After each version, I give some comments. In the concluding section of the chapter, I discuss the social significance of the mango story. In this chapter as well as in the next two, I include genealogy charts as well as maps showing the expansion of some of the kin groups. The charts are based on the content of stories told by a number of storytellers.

## 5.2 Features of the mango

Mentawaians depend heavily on sago, banana, and taro to meet their daily needs for food. In addition, they commonly eat pork of both domesticated pigs and wild boars as well as diverse species of fish caught in nearby rivers or in the sea. Besides collecting foodstuffs from nature, Mentawaians customarily cultivate crops as well. Another important source of nourishment is a variety of fruits.

Some fruit trees grow naturally, while others are planted. In traditional gardens, common fruit trees are durian (*Durio zibethinus* L.), jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum*), and mangos (*Mangifera indica*). Mentawaians distinguish several varieties of mangos: *sipeu*, *bailoi*, *abbangan*, *lakkau*, and *limu*. To differentiate *sipeu* from other kinds of mango, Mentawaians look at the size of the trees and the time needed for those trees to grow enough to bear fruit.

*Sipeu* has a smaller fruit than the other varieties of mango in Mentawai but it is highly valued for its delicious flavour. At maturity, the size of the *sipeu* fruit is only a little bigger than a chicken egg. Nevertheless, the *sipeu* tree is bigger than the others. The tree may reach a height of 10 to 15 metres and the thickness of its trunk can be over one metre in diameter. In contrast, the *abbangan*, *lakkau*, *bailoi* and *limu* varieties of mango have smaller trees but larger fruits. *Abbangan*, *lakkau*, *bailoi* and *limu* begin to bear fruit within eight to ten years after being planted. *Sipeu*, in contrast, grows slowly, taking ten to fifteen years before it bears fruit. Mentawaians do not intensively care for their planted trees. After planting the trees, they leave them for a few months or even years, until one day they return to check whether the trees are still



growing. They then clear the vegetation around the trees in order to protect the trees from being overgrown by grasses and other plants. A few years later, the trees are big enough to bear fruit. People again clear the vegetation around the trees in order to ensure that the fruit will be easy to gather during the fruit season, *rura*.

The size of the annual harvest, and whether there will be any fruit to harvest, is highly unpredictable. After three or four small seasons (*rura siboitok*), there is one great fruit season, or *rura sabeu*. At that time, a lot of trees produce enormous numbers of fruits. In between great fruit seasons, there may be several years of small fruit seasons and one or more years of no fruit at all. *Sipeu*, unlike other varieties of mango trees, seem to need a few regular seasons to rest before another great fruit season.

Why did Mentawaians traditionally not spend much effort on caring for mango trees? Mentawaians were actively engaged in such other activities as collecting food and tending domesticated animals, activities that were also time-consuming, so they did not have enough time to take care of mango trees. In addition, they obeyed particular taboos, and that meant that activities of cutting and clearing were often temporarily postponed, for instance in the nine-month taboo period for a pregnancy. During this taboo period, a husband would not do activities considered risky to his wife's pregnancy. Mentawaians traditionally believe that to cut a tree may adversely affect the baby's life in the mother's womb. Therefore, a husband would not work in the garden much until after his wife gives birth. Although Mentawaians only irregularly care for their planted trees, they do remember the place where young trees have been planted

### 5.3 The mango story

During my fieldwork I spoke with storytellers of several different kin groups about the mango story. Some storytellers believe that their ancestors had to move away from their homeland because their family members quarrelled over the mango harvest. Besides these storytellers, I also met several other storytellers from other kin groups who were not directly connected to the mango incident. Nonetheless, they continued telling the story of the mango incident, wholly or partially, before telling the family story pertaining to the migratory movements of their own ancestors. They usually mentioned the mango incident briefly, in just two or three sentences. For instance, they would say 'our ancestors spread out from Simatalu because of mangos', without mentioning the rest of the story.

A few other storytellers honestly admitted that the mango story was not their own ancestors' story, although they knew the story thoroughly. They had a family story of their own, which was totally different from the mango story.

An old man residing in Sipora is a clear example of how a member of a kin group may be familiar with the mango story without necessarily having any links to it. Takmanggai Taikatubutoinan (see Photo 5.1), a 76-year-old farmer and a landlord in the village of Saureinu on the island of Sipora, told me about the mango story, even though he said it did not belong to his kin group. His version is given in translation in Story 6.



Photo 5.1 Takmanggai Taikatubutoinan<sup>10</sup>

### Story 6

Some groups of people moved away from Siberut to Sipora and Sikakap (Pagai islands). Their ancestors fought over mango fruits and there is a story about the incident. My ancestors did not come to Sipora because of mangos. They moved away from Siberut because they were afraid of being killed by a particular kin group residing in the northern part of Siberut. The mango story is about

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<sup>10</sup> This picture was taken in 2004. Two years later I got an e-mail from one of my relatives telling me that this informant had passed away.

two brothers: the older (*kebbu*) and the younger (*bagi*). They were from the same family. They had agreed to share the branches of the mango tree. Half of the tree was claimed by the younger brother and half was claimed by the older brother. They made circles on the ground under the tree to show the branches claimed by each of them.

Early one morning, the older brother went to the tree together with his son. He saw that his fruits [lying on the ground] were smaller than those of his younger brother. The older brother therefore exchanged his smaller fruits for the bigger ones belonging to his younger brother. Thereafter, the younger brother went to fetch his fruits. He was surprised to see that all of his fruits were small. He suspected that his older brother had exchanged the fruits. The younger brother collected all the fruits and returned home. Upon returning home he immediately accused his older brother of exchanging the fruits. They thus got involved in quarrels. The older brother did not like to be accused. He threw the fruits on the ground. Because of his act of throwing the fruits on the ground, the older brother and his family were called Sabeleake (people who threw fruits on the ground). Due to the incident, the families decided to separate from each other and leave for new places. They did not like each other anymore. After then, the families began to disperse. Other families living in the valley where the mango incident took place followed the migratory movements of the families.

We, the Mentawaians, did not move away from our homeland all at once. We moved one by one. After one family departed, others followed. From Siberut, they went to Sipora and later they moved further to the Pagai islands. (Narrated by Takmanggai Taikatubutoinan, age 76; Saureinu – Sipora, 2004)

Analysing the content of the story, I note that the mango story indeed does not belong to the kin group of the storyteller. Nonetheless, the storyteller shows that he was quite familiar with it. He recollects the content of the story but not the names of the people who instigated the incident. But the storyteller's knowledge is not comprehensive. He does not recollect the destinations where the first families had gone after the mango incident. He does not know the names of the groups that had left the homeland because of the mango incident. This means that the storyteller does not know which plots of land were claimed by the migrating families.

I was convinced by storytellers of several kin groups residing in separate places on Siberut that their groups have a direct link to the mango incident. These groups are: the Siribetug kin group dwelling in Sirisura in the upriver valley of Saibi Samukop (in 2006 they moved to a new settlement called Simoilaklak), the Salakkau kin group living in Saibi Muara in the downriver settlement of Saibi Samukop, and the Satairarak kin group living in a place called Maileppet. The three kin groups seem to have preserved the content of

the mango story. From each of these three kin groups I listened to a storyteller tell the mango story; their versions are given below.

### **5.3.1 The mango incident as told by the Siribetug kin group in Sirisura**

My two cousins and I visited the upriver place in the valley of Saibi Samukop called Sirisura in 2002. There, I met several persons of a kin group called Siribetug. I spoke with a man named Marinus Siribetug (see Photo 5.2). The man is a shaman (*si kerei*). I decided to interview him because other villagers recommended him when I asked them who could tell me about the mango incident. He is an acknowledged storyteller of the Siribetug kin group as well as in the village. From him I collected another version of the mango story, when he kindly shared the story of his ancestors.



**Photo 5.2** Marinus Siribetug

As a shaman, he cured a lot of people living in the village. He and his family did not live in the village permanently because he raises pigs and practises shamanism in an upriver place in the valley of Saibi Samukop. It was not that he was taking a stand against the government by staying away from the government-established village, but the government did not allow him to have any livestock in the village. He therefore built a communal house in the upriver place called Sirisura. Every weekend, he and his family return to the village in order to join other villagers in activities like going to church services every Sunday and to social meetings organized by the village council to discuss and find solutions to problems in the village. His knowledge of Mentawai culture is extensive. He had been invited to mediate in conflicts in the region where he lives.

In 2004 he decided to leave his house and join another 100 families to inhabit a new government village. At first he was not really happy to live there, but after living there for some years, he felt better because he enjoys current developments in the new village more than in the previous one. He sometimes visits his old gardens near the previous village and takes care of his pigs there. He has opened new gardens near the new village where he plants cacao plants and banana trees.

When Marinus Siribetug told me his version of the mango story in 2002, he was still living in Sirisura. The story was as follows:

### Story 7

*Sipeu* (mango) was an early conflict that caused the separation of our family. Because of the incident, some of our ancestral families had to leave our homeland. Our ancestors have told the story of the mango incident through the generations until it was told to me. The mango story is as follows: *Si Boklutettet* was our ancestor. As my grandfather said to me, our ancestors numbered seven altogether. They lived in Simatalu on the riverbank of a place called Mongilailai. They were called Samongilailai because they occupied Mongilailai.

My ancestral families planted a mango tree. The branches of the tree were divided among the eight families: seven branches for the seven brothers and one for the father's family. In order to show the ownership of any fruit fallen, each family made a circle precisely underneath their claimed branch. There were thus eight circles. No one should take fruit that fell in other families' circles. Every morning, women of the house visited the mango tree to collect fruits that had fallen.

One day, the mother went to the tree to find out whether any fruits were ripe and had fallen in her circle. She went early in the morning while others were still sleeping. She saw that most of the fruits in other families' circles were bigger than hers. She took the bigger fruits and replaced them with the smaller ones that were supposed to be hers. Her daughter-in-law (*taliku*) came to collect her fruits too. She saw that her fruits had been exchanged. The daughter-in-law no-



ticed depressions in the ground. She saw that most fruits were smaller but they were all resting in bigger hollows on the soft ground. The small fruits did not make depressions in the ground. The daughter-in-law decided that someone who had come earlier that day had definitely substituted her fruits.

After asking everybody in the house, the daughter-in-law found out that the person who had exchanged her fruits was her mother-in-law. The daughter-in-law told her husband what she had seen when she arrived at the mango tree. The wife and her husband concluded that their parents disliked them. Due to this incident, the family decided to seek another place to live. Afterwards, other families affected by the incident decided to move away as well. Consequently, the majority of family members decided to move away (*musa-bu*) to find new places to live. They left their parents alone. This dispersal was known as *pusabuat sabeu Samongilailai*, the great separation of Samongilailai, because it affected many members of the group.

Several families joined to become one new group called Saeppunu. They settled in a place called Bat Polime. My ancestral family was part of the Saeppunu group. Later, a few of the Saeppunu families decided to move away again. They occupied a place located at Bat Bajak, an upriver place in the valley of Saibi Simatalu. My own ancestor stayed in Bat Polime. He and his family did not join the Saeppunu [the families who went on to Bat Bajak]. He and his family stayed, stayed, stayed, and stayed in Bat Polime. One day, his father felt so sorry because his sons had left him because of the mango incident. The father decided to visit his children and persuade them to return home. The father visited my ancestor's place. In the past, people used to address each other as *bolaik*, which literally means 'friend'. We do not frequently use the word anymore currently. 'Bolaik, I come to visit you, because the rest of our family and I have missed you all so much,' the father said to his son. 'Well... actually we were seriously disappointed by you and our mother. Because of your misconduct, we finally had to decide to stay away from you. You and our mother were deceitful to us. This occurred almost every day. We think that is more than enough.' My ancestor kept refusing what his father tried to propose. 'You should not think so... if you would return to us, I have decided to sacrifice my pigs in order to bring all members of our family together,' the father attempted to persuade his children again. 'If you intend to do so, you should go and inform my other brothers in Bat Bajak,' said my ancestor. The brothers living in Bat Bajak were the ancestors of the Saeppunu. All the brothers decided to discuss their father's proposal, but they did not say anything about their mother. They just disliked her. After discussing their father's plan, my ancestor's brothers residing in Bat Bajak eventually returned home with their father. My ancestor living in Bat Polime did not join his brothers. He continued to reject his father's invitation even though his father had proposed to give a festivity for the family reconciliation.

The storyteller took a break at this point and lit a cigarette. I put the recorder on pause. He investigated the tape. He was surprised to see the small recorder. It seems that he had not seen it before. A lot of smoke was pouring out through his nostrils while his lips kept pinching the cigarette, and he was holding the recorder in his two hands. He replaced the recorder in its initial place. Meanwhile, I made notes of questions to ask after he finished telling me his story. After a few blows of smoke, he drank his cold tea that had been placed on the table about an hour earlier. He gave me a sign when he was ready to continue telling his story.

While living in Bat Polime, the relatives of our ancestor decided to form a new group, called the Satobbou. They accordingly left for a new place located in Paipaijet. They left us behind because of humiliation and a misunderstanding having to do with pigs. The story of the Satobbou is as follows. One afternoon, when all members of our family were settling down in the front part of the house, pigs returned from forests in the vicinity of the house. Pigs were usually fed in the front yard of a communal house (*uma*). While most of the pigs were eating, two pigs were mating (*palukkehek*), and everyone could see that.

Father looked at the embarrassing occurrence and he was ashamed, because his daughter-in-law was sitting on the veranda of the house and also seeing the two pigs mating<sup>11</sup>. The father went inside the house without saying a word to anybody. He took his spear, and he threw the spear and it hit one of the two pigs and killed it. The killed pig belonged to his son and the other belonged to him. Other members of the family in the house were amazed at what the father had just done. The father's son, who owned the pig, found out that their pig had been hit by his father's spear and said angrily 'Our father shot my pig. It was fine if the spear had hit his own pig.' They asked their father why he had speared the pig. Hence, serious quarrels emerged between the father and his son. The son disagreed with what his father had just done. He could not accept that his father's spear had hit his son's pig. The son seemingly misunderstood his father's act. He thought that the father disliked his son and his son's family, as he lived and shared everything with his father in the same house.

The son used that pretext to move away to Paipajet. From Paipajet, he went on to Sagulubbe. In Sagulubbe, his family changed their kin-name from Satobbou to a new one, called Sabaggalet. I do not know why the name was changed. Our ancestor moved from Bat Polime in the valley of Simatalu to the valley of Saibi Samukop and his family became Siribetug. The family dwelled in Sakreake for a few generations. When my great-grandfather was leading the family, they moved again to Sirisura, where we are currently living. We departed from Bat Polime voluntarily. [Recently, a few Siribetug families live in the place called Simoilalak.]

11 See Schefold 1986 for further discussions on taboos of family relationship.



The rest of our families remaining in Mongilailai in the valley of Simatalu were still called Samongilailai. What I remember about them is that they were engaged in a hostile conflict with a kin group called Sapokka residing on the riverbank of Saibi Simatalu. They had a disagreement about a pig. The pig had been obtained from the Sapokka kin group as the bride price for one of our female ancestors, who married a male member of the Sapokka kin group. Members of Sapokka shot the pig to death and this signified that they wanted to get the pig back. Customarily, the Sapokka could not do that. It was against the initial agreement of the couple's marriage and it disrupted the harmony of the relationship between the two neighbouring groups. Therefore, one of our relatives killed some Sapokka. Thereafter, our ancestor who killed the Sapokka migrated to another place together with his family.

The majority of our relatives moved to a place called Bat Koddobat, after which they were called Sakoddobat. While a few families remained in Bat Koddobat, others continued migrating to the valley of Rereiket. They were called by the new name Salabok. And the rest of our relatives in Bat Koddobat moved away to inhabit an area called Sirileleu [currently called Taileleu]. They became the Salamao, Samongilailai, and Salakkokoai [kin groups]. Although we are currently living under different kin-group names, we were all descended from one ancestral origin called Samongilailai. (Marinus Siribetug, age 65; Sirisura – Siberut, 2002)

In this story, the narrator tells us about his ancestor who led the storyteller's ancestral kin group after the mango incident. He also mentions the first place-name where the ancestor and his families dwelled in Simatalu at that time. According to the storyteller, the mother of his ancestral families instigated the family conflict. She was deceitful towards her daughters-in-law by taking bigger fruits and leaving smaller ones for her daughters-in-law. The mother appears as an evil character in the mango story. Hence, sons of the ancestral family decided to move away from their parents. However, the father of the family visited his sons and asked them to return home. The father's efforts eventually turned out to be a great success as a few of the sons came home. Some of the sons kept refusing to return home and they migrated to other places and became new kin groups. The following chart (Chart 5.1) summarizes the migratory movements of the storyteller's ancestors, as indicated by his story.

The storyteller mentions another occurrence in the same story, which had caused further migratory movements of his ancestral family. The story says that the occurrence did not involve the same father who was involved in the mango incident. The father who was involved in the second conflict was from a different generation. However, both incidents are similar in that parents are at odds with their children. In the first occurrence, the mother behaved wrongly, but in the second occurrence it was the father who made a mistake.

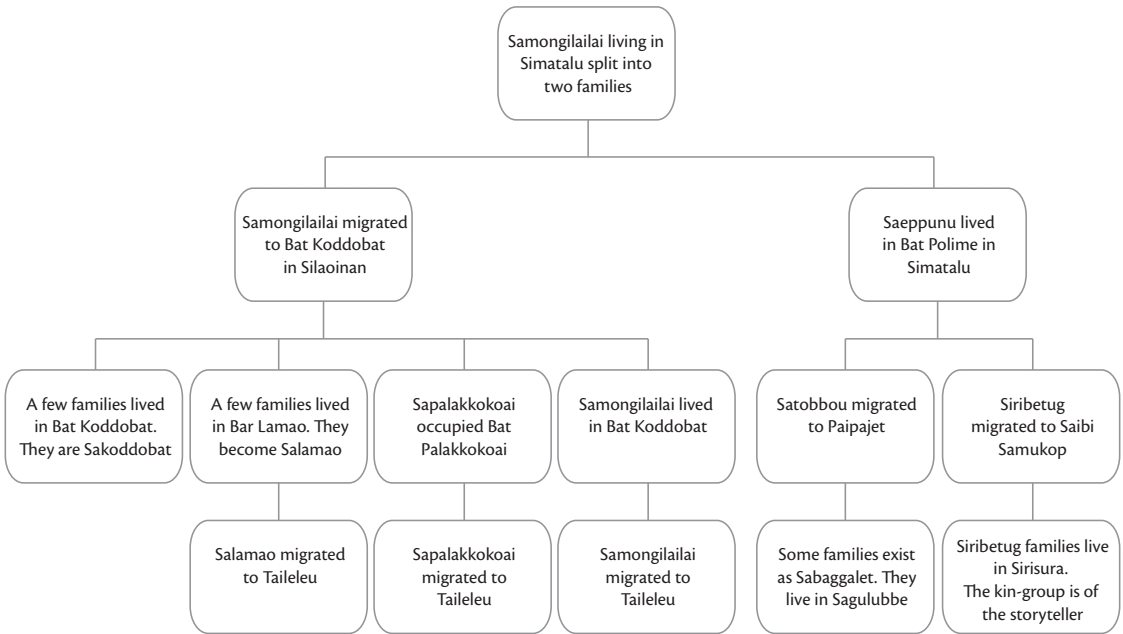


**Chart 5.1** Expansion of the Siribetug kin group

The father was embarrassed by two pigs mating in the yard in the presence of his daughters-in-law. In Mentawai, such a situation was indeed – and still is – unacceptable. Two individuals related by blood or marriage should not be in a sexually embarrassing situation. A male person should avoid seeing animals mating in the presence of his female relatives. The father did not avoid the situation. He was annoyed and tried to bring the embarrassing situation to an end by throwing a spear at the mating pigs. He probably simply wanted to separate the pigs; however, his act turned out to kill one of the pigs. The son saw his father using a spear to hit his pig and kill it. On the one hand, the son to whom the pig belonged interpreted his father's act mistakenly. It was simply that the father did not wish to be humiliated by the two pigs mating in front of his daughter-in-law. On the other hand, the son's response was not fully wrong. In Mentawai, if someone uses a sharp tool to intentionally damage someone else's property, he may be assumed to have a harmful intention toward that person. Because he used a sharp tool, the father's act of spearing his son's pig was understood as an indirect hostility against his own son. The unfortunate consequence was that the father was separated from his sons and their families. Similar events thus repeatedly occurred over time, affecting the same kin groups.

### 5.3.2 The mango incident as told by the Salakkau kin group in Saibi Muara

The next version of the mango incident was collected from a kin group called Salakkau. This kin group lives in Saibi Muara, a government village located in the valley of Saibi Samukop. My mother is a member of Salakkau. My mother once told me that her ancestral kin group had left their homeland because of the mango incident. She also told me that she was a relative of the Sakerebau<sup>12</sup> kin group, which was her initial kin group. Accordingly I wanted to interview my maternal grandfather. The opportunity of doing so was offered when my grandfather came with my maternal uncle to visit their Salakkau relatives in Saibi Muara to discuss the status of their ancestral land located in an upriver place of the valley of Saibi Samukop. They had to travel to visit Saibi Muara, as they live in another village called Totoet.

I took this opportunity to interview my maternal grandfather; however, instead of answering my questions he advised me to meet with one of my uncles. My grandfather was much older than his nephew, but his nephew supposedly knew more than my grandfather about their past. I thus turned to my uncle Jakobus Salakkau. My grandfather and my maternal uncle sat on the floor next to me while Jakobus Salakkau sat about a metre from us on the opposite side. My Sony tape-recorder was placed between us. A few other Salakkau members were also present at this gathering. They sat around us. My uncle told me the mango story as follows.

#### Story 8

We were known as Sakerebau before we moved away from our homeland in Simatalu. We dwelled precisely in the upriver place called Lubaga, where our land in Simatalu is also located. The Sakerebau planted a mango tree (*sipeu*). When the mango tree had fruits, members of Sakerebau agreed to divide up

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12 Persoon specifically studied the Sakrebou [Sakerebau] kin group residing in a settlement called Bosé, located in the northern part of Siberut. According to Persoon's findings, the Sakerebau once inhabited an upriver place in the valley of Sikabalan. Some families moved to start a settlement located near the mouth of Sikabalan river. While some families remained at the Sikabalan river-mouth, a few Sakerebau families decided to migrate to a place called Bosé (Persoon 1994: 267-270). They seem to be relatives of the Sakerebau residing in other places of Siberut, such as those who are dwelling in Saibi Samukop.

Sakerebau can mean 'a group whose communal house (*uma*) has a *kerebau*', where *kerebau* is a piece of wood placed in between the front side of the entrance pillars of the house. This is a special construction making this house slightly different from those of other groups. Because only Sakerebau initially had that sort of house, this kin group was called *Sa-kerebau*, 'group of people whose house has a *kerebau*'. However, there is another kin group named Sakerebau, but their name was derived from the fact that the group resulted from a merger of two or more different groups. Therefore, they called themselves *Sa-kerebau*, 'new group'. In the story text, Sakerebau refers to the group who once had a communal house with a *kerebau*.

the branches of the tree among the family members. They made a kind of circle on the ground, exactly beneath each branch of the tree.

One morning an older brother of the family went to collect the fruits in his circle. He noticed the fruits in his circle were smaller than the fruits in his younger brother's circle. Thus, he took the bigger fruits from his younger brother's circle and replaced them with his smaller fruits. When the younger brother arrived at the mango tree, he was surprised to see small fruits lying in bigger depressions in the ground.

Our ancestors in the past got upset easily. Due to this mango incident, our ancestors made a dugout canoe out of a particular sort of durian tree called *togtug*. They wanted to leave the rest of the family. Togtag and Makkainou were our two ancestors who made the canoe, but they never succeeded. So, they decided to make a raft out of bamboo poles. This time they did succeed in making it. Thereafter, they collected taros and other fruits. Next, they drifted to the south and arrived at a place called Matobe in Sipora. Togtag stayed in Sipora and Makkainou continued to seek other places. He eventually arrived at a place called Matobe in the Pagai islands.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Sakerebau group in Simatalu began to split up. Some families migrated to a place called Sikatirik. After settling in Sikatirik they moved further to Sikabalan. Later they moved to a place called Tatubeket. Other Sakerebau moved from Simatalu to Saibi Samukop and further to the southern islands, to Sipora and the Pagai islands, following the coastline on the east side of the archipelago.

Jakobus Salakkau paused in his storytelling while he drank a cup of coffee. I pushed the recorder button on pause. I offered a cigarette to the storyteller, but he refused it. I was surprised that he did not smoke. The majority of Menta-wai adult men smoke; even in the interior of Siberut, boys of the age of twelve have already begun to smoke. They even smoke freely in front of their parents. Instead of responding to my offer, the storyteller asked me what I was doing in the Netherlands. He wanted to know how cold the winter is. He was curious about the cool weather as he once heard European tourists saying that the winter can be terribly cold. After describing what I experienced in the Netherlands in order to satisfy his curiosity, we continued the recording.

When our ancestors dwelled at the place called Tatubeket that was the moment we changed our kin-name from Sakerebau to Salakkau. It happened like this. There was a kind of tree called *bailoi*; in Tatubeket, people called it *lakkau*. This tree had fruits like mango but smaller than mango. There were three brothers. They ate the fruit of the *lakkau* tree. One fruit was shared by the three of them. The older brother took off the skin of the fruit. He then cut and shared the fruit with all of them equally. After they ate the fruit, each of them licked the *lakkau* seed. The younger brothers were allowed to begin first. When

it was the older brother's turn, he swallowed the seed. This disturbed the two other brothers because they had agreed to plant the seed in order to have a new tree. Therefore the two younger brothers said critical things to others about the older brother, saying he did not follow their initial agreement. 'Our older brother was so fond of *lakkau* fruit that he swallowed it. He wanted to keep it for himself. He did not want to share it with us anymore.' They kept telling this to other people in order to humiliate him. They, however, never talked about the matter with the older brother.

One day, the older brother heard from other people about his two brothers' criticism of the *lakkau* seed incident. In order to avoid their tedious criticism, he suggested his wife that they leave for a new place. 'Let us go from here, my two brothers always nag about the *lakkau* seed. They have started calling me *sikolok lakkau* (person who swallowed the *lakkau*).' They packed their goods and chickens, and placed them in a dugout canoe. They did not have many things to take at that time, and so they left Tatubeket.

From Tatubeket, they went to stay at a place called Berisigep. The place was occupied mostly by a group of people called Sateiku. The Salakkau ancestor lived there; they had a garden and domesticated animals. While living there, the two younger brothers came over to visit the family. The two younger brothers stayed for several months. They then decided to return to Tatubeket, and the older brother and his family took this opportunity to move further to Simalegi. They left their children to take care of their gardens in Berisigep. However, the two younger brothers were still able to reach the older brother's family. Therefore, the older brother's family left Simalegi for a place in Simatalu. They eventually settled in Simatalu. In Simatalu, he did not use the name Sakerebau anymore. Instead he used the name Salakkau. They dwelled in Simatalu; they dwelled, dwelled, dwelled, and dwelled in Simatalu. Meanwhile, most of Sakerebau remained in Tatubeket; Pokai and Sikabalan afterwards migrated to the southern islands of Mentawai.

At some point warfare (*pasaggangan*) broke out among the people living in Simalegi and in Simatalu, so the Salakkau in the valley of Simatalu moved to Sirilabat in the valley of Saibi Samukop. The leading person who instigated the migration from Simatalu and went to Sirilabat was *si Boirosiat*. *Si Boirosiat* was our direct ancestor and has ancestral connections to me. It was about seven generations ago. Boirosiat had two sons: *si Gabaisailimut* and *si Ruhut*. *Si Gabaisailimut* was my great-grandfather and *si Ruhut* was your maternal grandfather's grandfather [my mother is a Salakkau]. They settled down at the place called Sirilabat near Sakreake. This place is located in the upriver place of Saibi Samukop. They found land in an area called Teitei Tabot, and Bat Kurejet. They dwelled in Sirilabat and their name was still Salakkau. They were Salakkau, Salakkau, Salakkau, Salakkau, Salakkau, Salakkau, and Salakkau. Our ancestors still lived in Sirilabat when a kin group called Satoutou assassinated a few of our ancestors. From Satoutou we received two plots of land, located in places

called Sikuret and Simatet, as the price [compensation] for the assassination of our ancestors (*porak segseg logau*). When we, the Salakkau, got involved in conflicts among us, some of our members decided to separate from us and form a new group called Sakeru. They went to dwell on the banks of a deep river and therefore they were called Sakeru (*keru* means deep river).

My uncle stopped telling his story for a while. He looked for something and found a piece of paper. He tore the paper in pieces and arranged the pieces one after the other in two lines. He showed me his ancestral generations after the group became known as Salakkau and moved from Simatalu. He then continued telling me his story.

Boirosiat's descendants had been expanding within the Salakkau kin group over several generations. Boirosiat's sons were Ruhut and Gabaisailimut. Ruhut's sons were Bakkli and Gidjau. Bakkli had no son. Gidjau's son was your maternal grandfather, named Agustinus [the storyteller is my mother's relative], and from him descended your uncle, the younger brother of your mother, named Dominikus, and from him your cousin named Gustimar. Gustimar was the only son of your uncle, though Gustimar has several sisters. One of his sisters has a son called Marean, but we cannot count him because she [Marean's mother] married into a different kin group and so her son belongs to her husband's group. If we want to calculate the number of generations from Boirosiat to Marean, son of your cousin, we pass through seven generations.

The names of our ancestors are easily recognized because we of the Sakerebau and Salakkau kin groups often use the kin-name for our current individual names. Only our kin-group members, distinguishing us from other kin groups' ancestral names in Mentawai, use such names as Timai, Sogaiebbu, Paule, Oitok, Manaibu, and a few other Sakerebau and Salakkau ancestral names.

My daughter Timai went to North Sumatra to study. There, she met a female Mentawaian whose name was also Timai. My daughter was curious why this female Mentawaian had the same name as hers. After they introduced themselves to each other, they found out that they were related to each other. One of the two Timai was from the Salakkau kin group and the other came from the Sakerebau kin group. They were therefore 'sisters', because the Salakkau and the Sakerebau are related ancestrally. I could not use a name that was usually used by other kin groups. As a Salakkau, I am a [relative of] Sakerebau, and as a Sakerebau, I am obviously a Salakkau because of our historical occurrences and sharing the same origins. (Narrated by Jakobus Salakkau, age 60; Saibi Muara – Siberut, 2002).

The storyteller believes that his ancestral family decided to split up and departed from their homeland because of the mango incident. That happened when his kin group was still part of the Sakerebau kin group. However, it was

misconduct of the older brother of the family that split up the whole family. By taking the bigger fruits and leaving the smaller ones for his younger brother, the older brother instigated the conflict. The storyteller, however, does not identify the two brothers by name, nor does he say clearly which of those brothers had decided to leave to seek a new place to settle, elsewhere on the island.

In the next passage of his story, the storyteller discloses two names of individuals who made canoes in order to migrate to the southern part of the Mentawai Islands. However, it is not clear whether the two brothers were the same persons who were engaged in the mango incident. The storyteller describes the further migratory movements of the two brothers until they reached particular places in the southern islands. After describing the journey of his two ancestors, the storyteller goes back to telling about what happened to the rest of the family residing in Simatalu. At this point, he continues relating how his ancestors moved to the northern part of Siberut island.

The storyteller focuses on one specific occurrence while his ancestors stayed in a place called Tatubeket. This occurrence became a new story of origin, explaining the creation of a new kin-name, Salakkau. In this occurrence, three brothers are involved in a conflict over a mango seed. This is a similar motif to the earlier conflict over mangos in Simatalu.

The mango conflict in Tatubeket had led to the existence of a new kin group called Salakkau. Members of this new group were originally from the Sakerebau kin group. Because of this, the storyteller does not tell any more about the Sakerebau kin group, since his focus is on the expansion of the Salakkau kin group. Due to the mango conflict, the ancestors of Salakkau gradually moved from one place to another until they returned to Simatalu. These migratory movements are shown in Chart 5.2.



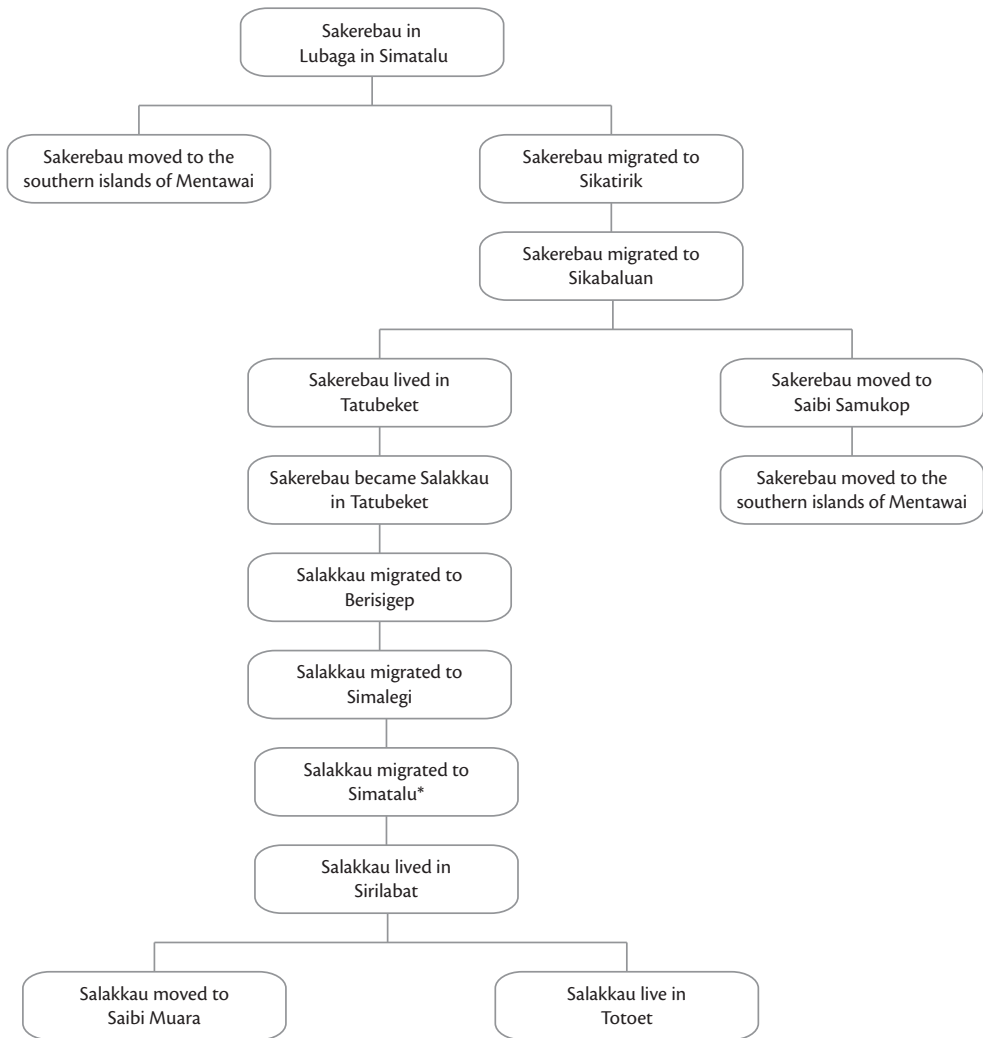


**Chart 5.2** Expansion of the Salakkau kin group

\* marks the point in time after which the storyteller can recollect the names of individual ancestors, as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 5.3)

The storyteller carries on narrating the story of his ancestors' migration. The ancestors left the valley of Simatalu to seek a new place (Sirilabat) in the valley of Saibi Samukop. At the point in the story when the Salakkau arrive in Sirilabat, the storyteller begins to recollect the names of individual ancestors. The first ancestor whose name he remembers is Boirosiat. The storyteller also recollects a few plots of land that belonged to his kin group when they lived in Sirilabat in the valley of Saibi Samukop, including the land they received from another kin group as payment for his ancestors' assassination in a headhunt-

ing raid. The storyteller hereby recollects a memory of his ancestors seven generations ago, which was after the ancestors left the valley of Simatalu for the second time. This memory is summarized in a genealogical chart (see Chart 5.3).

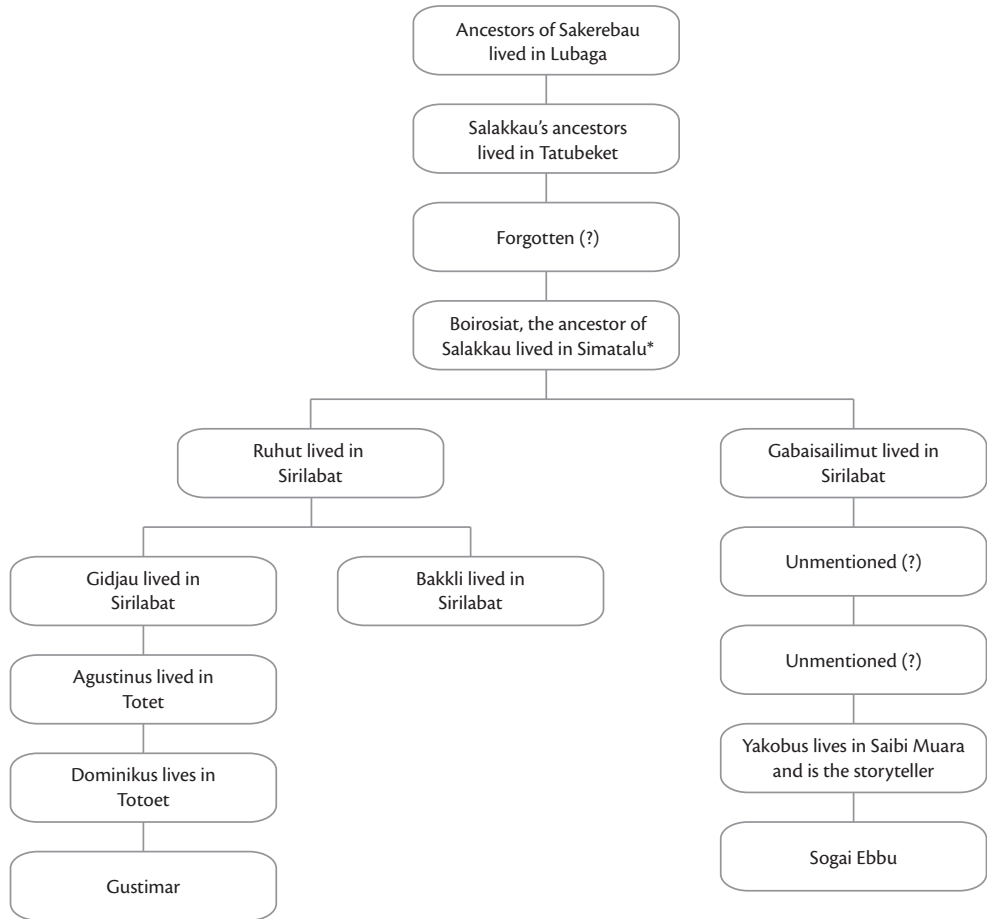


**Chart 5.3** Genealogy of the Salakkau kin group

\* indicates the ancestor who was part of the migration marked with an asterisk in Chart 5.2 above.

### 5.3.3 The mango story as told by the Satairarak kin group in Maileppet

The next version of the mango story was told by a kin group called Satairarak.<sup>13</sup> I met a storyteller of the Satairarak kin group in his house on a Sunday afternoon. Like most other villagers on Sunday, the storyteller stays at home

<sup>13</sup> This kin-name is derived from *satai* = a group of people, *rarak* = relatives, meaning 'a group of people with many relatives'.

enjoying his leisure time after working in the fields on weekdays. When I arrived, the storyteller was sitting in his house together with his wife and a fellow villager. The storyteller's sons were not at home. They were playing football with their friends, a popular sport on Siberut island. They usually do that every Saturday and Sunday afternoon. The house was thus fairly peaceful, and even more peaceful after the neighbour went home, leaving the old man, his wife, and me alone.

The storyteller knows me, as I once worked in Maileppet village on a UNESCO sanitation and clean water project in 1999. Moreover, he is familiar with my paternal and maternal families. I was treated as one of his relatives. He approached me and asked what I wanted from him. Meanwhile, his wife went to the kitchen to make cups of tea for us. I asked him whether he would tell me his family story about mangos. He chose a wooden wall where he could lean his back against it while seated on the floor opposite to me. I was seated in front of him, and my notebook and the tape-recorder were placed between us. While he was preparing to tell me his family story, the storyteller's wife sat a few metres from us on the front side of the house. She was making fishing net. She did not really notice what we were doing or she just did not want to disturb us, as we were talking about a male matter. Women in Mentawai usually are not involved unless they are asked to contribute their opinion to the conversation. Men's matters sometimes are kept separate from women's matters. The storyteller began telling me the story after giving me a sign to press the 'on' button of my tape-recorder. His story of the mango incident was told as follows.

### Story 9

Our place of origin was in Simatalu, on the riverbank at a place called Lubaga, and our kin group was called Satairarak. We moved away from our place of origin because we did not want to get involved in the conflict about mangos. This conflict had led to our initial expansion. My ancestors told the story through the generations until it was told to me. The story was as follows:

At that time, the mango tree was bearing fruit. There were two brothers. They waited for the mangos to fall, as a sign that the fruits were ripe. Beforehand, they had agreed to divide their rights to branches of the tree in order to get access to the fruits. The two brothers and their families each claimed certain branches. The younger brother said, 'So, brother, you can have the branches on the east side of the tree and I will take the other side of the tree.' The younger brother thus took the initiative in sharing the rights to branches of the tree. 'You should wait until the fruits in your part have fallen into your circle, then you take yours, but you may not take mine.' They thus made a kind of rule about what they should do when the fruits dropped. When the fruits were ripe, the moment had come for the two brothers and their families to collect their fruits.

Unfairly, the younger brother went to visit the tree earlier than the older brother. The younger brother exchanged the smaller fruits that had fallen from his branches for the larger fruits that belonged to the older brother. When the older brother came to collect his fruits, he saw that his younger brother had replaced his fruits. He noticed this by investigating the holes where the fruits had fallen. 'My younger brother may have exchanged my fruits. Depressions where the fruits fell indicate that the fruits should be bigger, but now these smaller fruits are in the bigger depressions.' He returned home and argued with his younger brother about the fruits. His younger brother did not want to admit what he had done. The older brother felt that his younger brother had cheated him, therefore he asked his younger brother to leave the place in Simatalu; consequently, their family relationship was over. The older brother remained in Simatalu. The younger brother decided to seek a new place to live in order not to see each other again. The younger brother went to Paipajet. He lived in Paipajet and had a family. He lived there for quite some time. Afterwards, he decided to leave the rest of his family in Paipajet and go to a new place in Sikabaluan. From Sikabaluan, the offspring of the younger brother moved to Saibi Muara. They stayed there a short time. Then they came to live in Maileppet. They built a communal house (*uma*).

The older brother remaining in Simatalu moved to a place situated on the riverbank in Rereiket. From there the offspring of the older brother went to a downriver place called Muara Siberut. They temporarily settled there. Afterwards, they permanently built an *uma* in Maileppet. While dwelling in Maileppet, the offspring of the older brother met descendants of the younger brother. 'Who are you?' they asked each other. The descendants of the younger brother explained, 'We came from the riverbank of Matalu and our ancestors moved to Paipajet and later went to Sikabaluan. Our ancestors continued moving to Saibi Muara and then arrived at Maileppet.' The offspring of the older brother also explained their journey, 'We also came from Simatalu and moved to Rereiket and later arrived at Muara Siberut, but we finally settled down at Maileppet.' Thus, they asked the descendants of the younger brother, 'So... what is your group called?' The descendants of the younger brother answered, 'We are Satairarak, and you?' 'We are also Satairarak, so we are relatives.' Since then, we lived in Maileppet together. We opened new gardens.

One day, some kin group set fire to the house of the part of the Satairarak kin group who formerly came from Saibi Muara. After that incident, they returned to Saibi Muara. And we went to Katurei. We, the offspring of the older brother, lived in Katurei and opened our gardens on other people's land. People in Katurei were not so nice to us. They always took our gardens after they were already sowed well, even though they had initially given us permission to make our gardens on their land. We realized that we could not live in this situation, so we returned to Maileppet. We already had gardens in Maileppet. Thus, we split up into two parts. Some of our relatives remained in Katurei and we

returned to Maileppet. Currently, although we have been dwelling in different places like in Saibi Muara, Rereiket, Katurei, Maileppet, Sikabalan, Paipajet and Simatalu, and even though the names of our kin groups have also changed, yet we have still kept in touch with one another.

Some years ago, we became known as the Samaileppet kin group, because we had started living in Maileppet together with other families before many other people came here. But we did not know who had occupied this place before us. We heard that other people who migrated to Sipora had occupied this place in an earlier expansion. It was recently, just this year that we began to use our old name, Satairarak, rather than Samaileppet. We decided to do this because in Maileppet we always argue about land. Other families see us not as real Samaileppet. Therefore, we returned to using our former kin-name, Satairarak.

Our ancestor was *si* Gurikpara, who moved to Rerireiket. Gurikpara's son was Beu Leleggu. Beu Leleggu's was known as *si* Paipaijetna. *Si* Paipaijetna had a son – who is my father – and then I myself am called Beu Asag and then my son is named Jeremias and my grandson is named Aloysius [Jeremias is actually an adopted son of Beu Asag but he regards Jeremias like a real son who will keep the name of Asag's kin group]. We have already passed through seven generations. In Saibi Muara, our relatives are the Salakkau and Sakeru kin groups. We were from the same ancestral family, which was the Sakerebau. However, I cannot tell you how we are related to Sakerebau. I do not remember in detail, as our separation occurred in Simatalu long ago. In Paipajet and Rereiket, our relatives were always called Satairarak. In short, I may conclude that from Simatalu, our ancestors moved to Paipajet, Rereiket, Simalegi, and Saibi Muara. Our relatives in Rereiket moved to Sagulubbe, Silaoinan, Katurei, and Maileppet. (Narrated by Beu Asag Satairarak, age about 70. He did not know his age precisely. He lived in Maileppet – Siberut, 2002).

The storyteller describes a situation when his primary kin group resided in Simatalu. He narrates the mango incident, which occurred because the younger brother exchanged mango fruits, taking the bigger fruits and leaving the smaller ones for his older brother. By doing this, the younger brother seemingly broke the agreed rule for his own profit. However, his mistake had to be paid with a painful consequence: his older brother sent his family away in order to find another place instead of staying together. According to the storyteller, the families residing in Maileppet are the offspring of the older brother. Before dwelling in the village of Maileppet, ancestors of the storyteller lived in Simatalu. The ancestral kin group of the storyteller split into two groups. Each of the families followed a different path. After the early migration one family descended from the younger brother met the other family in Maileppet. The other family was descended from the older brother, and they recognized each other after telling the stories of their family origins. They lived in Maileppet

for a while before eventually splitting up again because the communal house of the younger brother's descendants was burned down. The kin group of the storyteller moved to Katurei and the other family returned to Saibi Samukop, where the family had lived earlier. The group did not stay in Katurei permanently, as the Katurei villagers disliked the group. However, they did not want to give up what they had planted. A few families remained in order to take care of the planted trees and the other families returned to Maileppet, where they are currently living. The storyteller recounts the journey of his ancestors from Simatalu to Maileppet as summarized in Chart 5.4.

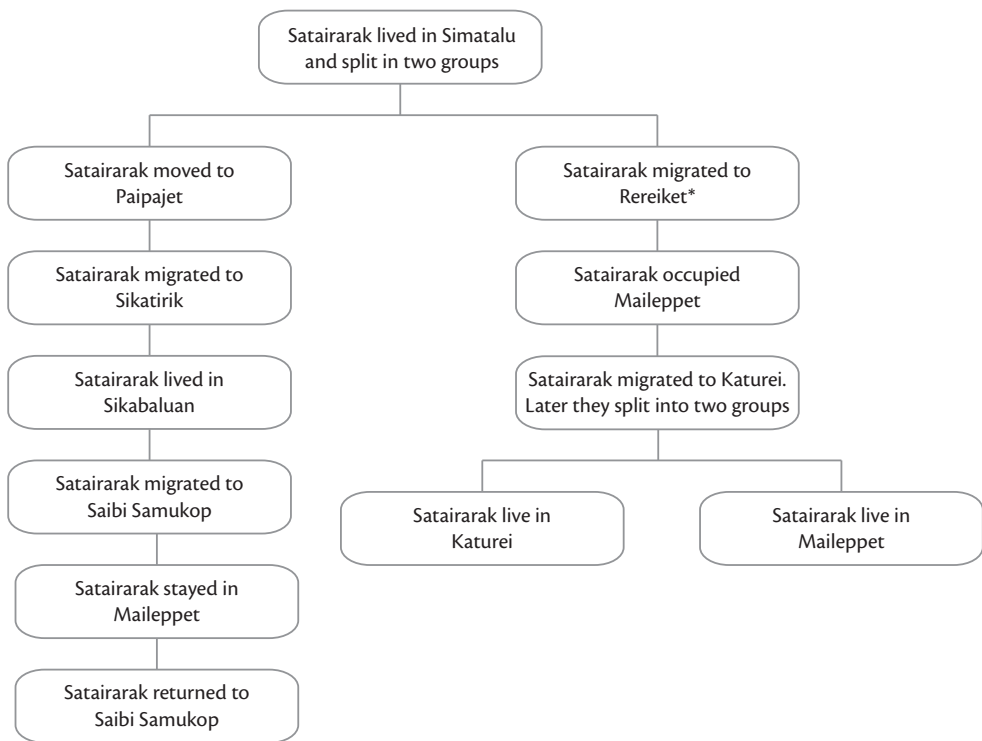


**Chart 5.4** Expansion of the Satairarak kin group

\*indicates the migratory movements of the storyteller's own kin group

He also narrates a list of generations that he remembers since the time his ancestors left the place of origin. This genealogy is given in Chart 5.5. One thing that surprised me is that he recites a genealogical list, but he does not tell it accurately. He in fact does not have any sons but he raised the sons of his brother. He treated them like his own sons. When he told me his story he did not tell the accurate order of the sons. He mentioned the younger son's name instead of the older one. I know those sons. I presume that when he mentioned the

names of the sons, he meant to indicate the different generations of his family, rather than explaining the exact genealogical order.

The other point the storyteller tells is about a family connection. The group seems to be related to several other kin groups, for example to the Salakkau. However, he does not reveal that connection in detail. The Salakkau families live in the valley of Saibi Samukop and some families of Satairarak once lived in the valley of Saibi Samukop. Perhaps the two groups are related as they once lived in the same valley, or perhaps they are related because of the same past occurrence, namely the mango incident. Unfortunately, such connections are not included in their family stories. In fact, members of both groups indeed regard each other as relatives by visiting each other and staying at each other's homes and avoiding marrying each other (as marriage within a kin group is considered incestuous).

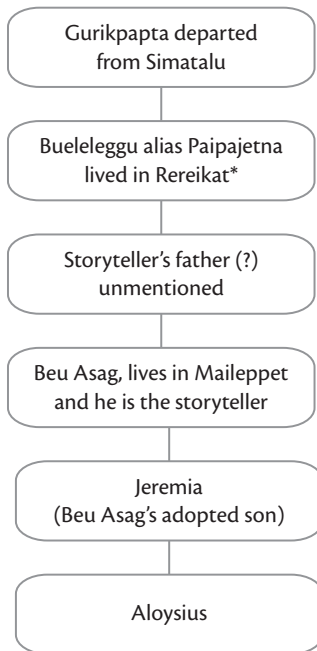


**Chart 5.5** Genealogy of the Satairarak kin group

\*indicates the ancestor who is considered to be the direct ancestor of the storyteller



## 5.4 Social significance of the mango story

The various versions of the mango story all have similar elements. The storytellers proclaim a particular place of origin from where their ancestors departed. In that place of origin, a mango tree was planted. The family had one mango tree with a lot of branches. This tree symbolizes a kin group that has one origin and the several branches of the tree represent several related families of the kin group. In the stories each family has a branch of the tree and claims the fruits of their branch by placing a circle on the ground, precisely under the chosen branch.

The circle symbolizes a social boundary among members of a kin group related to a communal property. Every family has particular rights to a communal property and every family member of the kin group should respect each other's rights. This is illustrated in the passage saying that a family should not take any fruits that fall into a circle belonging to another family. In order to avoid conflict, agreements about the tree should be respected. Such a conflict occurred in the past and Mentawaians learnt something from it. They learnt how to share their communal properties properly.

At present, people do not make circles under trees anymore. During the fruit harvest, all family members go to a tree and harvest the fruits all at once, and then they share the fruits equally among the family members. They do that in the presence of all family members so that everyone witnesses that every family receives the same share. This way of doing things has reduced tension among family members and the same way has been used in sharing other communal items like pork or money, for instance if forest land is surrendered to logging companies or if a piece of communal land is sold.

By analysing the mango story, we may identify some moral standards. For instance, the mango conflict occurred because of disobeying and disrespecting an agreed social rule. By taking bigger fruits from someone else's circle, one family member showed that she or he wanted a bigger share than other members. Equality in having things is very important in Mentawai. In other words, an unfair and unequal act is totally unacceptable. The other families who found out that their fruits had been substituted interpreted the behaviour of the family that had exchanged the fruits as insensitive and deceitful. A few individuals' selfish interests had ruined the social harmony among members of the kin group.

Besides relating places, events, and moral standards, the mango story conveys a general indication of the personal identity of prominent ancestors mentioned in the story. How many individual ancestors' names are mentioned in a given version of the story may simply be related to how good a memory a given storyteller has. It seems to me there is no systematic attempt in this particular story to memorize the names of the disputing ancestors. Because of this

absence of names, I speculate that the mango story may be the oldest incident that is still remembered.

The last point I notice about the mango story is that none of the versions of the story explicitly link the migratory movements to the claiming of particular plots of land. The storytellers simply relate that their ancestors moved from one place to another. This point makes the mango story different from most family stories, which tend to emphasize ownership of particular plots of land. A storyteller may not know which plots of land were claimed by his ancestors because the mango story seems to focus more on the conflict and the migration and less on the plots of land that were claimed.



# 6

## The pig story

### 6.1 Introduction

The next story of family conflict is a story about a pig (*sakkoko*). The story tells how two neighbouring kin groups residing in the same valley of Simatalu became involved in a harsh assault on account of a pig. One of the kin groups received the pig from the other as a bride-price. After receiving the pig, the new owner failed to keep the pig in its pen, and the pig presumably wandered back to the group from which it had come. The new owner did not know that, and kept searching for the missing pig. Finally the former owner recognized the pig walking around the communal house. Instead of returning the pig to the new owner, however, the former owner shot the pig and ate the pork. The slaughter of this pig became the focus of a serious conflict between the two groups. In this chapter I present several versions of the pig story.

Both the mango story in Chapter 5 and the wild boar story in Chapter 7 relate the migratory movements of several Mentawai kin groups, but they do not describe the migrations in as detailed a way as they are described in the pig story. The pig story gives the details needed for the discussion of migratory actions in Chapter 9. Therefore, I made use of the pig story to get information about the early migrations of Mentawai ancestors. The pig story also portrays the separation process in which families of a particular kin group split into several new kin groups. It appears that the process of migration resulted in families of a kin group expanding both genealogically and geographically. For these reasons, I decided to use the pig story to illustrate the migration and expansion of Mentawai kin groups.

Besides, the pig story illustrates a particular aspect of Mentawai culture, which is animal husbandry. Domesticated animals like pigs have an important place in Mentawai culture. A person's animals show how prosperous and respected that person is. Therefore, before looking thoroughly at the pig story, I want to describe the traditional way Mentawaians raise pigs, for what purposes they tame the animals, and the role of pigs in Mentawaians' daily lives.

Afterwards I give translations of three versions of the pig story. I then analyse the pig story briefly, before concluding the chapter.

## 6.2 The domestication of pigs

Mentawaians traditionally raise pigs. Having pigs benefits the whole family. Every family member is involved in taking care of the pigs, as the pigs need to be fed every day. Adult men cut down trunks of sago palm growing near their homestead and divide them into several small logs. They soak these logs in the river in order to maintain the quality of the soft part of the sago and to prevent the log becoming rotten. The logs float near a riverbank close by. Women and young people go to the riverbank to take a log of sago whenever they need to feed their pigs. They divide up the log into smaller portions so that the pigs can eat the soft part of the sago easily.

Mentawai houses are built on strong wooden stilts. Under the house floor there is enough space to keep several pigs. Mentawaians sometimes fence in a pen under their house where they can closely watch their pigs. Alternatively, people may build a pig pen with a roof next to their house, or near their garden by a riverbank. Pigs are not tamed completely. They are free to roam around in the vicinity of people's houses during daylight in order to find something to eat. The pigs return to the pen in the evening, and family members feed them sago palm there.

Before a family starts raising pigs, the father of the family usually carries out a small ritual in order to prevent the pigs from being eaten by snakes, being stolen by other people, and from illnesses that can wipe out all pigs at once. Prior to carrying out the ritual, the father has to observe a number of taboos, such as not eating uncooked foods and not having sexual relations for a period of time, usually three or four weeks. During the ritual, the father marks the new pigs (usually bought from neighbours) by cutting away a small part of the pigs' ears in order that the family may easily recognize which pigs belong to them.

Mentawaians sometimes eat pork on ordinary days, for instance if there is no meat from hunting wild animals. However, they slaughter their pigs for various rituals, the ritual for a newly born baby, the wedding ritual, the new house ritual, the healing ritual, and a few minor rituals. A crew from England making a documentary film and I were in Simatalu in 1998 when a father of a family performed the ritual for his son's new house. We were allowed to experience the entire process and we made a documentary of it (Wawman, 1999). We witnessed the father sacrificing four pigs for his son's new house. The father 'read' a prediction of good luck, good health, and prosperity for his son and the rest of the family when he examined the hearts of the ritually blessed

and ritually slaughtered pigs. Mentawaians may also read their fortune by examining the intestines of ritually blessed and ritually slaughtered chickens.

Skulls and bones of the ritually slaughtered pigs are collected in a special part of the family's house. The Mentawai communal house (*uma*) is generally divided into four sections: *laibokat* (veranda) at the front of the house; behind that, the *abut kerei* (where people make a fire for rituals); behind that, the *puturukat* (where people usually perform dancing during rituals and adult men sleep in this room); and at the back of the house, the *baligat* or *katubaga* (where women and children sleep and cook daily meals). The *laibokat* and the *abut kerei* are the parts of the communal house relevant for the ritual slaughter of pigs.

Skulls and bones of domesticated animals are kept separate from those of wild animals. Skulls and bones of wild animals like monkeys, deer, and wild pigs are placed in the *abut kerei*, tied to a wooden board above the fire. Whenever people ritually cook meats, these skulls and bones get warm and smoky, to propitiate the forest spirits. In the Mentawai way of thinking, people do not take care of animals in the wilderness. It is the forest spirits who take care of wild animals. After the meat of wild animals has been eaten, the skulls and bones are placed near the fire as a sign of respect. Mentawaians assume that the forest spirits will be glad and will bring prosperity to the family when they see that the family have been taking good care of the skulls and bones of wild animals. The skulls are positioned towards the outside of the house, communicating to the spirits of other wild animals living in the wilderness. If people show the proper respect to the forest spirits by performing the appropriate rituals, then they will have better luck hunting, and will more easily catch wild animals. And the forest spirits will not be angry at the hunters.

In contrast, Mentawaians tie the skulls and bones of domesticated animals, mostly pigs, to a wooden board on the *laibokat*, far away from the *abut kerei*. Hanging these skulls of domesticated animals outside the house and far away from the fire is meant to allow the bones to be 'possessed' by the cold. These skulls and bones do not need to be warmed, because the slaughtered pigs have been cared for by people. The skulls and bones are positioned towards the inside of the house. By doing so, the spirits of the slaughtered pigs may remain in the surroundings near the house where they were raised.

Besides their place in rituals and daily meals, pigs are highly valuable as payments in a variety of social transactions. Bride-prices and fines are commonly paid by surrendering a few pigs. *Ibat pangurei* (wedding meal) is prepared by slaughtering pigs. It is the bride's family giving the slaughtered pigs to the family of the bridegroom. The size of the pigs slaughtered for the wedding meal indicates how high a bride-price the bride's family requested. Pigs are also used as gifts given to family members residing elsewhere, or to friends as a symbol of friendship. Above all, having a lot of pigs is important for Mentawaians, because it says something about people's status in their community, such as *simasakkoko* or 'people who have pigs'.

So, pigs are very important for Mentawaians. Raising pigs is meant to satisfy Mentawaians' daily need for meat, to form exchange relationships, as payment for social misdeeds, and to use in rituals.

### 6.3 A cruel conflict over a pig

During my fieldwork I met individuals from several kin groups in the Mentawai Islands who declared themselves to be descendants of Samongilailai, even though they currently belong to kin groups not named Samongilailai. After listening to their family stories, however, these kin groups all turned out to have ancestral connections to the Samongilailai kin group. They are apparently descendants of the Samongilailai kin group because their family stories define their connections to the early Samongilailai kin group. They tell of the same place of origin from where the Samongilailai commenced to exist as a kin group. They also tell about the same past occurrence that forced the early families of the Samongilailai kin group to leave their homeland in Simatalu for new places elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands. Samongilailai was the initial kin group involved in the conflict over the pig. All the family stories of these different groups mention the same ancestor's name as being involved in the conflict.

It appears that ancestral connections existing among those kin groups continue to link one family to the others even though these groups had been differentiated by other kin-names and had settled in different places. Below, I begin by looking at the pig story collected from the Salamao kin group residing in the village of Taileleu. Subsequently, I focus on a story from Sioban on Sipora island. The last example is taken from the Samongilailai kin group living in the village of Maileppet. The order of the three stories below simply follows the order in which I collected them.

#### 6.3.1 The pig story as told by the Salamao kin group

In search of Samongilailai kin-group members on Siberut, I arrived at a village called Taileleu located in the southwestern part of Siberut in 2004. I met an old man called Aman Maom (see Photo 6.1). When he was young he was known by the name Terig Kerei. However, after his first son was born and given the name Maom, Terig Kerei changed his name to Aman Maom ('father of Maom'). In the 1990s his son died in a car accident in Padang, and thereafter he was called Teu Maom. *Teu* is a shortened form of *teteu* (grandfather or grandmother). *Teu* also means 'poor' in the sense of losing someone. He is an old man and at the same time a poor man.





Photo 6.1 Aman Maom Salamao

He is a shaman of the Salamao kin group. He has been practising shamanism since his oldest son was a little boy, which was in the 1960s. He has three houses. One is located in the government village of Taileleu and the other two are in the upriver place of Taileleu. Aman Maom Salamao's ancestors were from Samongilailai. However, Aman Maom and his families did not keep the Samongilailai kin-name. After separating from the rest of the Samongilailai kin group, Aman Maom's ancestral families used the kin-name Salamao. The group once lived at a place called Bat Lamao in Silaoinan, from which their kin-name was derived and in which valley the Salamao separated from the Samongilailai. Aman Maom Salamao told me the story of the assault on the pig and his family's migration to Taileleu. The story is as follows:

### Story 10

We moved away from Simatalu because we became involved in a dispute with a kin group called Sapokka. The dispute was about a pig. My ancestors told me a story which we must always remember. The story is as follows. Our ancestors lived in Simatalu, and Sapokka [kin group] became one of our ancestors' neighbours. One of the Sapokka sons got married to one of our ancestors' daughters. Emeiboblo was our prominent ancestor when the assault occurred. Sapokka offered him a pig as bride-price. Therefore, our ancestor respected Sapokka very well.

One day, Sapokka shot the pig that had been given as our ancestor's bride-price. After shooting the pig, the Sapokka families ignored the fact that their daughter-in-law was from Samongilailai. She seemed to recognize the pig and she asked about it, but they did not tell her the truth. A few days later, her father Emeiboblo came to visit Sapokka, 'Perhaps, you have seen my pig, my dear relatives-in-law (*kaddei*). I have been missing it these recent days. I suppose the pig has returned to you, as it came from you. Therefore, I came to ask if you had seen it here lately.' Sapokka denied it, 'No, we did not see any pig that we had given to you.' Of course, Sapokka deliberately lied to Emeiboblo. Emeiboblo's daughter heard their conversation.

Afterwards, she went to visit her father's house and revealed everything she knew about the pig that the Sapokka family had eaten in recent days. After listening to his daughter, Emeiboblo decided to extract a fine from Sapokka. Emeiboblo sought some people as mediators (*sipasaili* or *sipasui*) in order to negotiate the quarrel that had arisen between him and Sapokka. The negotiators arrived at Sapokka's house, 'We come to represent Emeiboblo, whose pig has been shot and eaten by you. Emeiboblo already found out that his pig has been shot because his daughter has told him about it. Therefore, we now come to ask you to pay a fine for the pig shot (*tulou saina*). You have to pay a pig to Emeiboblo to make good with him again.' After hearing the accusation, Sapokka said, 'So, that is the reason why you come here. Emeiboblo found out about his pig from his daughter. Because the daughter reported us to her

father, we are not going to pay the fine. We admit that we shot the pig for special purposes, but we are not going to pay the fine.' The mediators returned to Emeiboblo reporting what Sapokka had said. However, Emeiboblo calmed the case down. He postponed discussing the case, he postponed, postponed, postponed in order to find another way to urge Sapokka to replace the shot pig. Emeiboblo needed some time to think about it but it was not long enough.

After waiting for few days, Emeiboblo sharpened his machete and spear. He did not bring his bow (*rourou*) and poisoned arrows (*silogui*) when he visited the house of the Sapokka family. He tried to be inconspicuous to Sapokka. At the house, Sapokka family members were cooking banana. Emeiboblo addressed a question to them while he was sitting next to them, 'Why do you not fulfil the request of negotiators that I sent to talk to you, that you have to pay me a pig as replacement for what you shot?' Sapokka intentionally rejected Emeiboblo's request and answered him, 'We do not want to pay it because we just do not want to do so. If you want to get it you have to do that with the shiny, sharpened machete and spear.' While he stood up, Emeiboblo said, 'I shall do as you wish.' And the next moment he threw his spear to hit the person who had answered him, who was cooking banana, and then swung his machete to another person sitting next to him. The rest of them ran away out of the house. Then Emeiboblo returned home.

However, that occurrence did not frighten the Sapokka at all. They prepared their hunting tools and pursued Emeiboblo in order to take their revenge for their two brothers' death, the brothers who had been assassinated by Emeiboblo. Before the Sapokka arrived, however, Emeiboblo and his families had left for a place located on a hill called Sigarena. They built a shelter. They opened a garden (*mone*) as well.

While in exile, Emeiboblo's younger brother wanted to return to Simatalu. He asked Emeiboblo for permission for himself and his family to return to Simatalu, 'As a matter of fact, it was not me who was involved in the violence against the Sapokka. I have decided that they are not going to be violent to us. If all of us [permanently] leave our place, house and pigs, we are losing a lot of things. They are going to take the things away from us. If you do not mind, my families and I will return to our place.' Emeiboblo allowed his younger brother and his family to go back to their home. 'You may return and take care of our chickens, pigs, house, land and gardens. We still have a few pigs there. They are very important to me. One day we will return to visit you, I promise!' So, some members of Samongilailai did return to Simatalu. Emeiboblo and his family remained at the place Sigarena. He fed his chickens with wild palm trees (*bat ariribug*). Emeiboblo's younger brother's family who returned to Simatalu were Lajomanai's ancestor (*punuteteu* Lajomanai), Moggui's ancestor (*punuteteu* Moggui), and Sisilogpa's ancestor (*punuteteu* Sisislogpa). [These are names of three people currently living in the village.]

When the Sapokka heard about the return of Samongilailai, they prepared themselves for violence. 'So, have Samongilailai returned? Let us make a deal with them!' Sapokka decided to make an agreement with Samongilailai. Samongilailai was the name of the kin group of Emeiboblo and his brothers. Sapokka arrived, 'We have come to make a deal with you about the death of our two brothers.' Samongilailai said, 'We have nothing to do with the hostility. Our brother Emeiboblo did that. He is now in Teitei Sigarena. If you want revenge, you can visit him there. But we suggest you not go there because they perhaps have already left for a new place, or it may be possible that all of you will get shot by him.' At the place called Teitei Sigarena, Emeiboblo lived with his relatives. One of the relatives was a person called Pajorot. He was the ancestor of descendants that migrated to Sipora. Another relative was the ancestor of those families who moved to the place traditionally called Tateiku [currently the location of the government villages Berisigep and Sigappona], and also the ancestor of those families who later moved to the place called Cempungan.

As promised, Emeiboblo visited his brothers and the rest of the families in Simatalu. The families still had pigs and Emeiboblo wanted to take his share. When he visited them, the brothers were processing sago from palm in order to obtain flour to cook for their daily food. Upon his return, Emeiboblo wanted to know whether the Sapokka were still looking for violence after the return of his brothers and their families. Emeiboblo was not ready for violence; he was always afraid of Sapokka. He therefore hid himself in the house. However, he still felt insecure. He went to climb a tree called *toilat*. He brought with him a jackfruit (*peigu*) in order to fill his stomach while he was on top of the tree. Some of the seeds of the jackfruit fell down near the root of the *toilat*. At evening, when his brothers returned to process sago, he returned home, too. 'I just returned from the *toilat* tree. I ate jackfruit there. If one day the jackfruit grows there, you should remember that the fruits belong to me. That means they belong to you, too.'

Thereafter, they sacrificed pigs and Emeiboblo took his share and in the early morning returned to his families at Sigarena. Emeiboblo departed with the help of his brothers, 'You shall accompany me and soon after I arrive, you may return home.' They went upriver, upriver and upriver. While they were paddling their canoe, Emeiboblo introduced his brothers to their land and its borders, including rivers. When they approached the big river mouth, they turned to enter the small river called Polime. They kept paddling, 'This is the river called Polime and the land in this area belongs to us.' When they arrived at an area where they found many rattans, Emeiboblo stated, 'This is the border of our land. I have shown you the beginning of its border. It starts from there until it reaches this place where we are now. All of this is our land.'

He arrived at Sigarena and he did not continue migrating in the direction of Cempungan (in the northern part of Siberut), but he chose to migrate southwards to Silaoinan. He moved there and claimed a plot of land afterwards. He

did not find marks of other people indicating other people's claim to the land, so he claimed the land himself. But when he arrived at the river mouth of the place called Mongan Masat, where to the right is the river called Bat Sapsap, and carrying on to the upriver place called Tirit Sapsap, he stopped there. He then returned to where he had come from initially. All rivers and plots of land captured within the borders, carrying such names as Mongan Sirau, Mongan Koddobat, Bat Mapiligi, and further downriver Bat Silaoinan, were claimed by him as properties of Emeiboblo and his relatives.

In order to secure the borders of the land, Emeiboblo and his brothers retraced the river called Bat Masat and reached the upper part of the river. They stumbled up hills. They passed through forests on the top of hills, top of hills, top of hills, top of hills. When they arrived at the upriver place called Tirit Magoga, where there were river mouths called Mongan Lamao and Mongan Mongilailai, they came across a forest path where many people from Simatalu walked, leading them to the upriver place called Tirit Samukop, and then they arrived at Sigarena, where Emeiboblo's lands were situated.

Soon after he returned, he told members of his families, 'We have extensive land and I shall tell you its borders. Those lands located outside of the borders do not belong to us, because other people had claimed them before us. So, you shall not claim any of that in order not to provoke any conflicts. But land inside of the borders is ours; that land belongs to us, the Samongilailai.'

After they stayed at Sigarena for some time, they began to expand. The ancestor called Sipajorot was a relative of Emeiboblo. He moved away from Siberut. Sipajorot and his family began to depart from Sigarena and arrived at the river mouth called Mongan Sarabua; they passed by a place called Sirau on the right side. And some of them moved to Cempungan, but they did not stay there long. When a harsh hostility among Mentawaians took place in Cempungan, they left Cempungan and went to Saibi Samukop. Then they came to occupy a place called Malamit. Then they moved to Maileppet. Sibeutenga and Siliggai are Sipajorot's current descendants, who are now dwelling in Maileppet, while other families had immigrated to Sipora.

The rest of Emeiboblo's relatives moved from Sigarena to the riverbanks of the place called Magoga. Later they moved again to the riverbanks of the place called Lamao. They were thereafter called Salamao.

We are Salamao, who descended from Emeiboblo. Because we lived in the place called Lamao, we got a new kin-name, Salamao. We stayed there, we stayed and stayed and stayed, and later moved on to inhabit the river mouth of the place called Bebetratci. Then we moved to the river mouth of the place called Mongan Palakkokoai, precisely at the place called Sirigdig. From Sirigdig we continued to migrate to here in Taileleu. Our ancestors moved from Sirigdig to Taileleu, because people were hunting them. Those people were called Sabirut. [The storyteller does not clarify who the Sabirut were. He just



mentions Sabirut. He might mean people living in the southeastern part of Siberut.]

A niece of Emeiboblo was terrified and ran away to hide herself from the sight of the Sabirut, so that her body wrap dropped off and she was consequently naked. The Sabirut found out that the woman was a family member of Samongilailai. The Samongilailai requested to the Sabirut to pay a fine for the embarrassing incident. Sabirut paid that fine by sacrificing their pigs. However, the payment did not make the Sabirut happy, as they knew that the woman was a member of Emeiboblo's family and thus belonged to the cruel Samongilailai. They therefore assumed that the Samongilailai would kill Sabirut eventually.

In order to convince Sabirut, Samongilailai slaughtered a *sigelag* pig [*sigelag* is a particular size of pig, one weighing 50 to 60 kilograms], as a manifestation of Samongilailai's goodwill. Sabirut put the pork into bamboo tubes; this way of preparing pork is called *siliglig* [this term is used later to name a plot of land]. In their turn [as a favour to Samongilailai], the Sabirut were willing to accompany the Samongilailai to go to their land at the river mouth of the place called Mongan Masat. Sabirut said, 'As you said that you have plots of land located at the place called Bat Masat which borders on our land, too, we would like to accompany you there so that we can show you the borders of our land.'

So, from the river mouth of the place called Sabirut, they went upriver to a place called Silaoinan. On the way, they passed a place called Kairogdag. When they arrived at the place called Mongan Masat, the Sabirut said to the Samongilailai, 'You can take the land called Masapsap on the left side of the river Bat Masat. The land belongs to us, but Masapsap is now yours as payment for the humiliation of your sister; this land will be called *porak tulou pakaila* (land for erasing humiliation) but it is also called *porak siliglig* because of the pig you slaughtered for us, showing your goodwill.' The Samongilailai stayed there and their numbers grew.

Some of the Samongilailai moved again to some other place located at the river mouth of Rogdag, where they planted mango trees (*abbangan*), sago palms, and bamboo groves. They built an *uma* as well. In that place, some of them decided to split up into several groups. Ancestors of the kin group called Saeppunu decided to be live separately from the Samongilailai. They emerged as a new kin group. The Saeppunu moved to the river mouth of Siberut. One of their current descendants is known by the name of Satalojo and resides in Puro. He is the leading figure of the kin group today. Some of our other relatives moved away to a place called Sirau, they became the Salakkokoai kin group. Their current descendants are Aman Sila'luppa and his families, Taigo-jongenda and his children, and Sibulauseddet and his families.

Some of the other Samongilailai split up to become the kin group called Sakoddobat, who moved to a place located in the river mouth called Koddobat. They built an *uma* at the river mouth and later moved again to the place called Mongan Simapiligi, where they planted sago palms. The course

of our own expansion in the kin group called Salamao was begun from the place called Mongan Koddobat. One of the offspring of Emeiboblo was Sikora. Sikora had seven sons and a daughter. The daughter got married to a son of the Saleilei kin group. We thus have a family relation to that group through marriage. Sikora's sons were Simateingorut, Simateimut, Siturugougou and others whose names I do not remember anymore very well.

Then, we as Salamao moved to the river mouth of the place called Mongan Kerengan. Four sons of Sikora's children migrated to the place called Bat Sirileleu (now called Taileleu). Sioremanai was the ancestor of Samongilailai, Sislakkerei was the ancestor of Salakkokoai, Sigorottai was the ancestor of Salamao, and Siturugougou. The four ancestors and their families migrated to the riverbanks of the place called Sirileleu (now called Taileleu). At that time we moved away, because other people in northern Siberut began to get involved in violence. Satubeken and Saseppungan began it. Consequently, our ancestors moved away and arrived at the upriver place of Sirileleu. When arriving at Sirileleu, our ancestors met the kin group called Sakaloat; the Sakaloat were the landowners (*sibakkat laggai*). The Sakaloat accepted our ancestors staying in their lands. Our ancestors did not have any right to possess land there because the early inhabitants, the Sakaloat, had been the first to occupy the land in Sirileleu. Our ancestors were given the opportunity to build their houses and have a plot of land to use to make their own gardens, but they did not have rights to the land where their gardens were located.

After staying there for some time, they had plenty of chickens and pigs. So they gave some pigs to the landowners as payment for the plots of land they were using for building their houses, raising chickens and pigs, and opening gardens. Chickens and pigs were valuable payments at that time. Later, our ancestors became involved in disputes with the landowners, and our ancestors decided not to stay with the landowners any longer. Our ancestors of the Salamao group, who are also the ancestors of the Samongilailai and the Salakkokoai, moved away in order to avoid conflict with the landowners. Thus we went to inhabit a place located downriver of Sirileleu. The Salakkokoai inhabited a place located at the river mouth called Sisugsug, and we Salamao stayed in the place on the opposite side of the river of Sirileleu, where the river mouth of the place called Sisugsug is located.

One day the Salamao and the Salakkokoai were in a dispute over insulting each other's wives. The dispute had created bad relations between the two groups. In order to calm down the dispute, the Salamao paid the Salakkokoai sago palms located in five different areas and received from the Salakkokoai a big pig with brown skin (*babui siboje*). Afterwards, we stayed and kept planting sago palms and raising pigs and chickens. After we finished planting our gardens and raising pigs and chickens, one of us called Simateipara went to set his trap (*mutapi*) to catch animals in the forest. He caught a lot of animals and at that moment we came together for the second time with the Sakaloat, the



landowners in Sirilelu. Unfortunately, our good relations with the landowners were short-lived. We had to split up again and separate from them. We did not want to stay together with them anymore. In order to leave the landowners, we had to pay them four plots of our gardens (*epat ngamata mone*), a huge pig (*babui*), four baskets of chickens (*epat log manu'*) and an iron wok for cooking (*okali*). We had to pay for all the costs of things we had used and got from the Sakaloat. We paid for our own independence.

Before we were definitely separated from the Sakaloat, they reminded us, 'Because all of you who are descended from the kin group called the Samongilailai, including the Salamao and the Salakkokoai, do not want to join us any more, we would like to remind you that if you go upriver to the place called Bat Mabilabilag, that is the border of your places where you can plant and harvest things. For your information, if you [go further upriver and] arrive at the river mouth of Kaloat, you have to always remember that you are entering the borders of the lands belonging to us. You should not hesitate to enter them. You can hunt animals in the forest of our lands but you must not take any rattan or other valuable natural resources. You can make your own garden if you like, too.' But we did not want to get in trouble, so we stayed away from them. We, the Salamao, stayed downriver. Some members of the Salamao group stayed at a place called Bat Limu and they acquired a new name, Salimu. The Salimu are now independent, as a new kin group. They have their own *uma*. However, we are still related to them ancestrally.

We are currently occupying the place we bought from the landowners. But our former lands have been left in the hands of our relatives at a place located along the riverbanks of Koddobat in Silaoinan and at a place around the hill of Sigarena. Those places are our ancestral heritage. We do not allow anyone else to take them away from us. Other people cannot freely exploit the natural resources that are available in those places. This story I am telling you was told to me by Siruate'te', my ancestor. He was descended from Emeiboblo. He told the story to my father. Now I am already old and I am going to tell the story to my sons and grandsons. (Narrated by Terig Kerei (Aman Maom) Salamao, age 78; Tailelu – Siberut, 2004)

This story relates three main events. The first is a past occurrence in Simatalu. The second is the exploration of places in the valley of Silaoinan. The third is an occurrence when the group went to live in Tailelu. The storyteller begins by narrating the hostile killing of a pig that had been given as a bride-price. Because of the pig, his ancestors became involved in a conflict with the kin group called Sapokka and commenced to emigrate from Simatalu.

The storyteller demonstrates his familiarity with the ancestral narrative of the Samongilailai kin group through detailed recollection of the pig-killing incident, place-names and locations of plots of land, numbers of families founded in the course of migratory movements, and names of his other ances-

tors that had led the group to move out from Simatalu. He also recollects some ancestors of Samongilailai that had led their families to create new kin groups. The relationships among the related kin groups are shown in Chart 6.1.

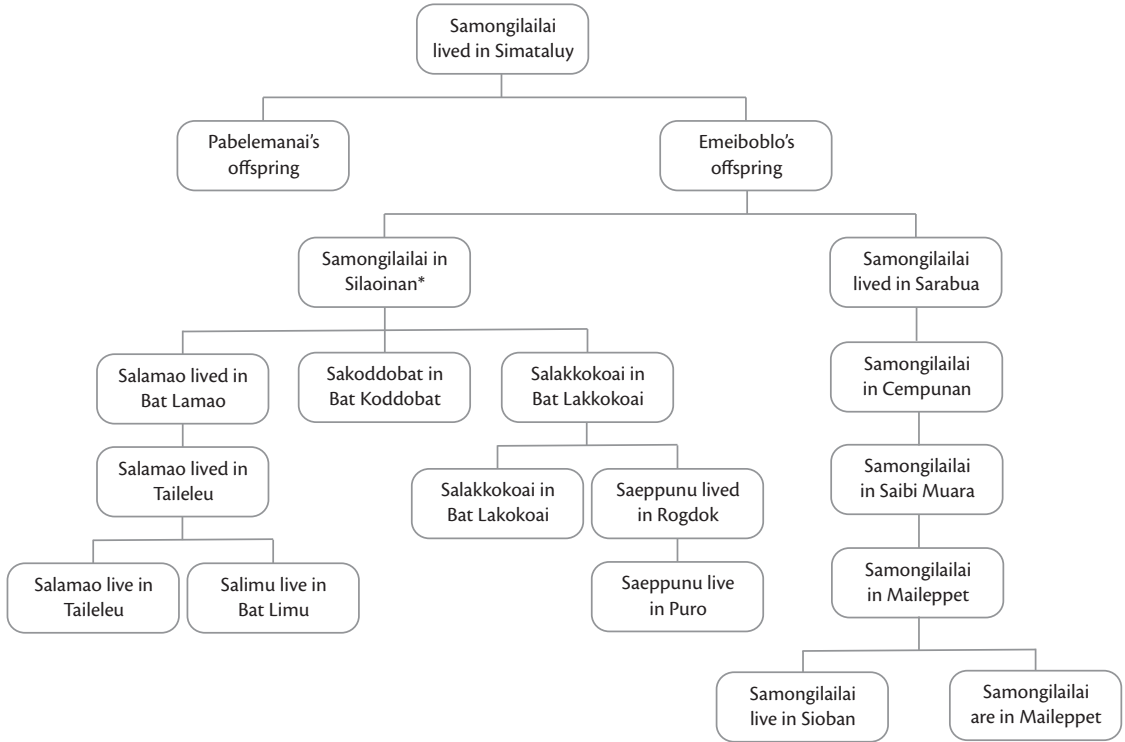


**Chart 6.1** Expansion of the Salamao kin group

\*marks the place-name where the storyteller's ancestor created a new kin group. The ancestor's name is as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 6.2).

The storyteller does not talk explicitly about his particular ancestors who created new kin groups while explaining the splitting up of the family. As the storyteller does not recollect the ancestors' names, he replaces those names with the names of current descendants of those ancestors. So, instead of learning the ancestors' names, we are given the current names of the ancestors' offspring. It seems that the storyteller once heard about them or met them once. They might be leaders of current Samongilailai families residing in various places in the Mentawai Islands. I sketch the genealogical ties between those families in Chart 6.2.

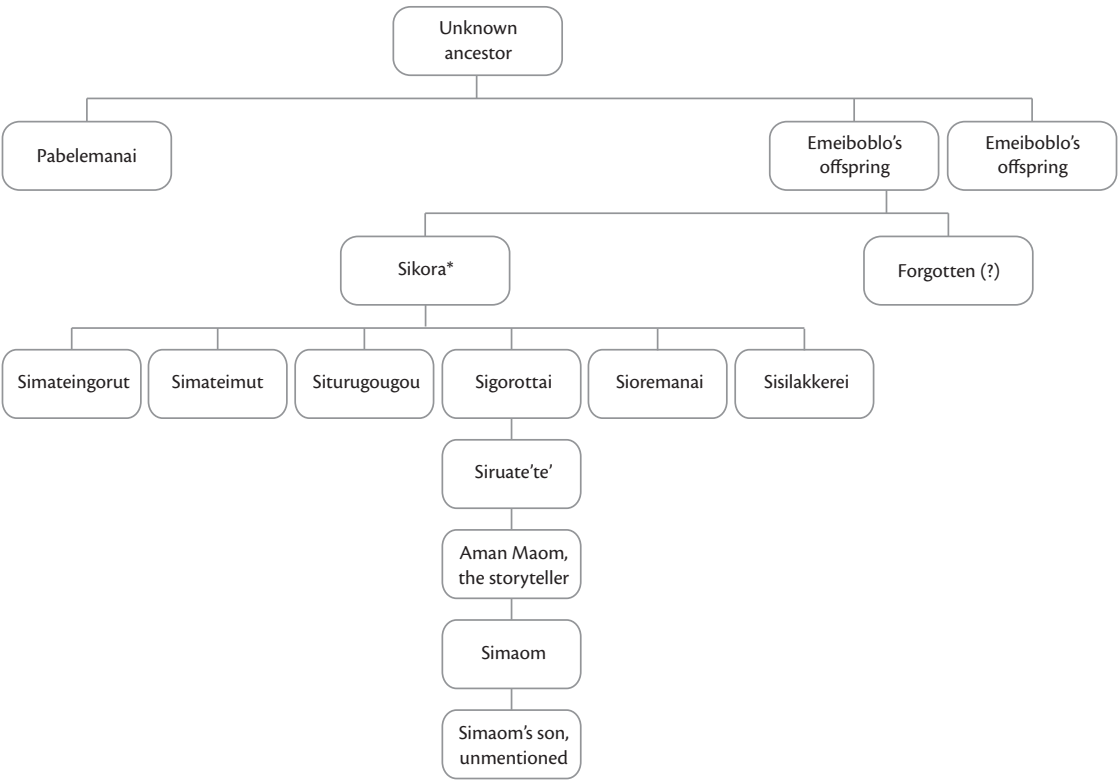


**Chart 6.2** Genealogy of the Salamao kin group  
\*indicates the ancestor who created the storyteller’s kin group in the place marked with an asterisk in Chart 6.2 above.

**6.3.2 The pig story as told by the Samongililailai kin group in Sioban on Sipora**

In 2004 I visited the village of Sioban on Sipora island, where I met another group of Samongililailai. This kin group is the owner of the place and land in Sioban. According to Sioban villagers, Samongililailai was the first kin group to settle permanently in Sioban. Among them, I met several elders; however, only a small number of them knew their family stories. One of those people was Gustap Samongililailai (see Photo 6.2), father of several sons.

He was active in the Protestant church as one of the church elders. I visited his house several times to become acquainted with him and his family. We exchanged information about our family backgrounds. It took a few days for us to get to know each other before I had an opportunity to interview him. Eventually, he trusted me and told me his pig story.



**Photo 6.2** Gustap Samongilailai (at left) and his two sons

He told me the pig story while his sons were seated around us listening. We sat in the house of one of his sons. They were actually building the house on land that belongs to the Samongilailai. The house is located near the graveyard of Sioban village and where the family garden is situated. They wanted to build the house there to protect the land from being used by other people. The pig story, as it was told to me, is also about how the ancestors of the Samongilailai arrived at Sipora and settled in Sioban. The story is as follows.

### **Story 11**

At the beginning, our kin group was called Saurei, while we were still living in Paipajet. The name of our ancestor was Siranjau. He had two sons. I do not remember the name of the older son, but the younger son was Simatatlaggai. He was our ancestor. Simatatlaggai moved away to dwell on the riverbank of Matalu in Lubaga. His older brother remained in Paipajet.

When our ancestor arrived at Lubaga he found a plot of land, whose borders adjoined the borders of land belonging to the kin group called Sakerebau. The land was located on the riverbank of the place called Baibai. It included the upriver portion of the place called Lubaga, where the land adjoined land belonging to the kin group called Sirirui. The border here was called Kalaimurau. The border extended until it reached a place called Sirilogau. These were the borders of our land claimed by Simatatlaggai in Lubaga. In Lubaga, a small river called Bat Simaottot was used as border of our land as well. That border ad-

joined land belonging to the descent group called Saelet. When our ancestor Simatatlaggai was in Lubaga to occupy the place called Mongan Lubaga, more precisely called Siatsemi, Simatatlaggai had sons and daughters. They were named: Emeiboblo, Pabelemanai, Maliggai, and a daughter, I do not remember her name. Maliggai married a son of the descent group called Sakoikoi, and the Sakoikoi were the closest neighbours of our ancestors. They became the so-called *teitei uma* [neighbour, literally 'behind the house'] of our ancestors. The Sakoikoi occupied a place in an area called Lebbekeu. Some of the Sakoikoi split off in order to become the kin group called Siritoitet. Another daughter of our ancestor married a son of the kin group called Sapokka.

When they lived in Simatalu, our ancestors raised pigs. One of their pigs went to dig in the ground in order to feed itself in the valley near the place Sapokka occupied. Sapokka shot the pig. Afterwards, they [members of the Sapokka group] brought it home and they ate the pork. Emeiboblo's sister saw the pig. She recognized that the pig belonged to her father and brothers. While the Sapokka, including Simatatlaggai's daughter, ate the pork the daughter saved a small piece of the pig's cooked skin. She dried the skin in the sunshine. One day, Sapokka's daughter-in-law asked permission from her husband to go visit her father, Simatatlaggai. Her husband allowed her to go. In the meantime, Emeiboblo and his brother and father were searching for their pig.

She went to visit her family and she brought with her the skin of the pig. She rolled it together with her hair. When she arrived at her father's place, she asked her sister who had married a member of the Sakoikoi group to comb her hair. In that way, her sister found the skin of the pig, 'What is this? It looks like the skin of our missing pig.' They showed the skin to their brother, Emeiboblo. Emeiboblo asked when Sapokka had killed the pig. From the information told by his sister, he realized when he had begun to miss the pig. Emeiboblo disliked that event. He decided to extract a fine from Sapokka.

Emeiboblo informed Sapokka, 'I have come today to your house in order to get paid for the pig you shot, which belonged to me.' Sapokka did not want to pay and said, 'If you want to get paid, you can take your payment on our sharpened metal arrows (*tunung*).' Emeiboblo did not want to get involved in a serious dispute with the Sapokka because they had become relatives in a marriage relationship. But he wanted to be paid the same size of pig Sapokka had shot. Sapokka refused to pay. So Emeiboblo returned to his house and reported to his families what the Sapokka had said. Emeiboblo and Pabelemanai prepared to attack Sapokka. They sharpened their machetes and spears.

When the cock crowed in the morning, they went to the house of Sapokka. It was early in the morning. When they arrived at the place, Emeiboblo killed one of the Sapokka. Other Sapokka went after him and his brother. Emeiboblo hid himself by climbing a tree called *toilat*. He brought his spears and bow and arrows up the tree with him. He hid there when Sapokka looked for him and then returned home. Some Sapokka were near the tree but they did not see

Emeiboblo. The Sapokka wanted to go to Emeiboblo's house but they hesitated to do so, because they anticipated being shot by the rest of Emeiboblo's relatives. The Sapokka decided to return to their house. Next day, they again went to hunt Emeiboblo. They did that several times. Emeiboblo decided to leave his brother and the rest of the families, because the Sapokka hunted him almost every day. He and his family left for a new place.

Before Emeiboblo left, he handed over rights to their land, gardens, vegetation, animals, and other possessions to his brother, named Pabelemanai. Emeiboblo said to Pabelemanai, 'My family and I are going to leave you to stay elsewhere; you are going to stay here for the rest of your life. You have to take care of our gardens and other possessions of ours. You must know the borders of our land. Leleu Simagerettobat belongs to us. This hill is a large one. This hill is bordered by land belonging to Sakerebau, Sakoikoi and opposite the villages of Simalegi and Sakatiri, and then adjoining land belonging to the groups called Siritoitet and Saoppu, and finally adjoining the land belonging to Sakerebau.' Emeiboblo reminded his brother about the other lands and rivers which belonged to them. The lands and rivers were situated at the place called Bat Saibi Simatalu. The borders of their land, including rivers, started from the river mouth of Bat Saibi Simatalu extending upriver to a place called Kulumen.

Another piece of land, Emeiboblo told his brother, was named Teitei Sirigdig. The entire hill belonged to the Samongilailai. Afterwards, our ancestor commenced to migrate. He stayed at a place called Teitei Sigarena. At Teitei Sigarena, Emeiboblo built a shed and planted a mango tree (*abbangan*). Teitei Sigarena was divided into two parts. One side of the hill belonged to the group called Siriratei and another side belonged to us. After staying there for some time, Emeiboblo moved to a place called Sirilabat because the son of his sister lived there. Sirilabat was located in the upriver valley of Saibi Samukop. While Emeiboblo was staying in Sirilabat, he asked his nephew if there was land that other people had not discovered (*siau*) yet. It took Emeiboblo and his family eight days to accomplish a trip in order to ensure himself that other people had not claimed the land. They arrived at a place called Bat Simapeleku'. After staying with his nephew, Emeiboblo decided to leave again. He made a canoe beforehand. The canoe was made out of a durian tree. This durian was called *togtug sinikki бага*. The durian belonged to his nephew. After the canoe was completely finished, Emeiboblo and his family moved downriver and arrived at a place called Bat Koddobat. They claimed Bat Koddobat as theirs.

At this point, the storyteller paused in telling me the story. He called my attention to a finch's song. The bird was singing clearly in the daytime. This bird is called *kuilak* in Mentawai. Mentawaians believe this particular bird is a particular sign if it sings on particular occasions. The bird sounded like it was close to the house, but we could not see it. The storyteller told me that what he was telling me was the truth, and the song of the *kuilak* was evidence that it was



the truth. After he let me know about it, another animal made a sound. It was a small house lizard, called in Mentawai *supsup*. The sound made by the animal was interpreted in the same way as the song of the *kuilak*. He then continued telling me his story.

They then moved again downriver until they arrived at a place called Bat Siriano. But Sibubu and Sitoggro had occupied this place first. Emeiboblo and his family met with Sibubu and Sitoggro. Sibubu and Sitoggro invited them to stay with them there. When Emeiboblo and his family stayed in the house of Sibubu and Sitoggro, the two hosts beat their wooden drums (*tuddukat*) to inform their neighbours and relatives to come. They transmitted messages telling about the arrival of Emeiboblo and his family at their place. The messages transmitted by Sibubu were: 'Neighbours and relatives, you have to come and bring along with you sharpened tools, spears, arrows and bow and machetes in order to eliminate people from Simatalu.'

Soon after that, some people arrived at the house of Sibubu and Sitoggro. Those people immediately wanted to kill the people from Simatalu, who were Emeiboblo and his family. But Sibubu and Sitoggro stopped them. They said, 'We are not going to kill anybody today. I invited you here in order to introduce you to my new relatives (*ra'ra'*). So, if you see them opening gardens or gathering food, you know that they are my family (*saraina*). Consequently, you shall not kill them.'

Thereafter, Sibubu introduced Emeiboblo and his family to those people. They lived there together in peace. Everybody came to bring something for Emeiboblo and his family. They brought coconut seeds, young sago palms, and other trees for Emeiboblo to plant. A feast was set up. Emeiboblo dwelled in the place and had some children. They were Sisausau, Sikora, and the ancestor of Sabeleake whose name I do not remember, and a female called Situkai. Sibubu and Sitoggro accompanied Emeiboblo and his family to go upriver, where Emeiboblo and his family could plant all the seeds he had received from people who initially came with the intention of killing him.

On the way upriver, Sibubu requested Emeiboblo to bend his bow and set an arrow on. Emeiboblo was to stay on one side of the riverbank, while Sibubu with a spear in his hand stood on the other side. They opposed each other. Emeiboblo did not understand why Sibubu asked him to stand opposing him. Emeiboblo said, 'I have seen *ulaunia manua* [literally, the light of the sky; meaning I have survived] because of you, now you want me to bend my bow and put the arrow on. Are we going to kill each other?' Sibubu answered him, 'Emeiboblo, my best friend (*siripo*), you must listen to me very carefully and remember what I say to you. What I want to say to you must be remembered also by our offspring (*sapunuteteuta*). I have given you seeds of sago palms, and now I am going to give you a plot of land where you can plant them. Starting from here, at the river mouth of a place called Bat Simasapsap, and extending



upriver until you reach a place called Bat Koddobat, you enter that place and continue to the upper part of that river until you encounter a river where it is divided into two waterways. You have to follow one of the rivers called Bat Limu, until the end of this river where you cannot find water anymore. These are all borders of our land. What I have just told you are borders of the land where you can make your own gardens. The land enclosed in those borders now belongs to you and your descendants.' After Sibubu explained the borders, he stated clearly to Emeiboblo, 'But my best friend (*siripo*) Emeiboblo, you have to be aware of the fact that if you come downriver intending to expand the borders of the land I have given you, claiming it as your new land, this, my spear, is going to strike your body dead.' Soon after he finished his words, Sibubu forcefully struck his spear into the ground, thereby breaking its wooden handle. This moment symbolized their agreement. 'Now I see your point, my friend. You have given me your own land, you have even sketched the borders of which land is going to be mine and which land was yours initially. But my friend, you have declared to me that I cannot take over your own land except the land you have given me. If I come to take over or expand the borders of the land given to me, I am going to die by means of your spear just as you struck the spear to the ground. Now I declare to you, if you take over the land that you just gave to me, or if you narrow the borders of the land given to me, I am going to shoot you by means of my bow and its poisoned arrow.' Soon after he said that, Emeiboblo released his arrow to hit a sago palm. Sibubu wanted to stop Emeiboblo shooting his arrow by replying to him metaphorically, 'Hey, my friend, it is not necessary to release the arrow, it might hurt somebody.' Afterwards, Sibubu closed his speech by saying, 'For your remembrance, this land I just gave you is the land called *porak pukisi* (land for payment for the threat), because I asked other people to come with sharpened tools to kill you, although they did not do so.' Sibubu continued, 'The *porak pukisi* is mostly located in Bat Koddobat, including the upper part of the river Bat Koddobat. But the land at the source of the river belongs to the kin group called Sakaelagat. My own land adjoins their land, too. Sakaelagat are the group of people who dwell in a place called Saibi.'

After the oral agreement was made, Emeiboblo began to plant durian trees, coconuts, sago palms, and bananas and built his house where he could raise pigs and chickens and raise his children. After living some time in this place, Emeiboblo returned to Sirilabat, where he again met his nephew, and he told him about his new land. Emeiboblo said to his nephew, 'Plots of land starting from Sirilabat until Simapeileiggut, including Bat Simasapsap, and the downriver part of Bat Koddobat belong to me. The upper part of the river including the hilly area of Bat Limu belongs to the Sikailagat.' He told his nephew so that after he [Emeiboblo] died, someone would already know which land belonged to Emeiboblo. After he stayed, stayed and stayed at his nephew's place, Emeiboblo and his family returned to their land in Silaoinan.

One day they went fishing. Some members of his family, mostly women, remained at home. Sakaelagat visited the place where Emeiboblo's family were staying. They wanted to visit the family in order to have a drink or eat something. Because of headhunting practices at that time, many people were afraid of other people's attacks. Everyone had always to be aware of everybody else before visiting each other. When Sakaelagat arrived at the place, therefore, all the women in the house ran away. When they were running away, those women's clothes fell off because their clothes had got stuck on a thorny rattan (*labi*). They thus ran away without any clothes. They were naked. Sakaelagat shouted, 'You should not be afraid of us, because we are not going to kill you. We come to ask for something to drink or eat.'

When our ancestors returned from fishing, they found their house empty and silent. Emeiboblo searched for his family but no one was there. He thought that other people had perhaps killed his family. But he did not find any bodies or any evidence indicating bloodshed. He called their names and from the bush near their house women answered him that they were hiding from other people who had just come to the place and they were naked.

Two days after that event, Emeiboblo and his family went to visit Sakaelagat. Sakaelagat welcomed Emeiboblo and his family. Sakaelagat prepared food and drink for all of them. Sakaelagat already knew the purpose of the visit of Emeiboblo and his family. Sakaelagat said, 'We know now why you have come to visit us. That is because of your women and daughters when we arrived at your place, they ran away and got naked because their clothes dropped while running away from us.' Emeiboblo asked about the consequences of what Sakaelagat had done to his family. The next day, Sakaelagat together with Emeiboblo and his family returned to the place where Emeiboblo stayed. Sakaelagat gave Emeiboblo and his family a plot of land. The land was located in between the places called Bat Koddobat and Simapaddegat. This land was called *porak katukaila* (land paid for humiliation). Since then, that piece of land has belonged to Emeiboblo and his family entirely, and they remained in the area called Bat Koddobat, adjoining the rest of the lands belonging to the Sibubu and the Sakaelagat. Emeiboblo passed away in Bat Koddobat.

Emeiboblo's three sons were Sikora, the ancestor of the Sabeleaken, who later migrated to inhabit a place in Bat Rereiket, and Sisausau. Sikora remained living in the valley of Silaoinan. Sisausau was our ancestor who migrated to Sipora. Sisausau was also called by the name Sipanajojo. His journey began from Silaoinan to Sirilabat. From Sirilabat, he went down to the coastal areas where he claimed plots of land located in places called Beat Torongai, Toinongonai and Tiniti (a place near the current settlement called Maileppet). When Sisausau inhabited a place called Torongai, he found a plot of land (*mone*) located on the riverbanks of places called Bagat Peigu until Sakkelo. Sisausau found signs indicating other people's occupation, starting from Sakkelo to the upper part of the river Sabirut. Therefore he did not claim the area. Sisausau then moved to Rereiket, where he

found a plot of land in Rogdok. There he built a house and planted a durian tree (*kinoso*) and a coconut tree. In Rogdok, Sisausau found land in two places called Simalabi and Simapelekag. While he stayed in Rogdok, Sisausau had a son called Sipajorot. Sisausau passed away in Rogdok. Our ancestor Sipajorot carried on the migration to Sipora. The son of Pajorot was Sijaja. Sons of Sijaja were two: Sisala and Sibukkutlaba.

Sisala was my ancestor. Sisala had two sons called Sisialaggai and Sime-meuma. Simemeuma was the ancestor of our relatives who live in a place called Sao of Sipora. Sisialaggai was my ancestor. The sons of Sisialaggai were Palimaigo, Tasibuat and Takilibet. Palimaigo's sons were my grandfathers, called Sikatsaipeu, Sibelasot and Silulumonga. My father, named Josep was one of Sikatsaipeu's sons. Josep had brothers named Mateus, Levi and Benjamin. My name is Gustap and I am the son of Josep. My sons are those who are sitting next to me, listening to my story while I am telling it to you. Two of my other sons have married and already have sons. We have passed through 14 generations since we migrated from our original home on Siberut island.

Our ancestor Sipajorot and his family arrived at the island of Sipora, initially inhabiting a place called Goiso'oina. When they dwelled at that place, the river there was too shallow. It was not good enough to paddle a canoe, so they left the place. Then they moved to a place called Bagat Ureinu [currently called Saureinu], where they stayed temporarily. They planted a bamboo (*abre*). But the place was full of crocodiles. They were afraid of crocodiles, so they decided to leave the place and went to a place called Simatoraimonga. When they arrived at this place, many strange things happened. This place was haunted. Therefore they returned to Siberut and stayed in Rogdok. Their grandfather, called Siubat ('old man'), stayed here alone. The grandfather conducted a ritual to get the place rid of the ghosts. Sometimes, the Samongilailai in Rogdok in Siberut went to visit their grandfather in a place called Simatoraimonga in Sipora. But they did not want to stay there. Every time they went to visit him they said, 'We are going to visit our grandfather, called Siubat.'

Since then this place has been called Siubat. The grandfather named Siubat returned to Siberut to ask his family to stay in Simatoraimonga. When he left Siberut, many people came along to stay in this place [Simatoraimonga], just as the words of our ancestor said, '*Tunung le' kutata'ta*' [while illustrating holding a spear], *abelaat, ka logui-at'* [while illustrating curving a bow in order to shoot an arrow] (I threw a spear away, thereafter I took a bow and arrow). Our ancestors were like *tunung* who pioneered to inhabit this place, and other people were like *logui* who followed our ancestors' trail.

After the arrival of our ancestors, the kin group called Sakoikoi and others came to inhabit this place [Simatoraimonga]. The kin group called Taikatubutoinan later occupied the place called Bagat Ureinu. They inhabited an upriver

place, claiming the place as their own, but the river mouth belonged to us, the place where the bamboo was once planted. The Taikatubutoinan attempted to claim our land. They burned down the bamboo planted by our ancestors. The bamboo was the evidence of our ancestors' occupation of the place.

Nowadays, I do not know exactly where our land in Bagat Ureinu is located. I also do not know the borders of the land. What I do know is the names of the land. I know the names of the land because of my ancestral story. If I wanted to become acquainted with my ancestral lands I would have to refer to the names while asking other people if they know where the lands are located. (Narrated by Gustap Samongilailai, age 63; Sioban – Sipora, 2004)

The storyteller is quite familiar with his ancestral family residing in Paipajet. Part of this family, according to the storyteller, migrated to Simatalu and began the Samongilailai kin group there. Then the pig incident occurred in Simatalu. According to this storyteller, the woman was not a daughter but a sister to Emeiboblo, the prominent ancestor of the group. It is not clear in this version whether the pig was received from Sapokka as a bride-price, or whether it was just a pig raised by the Samongilailai. However, the killed pig certainly belonged to the Samongilailai, as Samongilailai fought to get the pig back from Sapokka. The story then relates information about Emeiboblo, who brutally killed the Sapokka by himself. The younger brother who came along in the attack did not do any harmful act. So he was not held responsible for Emeiboblo's brutal act.

Further on in the story, the storyteller reveals the places his migrating ancestors had lived in. The migrating ancestor and his family arrived at the valley called Silaoinan. There, his ancestors received some plots of land. In describing the borders of the plots of land, the storyteller mentions other kin groups that were residing in the Silaoinan valley. This tells us that other kin groups had occupied the area before the Samongilailai arrived there.

After the death of Emeiboblo, Emeiboblo's descendants became the next leaders. They led the next course of migrations and became prominent individuals within newly established kin groups. One of the newly established groups migrated to Sipora, and turned out to be the first kin group to dwell in Sioban village on Sipora. The other newly established kin groups are not really mentioned in the story, as the storyteller was not familiar with how those relatives had fared while they migrated in different directions. The migratory movements described in the story are sketched in Chart 6.3 and the genealogical links among the Samongilailai kin group as told in Story 11 are given in Chart 6.4.

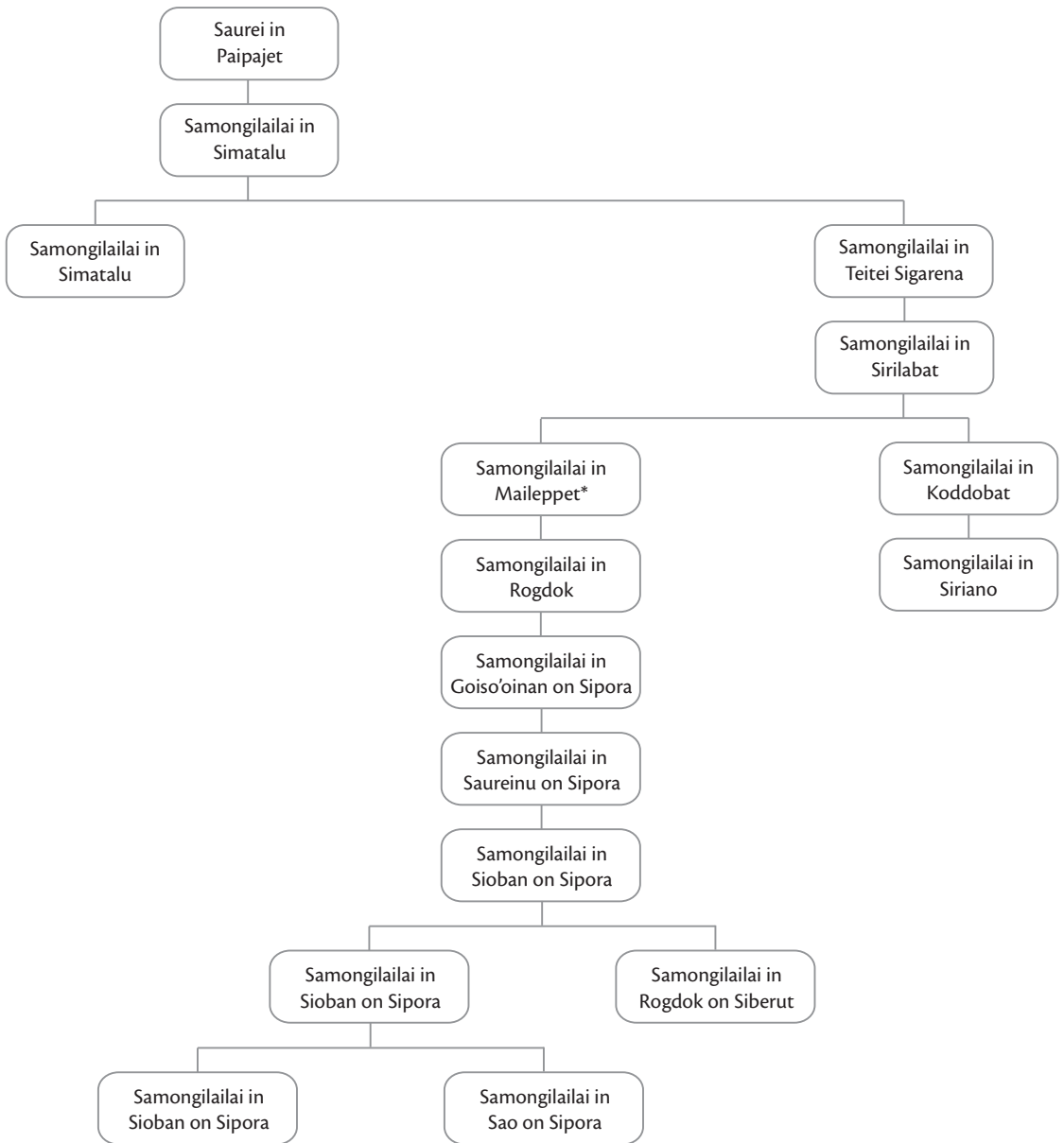


**Chart 6.3** Expansion of the Samongilailai kin group

\*marks the place-name where the storyteller's important ancestor lived. The ancestor's name is as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 6.4).

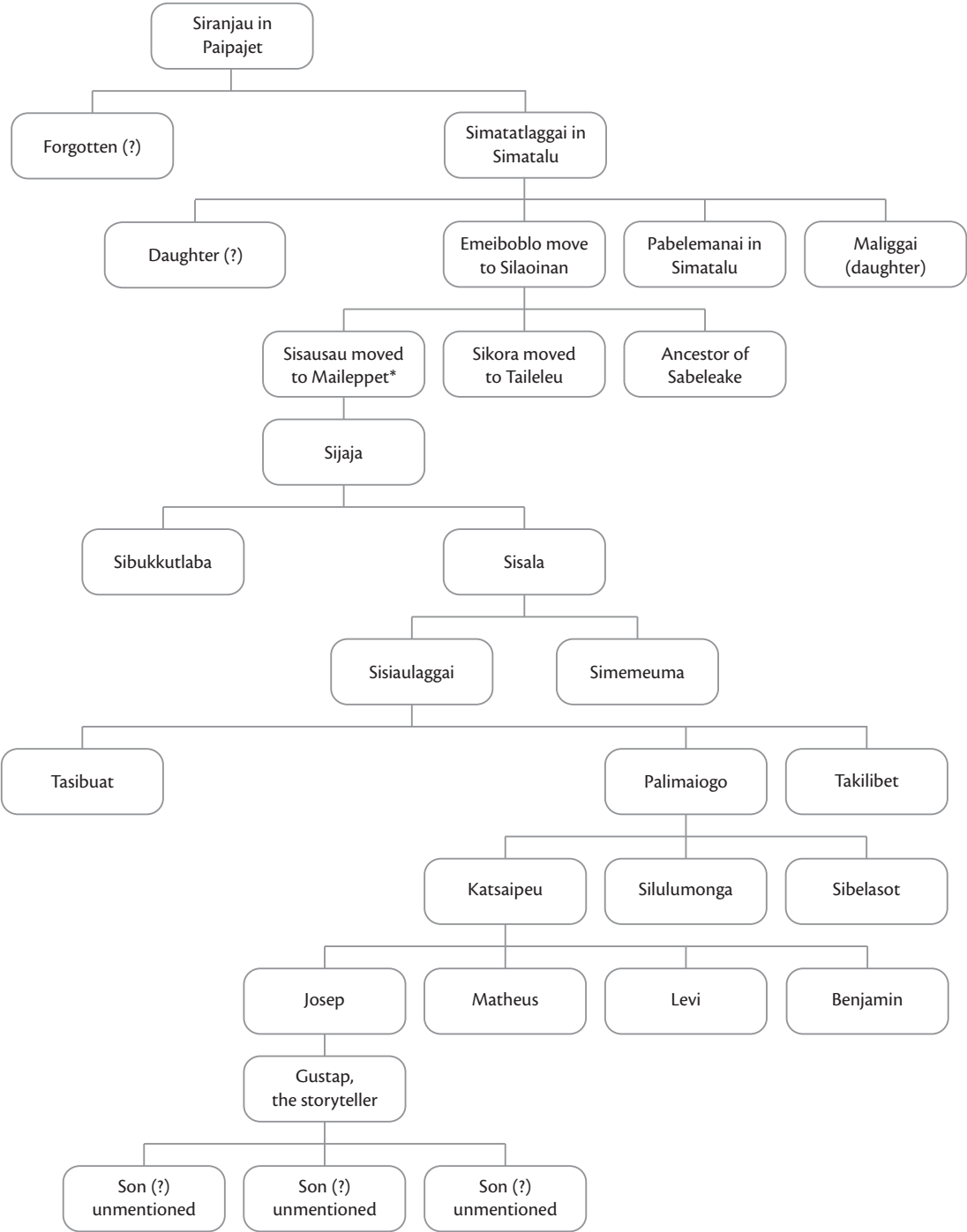


**Chart 6.4** Genealogy of the Samongilailai kin group

\*indicates the ancestor’s name who was regarded by the storyteller as an important ancestor. During the migratory movement, the ancestor once lived in the place marked with an asterisk in Chart 6.3 above.

### 6.3.3 The pig story as told by the Samongilailai kin group in Maileppet

In January 2006, I carried out fieldwork to gather information about a land conflict on Siberut. I returned to Maileppet to meet with several kin groups that had once been in a conflict over land rights against the Samongilailai from Sipora (see Chapter 10).



**Photo 6.3** Petrus Beutenga Samongilailai

When I was in Maileppet, I was surprised to hear that the Samaileppet kin group, which had consisted of seven different kin groups, had split up from each other. The seven previously united kin groups currently exist as seven independent kin groups. The Samongilailai kin group in Maileppet, which had earlier merged with six other kin groups to create Samaileppet, now exists again as Samongilailai.

Petrus Beutenga Samongilailai (see Photo 6.3) was a prominent member of Samongilailai in Maileppet. He was involved in a conflict over land rights in Maileppet. He joined Samongilailai from Sipora in order to oppose Samalinggai and Sarubei (see Chapter 10 for details of the land conflict). In order to understand the land conflict, Petrus Beutenga Samongilailai and I traced the roots of their claim to the land in Maileppet. Accordingly, he told me his kin group's version of the pig story.



Beforehand, while sitting next to me, he had asked his wife to look for a notebook where he had once written down the Samongilailai genealogy. However, his wife could not find the notebook and he could not find it either. He assured me that he still recollected what he had once written in the notebook. What he once wrote was then told to me in the following story.

### Story 12

Our ancestor was called Silatjaumanai. Simatatlaggai (male) and Sialuok (female) were Silatjaumanai's children. Children of Simatatlaggai were four: three sons and one daughter. Those sons were Sigegeake, Emeiboblo and Pabelemanai. Sigegeake moved to Paipajet. There, his kin group was called Sabulautagga. Pabelemanai was the forebear of the Samongilailai dwelling in Simatalu. They are currently called Sababbam. Emeiboblo was the forebear of those families currently residing in southern Siberut (Silaoinan, Maileppet and Taileleu) and on Sipora and Pagai. Those families split up into the groups called Samongilailai, Salimu, Salamao, and Sapalakkokoai. Children of Emeiboblo were Sibokkolo, Sikora, and some daughters. Sibokkolo was the ancestor of those who are now residing in Maileppet and Sioban on Sipora island. One of Sibokkolo's children was Sipajorot alias Sipanajojo (the dog shooter). Sikora was the forebear of Salamao, Salimu, Samongilailai and Sapalakokoai. Those groups currently live in Taileleu.

When our ancestors moved out from Silaoinan, some of the family members remained there. They are now called Sakoddobat, because before departing we all dwelled in Bat Koddobat. Before dwelling in Bat Koddobat we lived in Teitei Sigarena, where we split up into several groups and each group chose a different destination. So, our separation began in Teitei Sigarena. Prior to departure, our ancestors divided up their communal possessions, namely two *unou* (plate made out of jackfruit wood), a set of *uman kateubak* (drums made out of palm trees), one *lulag puiringan* (special wooden plate for rituals), and one *asaat* (whetstone); each group took with them one. Besides those objects, they also shared the secrets of warfare tactics and practices, including mantras and ritual formulas. Samongilailai, who moved south, arrived at the valley of Silaoinan. At this place, we split up again. Samongilailai who moved away to Taileleu took with them one of the *unou*. Samongilailai who moved to Sipora took with them the other *unou*. They also took the *asaat*. But the *lulag puiringan* remained in Silaoinan. The Samongilailai who moved to Maileppet took with them the *uman kateubak*.

Our initial kin-name was Sakerengan. This used to be our name before we were called Samongilailai. We moved away from Simatalu to Teitei Sigarena because Emeiboblo killed members of Sapokka. He did so, because Sapokka stole Emeiboblo's pig. Sapokka ate the pork of the pig. The pig for Emeiboblo was a bride-price. He had received that pig from the Sapokka themselves. It was because a daughter of Emeiboblo got married to a son of Sapokka. Since the

killing of that pig in Simatalu, the Samongilailai commenced to disperse. In further migrations, we arrived at the valley of Silaoinan and claimed a large plot of land. That land in fact belongs to all the members of the Samongilailai including those who have moved away from there. Our land was situated in between the river mouth of the place called Bat Kalea and the river mouth of the place called Bat Masat. The border of the land is the upriver place called Sirau, from there it moves up to a hill and turns to another hill and then down to the river mouth of a place called Mapopoalat. The entire area belonged to us. The place was not the only land we had in Silaoinan. There was a large piece of land that belonged to the group called Sakaelagat. The Sakaelagat kin group had given us a plot of land because our ancestor Emeiboblo offered to the Sakaelagat a pig and sago for their meals, when they came to him for a meal because they were fishing in Sibuddaoinan.

That happened in this way: Sakaelagat dwelled in Silaoinan. They went to Sibuddaoinan for netting sea turtles. When they were there, they ran out of food. So, they went to seek Emeiboblo who was in Sirilabat, staying with his nephew after finding his own place in Silaoinan where the Sakaelagat knew him. Soon, the Sakaelagat met Emeiboblo. The Sakaelagat got sago from him. Emeiboblo did not only offer sago to them. He also offered his pigs. Half of the pork was eaten in Sirilabat; another half was put into bamboos. When the Sakaelagat decided to return to their fishing, they received another pig from Emeiboblo. Emeiboblo went to accompany the Sakaelagat while returning to Sibuddaoinan. In Sibuddaoinan, the Sakaelagat said to Emeiboblo, 'We have eaten your sago and pork but you did not eat ours, especially you did not eat any turtle that we caught. Due to this fact, you get a plot of land from us instead.' For his kindness, Sakaelagat gave a plot of land to Emeiboblo. The land extended from the riverbank of a place called Maragure up to the river mouth of a place Koddobat. This land was called *sakit sakkoko* (payment of pigs).

Another plot of land we also got from Sakaelagat was the plot of land extending from the river mouth of a place called Simasapsap further to the river of a place called Simapiligi until the riverbank of a place called Koddobat. This plot of land was obtained from Sakaelagat due to a humiliating incident. One of the Sakaelagat disturbed Emeiboblo's sisters while they were fishing in the river. The river belonged to Sakaelagat. In order to protect the river and fish, one of the Sakaelagat chased Emeiboblo's sisters away. The women ran away so that they lost the banana leaves that were wrapping their bodies. They got naked and hid themselves in the place called Salipak. Emeiboblo knew the case but did not ask any penalty. However, the Sakaelagat offered intentionally to Emeiboblo a plot of land. This land was called *monen pakaila* (land for humiliation).

The last plot of land we received in Silaoinan was called *porak tuilu* (land because of threat). When Emeiboblo arrived at Silaoinan, he went to visit a person called Sibubu in order to seek shelter and food to eat. But Sibubu was a bit afraid of the fact that he had a stranger in his house. He was not

afraid of Emeiboblo but he was concerned about Emeiboblo's safety. Sibubu did not want Emeiboblo to be killed by other people in his neighbourhood. Sibubu beat the wooden drums (*tuddukat*), calling his neighbours. Immediately, neighbours like the Sabirut arrived at Sibubu's place. They came with bows and arrows. Sibubu explained to them why he had beaten the drums. He asked Emeiboblo to show himself after hiding in the ceiling of Sibubu's house. Sibubu introduced Emeiboblo to the neighbours so that they would recognize him. Whenever he went around the Silaoinan valley, those people would not kill him. After that occasion, Emeiboblo decided to return to Simatalu. Sibubu went to accompany him. When they were canoeing, Sibubu struck the river mouth of a place called Masat by means of his bamboo stick used to paddle his canoe. Sibubu spoke, 'My brother from Simatalu, Emeiboblo, I only accompany you until this river. From this point I offer you this land, you must not extend this border whenever you come downriver or shorten this border as you go upriver. Remember carefully, if you come downriver to extend this border, you will get shot by my bow and arrows.' So Sibubu ended his speech. Emeiboblo said, 'I accept what you said, and if you alter the borders of the land that you have bestowed on me, I will hit you by means of my spears.' Sibubu continued, 'If you have dogs and they die, you have to bury them here in order to remember that this land commemorates our friendship.'

Afterwards, Sibubu returned to his home, and Emeiboblo continued his journey. In this way, Emeiboblo got a plot of land from Sibubu. Those lands currently belong to all of Emeiboblo's descendants.

Now, I am about to tell you about the lands found by my ancestor called Sipajorot alias Sipanajojo. From Silaoinan, Sipajorot went to the place called Cempungan, and from there he moved to dwell in Saibi Samukop and lived among the group called Sagurug. While he was there, he killed a member of the group called Sanene. His relatives paid for the misdeed by surrendering two plots of land located in the places called Bat Rapperat and Bat Sibuddaoinan. Sibuddaoinan is the place where most Sanene currently live.

Afterwards, Sipajorot moved away from there. He found land during his journey. The land was situated between the place called Beat Torongai and the river mouth of Siberut. So Maileppet is part of that land. He occupied a place called Silogau, because he was afraid of being killed by his enemies. He thus went to the river mouth of a place called Rogdok in the valley of Rereiket. He built a house there. He lived in Rogdok for some time. While living there, the Satoutou came to Sipajorot's house and took away the ladder of his house for unclear reasons. He shot them to death as a consequence. But he had to pay for his misdeed with plots of land namely located in the places called Bat Lakokok, Bat Simege and Bat Labbaet. Afterwards, he went downriver and dwelled in a place called Riringoinan in Katurei bay. He married a daughter of Sagoilok, a kin group residing there. She was the daughter of the father called Suratkerei. Her name was Siumata. From this marriage, Sipajorot had a son

called Sipaja'ja'. Sipaja'ja' moved over to Sipora and one of his current descendants is Simagasa who lives in Tuappeijat. The rest of the families carried on their migratory movements to populate Sioban, a settlement of Sipora, and further to the Pagai islands. (Narrated by Petrus Beutenga Samongilailai, age 52, January 2006)

The storyteller focuses on telling the individual names of his ancestors, the objects that were brought along by the Samongilailai families during the migratory movements, and the plots of land that belonged to particular groups of Samongilailai families. The storyteller's story is not structured very well. He starts telling about the migratory movements at a certain place, where his ancestor had arrived. Later he traces back to the home place of the ancestral family in Simatalu. Nonetheless, I can reconstruct the expansion of the Samongilailai kin group living in Maileppet in Chart 6.5.

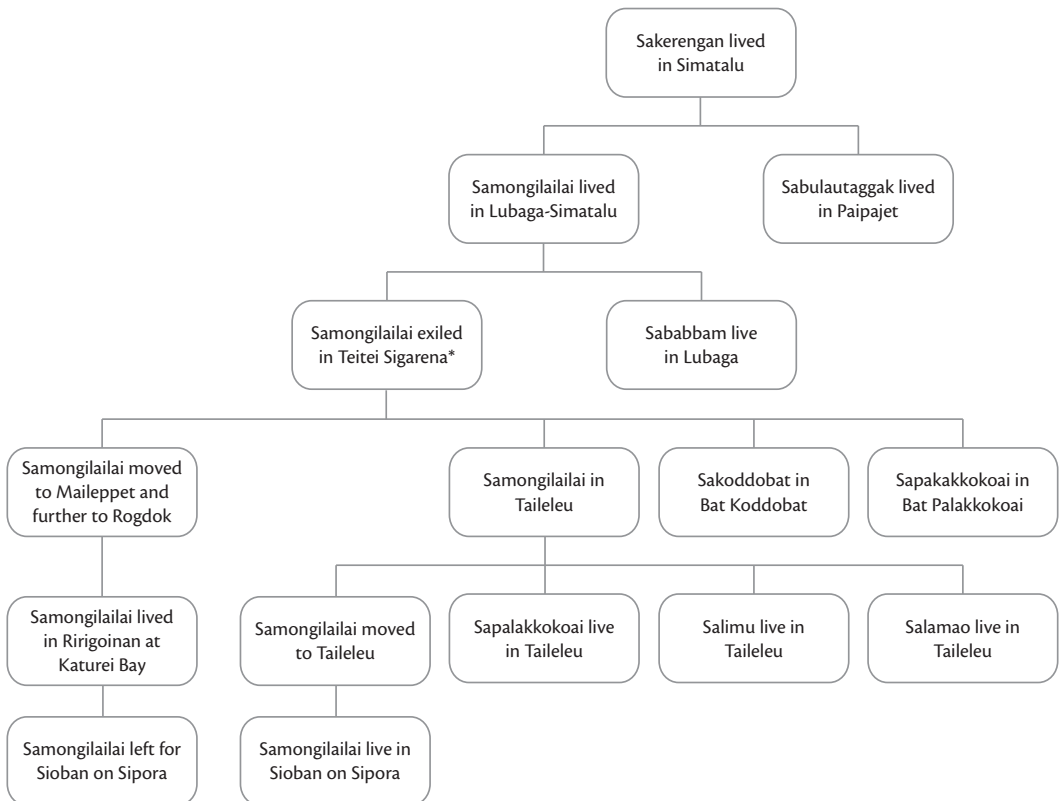


**Chart 6.5** Expansion of the Samongilailai kin group in Maileppet

\*marks the first place-name where the storyteller's important ancestor had dwelled in the course of migration. The ancestor's name is as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 6.6).

Moreover, he does not begin his story with the killing of a pig. When he comes up with the part about the killing of a pig, he tells it simply and briefly. In further telling, the storyteller concentrates more on illustrating how the migrating ancestors, namely Emeiboblo and Sipajorot, claimed plots of land. I assume that the current conflict over land in Maileppet strongly influences the way the storyteller tells his story, which focuses on land matters. In Chart 6.6, I reconstruct the genealogy of the Samongilailai in Maileppet.

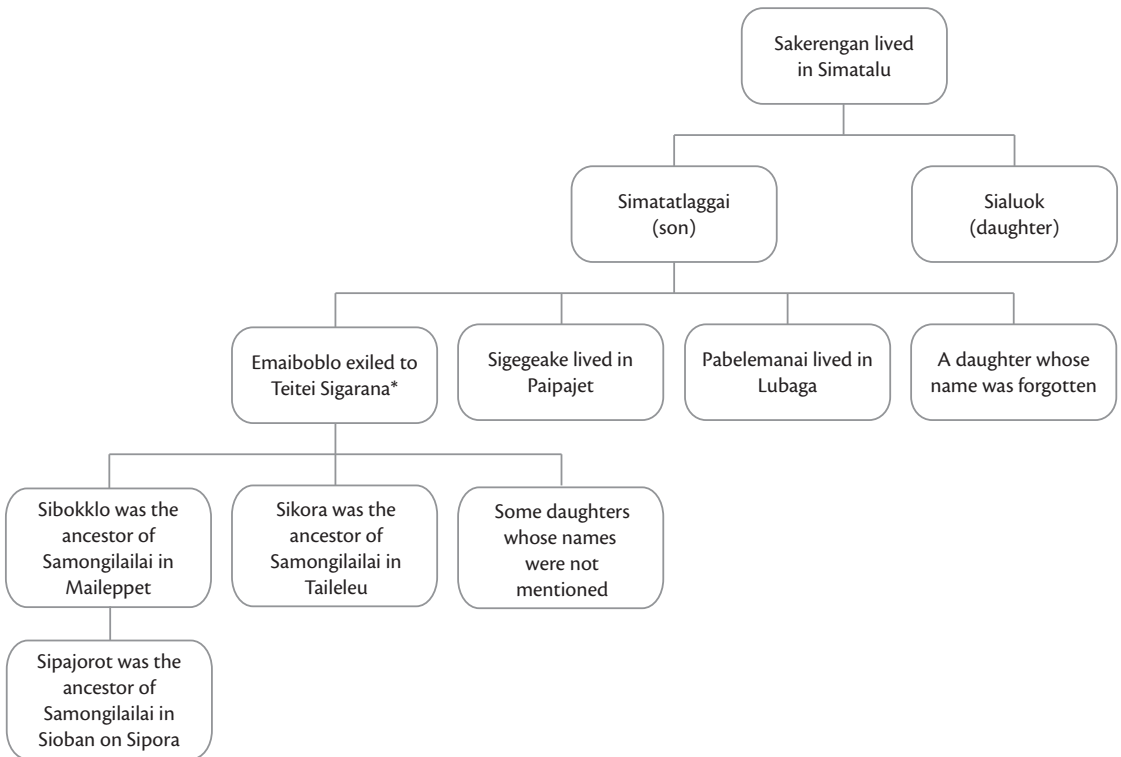


**Chart 6.6** Genealogy of the Samongilailai kin group in Maileppet

\*indicates the ancestor's name who was regarded by the storyteller as an important ancestor. During the migratory movement, the ancestor once lived in the place marked with an asterisk in Chart 6.5 above.

Oral agreements between Samongilailai and neighbouring kin groups regarding particular plots of land are mentioned in the family story as well. Even the borders of those plots of land are clearly mentioned. For outsiders, I find it difficult to figure out where the particular plots of land are located exactly and how extensive the plots of land are. When I asked the storyteller whether he knew the place, he ensured me that he even knew the names of the small rivers used as markers of the land's borders.

## 6.4 Interpreting the pig story

Stories of the killing of a pig explain the attempt by two neighbouring kin groups called Samongilailai and Sapokka to define each other's possession of a pig. The Samongilailai assaulted the Sapokka by killing members of the Sapokka when the Sapokka got back the pig given to the Samongilailai. To the Samongilailai, their ancestor's action in killing members of Sapokka was seen as a punishment of the Sapokka for their misbehaviour in stealing the Samongilailai's pig. This killing by the Samongilailai is remembered as the greatest event. As the Samongilailai had killed a few Sapokka, they did not feel regret to leave their homeland. On the contrary, they were proud of the assault because the loss was on the enemies' side. Moreover, they grew to be one of the largest kin groups in Mentawai because of that event. The initial kin group expanded into several new kin groups and claimed many plots of land. Before they assassinated members of Sapokka, they had had only a small plot of land in Simatalu.

Judging by the family stories, the current kin groups of Samongilailai share some major features. For instance, the migrating ancestor's name Emeiboblo is mentioned in every story of Samongilailai. After leaving his homeland in the course of migration, the migrating ancestor inhabited a place called Teitei Sigarena. This place is mentioned in the stories. Yet according to the stories, every kin group of Samongilailai tended to migrate south in the Mentawai Islands. If a family once moved to northern Siberut, the family nevertheless reversed their journey and eventually turned south like the other families of Samongilailai did.

Besides the features they share, every current kin group of Samongilailai has its own history of expansion. The change of their kin-names is a clear example. For instance, a few families settled in Bat Koddobat and they became Sakoddobat; some families dwelled in Bat Lamao and they became Salamao. Locations mentioned in the pig stories illustrate that the Samongilailai passed through many places, and the migrating family separated at certain points. From these points, each of the separate families continued their journey in different directions. As this happened, connections among the separated families were rare, they even might not meet each other at all. Nevertheless, their genealogical ties remain. In a later stage of migratory movements, the migrating families might meet again; however, they did not merge in order to form one kin group like the initial Samongilailai. Individual kin groups of the migrating Samongilailai kept splitting up.

The first migrating family of Samongilailai was not the first group to explore several places on the island of Siberut. Other kin groups, for example Sakerebau and Samaloisa, had first found and occupied plots of land. The migrating family of Samongilailai only claimed a few plots of land that were still free. Nonetheless, the family eventually acquired more land. According to the

pig stories, the Samongilailai family not only claimed free plots of land, but also received plots of land from other kin groups. The plots of land were the payment of fines due to humiliation and due to threat, or were gifts bestowed by other kin groups due to a close friendship that the family had with those kin groups.

Family stories also contain information about communal land. There are two kinds of communal land. The first is a plot of land located in the place of origin; the second is a plot of land that was claimed in the course of migratory movements. In principal, all these plots of land belong to all Samongilailai descendants (*muntoḡat Samongilailai*). The migrating ancestors transferred responsibility for the protection and maintenance of all communal possessions of the Samongilailai to relatives that did not move away from the plots of land claimed. In case no other families remained at the place, trustworthy neighbours would be given the opportunity to take care of the land and use it. They are called *sipasijago porak* (caretaker of land), and it adds to the status of this group. Rights to the use the plot of land were handed over before the actual owners left for new places in order to ensure rights to the land would remain in the hands of the initial landowners.

Sometimes, a newly established kin group of Samongilailai might acquire some plots of land in the course of migration. This means that relatives of the kin group that had emigrated elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands would not have the same rights to all the land claimed by the kin group – unless all descendants of the group had died. Relatives of the group that has disappeared then have the right to claim plots of land that were owned by that kin group. Nonetheless, as long as the kin group that claims a plot of land still exists, the relatives may only have the right to use the land. Because they are descended from the same ancestral family, they may have access to the land of any of the kin groups to whom they are related.

Examining the family stories, we see that there is inconsistency in remembering ancestors. Ancestors of a kin group are probably forgotten if they did not claim any land or did not establish a new kin group or did not contribute significant events in the group's history. As a consequence, only some of the prominent ancestors, including ones who passed away three to five generations ago, are remembered in Mentawai. Judging from the pig stories, Mentawaians may in some cases recollect ancestors' names as long ago as ten or fifteen generations. It is quite clear that the stories do not report in detail all the events that occurred throughout the generations, but rather they consist of crucial events, which are special features of the kin groups that own the stories.



# 7

## The wild boar story

### 7.1 Introduction

The last group of stories relating an occurrence with similar consequences to the pig story and the mango story concerns wild boars, or *siberi*. The word refers to a lot of wild boars living in a group. Therefore, in other Mentawaiian dialects, wild boars are called *simaigi*, meaning ‘many’. The wild boar incident is about a father’s failure to catch wild boars. The father assumed that his female relatives were deliberately humiliating him when they repeatedly sang about his hunting failure. The father tried everything he could think of to compensate for his failure. However, his efforts did not erase his relatives’ memories of it. He and his family eventually decided to leave their homeland. They sought other places to live on Siberut island. Subsequently, other members of the kin group dispersed further geographically and split up into new kin groups.

I use the wild boar story as an essential example in analysing current conflicts over land rights. Several kin groups tell a version of the wild boar story, and some of those groups are involved in the current conflict over land rights in Chapter 10. Nevertheless, the wild boar story is not the only story bearing on the roots of the current land conflict. In fact, the two other stories presented in the preceding chapters also hold clues to the causes of the current conflict.

I first describe the cultural characteristics of Mentawai traditional hunting. Because the wild boar story tells about hunting activities, it adds to our understanding of traditional hunting. Hunting is an important social and cultural practice for Mentawaians.

After describing traditional hunting, I present three versions of the wild boar story which were collected from three related kin groups. I know other kin groups who tell a similar story but they are not related to the kin groups presented in this chapter; however, I chose just three of them, enough to illuminate the land rights case. In Chapter 10 I examine how the family stories

about the wild boar can be used in resolving a particular conflict over land. An interpretation of the wild boar story closes this chapter.

## 7.2 Social and cultural aspects of traditional hunting

Traditional Mentawaians hunt such wild animals as monkeys, wild boars, deer, and birds in order to have meat needed for daily meals as well as for completing particular rituals. Hunting wild animals in the forest is a major activity performed by male Mentawaians. Boys learn to hunt near home. Using a bow and arrow, they shoot coconuts placed at a certain distance. After mastering the mechanics of shooting, they start hunting small birds. They do that for pleasure. When the boys become adults, the hunting turns serious. An adult hunter needs to know many things. Familiarity with the natural surroundings, expertise in recognizing animal tracks in the mud, differentiating sounds made by animals, recognizing forest paths made by animals, awareness and wisdom in dealing with wild animals when they come across them in the forest, and skill in shooting animals to kill are a few of those aspects. Having such knowledge, a great hunter will be respected by his relatives. Having such knowledge and skill can be a great benefit for a young man in promoting himself to easily get a wife, besides being respected by other hunters.

Mentawai hunters observe certain habits before hunting so that they may more easily catch wild animals. Everything needs to be planned carefully before they go hunting. To hunt monkeys, for instance, a Mentawain should wake up early, in order to hear the monkeys start calling, at about four or five o'clock in the morning. He then needs to follow the sound and arrive at the location before the monkeys move away from their overnight place. Mentawaians generally go hunting in the forested land belonging to their own kin group, located near their dwelling place. They frequently hunt in a group. Nonetheless, particularly skilled hunters are fond of hunting alone. When people go hunting together, they bring a few dogs to help catch and find the shot animals. In fact, none of the animals die immediately after being shot. They may still run or fly a few metres. In this case, it can be rather difficult to find the shot animals, as the wild forest is covered with trees and bushes. Therefore dogs are needed to go find the shot animals.

In the course of hunting, people sometimes simply get lucky and stumble upon wild boars in a large group while those boars are eating or just playing around in the mud. Having great skill in using a bow and arrows, Mentawaians would not miss when shooting a wild boar in such a situation. When the hunters return home, wooden drums (*tuddukat*) are beaten in order to call the family members together. All the related members of a family residing in that place would without exception be invited to share in the shot animal regardless of who caught it. The meat is shared equally among all family members.

Soon after the festivity is over, the families return to their houses, taking with them what is left of the pork.

By means of a bow and poisoned arrows, carried between the arm and the side of the body, and a machete held in the hand, Mentawaians go hunting. In order to hunt wild boars and deer while bringing a spear as an additional hunting tool, Mentawaians trace a series of footprints during daylight. If they do not see any animal footprints, they just wander in the forest until they stumble by chance upon some animals. Or, they try to follow sounds that are recognized as the voices of particular animals. If they recognize wild animal footprints but those animals are not caught during hunting, the hunters just set a trap (*luluplup*) or a special rope (*sesere*) that is purposely made to ensnare animals. They wait for a day or two, then visit the trap to see whether any animals have been caught.

In order to catch birds and bats, Mentawaians put an adhesive substance (*ekket*) on a long wooden stick. The substance is collected from particular trees. People chop the trunk of the tree in order to accumulate adhesive resins, for instance from the jackfruit tree.

People do not always return from hunting with a great result. They may return home with empty hands. In such a situation, generous hunters sometimes kill some of their own domesticated pigs or chickens in order to replace the unsuccessful hunting. By doing so, their families, who have been waiting for the return of the hunters, may still feel delighted and the exhausted hunters can be replenished with a hearty meal.

However, not all family members are generous. Some Mentawaians are frugal, even parsimonious. They do not want to sacrifice their domesticated animals unless there is a good reason. They may want to keep their domesticated animals for more important purposes. Rituals, social prestige, and means of payment are some of these purposes. If a family has as many pigs and chickens as possible, the family will be respected and seen by neighbours as a rich family. Such a family will find it easy to pay a fine or a bride price. Given this situation, slaughtering one's own pigs to compensate for a hunting failure may not be desirable.

### 7.3 The wild boar incident

In the wild boar story, the father comes across wild boars while hunting in the forest. The wild boars are lying unconscious on the ground near a tree called *laggure*. The fruits of this tree contain a poisonous substance. Animals that eat the fruits may lose consciousness temporarily, and this is what happens to this group of wild boars. The father misjudges the unconscious state of the wild boars. Animals temporarily affected by the poisonous *laggure* fruit will not immediately awaken unless they are showered with water. When the father

returns home, he asks his relatives to go fetch the wild boars before it starts raining. This moment is the beginning of tragedy for the father and his family. When the relatives return to the place in order to fetch the wild boars, the wild boars have awakened and run away. This is seen as the father's mistake or failure. In order to compensate for his humiliating failure, the father tries a lot of things. However, his female relatives keep reminding him by singing humorously about his failure again and again. The migratory movements caused by this wild boar incident are called by the Siriratei kin group *pusabuat kalulut silango siberi*, meaning 'dispersal because of unconscious wild boars', in short *siberi*.

I collected three versions of the wild boar story. They are from three kin groups residing in three different settlements. One version was collected from Saleleusi, a kin group residing in Paipajet. Afterwards, a version was recorded from Sakatsila, a kin group dwelling in Saibi Muara. And the third version, collected from a place called Saliguma, belongs to the so-called Satoko, a kin group whose members also live in Saibi Muara.

According to these family stories, the initial kin group affected by the incident was known as Sakerenganleleggu, meaning 'a group of people whose voice was as loud as thunder'. Family members of that group departed from their homeland in Simatalu after the wild boar incident. They commenced to split up, and after some time they had acquired different kin-names. They also inhabited different places on Siberut island instead of staying in Simatalu. Some of the kin groups are Sakerenganleleggu, Siriratei, Sakatsila, Sake-laasag, Sakairiggi, Saririgka, and Satoko. Although the groups use different kin-names and rarely visit each other if at all, they still recognize their kinship to one another because their family story about the wild boar incident shows their family connection.

I discuss three of these related kin groups – Saleleusi, Sakatsila and Satoko – from whom I collected three versions of the wild boar story. They live in three separate places: Paipajet, Saibi Muara in the valley of Saibi Samukop, and Sarabua, a hamlet of Saliguma village. Each version emphasizes a particular theme of the story: the Saleleusi version highlights the migratory movements, the Sakatsila version emphasizes the occupation of places, and the Satoko version gives details about the growth of the kin group.

### **7.3.1 The wild boar story as told by the Saleleusi kin group in Paipajet**

I explored the Simatalu valley in order to find kin groups that had some relation to the wild boar incident. My efforts, however, were unsuccessful. It appears that no kin groups or descendants affected by the wild boar incident are living there today. Several other kin groups were indeed living in settlements in Simatalu; however, they had family stories of other early conflicts. Next to the Simatalu valley, there is another village called Paipajet. I decided to visit

this village in 2004, where the mouth of the Paipajet river flows into the main-stream of the Simatalu river. Because of the strategic geographical location, I thought that some families of the kin groups affected by the wild boar incident might have migrated to Paipajet, even though geographical closeness was not what I initially expected based on what I had learned about migratory movements.

In Paipajet, I met with a kin group called Saleleusi. I visited Saleleusi members in the evening, because during the daytime they worked in their gardens. A few Saleleusi families gathered in the Saleleusi elder's house. The kin group did not have a communal house (*uma*) anymore since they came to live in a government village in the 1960s. In order to be as close to each other as possible, to re-create a feeling of being in a communal house, they built their houses next to each other in the village. Most of the women sat together on the floor inside the house, and about seven men sat next to me to listen to the storyteller's story. The following story tells how Saleleusi got to Paipajet.

### Story 13

The familiar name of our ancestor was Silango [which means 'unconscious']. But his real name was Sikoibatei [eater of animals' liver]. He occupied a place on the riverbanks of Simatalu. Our ancestor was called Silango because of *siberi* [the wild boar incident]. The whole story is as follows. One day, Silango or Koibatei [a shortened form of Sikoibatei] went to hunt animals in the forest. In the course of hunting, he came across wild boars lying unconscious on the ground under a *laggure* tree. The tree had fruits, and *laggure* fruit has a toxic substance that may cause those who eat it to become unconscious or even die. He brought one of those boars home when he returned. Instead of bringing the boar to the communal house (*uma*), however, he placed it near a bamboo grove situated close to the house. He did so in order to surprise his relatives. He asked his wife to collect bamboo, 'Please, go together with our sisters-in-law (*eira*) to collect bamboo for cooking. The male members are going to collect wild boars in the forest.' But they did not immediately go to accomplish their tasks because it started raining. After the rain stopped, they carried out their tasks. While the women collected bamboo, the men went to the place where the wild boars were lying unconscious. However, when the men arrived at that place, the wild boars had already run away. It seemed that the wild boars had been awakened by the rain. The men returned home empty-handed. They informed Silango about what had happened. In response to the situation, Silango asked his male relatives to catch some of his own pigs to replace the escaped wild boars. They thus all had pork to eat, but it was not the meat of wild boars. The pork was from Silango's own pigs. After finishing their meal, Silango's sisters-in-law and daughters-in-law (*taliku*) sang a song with lyrics that irked Silango: 'Because of *silango* [unconscious wild boars], we have just eaten our father's pork', while soothing their children to sleep.

After the festivity was over, Silango made a trap (*luluplup*). When the trap was ready, Silango set it on the ground in the forest near his residence. After some time, a wild boar was caught in the trap. The family then held another festivity. Afterwards, the women sang a song, 'We have just had a festivity because of Silango [the person who set the trap]'. Afterwards, Silango made another trap. This time it was made out of rope (*sesere*). The rope snared another wild boar. He brought it home. Silango's families again held a happy festivity. As they prepared for the festivity, the women sang their favourite cradle song: 'Because of Silango, we are going to eat wild boar meat snared by *sesere*'. Silango began to be aware of the fact that his daughters-in-law were singing about him. The song irked him badly.

After the festivity concluded, Silango conducted the headhunting ritual (*mulabbara*) in order to show his daughters-in-law his anger at being humiliated. He was a brave man and deserved respect. Later he killed people in Simalegi. When he returned home, the families celebrated his return. However, his headhunting raid did not stop Silango's daughters-in-law from singing their favourite song. And again the women sang the song, 'We are carrying out a festivity to happily celebrate the return of Silango' – still referring to the initial mistake of the unconscious boars.

After completing the headhunting raid (*mulepa*), Silango visited his garden. The garden had a name, *mone simaitso* [visible garden], and was located on a hill called *Taddaken*. He already knew that it was the right moment to harvest the durian fruits; therefore he asked his families and *sinurug* [neighbours asked to lighten the work of a heavy or time-consuming task] to gather the durian fruits. When the durian fruits were nearly harvested, Silango remained on top of the durian tree. He sat on the highest branch. Silango shouted to his brothers, 'You all may return now. I am still inspecting our gardens.' All the helpers (*sinurug*) returned home and Silango harvested the remaining durian fruits. He and his own family collected all the durian fruits and, instead of returning home to Simatalu, they went away to Simalegi. In the meantime, other families were waiting for the return of Silango and his family. But they never showed up. Silango and his family had gone to Simalegi. They stayed in Simalegi. They stayed, stayed, stayed, and stayed there. The rest of the families in Simatalu began to worry, as Silango and his [nuclear] family did not return home. They asked other people if they had seen Silango and his family. After seeking for some time, they eventually found Silango and his family in Simalegi. When they arrived at his place, Silango pretended to be ill. The families asked Silango and his family to return. 'We have come for you and we want you to return with us.' But Silango did not really want to return. Therefore he said to his relatives, 'You go home and I will come after you soon, after I recover from my fever.' He promised them, but he never returned. To the contrary, he went to another place, called Terekan.

In Simatalu, his relatives were waiting for his return, but he never showed up. They went to Simalegi to visit Silango and his family for a second time. However, they arrived at Simalegi in vain, because Silango and his family had already left for Terekan. The seekers from Simatalu then went to Terekan to find Silango. And it happened in a similar way, 'So... you are here now!' 'Yes, I am here,' Silango said. The families from Simatalu said, 'We insist that you return with us.' Silango once more promised them, 'I will come when my fever has gone.' But he never kept his promise. Instead, he moved further and further away.

At that time, he left for a place called Sirilangai. After that, he continued his journey to a place called Cempungan. He stayed there for a while. Then, in his further journey he arrived at a place called Saibi Samukop, before moving away again to the southern part of Siberut.

He claimed a plot of land in a place called Boriai, near Muara Siberut. He stayed there and his family expanded. From Siberut, some of his family gradually moved away to Rereiket, Sirileleu, and Sakalagat [the southern islands]. Our ancestor Silango or Sikoibatei returned to Siberut, and moved to Sirileleu, where he passed away. One family of Silango's descendants in Sirileleu moved to Sagulubbe. This family became the ancestors of our current families in Paipajet. Our ancestors lived in Sagulubbe at a place called Kalea. Afterwards, they came here to Paipajet. The landowners of the kin group called Sageileppa welcomed our ancestors [in Paipajet]. From Sagulubbe, our ancestor named Tarourou led our migration. He was one of Silango's descendants. Saleleusi was our kin-name when we were in Sagulubbe. Currently, in Paipajet, we use the same name, Saleleusi. We are descended from Tarourou about ten generations ago. Tarourou descended from our ancestors, whose names are as follows: Taktik, Tatitiet, Teu Tatuddukat, Aman Bilumanai, Teu Tengai, Teu Puleppu, Teu Saigatmanai, myself and my sons. (Narrated by Lemanus Saleleusi, age 47; Paipajet – Siberut, 2004)

Examining this story, I see that the storyteller still remembers his ancestor involved in the wild boar incident. The storyteller additionally mentions the initial place from where the family started to migrate. Prior to the migratory movements, some other events took place after the wild boar incident occurred. The ancestor is said to have carried out hunting activities in order to stop his female members singing of his failure in catching wild boars. The storyteller also mentions that his ancestor conducted a headhunting raid as the ultimate way to stop his female family members from ridiculing him. However, his action did not have the desired result. Because of his humiliation, he eventually decided to leave his place of origin.



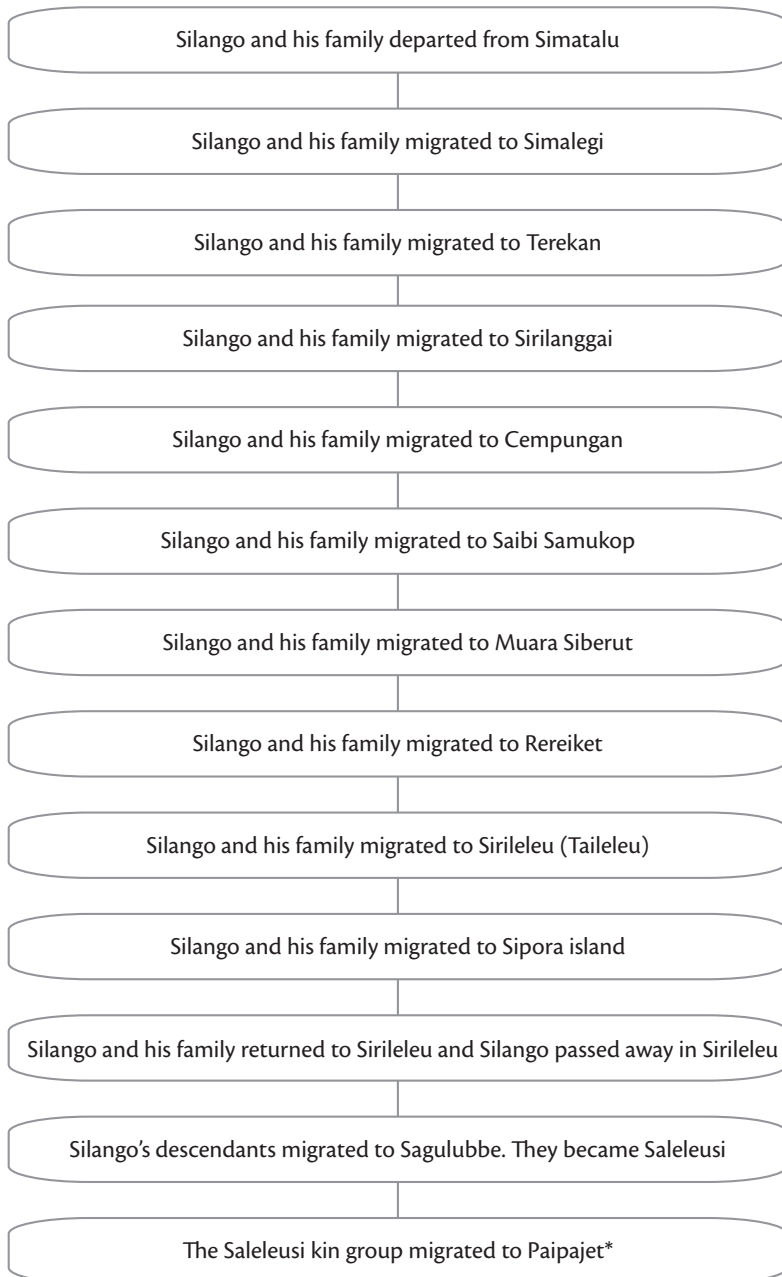


**Chart 7.1** Expansion of the Saleleusi kin group to Paipajet on Siberut  
\*marks the place-name where the storyteller's important ancestor had migrated.  
The ancestor's name is as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 7.2).

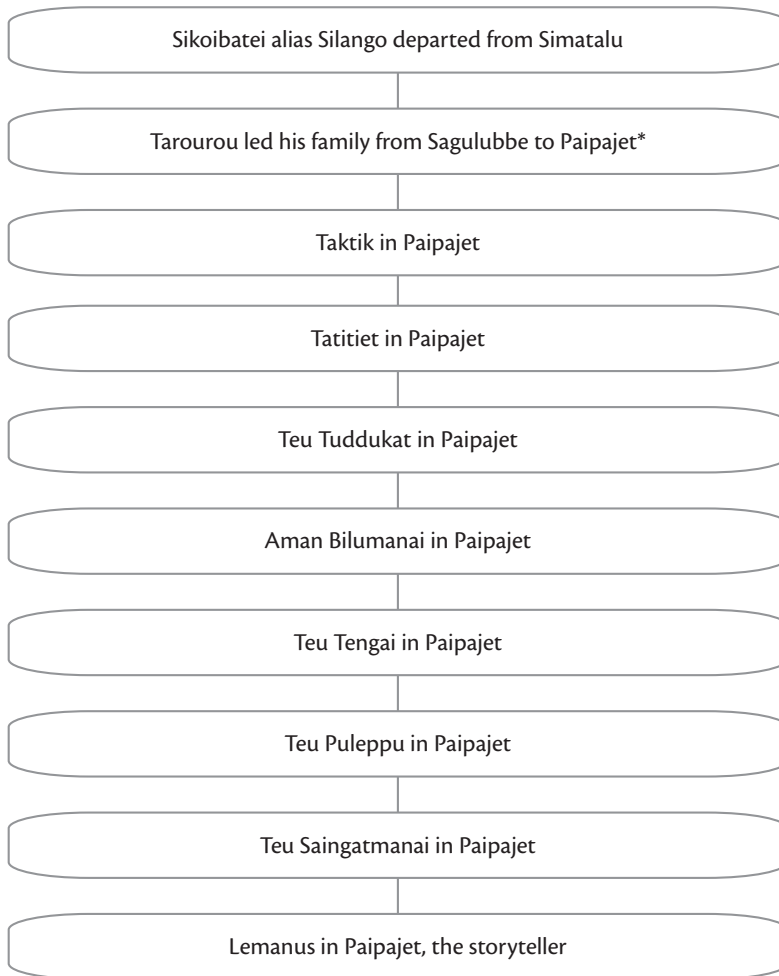


**Chart 7.2** Genealogy of the Saleleusi kin group in Paipajet

\*indicates the important ancestor who had led the storyteller's kin group migrating to the place marked with an asterisk in Chart 7.1 above.

After that, the story relates information about the migratory movements of the ancestral family. And the storyteller tells that the other families (relatives) kept looking for the migrating family in order to bring them back home. However, the first migrating family kept deciding to move away. The migrating family passed through several places. Chart 7.1 summarizes the migration of the group according to this storyteller's story.

Several place-names where the migrating family moved are mentioned. However, the storyteller does not mention any other groups that might be related to Silango's initial family and to the wild boar incident. In the final passage, the storyteller lists a number of ancestors' names in order to show how

many generations the family has passed through since the incident took place. He obviously forgets a few generations, as he focuses in fact on his own ancestors' names when they were in Sagulubbe. He does not list the earlier generations between Silango and the one who led the group to settle in Paipajet. The storyteller only mentions Silango as the prominent ancestor before telling about other ancestors, for instance Tarourou. The family generations of the Saleleusi kin group, as derived from this story, are given in Chart 7.2.

### 7.3.2 The wild boar story as told by the Sakatsila kin group in Saibi Muara

One of the twelve kin groups residing in the village of Saibi Muara today is Sakatsila. The name means 'group with half a roof'. Sakatsila are actually part of the Siriratei kin group. After being separated from the Siriratei, the Sakatsila got into a dispute among themselves. The Sakatsila rejected a few family members, who later formed a new kin group with the name Saririkka (discarded families). Before being separated from the Sakatsila, the Saririkka took half of the roof of their communal house (*uma*) and left the other half for the Sakatsila. This event is the origin of the Sakatsila kin-name.

The storyteller of the next story is Kobou Sakatsila (see Photo 7.1) from the Sakatsila kin group. He was invited to meet me at my paternal grandmother's house in 2004. I was staying at her house at the time. My father and two uncles



Photo 7.1 Kobou Sakatsila (in the middle, wearing the white shirt)

of mine were present at the meeting. A few of my nephews were there as well. I asked the storyteller to tell me the story of the wild boar incident.

I decided to get information from him after my nephew recommended him to me. The storyteller seemed to know the wild boar story better than other members of the Sakatsila kin group who were residing in Saibi Muara. Kobou Sakatsila told the story as follows.

#### Story 14

Long ago our ancestor dwelled in Paipajet. He moved away and settled in a place in Simatalu; his name was Sikoibatei, but the well-known name he came to be known as is Silango. He stayed in Simatalu. He stayed, stayed, stayed and stayed. He had children and grandchildren; I do not know how many there were in total. In Simatalu the family lived at a place called Bat Pojai. Our ancestor Silango was hunting one time, when he stumbled across wild boars (*siberi*) lying unconscious on the ground. These boars had just eaten fruits of the tree called *laggure*. These fruits contain a sort of poison, which may paralyse those who eat it and make them temporarily unconscious. After finding them, Silango wrapped up the wild boars with palm leaves (*bulug poula*) but he did not tie up the legs of the boars as he thought they were already dead.

When he returned home, he brought one boar and placed it near a cluster of bamboo. Soon after he arrived home, he announced to his families that he had just found wild boars while hunting in the forest. Upon arriving at his house, rain was falling heavily. It was raining, raining and raining. After the rain stopped, he asked his male relatives to go with him to fetch those wild boars. 'Let us go to collect the boars lying dead on the ground. But we should not hope too much because rain has just fallen.' So they went. First they arrived at the bamboo cluster [near the house], and Silango did not see the boar he had just laid there. It seems it had run away because the rain had awakened it. 'Tilei... [this word expresses surprise, rather than its literal meaning, which is 'vagina'], one pig I just put here already ran away. I am afraid the others will have run away as well.' However, they kept going to the place where the boars had been lying. When they arrived, they clearly saw the empty palm-leaf wrapping, and footprints of the boars were seen everywhere on the ground under the *laggure* tree. 'Tilei... they have gone, what are we going to do now?' Silango could not believe his eyes. The others said, 'There is nothing to do about it, let us go home.' Silango or Sikoibatei thought about what he could do to make his relatives happy.

He decided to replace the wild boars that had run away, with his own tame pigs. In order to count the wild boars that had run away, he counted the empty wrappings made out of palm leaves. He asked his male relatives to catch that number of his own pigs and slaughter them for a festivity. Everybody was happy. Brothers, sons, daughters, children-in-law and grandchildren of Silango were invited to attend the festivity. *Tuddukat* [wooden drums] were

beaten and *kajeuma* [three different sizes of drum made out of palm trees covered with snakeskin] were warmed and beaten as well. They cooked pork, taro and sago, and beautifully decorated their house with flowers and special leaves (*pamanai-manai*). After eating the pork, his daughters-in-law took care of their children, singing a song in order to lull them to sleep. The lyrics of their lullaby annoyed Silango, 'We have just had a party because of the wild boars.' They sang the song almost every day. The song was not initially intended to irk Silango. It was just a lullaby. However, after hearing it regularly, it began to irritate Silango.

One day, Silango went out to set a rope trap (*tapi*) to snare deer. When he returned home, he carried a deer with him. He had successfully caught one. A celebration was held again, and his daughters-in-law sang a similar song. 'If it were not for the wild boars, we would not eat any deer meat.' Silango almost lost his patience due to the attitude of his daughters-in-law.

In order to stop hearing the song, he asked his families to catch his pigs and hold another festivity. But this did not stop the daughters-in-law from singing that song. Being upset now, as well as angry, Silango prepared (*mulabbara*) to conduct a headhunting raid. He looked for someone's head (*mulakeu*). We do not know whose head he wanted to hunt [the storyteller hid this information from me]. Silango wanted to conduct the headhunting raid in order to show his daughters-in-law what sort of man he really was. After conducting the headhunting raid, he returned home. The relatives celebrated his return (*mulepa*). However, this headhunting raid still did not stop the women singing the song.

When the durian season came, all members of the family went to harvest the durian fruits. Silango was in the top branch of the durian tree and said to his families, 'All of you may gather up all the harvested fruits and return home immediately. I will see whether there are more fruits remaining, so that I can save some fruits here for my chickens. [In Mentawai, people do not usually use durians to feed chickens, but sometimes people throw parts of the durian fruits to the chickens. I suppose the storyteller is using chickens as an easy example.] I will harvest them later but first I have to see how many fruits are left. It will take me a while to look for the fruits remaining. It is better not to wait for me and my wife.'

Afterwards, all members of the family returned home. Silango harvested the rest of the durian fruits. Together with his wife, he gathered up all the remaining fruits and went away from the place. They did not return home. They went to Simalegi instead. They lived and lived and lived in Simalegi. Two sons of Silango named Boalai and Tainambu, who lived in Simatalu, went looking for their parents: Silango and his wife. They looked for their parents; they looked and looked for them. Then, the parents and the sons met again in Simalegi. Silango disliked the family meeting. He wanted to get away from the rest of his relatives and that is why he moved to Sikabalan.

He found a plot of land at a place called Teitei Saaleibaga. He and his wife lived there for a while. They opened a garden but not for very long. The two sons came to meet them again. 'So... you are here,' said the sons. 'Yes, we are here,' answered the parents. Silango decided to leave immediately in order to avoid his sons.

Thus, he went away and arrived here in our village in Bat Mukop [this village is now known by the name Saibi Samukop] and settled in an area called Bat Bilag. He settled in Bat Bilag together with his wife. He did not want to return to Bat Pojai in Simatalu, where he initially came from. Silango and his wife settled in Bat Bilag. Again the two sons came after them. They all eventually decided to live there together in Bat Bilag. As their numbers increased, because other families from Simatalu came to join them as well, their kin group came to be called Sakerenganleleggu, because when they spoke each other, their voices sounded like thunder (*leleggu*). A new family [kin group] was thus formed at Bat Bilag.

One of those families was our ancestor. However, the [irritating] circumstance did not change and the daughters-in-law continued singing the song, which again and again made Silango annoyed. He and his wife therefore left the rest of the family in Bat Bilag and went to a place called Bat Rereiket while going upriver in the valley of Saibi Samukop. They did not stay there. When they [later] went downriver, they did not stay at Bat Silaoinan either. The family just passed through those places.

Eventually, they settled in the place Mongan Sabirut, currently called Muara Siberut. Silango found a plot of land located near the current settlement called Muntei. He planted sago palms at a place called Duluidui, which adjoined the borders of sago palms of a garden belonging to a kin group named Saseppungan, whose descendants currently live in Maileppet. Silango did not settle there for a long time. He went to Muara Siberut, where he had land in a place called Malupetpet, and Bat Sakkelo. He lived in Malupetpet. There he had five children: two girls and three boys. He did not want to settle there permanently.

He then continued to migrate, going to the island of Sakalagat [Sipora]. He brought along a son named Tareglilai. Perhaps there are relatives of ours descended from Tareglilai living in Sipora, but we do not know them. When Silango lived on the island of Sakalagat, our ancestors told us that whenever thunder made a loud rumbling noise in the night, Silango began to miss his homeland and his relatives. Because he missed his home, he returned to Siberut island. However, he did not return to Saibi Samukop or Simatalu. He settled on a large river in Taileleu. There he had another son, called Reureukerei. Thereafter, Silango ended his journey in Taileleu. He passed away there.

The storyteller stopped for a while. He drank a cup of tea and smoked a *kretek* (clove cigarette). He looked around him and asked me whether we were going to spend more time to complete the story. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and he assured me that his story would end after sunset, indicating that that he had a very long story to tell. My nephews and I were enthusiastically looking forward to hearing the rest of the wild boar story. So, he carried on with his story. Meanwhile, he took a piece of paper and tore it into pieces and formed them into round shapes like small balls. He then arranged the balls vertically, to represent his ancestors who had been born since the wild boar incident.

Silango's sons, named Boalai and Tainambu, who lived in Bat Bilag, migrated to a place called Sirilabat. This place is located in the upriver valley of Saibi Samukop. Living in that area, the two brothers always felt anxious. Every day they felt in danger, because they were occupying other people's land. They therefore decided to move to another place close to a graveyard. After they settled in this place near the graveyard, their kin-group name changed from Sakerenganleleggu to Siriratei, because they built their house near a graveyard (*ratei*). However, moving to the graveyard did not decrease their fear of reprisals from their neighbours in the valley. Near the place was a small river, which belonged to a kin group called Sabuilukkungan. In the past, our female relatives were diligent. They frequently went fishing in the river. Consequently, the Sabuilukkungan complained, '*Tilei... our fish have gone because of Sitoi ka laggai* (new arrivals in the village).' By using this expression, the Sabuilukkungan intentionally made disparaging remarks about us, Siriratei. They disliked us because we caught fish and shrimps in the river. As the first inhabitants of the valley, they claimed the river.

In order to get rid of us, the Sabuilukkungan went to a village called Cempungan to ask Cempungan villagers to [perform] killing. However, the Cempungan people refused to fulfil that request because of the distance between Sirilabat and Cempungan, which was not far away enough. After unsuccessfully asking for help, Sabuilukkungan went a little bit further and reached two other settlements. They arrived at a settlement called Tubeket in the northern part of Siberut. The Sabuilukkungan proposed to the Satubeket, 'Please, come and eliminate the *Sitoi ka laggai* [new arrivals] living on our land; because of them the fish in our river have been decreasing.' For the Satubeket, it was fine to do this because by doing so they could create an alliance (*pusiripokat*) with the Sabuilukkungan. Besides, they could show that they were a brave group of people in a headhunting raid. [The Satubeket people were well known as headhunters on Siberut island. The group is quite famous in family stories of kin groups living in different valleys on Siberut, telling of people going to eliminate the Satubeket to take revenge on them for the deaths of their relatives killed by the Satubeket during headhunting raids.]



Thereafter, the Satubeket came to murder our ancestors; they cut our ancestors' heads off. Our ancestors were Pajaggoina and Turukabei. When the Satubeket returned to their village, they took alive with them a young girl of our relatives, named Garaggag. Garaggag was a female about ten years old, if we would like to estimate her age. My late father said, 'The Satubeket returned home and they carried our young female ancestor on their shoulders with a happy face of victory.' After some time passed, eventually our surviving ancestors found an opportunity to take revenge on the Satubeket. After departing to take revenge, our ancestors called on the Sataggau, our neighbouring kin group residing in the place called Mut Koha. Our ancestors informed them about the revenge, saying, 'We are going to avenge the death of our brothers murdered by Satubeket and to bring our female relative back home.' The Sataggau supported our ancestors with food, canoes, paddles, and other things they needed for the journey. In order to have good luck for their mission, our ancestors performed *mulabbra*, a ritual for headhunting. Afterwards, they went to carry out the headhunting revenge.

In the north, in Sikabalan, they met up with our relatives, the kin group called Sakelaasag. The Sakelaasag were our relatives. They were descendants of Silango, when he still occupied and owned the land called Teitei Saaleibaga. The Sakelaasag had moved to Sikabalan because Silango had left them for a new place. When Silango moved to the valley of Saibi Samukop, we began to dwell in this area [Sikabalan].

Going back to those ancestors who wanted revenge, they stayed in Sikabalan with Sakelaasag. 'We have come for our little sister and to take revenge for our murdered brothers.' The Sakelaasag said, 'If you want to find our little sister, you look for a person called Pinabaibaina [one who does not settle permanently]. We gave her this name because she did not only live with her husband's relatives but she also came to visit us.' After spending some time with the Sakelaasag, our Siriritei ancestors waited for the right moment to attack. Our ancestors eventually decided to get revenge.

Upon arriving at the river where Satubeket's communal house was located, they saw a woman washing clothes. They cut off a stalk of a sort of ginger plant (*tairatti gojo*), often used as a spear. They threw it to the woman. She looked around and later saw them, 'Tikai... my uncles; my brothers... what has brought you here?' It seems that she still recognized them well. They approached her, saying, 'We have come for you and you may now return home with us.' She replied, 'But I cannot do that anymore, because I have a son and a daughter.' Our ancestors wanted to know if there was anybody else in the house in order to complete their revenge, and asked, 'Who is there at home?' She said, 'There is an old widow in the house.' They discussed what to do in order to kill the poor, unfortunate old widow (*silumang sitaurei*).

She returned to her house. When she hung up clothes to dry, she dropped a cloth that belonged to the old widow. She did that as planned. She asked the

old widow to get the cloth. When the old widow went to collect her cloth, our ancestors went to get the old widow and took her life by cutting off her head, legs and hands. Afterwards, our ancestors returned without Garaggag, their female relative. They returned to the Sakelaasag, and informed them what they had done to the Satubeket.

Soon after the event, they returned to their home in Sirilabat. Upon returning they came across the Sataggau again in the place known by the name Mut Koha, 'So... what is the upshot?' 'Well... we have taken "something" at the *ebbei sopag* [shallow side of the river], but we still need to take something else that is located at the *bakkat sopag* [upriver].' They spoke to each other allegorically in order to deceive the Sabuilukkungan. The Sabuilukkungan nonetheless heard the conversation of our ancestors with Sataggau by chance. Sabuilukkungan asked the Sataggau a question, 'What did the *Sitoi ka laggai* say to you about the results of their journey?' Then the Sataggau explained, 'Well, the *Sitoi ka laggai* have returned and told us that they have taken something from the *ebbei sopag*, but not from the *bakkat sopag* yet.' The Sabuilukkungan laughed about the story because they [the Sataggau] did not know the meaning of the deceiving sentence. The Sataggau disliked the way the Sabuilukkungan laughed at their explanation. The Sataggau said, 'You are now laughing at the *Sitoi ka laggai* but you do not know what their *pasailukat* [malicious way of referring to somebody else] was meant for, all of you are the next target. It is because they have found out that you asked the Satubeket to eliminate the *Sitoi ka laggai*.' After hearing what the Sataggau had just explained, the Sabuilukkungan were afraid.

After figuring out that our ancestors had found out who killed their relatives, the Sabuilukkungan decided to leave the place immediately. Before the Sabuilukkungan ran away from Saibi Samukop, our ancestors already got them. Our ancestors caught the Sabuilukkungan on the coast of Saibi Samukop. On the coast they made an agreement. The Sabuilukkungan said, 'You do not need to kill us; instead, you can take our land in Teitei Simataratat [hill of many frogs].' [This kind of land was called *porak segseg logau*, land for stopping bloodshed.] After that was arranged, the Sabuilukkungan made peace (*paabat*) with our ancestors. But the Sabuilukkungan had to leave Sirilabat. Therefore, they went to live in a place called Sipugpug. We [Siriratei] separated and lived in several groups. We now exist as Sakatsila, Saririgka, Sakairiggi, and Siriratei kin groups.

Then, lightning struck the Sabuilukkungan's communal house in a place called Sipugpug. Afterwards, they decided to leave the valley of Saibi Samukop forever. They moved to the valley of Rereiket. They did not return. Since then this place has remained in the hands of our neighbours, the Sataggau. Long, long after that happened, the Sataggau vanished. As our ancestors said, 'The Sataggau families died all at once like crabs in a cooking pot', but no one knew what had caused their death. Since then, no more people have occupied the

place in Sirilabat. The Siriratei had moved to Saibi Muara. The Siriratei took over rights to the land; at least we occupied most of this place and planted it with a lot of crops. The kin group called Siritoitet, too, was living here. Our Siriratei ancestors shared with them the care of the settlement and the land. Afterwards, people gradually moved to this village and increased the population, and some of us started selling plots of land to them. That also occurred about three generations before us, when some plots of ancestral land, for example in the place called Sigulugbaga, was sold by Siritoitet and my ancestors of the Siriratei group to your ancestors [meaning my ancestors], before your ancestral family eventually merged to establish your current kin group, called Satoko. Now, part of the settlement of Saibi Muara belongs to your family. (Narrated by Kobou Sakatsila, age 38; Saibi Muara – Siberut, 2004)

The storyteller of Story 14 begins his narrative by recalling the place of origin and the initial kin group's name. He then tells the story of the wild boar incident, including actions that his ancestors had carried out prior to spreading out from the initial place in Simatalu. The storyteller describes the course of his prominent ancestor's migratory movements from one place to another on the island of Siberut (see Chart 7.3). According to this story, the ancestor also moved over to Sipora. However, instead of staying in the southern islands, the storyteller's ancestor returned to Siberut and eventually passed away in a settlement called Taileleu.

The storyteller's next theme is the further development of the migrating ancestor's offspring, especially those who remained in the valley of Saibi Samukop. It happened about four generations ago. Assault and headhunting raids while residing in Saibi Samukop are recounted, too. Furthermore, the story relates how the storyteller's ancestral kin group obtained a plot of land because of the assault and headhunting. Eventually, the story closes with a new topic, in which the storyteller describes how his kin group came to occupy the whole settlement of Saibi Samukop after the other kin groups moved away from there or even vanished. Later, a new kin group was established and more and more newcomers arrived to populate the settlement of Saibi Samukop.

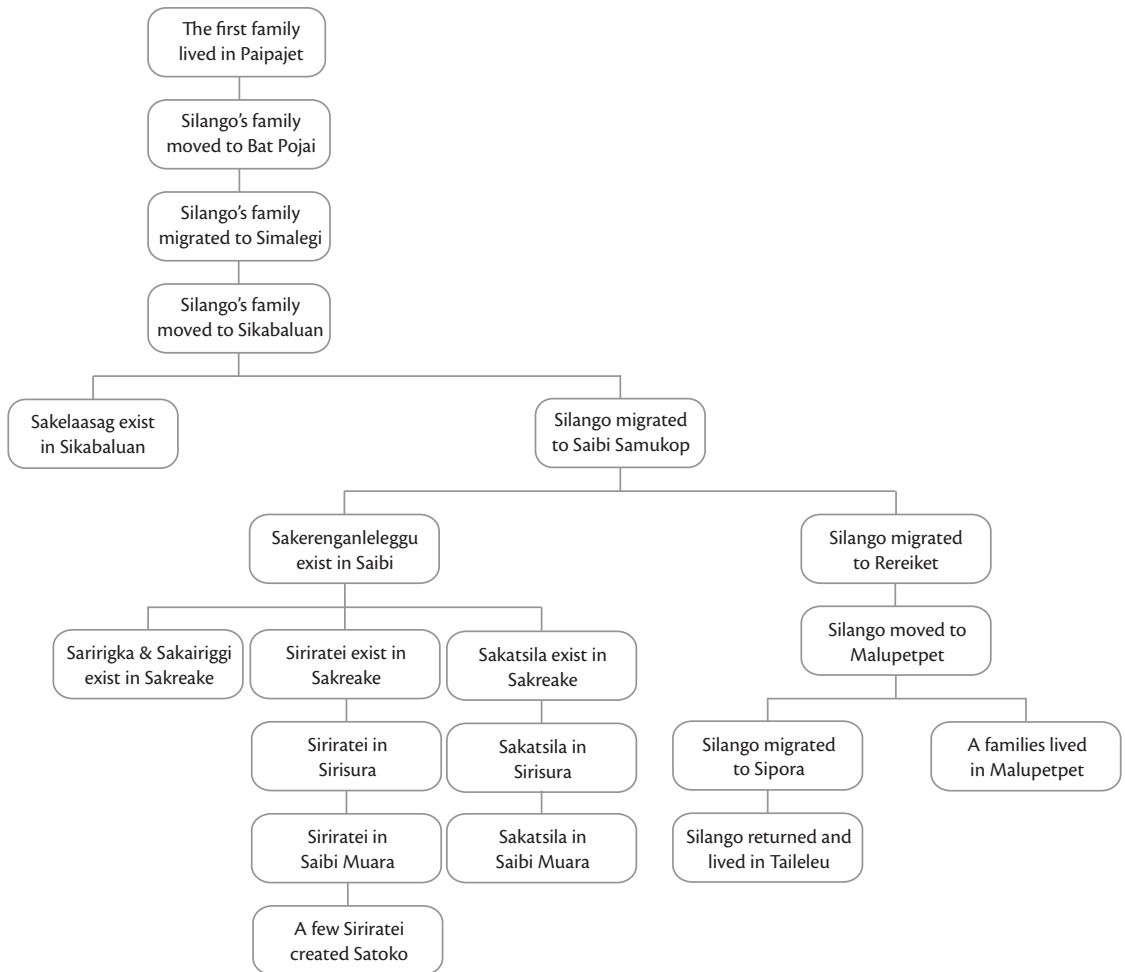


**Chart 7.3** Expansion of the Sakatsila kin group to Saibi Muara on Siberut

### 7.3.3 The wild boar story as told by the Satoko (Siriratei) kin group in Sarabua

The Sakatsila storyteller's story briefly mentions the emergence of a kin group called Satoko. Two different families established the kin group about five generations ago. One Mentawai family was from Siriratei residing in Saibi Muara, while the other was a Chinese family immigrating to Siberut when the father of the Chinese family was working as a soldier of the Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indische Leger (KNIL). He was sent to Mentawai in a military peace-making expedition in the early 1900s. At that time, the Mentawai Islands had been under the authority of the Dutch colonial government since 10 July 1864. The Chinese soldier witnessed the process of the Dutch authorities stopping the

headhunting practices on the island of Siberut and making peace relationships among kin groups residing in Simatalu and Simalegi. After achieving a peaceful situation in those valleys, the military expedition moved to the valleys of Rereiket and Silaoinan. Gradually, kin groups residing in other places of Siberut island such as Sikabaluan and Tatubeket were also brought to peace. The Dutch authorities of the military expedition announced to each settlement that headhunting practices were now forbidden, and they asked which kin groups had conflicts. Then they asked leaders of the quarrelling kin groups to make peace with each other.



Photo 7.2 Teu Jaasa Satoko

After retiring from the military, the Chinese soldier did not return to Sumatra. Instead, he and his family stayed in Mentawai in Saibi Muara. There he formed a close friendship (*siripo*) with a Siriratei family. Both families decided to resign from their former kin groups and form a new group, which was later called Satoko. At this point, they regarded each other as if they were really relatives, although they were not related by blood. Whatever problem one family had, the other tried to resolve it. They helped each other in all aspects of social

life. If one family was preparing a wedding ceremony, the other was invited, and helped by sharing the cost of the bride price.

The next version of the wild boar incident was recorded from the oldest member of the Satoko kin group and the respected elder of the Siriratei, Sakat-sila, Saririkka, and Sakairiggi kin groups (all of them related to each other). His name is Teu Jaasa Satoko<sup>14</sup> (see Photo 7.2). He was even esteemed by other kin groups in several villages of Siberut and Sipora because of his good leadership in leading his group and his villagers when he was the head of the village of Siberut in the 1960s. At the time, there were only a few villages. The storyteller's fame was also partly due to the reputation of his father, named Teu Ngaroi (his real name) or Teu Marimau (his nickname, Tiger), in helping Dutch soldiers to stop headhunting practices on Siberut island.

The storyteller himself was once chosen as *kepala kampung* (village head) in Siberut because he was known as a courageous man. As he got older, his memory of his family history was incomplete. He told me what he still remembered, as follows.

### Story 15

I will let you know what my grandfathers told me about the events they had experienced in the past long ago. According to our ancestors' story, this island was empty. No one knew from where and when a woman and her son had come to inhabit the island of Siberut. The woman gave her son a ring and asked him to search for a wife on this island. He searched and searched by wandering this island for an unknown period of time. Nobody knew how many days, weeks, months or years the son had spent walking around on this island. One day he met his mother again and he married her. Since then, the first people on this island, located in Simatalu, expanded the numbers of the Siberut population.

One of those families was our ancestor, called Silango, whose son was called Sile'uk. Sile'uk's son was Sisabau, whose son was called Sijobat. [Sijobat was also known as Teu Ngaroi or Simarimau.] I am Sijobat's son. My name is Jaasa and my sons are Johannes, Efraim and Martinus. Johannes's son is Sergius. Efraim's son is Vincensius and he recently got married and has a son as well. We have passed through eight generations. At the present time, we have spread over the whole island. We also have relatives who live on Sipora and Pagai islands. We are now called Satoko, by which name other people on this island [Siberut] recognize us.

Our kin group's name was formerly Sakerenganleggu. This name was created from the fact that our ancestors' voices were incredibly loud. When members of the group spoke to each other their voices were like the echo of

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14 Teu Jaasa Satoko passed away in November 2006. It was a few weeks before I had planned to meet him again in order to ask him a few questions that had come up during the course of writing this book.

thunder (*leleggu*). We had many members in our communal house (*uma*). At that time our group was led by ancestors called Sikoibatei and Sioiaken, and dwelled on the riverbank of the Simatalu river. One day, Koibatei [Sikoibatei] went to hunt in the forest, and he came across wild boars (*siberi* or *simaigi*), lying unconscious on the ground, under the tree called *laggure*. The wild boars were unconscious because they had eaten the fruits of the *laggure* tree. Those fruits have toxins that paralyse those who eat them. He wrapped up all the wild boars by using leaves. Afterwards, he returned home and asked his families for help in bringing the wild boars home. Rain was falling when his relatives went to the place where the wild boars were lying.

Upon arriving at the place, the wild boars had already run away because the rain had showered them and awakened them from their unconscious state. If Sikoibatei's relatives had not seen the wrapping, they perhaps would not have believed him. But they saw the wrapping and all the mud around the place where the boars had been lying. After that, the name of our ancestor changed from Sikoibatei to Silango. This new name was derived from the fact that Sikoibatei had failed to catch those boars. Thus, our ancestor acquired a new name, Silango Laggure, shortened to Silango ['unconscious'].

We arrived at Saibi Samukop and Sarabua because our ancestor disliked his new name. Later, our ancestors had plots of land in Malupetpet and Rereiket. Our expansion (*pusabuat*) was described to me by our ancestors as follows: Formerly, we dwelled in Simatalu and later moved on to inhabit the riverbanks of a place called Bat Bilag located along the upper reaches of the Saibi Simatalu river; currently the place is a settlement called Limau. Subsequently, we went over hills and settled on the riverbanks of a place called Sakreake. When we dwelled in Sakreake, our kin-name changed from the initial Sakerenganleleggu to Siriratei.

Other people gave us the name, because they were surprised to see that our ancestors had built their *uma* near a graveyard (*ratei*). Mentawaians are usually afraid to have a house close to any graveyard. They are even afraid of passing a graveyard. But our ancestors built their house near a graveyard. Afterwards, we went downriver to Saibi Samukop. A small number of the Siriratei decided to split up. Because of a dispute, some members of Siriratei opened and took away half of the roof of our *uma* while the other half remained. For that reason we called them Saririgka [discarded relatives], because they did not want to be part of us anymore. The rest of the relatives were called Sakatsila because half the roof of the house had been taken by Saririgka whose house had only half of the roof remaining.

A few Siriratei families again moved away from Sakreake to inhabit the river mouth called Saibi Muara in the Saibi Samukop valley. Other Siriratei relatives built a house near a tree called *kairiggi*, in Sirisura. They therefore came to be called Sakairiggi. Because of Silango's family's dispersal, we [Silango's descendants] have many plots of land. Boriai is one of them. Another part of our



land is located in Teitei Sigarena, at a place called *leleu simaitca* [literally 'visible hill'].

When the Dutch [soldiers of the KNIL] arrived at Saibi Samukop (Saibi Muara), our ancestors already inhabited the place. The Dutch did not stay there very long. The Dutch left Saibi Samukop for a new place in Muara Siberut. While in Saibi Samukop they encountered some difficulties finding clean water. When they left for Muara Siberut, they did not take all the materials of their houses with them, so our ancestors collected those materials, such as wooden boards and corrugated iron sheets used for roofing. Our ancestors used the iron sheets to cover the roof of their communal house. This was unusual building material for Mentawaians. The Satoko communal house now looked just like the house of Sumatran traders in Mentawai, so people started calling it *toko* (which explains the name Satoko for our kin group). Our ancestors bought a plot of land located in Saibi Muara, where currently people of many different kin groups live. The land once belonged to Sabuilukkungan and later they surrendered it to the Sataggau kin group. But all of the Sataggau died, so that their land came into the hands of the Siriratei and the Siritoitet. [The plot of land bought by Satoko was about 20 hectares, but the location for the village of Saibi Muara is much larger than the size that belongs to the Satoko.] From these groups of people, your ancestors [referring to me] bought it for your families [meaning the part of the Satoko kin group that are descended from the Chinese family]. It is precisely located in Sigulugbaga [a neighbourhood of Saibi Muara] (Narrated by Teu Jaasa Satoko, age about 90; Sarabua – Siberut, 2004)

This storyteller's wild boar story is slightly different from the two preceding versions. This storyteller begins his family story with the arrival of a woman and her son, of unknown origin, on the island of Siberut. This story is similar to the story of the pregnant woman drifting on a raft presented in Chapter 6, about the first people to come to Mentawai. The kin group of the storyteller might be one of those who are descended from the woman and her son who were stranded on Simatalu, but the storyteller does not name the generations between Silango and the woman who married her son while recounting his family generations. He simply says that his kin group's ancestor is Silango and that Silango was a descendant of the woman and her son.

The storyteller also tells about the geographical expansion of his ancestral family as summarized in Chart 7.4. The storyteller recounts Silango's next generations up to the storyteller's current family. From Silango to the storyteller's current family we can count eight generations. According to the storyteller, the genealogy of his ancestors is what is listed in Chart 7.5.

However, he does not tell about other events in the life of his ancestor prior to the migratory movements. He simply mentions that Silango disliked his new name, implying that he started wandering in order to get away from the

rest of his family residing in the homeland in Simatalu. While passing from one place to another, the ancestor occupied particular places where he claimed land. In the last passage of his story, the storyteller tells about the arrival of the Dutch (KNIL soldiers) in Saibi Muara in 1905 (Schefold, 1988: 98). This is said to be the moment when the kin group called Satoko was established.

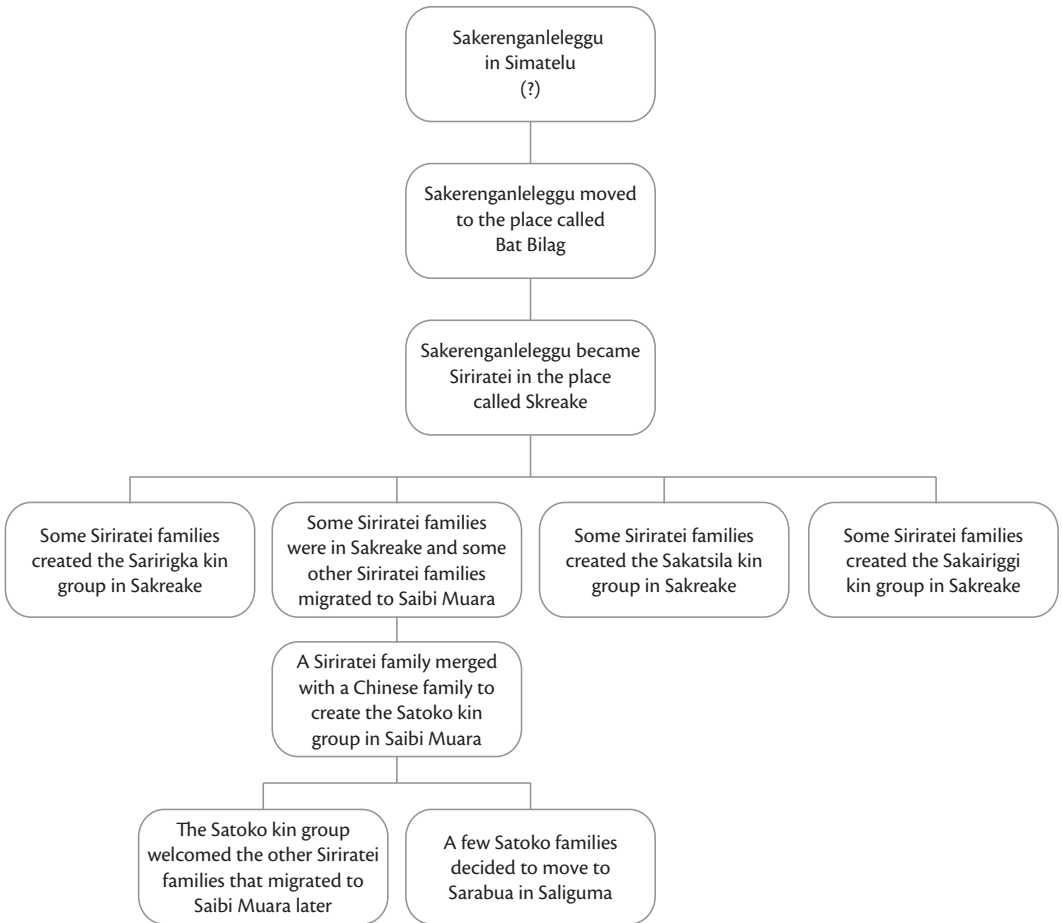


**Chart 7.4** Expansion of the Satoko kin group to Saibi Muara and Sarabua on Siberut

\*marks the place-name where the storyteller's ancestor initially lived. The ancestor's name is as seen in the accompanying genealogy chart (Chart 7.5).

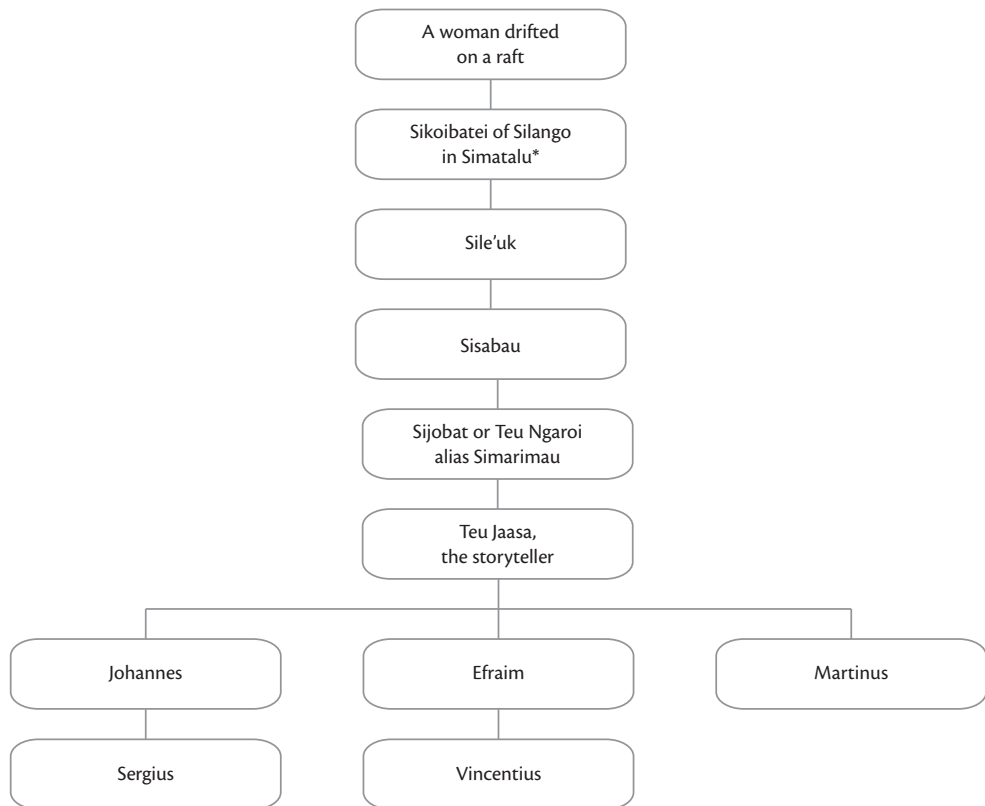


**Chart 7.5** Genealogy of the Satoko kin group in Sarabua

\*indicates the ancestor who created the storyteller's kin group in the place marked with an asterisk in Chart 7.4 above.

## 7.4 Interpretation of the wild boar story

Each of the three versions of the wild boar story presented in this chapter emphasizes a different main point. The Saleleusi version, for instance, seems to emphasize the long wanderings of the ancestor Silango. The ancestor passed through such places as Simalegi, Berisigep, and Saibi Samukop. The ancestor wandered round nearly the whole of Siberut island before moving over to Sipora, and eventually decided to return to Siberut, where he passed away in a place called Taileleu. Furthermore, the name of the family garden (*simaitso*) seems to be quite important to mention in the story. The initial communal property of the Siriratei kin group is known by the name *mone simaitso* (visible garden). This name became a kind of keyword that made it possible to reunite migrating family members. To recognize the family links among dispersed kin groups descended from Silango, the location of the garden must

be known. Silango's descendants should know the name of this garden. The Saleleusi storyteller recollects this name, and so does the Satoko storyteller.

However, this name is not mentioned in the Sakatsila version. Instead of remembering the communal land called *simaitso*, the Sakatsila storyteller recollects other lands located in northern and southern parts of Siberut. The Sakatsila storyteller seems to focus on the further development of descendants of his ancestor, especially in the valley of Saibi Samukop, telling how the Satoko kin group in particular or the Siriratei kin group in general occupied the settlement and land in Saibi Muara. In the Satoko version, the storyteller seems to emphasize the creation of the first Mentawai family and the formation of the current kin groups. The Satoko storyteller does not relate any additional events as the two other versions do. The Satoko version shows similarity to the Sakatsila version in mentioning several other kin groups at the time of the migratory movements. The Saleleusi storyteller fails to include such information, whether by choice or by accident.

The wild boar story is a family story about hunting wild boars in the forest. It speaks of the social and cultural relevance of hunting. Mentawaians' knowledge of their natural surroundings, such as where to go to have successful hunting, is integrated into the story. However, hunting is not meant only for catching animals but also for becoming familiar with the surrounding natural landscape. While hunting in the forest, Mentawaians will notice a particular location where they can get building materials or where there is good land for planting particular crops.

All three stories mention various plots of land that were claimed as theirs while moving from one place to another. Information about how the family grew is also documented in the family stories. The genealogy of the kin group became an important element of family stories. Knowledge of the migratory movements and the names of ancestors may confirm kinship between relatives that are currently separated by different kin-names and different places of residence.

In ending the second part of the book, I summarize here the content and themes of the mango story, the pig story, and the wild boar story, presented in the preceding chapters. The storytellers recount the route of the migration of their ancestors. They use particular terms when speaking of migratory movements. *Pusabuat* (divergence) is the process of spreading out from an initial area. *Pujaujaubat* (wandering) is the process of wandering in order to explore a new area. The term *pusabuat* describes the behaviour of animals, for instance pigs, when a group of pigs separate and go in different directions in order to save themselves from predators. This factor of predators forces the pigs to leave their place. *Pusabuat* used to describe humans in these stories suggests they feel forced by circumstances to leave for a new place. *Pujaujaubat* suggests something different. This term is used when Mentawai families moved

away from their place of origin because they wanted to find a new place where they would be acknowledged as the owner of the land, for instance if they could settle in a place that was not yet occupied. So they migrated voluntarily instead of being forced to. Nevertheless, both kinds of migratory movements (*pujaujaubat* and *pusabuat*) have the same result: people left their dwelling places and sought other places to live.

The storytellers' stories differ in length. The pig story (Chapter 6) is considerably longer and filled with more details than the mango story (Chapter 5) and the wild boar story. The specific aspects of these stories are the characteristics of the family story, the migratory movements and family expansions described in them, and the current conflicts over land rights.

Some stories contain only information about essential events. Other stories include more details and conversation. The longer narrations depend on factors like storytellers' memory and knowledge of events, which is necessarily limited. A storyteller does not remember details of an event. Instead he recounts his impression of an event that he once heard from his ancestors. But even though he may remember clearly, a storyteller may not want to tell his ancestral story in detail because he wants to prevent the details spreading outside of the family circle.

Some stories were told to me in great detail. This indicates that the storyteller has a great knowledge of past events of his ancestors, and also that the storyteller does not really mind if other people – in this case I, as a researcher – know their family stories. If the detailed information told in the story is not considered a family secret, then there is no reason to hide the story. Nevertheless, I suspect that each storyteller hid from me a few things even though he told me a long story. The storyteller sometimes honestly said that he would not tell me the names of individuals or groups that had harmed other kin groups during headhunting raids. This is a sensitive topic to discuss in public, because it may lead to a serious assault among kin groups in the present.

The family stories indicate that Mentawaians considered several factors before settling in a place. A ritual was performed when opening a new dwelling place. The leader of the family slaughtered a rooster and read the family's destiny in the rooster's intestines. If it was a bad sign, they would seek another place. If it was a good sign, they erected a shelter and gradually built a house. A good place was near a river because that made it easy to transport a lot of things. They could bring goods from downriver and upriver places to their settlement by means of a dugout canoe instead of carrying them on foot. A river was also perceived as a source of protein where Mentawaians regularly caught fish and shrimps, or collected shellfish.

Besides a river or stream, people noticed the type of soil. A sandy plot of land is ideal for planting coconut palms, while clay soil is ideal for planting fruit trees like durian, jackfruit and mango. A swampy area is ideal for grow-

ing sago palms, from which Mentawaians on Siberut obtain their staple food. The Mentawai Islands do not have extensive flat land where people can cultivate crops. The islands consist mainly of hilly areas. Nevertheless, Mentawaians generally do not build their house on a hillside unless it is for safety. As exemplified by the pig story, a family built a house on the top of a hill in order to hide themselves from the enemy. In the traditional situation, hilly areas are actually reserved for hunting and as an area where building materials can be gathered. If they cannot find an ideal place with flat, dry land, Mentawaians prefer to build a house near a swampy area that is good for growing sago.

In a few family stories, it is told that the ancestors of Mentawaians on Siberut lived in coastal areas (see the wild boar story). They claimed beaches and reefs where they could catch fish, sea turtles and diverse shellfish. Coconut palms grow in former settlements located near the coastline of the Mentawai Islands, signifying that the Mentawaians once occupied coastal areas. For reasons like headhunting, danger of flooding and tsunami, Mentawaians gradually moved inland, leaving their old coastal settlements unattended. In the era of headhunting, people in the south of Siberut for instance could reach a village in the north of the island by canoe. If a village was located near the coast, it could be easily seen and reached by headhunters from the sea. This would be more difficult if the village was located inland. In that case the headhunters would have to enter a river and locate the village before carrying out their raid. So building a house inland was considered safer than in a coastal area.

All family stories illustrate the process of gathering foodstuffs in daily life. In the stories, conflicts among family members frequently involve the collecting of foodstuffs. Not all the conflicts in the stories are within a single family (kin group); some are between two or more different families residing in the same valley. The stories usually relate more than a single incident. They usually mention other events that forced their migrating ancestors to embark on further migratory movements.





# Part Three



In part three, I examine contents of three stories presented in part two. I analyse them in three successive chapters by dividing three aspects of the stories in each chapter like characteristics of family stories, accounts of the early migration of Mentawaian ancestors and current land conflicts. Regarding the characteristics of family stories, I examine themes of those stories and describe circumstances of when and how a family story is told. Furthermore, I explain the position of a family story of a kin-group in the Mentawai community. Accounts of the early migratory action give an idea of which destination and places a few kin-groups' ancestors had passed through. The accounts do not exactly point out the position of places but they give the probable position. By means of illustrations we may comprehend some places mentioned in the stories. They also give us an idea of the journey of the kin-groups' ancestors. Regarding the current conflicts of land rights, I evaluate two cases. A case relates to a traditional situation where several kin-groups try to claim the same plot of land as the owners migrated or passed away. However, family stories give the rights of the land back to the relatives of the initial owners. The other case depicts similar situation to the first one; however, the last case is altered by external factors – the introduction of the government programmes to the traditional settlement.



# 8

## Characteristics of family stories

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the characteristics of the family stories that have been discussed in the three preceding chapters. I begin by examining the mango story presented in Chapter 5. I then examine the pig story presented in Chapter 6 and the wild boar story of Chapter 7. By examining the themes of these stories, we may come to see the characteristics of family stories in Mentawai.

Besides, I describe features of the storytellers who told me the stories, explaining people's competence in telling a family story. I also give an account of which family members may or may not listen to a certain family story. In the discussion of features of storytellers and listeners, I aim to reveal what Mentawaians think of their family stories. The outcome of this analysis is to determine what the social logic is of telling a family story and what the essential position of a family story is in Mentawai communities.

Before I look at the family stories, I first want to briefly evaluate the treatment of Mentawai oral narratives in the literature. They have not been examined thoroughly. I therefore take an opportunity to classify them into different categories. The aim of classifying the Mentawai oral narratives is to identify the position of Mentawai family stories in Mentawai oral narratives.

### 8.2 Mentawai oral narratives

Most types of Mentawai oral tradition are stories and in general they are called *titiboat*. However, the stories do not always fall neatly into one category. Stories telling about the origins and workings of plants, animals, human beings, and natural phenomena are called *pumumuan*. The word *pumumuan* is formed from the root word *mumu*, which literally means 'ripe' or 'mature' and figuratively means 'old'. Stories in *pumumuan* explain how things began. These

stories are narratives of things that occurred in the old time. Stories about the origins of the first human beings in Mentawai like those I elaborated in Chapter 4 can be classified in this category; however, stories of the origins of different kin groups of the Mentawaians are not included in this category. So, *pumumuan* can be understood as a category of mythical stories. Other examples of *pumumuan* can be found in Morris (1900), Hansen (1915), Kruyt (1923), Loeb (1929), Sihombing (1979), Spina (1981) and Schefold (1988).

Another kind of stories is called *pungungan*, formed from the root word *ngungu*, literally 'mouth' and figuratively it just means oral narrative. These stories resemble legends, fairytales, and fables. *Pungungan* stories may be hilarious, heroic or educational. Examples of such stories can be found in Karl Simanjuntak's unpublished manuscript<sup>15</sup> (1914), titled *Pungunguanda Sakalagan*<sup>16</sup> (Sakalagan's stories). Most of the stories in this manuscript tell about courage, and include stories about the legendary figure Pagetasabbau (see also Spina, 1981: 193-4). Stories about Pagetasabbau also describe the close relationship between an uncle (Pagetasabbau) and his two nephews who wanted to be handsome and accomplished. Such *pungungan* stories convey morals about culture and traditions, about how people are supposed to learn to live in society.

Mentawaians also have stories telling about apes, crocodiles, turtles, birds, snakes, pigs, deer, and lizards, describing what they are and how they live. Such stories are also called *pungungan*. Mentawaians make use of the characteristics of animals in order to teach people about these animals' behaviour, and to use these as examples for humans. Young people do not always positively respond to instructions given by their parents; so by making use of stories about animal behaviour, parents give young people something to think about, and hope that their children eventually will decide how to behave properly. A father encourages his son to be diligent and work fast. He tells his son a story about a crab on the beach or a spider making its web. The crab quickly runs and digs a hole for its shelter. A spider does not stop working before completing its web. Taking these animals as examples, a father gently encourages his son to accomplish his work as soon as possible and not to stop before finishing the work.

The story of *sibatebate sabba sitoulutoulu* or 'lizard and turtle' (a short version is in Loeb, 1929, a long version in Spina, 1981: 112-115) tells about two contrasting human characteristics: cunning and guilelessness. The 'cunning' turtle ridiculously fools the 'guileless' lizard on a banana tree growing near the riverbank. The fruits of the banana are reflected on the river water. The cunning turtle asks the guileless lizard to dive into the river in order to get banana fruits. While the lizard is in the water, the turtle climbs the banana trunk and

<sup>15</sup> I thank Panulis Saguntung for the copy of manuscript.

<sup>16</sup> Sakalagan is a group of people, residing in Pagai islands.

gets the fruits. The moral of the story is that one should not be guileless if one does not want to be taken advantage of by cunning people.

In his book *Die Mentawai-Sprache*, Max Morris (1900: 132-141) presents a lot of riddles collected from Mentawaians residing in Sipora where a collection of riddles is called *patura*, which literally means 'quiz'. In other places of Mentawai it is called *pasailukat* which literally means 'puzzle'. Such riddles were and still are popular among Mentawaians, especially during social gatherings. When people work together, for instance building a house, many riddles are told, to cheer people up so that they do not find the work too heavy and time-consuming. After someone tells a riddle, others usually attempt to answer it, and if someone gives the right answer everyone shouts their happiness, excitement and encouragement.

When many people work together and one person begins to lose interest in the work, and starts to leave for home, stopping earlier while others are still working, the rest of the group will address the person with a riddle like this one: *itco lee koat; lakka ienung* (if 'something' begins to look at the sea, 'something' moves faster toward it). The answer to this riddle is 'sea turtle'. If the person realizes that he has been ridiculed, he usually stays to carry on with the work until all decide to stop. Another example is: *gilik, bela ilu* (twist something off, tears drop), which is simply a riddle. The answer is *sakoile* or papaya fruit. If you pick a papaya fruit, a few drops of sap drip out of the broken stem. The message of this riddle is that every action has a consequence.

Another category of Mentawai oral tradition is called *sukat* or *bujai*, which is a set of sacred words or mantras occurring in ritual language. Some of these are used as prayers in ceremonies and others are sung. In Mentawai, Schefold (1988: 327) in his *Lia: das grosse Ritual auf den Mentawai-Inseln*, especially in chapter four of the book, discusses a great many examples of ritual language. On some occasions, ritual words are prayed and then sung. On other occasions, ritual words are only prayed and not sung. In order to avoid confusion, Mentawaians give names to the songs. The name of a song tells what kind of song it is. Songs are distinguished into two main categories: ritual songs and ordinary songs. Ritual songs, called *urai kerei* (shamanic songs), are usually sung by shamans (*tai kerei*). A shaman often uses singing in rituals as a way to communicate with spirits. *Urai kerei* can be further subdivided according to function. There is a group of songs for persuading spirits (*naknak simagre*) to join families in a ritual. There is a group of songs for re-harmonizing the relationship between body and spirit (*urai pameru*), and so on. Most shamanic songs are transmitted from a senior shaman to junior shamans and this transmission is called *panguli*.

Ordinary (non-ritual) songs are called *urai simata'* or *leleiyo* (ordinary people's songs). Mentawaians commonly express their experiences and feelings by singing them privately. For instance, a mother whose son recently died expresses her sorrow by singing while she is crying. According to the state of

feelings, meanings, and purposes, ordinary songs may be divided into several types, such as *urai soubaga* (sorrowful songs), *urai belet бага* (sad songs), *urai goat бага* (lonesome songs), *urai angkat бага* (happy songs), and *urai nuntut бага* (love songs). Some examples of Mentawai songs that have been recorded are on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings titled *Music of Indonesia 7: Music from the Forest of Riau and Mentawai* (Yampolsky, 1995) and *Songs from the uma: music from Siberut Island (Mentawai Archipelago), Indonesia* (Persoon and Schefold, 2009).

A type of stories in Mentawai that is important for this study is family stories, called *gobbui* (or *tiboi* in other dialects). These stories are about ancestral matters and historical accounts. *Gobbui* or *tiboi* may be translated literally as ‘talk’, with a figurative meaning of ‘story’. However, as the word *gobbui* or *tiboi* is not used alone. The word has to be accompanied by another word in order to be understandable. Examples are *gobbui porak* (story of land), *gobbui leleu* (story of hill or forest), *gobbui mone* (story of gardens and vegetation), and *gobbui teteu* (story of kin groups’ ancestors), in other places in Mentawai called *tiboi tubu* (story of oneself). Such stories cannot be separated from each other. Stories of the origins of a kin group, for instance, are closely related to stories of land, and to stories of gardens and stories of relatives. Each kin group has a collection of these stories. I call these family stories.

A family story is an oral historical narrative that can distinguish one kin group from another. The family stories function as one of a kin group’s identity markers. Family stories contain information about the group. Stories in the category of *gobbui* or *tiboi* are not seen as mythical narratives by the Mentawaians although they may provide mythical elements as they contain events that had occurred long ago. Nonetheless, information like the locations of places, the names of places, personal names, and the chronology of events, which are important elements of the family stories, is recognised as true by the Mentawaians. So, the content of the family story is about past occurrences of when the Mentawai ancestors were still alive. The family stories are not like *pumumuan* telling about things that happened in the mythical context. The family stories are oral historical narratives. The kin groups tell their family stories (*gobbui teteu* or *tiboi tubu*) in order to explain how they exist in different kin groups and who their ancestors were. The Mentawaians tell mythical narratives (*pumumuan*) in order to explain how the first human beings came to exist in Mentawai. However, there are no stories explaining how the current kin groups relate genealogically to these first humans in Mentawai. In fact, the first human being in *pumumuan* is not necessarily the ancestor of the current kin groups.

### 8.3 Themes of a family story

By listening to a family story, I become acquainted with diverse aspects of that kin group, most importantly the ancestors of the kin group, ancestral lands claimed by the kin group, and family connections between two or more related groups that currently reside in separate places in the Mentawai Islands. If these related kin groups are all descended from the same ancestral family, the groups usually tell the same family stories about their ancestors. What I think is that every family story recounts a past occurrence that affected a particular kin group.

In order to remember the content of a family story, there are rules and methods to guide storytellers to tell their family story properly. They choose particular occasions to tell the stories. Certain elders are chosen to play the important role as the prominent storyteller of their family stories. These elders maintain their family stories carefully by accurately transmitting the essential content of the stories through the generations, mostly to those who are perceived by the elders to have a certain quality and talent in speaking, listening and memorizing what they have heard. For a kin group it is crucial to maintain the stories accurately and as completely as possible, because family stories establish the identity of the kin group. Mentawaians do not tolerate the existence of a new version of their family story.

By means of a family story we may determine a link existing among families who have become separated from each other due to the early migration of their ancestors. Due to the early migration, related kin groups exist with different kin-names and currently live in separate places. When storytellers of two different kin groups tell about their ancestors, for instance as related in the wild boar story or the pig story, the storytellers may mention the same ancestors' names in a particular passage of their story. This signifies that the groups of the two storytellers are related as members of an initial kin group. They are descended from the same ancestors.

However, a story may also be told by two or more different kin groups without there being any family relationship among the groups. In the case of the mango story, because several kin groups lived in the same valley, they had a great opportunity to narrate the same story. Other groups adopted the story and used it as an illustration in their own family story. Nonetheless, each group told the mango story slightly differently as the subject of an early family conflict. One group's version of the story points out that the initial conflict was due to the mistake of the older brother, while another group's version emphasizes that the mistake was due to the younger brother. In yet another version of the mango story, we read that the mother of the family made a mistake, considering the daughter-in-law innocent. These differences signify the lack of relatedness among those groups.



### 8.3.1 The mango story

In Mentawai, *sipeu* is a name for a certain kind of mango. Storytellers who narrate the mango story generally highlight a family conflict over the size of mango fruits. Some storytellers point out that two siblings (an older brother and a younger brother) commenced the conflict. One story attributes the mistake to the older brother; another story blames the younger brother for making a mistake. These stories suggest the consequence of the conflict is that either the younger brother or the older brother left to seek a new place to live. In a third version, we are informed that both brothers left.

In Mentawai, an older brother symbolizes seniority, wisdom, leadership, superiority and maturity. A family expects a lot from an older brother. In contrast, a younger brother is perceived as a symbol of inferiority and immaturity. A younger brother needs to learn more and has to be led to understand something properly before he can do or decide something alone. Keeping these principles in mind will help us get a clearer picture in the mango stories of what an older brother should and should not do and what a younger brother is expected to do and not to do.

From the content of the mango stories, we get an impression of how an older brother and a younger brother acted in family matters. Story 8 tells that the older brother disputed with his younger brother. The older brother took bigger fruits from his younger brother. The older brother did not show his wisdom, superiority, leadership and maturity properly. Instead, he was selfish. The younger brother did not make a lot of difficulties in the situation. He joined his older brother in making a canoe although they failed. Later, they made a raft and decided to leave for the southern islands of Mentawai.

In the next passage of the story, the narrator tells how his current kin group came into existence. The story narrates another kind of mango fruit called *lak-kau*. Three brothers argued with each other. The conflict commenced when the oldest brother tried to keep the mango by swallowing its seed. The two other brothers did not accept the incident and they accused their oldest brother of behaving selfishly. The accusation pushed the three brothers apart. The motif here is similar to the first mango story: an older member of the family is eager to possess something (fruit) that belongs to the whole family. The older brother is concerned with his own interests while ignoring those of his younger brothers.

In Story 9 the older brother cannot accept that his younger brother behaved dishonestly. The younger brother chose the big mango fruits that belonged to his older brother. The older brother did not like that and he showed his superiority, punishing his younger brother by sending him and his family away. The younger brother eventually left for a new place, while the older brother remained at the place of origin. Later, however, the older brother and his family also go away to seek another place. The departure of all the family

members after the mango conflict means that there were no family members staying in the place of origin anymore. Both brothers left for the southern islands of Mentawai, where descendants of the two brothers later met again.

One storyteller mentions two women (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) instead of two brothers. In Story 7, a mother-in-law was deceitful towards her daughter-in-law. In doing so, the mother-in-law was perceived to have broken the common rule. She should lead her daughter-in-law to behave with proper manners. Instead, she took what the daughter-in-law should have. The daughter-in-law should be treated as a member of the family and should have equal rights within the family, but she did not get that. The mother-in-law's action was not acceptable in Mentawai. The husband of the daughter-in-law, who was the son of the mother-in-law, decided to leave his parental family and seek a new place. The son chose his nuclear family instead of staying with his parental family. This was done in order to express the son's rejection of his mother's misconduct.

What I generally understand from the mango story is a significant strong social judgment. By relating the mango story, storytellers emphasize that Mentawaians could not accept deceitful behaviour in their families. The story suggests that family members should acknowledge equal rights among themselves. In the mango story, equality is indicated by the decision that each family had the same entitlement to a branch of the mango tree. One individual or family did not have more opportunities and rights than the others. However, the idea of equal rights was not always practised. If family members did not follow the rules, they were at odds with each other. It seems that a family separation was considered to be the only possible solution to such a problem. Family separation as the best option in resolving a conflict is still common in Mentawai.

### 8.3.2 The pig story

In the pig story, we are led to focus on an assault triggered by a pig. The pig story is told by several kin groups with ancestral connections to each other, even though they currently live in separate places. Chapter 6 present three versions of the pig story. The story tells of a harsh dispute that affected two neighbouring kin groups. The conflict began when a few individuals from the kin group called Sapokka shot a pig to death and ate the pork. The shot pig belonged to another kin group called Samongilailai. The pig had been given as a bride-price from the Sapokka to the Samongilailai when a Sapokka man got married to a Samongilailai woman. After the pig had been killed, the Samongilailai still attempted to find a friendly solution by asking the Sapokka for another pig to replace the shot one. However, the Sapokka refused. The Samongilailai eventually decided to carry out a harsh assault.

The pig story reveals a lot about social matters involving pigs. Pigs are important to Mentawaians. A ritual is usually performed before someone prepares a place to raise pigs. Family members have to observe a taboo period lasting several weeks. The owner of the pigs has to cut down a lot of sago palms to feed the pigs every day. The number of pigs says something about the social status of the owner of the pigs. Pigs represent wealth.

Mentawaians raised pigs for various purposes. They used pigs as payment of various fines and for bride-prices. The number of pigs for a bride-price varies according to the agreement between the two groups. The bride-price can be partly paid with other things like cooking pots or durian trees. As the bride leaves her family and moves to her husband's family, the pig and the rest of the bride-price are considered by the bride's family as a symbolic representation of the absent daughter. The pig may be kept alive for a few months or years, or it may be slaughtered and eaten by the family members of the bride when holding their own party, as the daughter's family may not join the daughter's wedding ceremony held in her husband's house.

According to the pig story, the Sapokka recognized the pig that they had given to the Samongililailai as a bride-price when it reappeared near their house. Nevertheless, the Sapokka shot the pig to death and ate the pork rather than informing the Samongililailai as the current owner so that the Samongililailai could come and get the pig back. By shooting the pig, the Sapokka ruined their relationship with the Samongililailai and damaged the representation of Samongililailai's daughter. The Sapokka action was not acceptable. However, the Sapokka did not accept the friendly solution offered by the Samongililailai. Because of that, the Samongililailai had to harshly confront the Sapokka. A Samongililailai man assassinated a few Sapokka men.

Furthermore, the pig story communicates a social situation in Mentawai where it was not – and still is not currently – acceptable for individuals to destroy or harm things that belong to other people. Mentawaians consider a harmful threat toward their belongings as an indirect assault on themselves, and they do not simply allow this to happen. People must be chastised by being forced to pay for what they have damaged. The pig story also recounts how the migrating ancestor of Samongililailai had conflicts with neighbours in new places. Sacrificing pigs or surrendering plots of land resolved some of those conflicts. It seems that conflicts with neighbours and the involvement of pigs are the main motifs of the pig story.

### **8.3.3 The wild boar story**

In Mentawai, a family story contains historical information about the kin group. It tells about early conflicts that caused migration of the kin group, describing how family members separated from each other. It also names the places the group once occupied, indicating plots of land that belong to the

families and locations of their planted gardens. Generally, a family story tells about land and kinship. Moreover, a family story recounts factual happenings experienced by the kin group. For instance, headhunting raids carried out by the group against other groups are included in the family story, as illustrated by the wild boar story.

The wild boar story reveals another theme as well. This is the failure of prominent individuals of the group to behave properly. In the versions of the wild boar story presented in Chapter 7, the father of a kin group unsuccessfully tackles wild boars in the jungle. The wild boars were found lying unconscious on the ground after eating a toxic substance contained in fruit from a tree called *laggure*. The father apparently misjudged the situation and assumed that the wild boars were already dead. Therefore, he did not tie up their legs. Moreover, he did not foresee that the rain might awaken the boars. As the rain fell, the wild boars woke up and ran away.

By proudly announcing to his family what he had just come across, the father gave hope to his families that they would be able to eat the meat of the wild boars. However, the hope did not turn out to be a reality. Nevertheless, the father tried to pay for his mistake by slaughtering his own pigs. However, that did not help, and his failure turned out to greatly humiliate him.

The wild boar story suggests that the family members were disrespectful. The family members, mostly female ones, sang a song with words making fun of the father. This indirectly signifies disrespect towards the father. Initially, they might have sung the song without intentionally meaning to disgrace their father. But when they sang the same song again and again, it seems obvious that they were intentionally out to humiliate him. The father tried to compensate with different activities such as setting traps and headhunting raids. However, the father's actions did not stop the female members from singing their favourite song.

Because of his humiliation, the father finally left most of his family members at the place of origin and sought a new place for his nuclear family. Actions of the father's sons, who went after him to ask him to come back, show an effort to bring the family together. However, this did not have any positive result. The father and his family continued moving through many places. He never returned home.

The theme I see in the wild boar story is the repeating pattern of social actions of the past. By intentionally or unintentionally repeating an unconstructive thing, someone may damage social relationships within a kin group. In this case, we are informed about the division of an initial family into two, and the two groups dividing into more kin groups in later expansions. The father's actions of moving through a number of places caused the expansion of his kin group geographically and genealogically. The father's offspring grew to comprise several kin groups.

## 8.4 Telling a family story

During fieldwork, I observed how the storytellers tell their stories. Although they live in separate places in the Mentawai Islands, the storytellers had similar ways of telling a story. One group of storytellers had a matter-of-fact way of narrating their story. Seated in their house, they told me their story. They talked as if they were telling me about their daily experience. Their gestures were not exaggerated. Sometimes they raised or lowered their voice when appropriate. They used short sentences to build their narration. They did not use a lot of examples. They made important points directly. They told their story carefully. A few crucial things that may not be heard by their neighbours were told softly. These were things that they usually told secretly only to certain people who could be trusted. They seemed proud when telling secrets related to heroic actions of their ancestors. However, the majority of the actions of the stories are related to the killing of members of other kin groups in headhunting raids. What they foresee is appallingly bad consequences if relatives of the murdered persons find out that the ancestors of the storyteller assassinated their ancestors.

Another group of storytellers made more of a performance of their storytelling. While relating important events, they spread out their arms, opened their eyes wide, or demonstrated holding a machete, spear, or bow and arrow. They sometimes shook their head up and down to show that they shared the same opinion about their ancestors' actions. Sometimes they attracted listeners by repeating the same words several times. They changed the tone of their voice in order to attract the audience's attention. On other occasions, they took a significant pause while telling their stories in order to distinguish one event from others. However, listeners sometimes criticize these attractive and exaggerated ways of telling a story. These techniques make them doubt the truth of the story. These listeners start to feel that a family story is like a myth or legend in which a storyteller may freely vary his story to make it more entertaining.

I noticed another thing in both types of storytellers, signifying their similarity. They made use of small objects around them, like an empty cup or a package of cigarettes. They sometimes sketched curves or lines on the floor or wall of the wooden house by means of a knife, a machete, or charcoal in order to illustrate their stories clearly. Storytellers took listeners sitting around them as examples for the story. This made listeners pay special attention. I consider these methods to be elements of the Mentawaian oral tradition.

A Mentawaian storyteller transmits almost all the family stories to all members of his kin group. The stories contain information that concerns all family members. The important points of those stories must not be overlooked, because they convey historical accounts. A few particular stories, for instance stories pertaining to landownership, must be preserved carefully. They record the process of claiming new places and plots of land for the kin group. But the

family stories are not just about land. They also contain a lot of information about ancestors, relationships of related families residing in different places, and diverse conflicts that occurred in the past. The stories are all part of the identity markers of the kin group.

Some stories may be told exclusively on such special occasions as blessing a newly born baby, a wedding ceremony, the ritual for a newly constructed communal house (*uma*), or after burying the body of a family member. At such moments, all family members usually come together, and neighbours of other kin groups are usually absent. On other occasions, particular stories may be told while family members are working in the garden, or while hunting in the forest, or while canoeing up and down a river, where only a few family members are present. Telling a story at night allows two or more adults to share their family secrets or private stories. These ways are meant to avoid spreading information outside the family circle.

Mentawaians purposely limit the opportunity for particular groups of people to hear a story for a few crucial reasons. Particular stories actually contain family secrets, such as harmful actions done by ancestors of the group in the course of headhunting raids against other groups of people. Such hostile actions must be hidden from the kin groups of the victims, in order to avoid being harmed violently or burdened economically by the victims' families.

Nonetheless, a few stories are told while neighbours belonging to other kin groups are present. Stories of landownership are sometimes deliberately told in the presence of other kin groups. The storyteller's group may perceive their neighbours as allies. If a conflict over a plot of land occurs between the landowning group and other people who try to claim the land, neighbours who once heard the story may be asked to give testimony in order to clarify the status of the contested plot of land. If neighbours once heard the story about the contested plot of land, they may be expected to stand on the side of the landowner. For this reason, it is beneficial to have such a story be heard by neighbours.

## 8.5 Competence in storytelling

Storytellers are of various kinds in Mentawai. They may be categorized according to gender (women or men), social status (married or unmarried), and age group (adult or young). Several elders and other appointed individuals of the group have a great opportunity to tell the kin group's family stories. They usually lead the rest of the family members when there are family conflicts with other groups. The storytellers are usually leading figures of the group; in a conflict situation, they decide what to tell and what to hide.

Male storytellers have more extensive opportunities to tell family stories than females do. This is because male members are allowed by custom to ar-

range almost everything in the social lives of Mentawaian society and they take the most responsibility for any consequences due to decisions made for their group. This is strongly related to the patrilineal system of Mentawaian society. Male Mentawaians have to maintain and uphold their kin-names. In fact, the identity of the kin group depends on its male members. Females do not have this obligation.

From Mentawaians' point of view, a female member of a kin group usually leaves her group and follows her husband's kin group, which is the group they live with after getting married. As she will join her husband's family, it is risky if a female member of a kin group knows too much about her family history. She might accidentally mention unspeakable matters concerning her family to her husband's family. Her husband's family may take advantage of this. Because of this, men are chosen to take care of family stories.

Mentawaians perceive their family stories as reliable accounts of past events. A family story reveals a lot of matters important to a group, namely a list of ancestors, relationships with other kin groups, the group's collective possession of things like ancestral lands, and important social events that have occurred in the kin group. Due to the content and function of the stories, female storytellers do not have a recognized status to tell family stories. From Mentawaians' point of view, women are seen as 'secondary' members of the kin group. It is men who are traditionally responsible for carrying on a kin group's identity. For that reason, female storytellers are not frequently important storytellers.

Nevertheless, female storytellers in Mentawaian society may, sometimes, serve as key storytellers when males cannot carry out their tasks due to lack of knowledge. In such a case, the cultural distinction between men and women in telling family stories does not apply, because women know particular information better than men. Women may have specific knowledge of cultural and historical accounts. Especially, if they once witnessed a particular event in the past, or if they are the only individuals who heard a story told by their ancestors. In such a case, they have a crucial position in their kin group.

Mentawaians not only distinguish between male storytellers and female ones regarding the telling of historical accounts, but they also make a distinction among male storytellers. Only a few men, who are selected by talent, interest, and position, will get the opportunity to tell their kin group's historical account. Two to five male individuals of a kin group may undertake this important role. Most members of a group fully rely on and believe in the stories told by the storytellers. Owing to his crucial position, a male storyteller is required to have a good memory; therefore he can properly remember a series of past and recent happenings thoroughly. He should also be knowledgeable and skilful in relating the historical account to the rest of the family members, and be respected by them.



As frequently happens, particular stories may only be told in the presence of adult members. Sometimes, adults talk about something that may not be told in a public space. A family secret such as headhunting raids carried out by their ancestors must be hidden from the awareness of the victims of the raids and their descendants. Adults believe that children and young people are innocent and irresponsible. Therefore, younger people are not allowed to know particular family stories until older people consider them ready for the stories. Moreover, children are forbidden to show up at adults' meetings. Adults especially do not want to have children or young people around them when they are in conflict with other groups while discussing a sensitive matter like establishing the kin group's possession of a plot of ancestral land, because hostility may unexpectedly arise among them. In such a conflict, young people may easily become victims.

A few stories – for instance, stories about disputed plots of land – are normally narrated in the presence of male members only, particularly on ceremonial occasions. Another kind of occasion is a special meeting organized by a third party at which male members of two different kin groups dispute rights to a plot of land. The two parties explain why they believe they have possession of the land. In order to explain that, they tell their family story relating how their kin group came to have rights to the disputed land. Women are present at the meeting, but they are passive and do not give their opinions about the matter. They usually sit in the room listening to the male members talking about the case. Even if women are voluntarily present at such a meeting because they are concerned about their rights, their voice is frequently denied. The only way for female members to actively participate in the male sphere of telling family stories is if they are asked to give their opinion or if the matter under discussion concerns them directly. For example, such an opportunity is given to older women who are familiar with the case.

Within a kin group, a few people have a natural talent for telling stories, while other people need to listen to the same story several times before fully recollecting the whole content. They have to practise again and again until they are skilled in telling the story. This signifies that not all members of a kin group have the same abilities in telling family stories. Different storytellers may tell different versions of a story. The emergence of different versions does not really matter to Mentawaians as long as the family stories do not provoke controversy among the listeners. It is important to listeners to know the major themes of a story so that they can transmit the story to following generations properly. In order to do so, elders need youngsters who can remember things properly.

A lot of young people are not acquainted with how the story was created, maintained, and altered. Young generations of a kin group may be acquainted with the current place-names and the popular names of places; however, they

may fail to recollect the initial names and other names of places, as the names have probably not been told to them yet. The older generation might purposely hide the names from the younger generation. It is not only certain place-names that may be hidden from the younger generation. Other events are also hidden, such as notorious assaults. To hide some crucial events may cause the meaning of the story to be incomplete if the storytellers who know the story pass away without transmitting the hidden information to younger storytellers. Sometimes, younger storytellers try to find out the hidden information from other sources, from people who might be familiar with the event, and then add the information to their family stories. This may lead to the existence of several versions of a family story. Other versions of a family story may easily come into existence if storytellers intentionally change a few parts of the story in order to support their aims when using the story as the main source of information in a dispute.

After becoming familiar with the place-names, everyone in the group eventually has the same perspective on which place they are talking about. Because the members of the kin group that owns the stories know several different names for that place, they will be able to better defend their ownership of the place when confronted by another group who tries to claim it. If the owners of family stories have to use their stories in disputes, for instance, in defining family relationships among them, the owners of the stories may always refer back to the initial name of the place, because they are the only group of people that knows the initial name. In fact, the place belongs to the group and the group knows the story of the place. Their recollection of the old names of the place becomes a winning point whenever the group has to defend their claim to the place.

Important parts of family stories need to be remembered and transmitted to following generations. A kin group has a particular method, which is repeatedly telling the story at family gatherings or while visiting particular places, where older members remind younger members not to forget the story of the places. The method has a bearing on the process of telling family stories. In the present day, when paper and pen have been accepted as part of Mentawai culture, some Mentawai families write down the important points of their stories. Important points include the place-names that belong to the family, names of their ancestors who led the family to the current place, and particular events that affected the dispersal of the family. Nevertheless, they do not write down the entire story; this is in order to protect the story in case the notebook is stolen by another kin group.

A few youngsters with talent, selected by elders, may nevertheless have an opportunity to learn not only the themes of the story but also the secret words. These are young people who are perceived to be reliable and who are able to remember the words better than other family members when the story is told to them. In fact, a small number of people have a good memory to recollect any-

thing in great detail. To tell a story to young members is to keep the story from being forgotten. Older people will not be able to keep maintaining the story forever. Before forgetting the meaning and the complete details of the story and before they die, they have to ensure that selected youngsters who will continue this tradition so the following generations can learn their historical accounts. Therefore, the older people who know particular family stories remind the younger generation to consider the family stories. The older people guide the younger generation to the ancestral places and introduce them to the land and plants planted by their ancestors by saying, 'Remember this land and the trees growing on the land, they belonged to our ancestors and now belong to us. It is our task to take care of them.' Older people in Mentawai frequently say such words to younger people. My father and uncles spoke to me similarly.

## 8.6 Ownership of family stories

During fieldwork I observed that storytellers regularly mention certain kin groups or individuals of kin groups in order to point out which of those kin groups are their relatives and they mention the names of the places where those kin groups currently reside in the Mentawai Islands. When I visited one of the kin groups mentioned, I heard a similar story to the one I had heard from the kin group that I initially interviewed. For instance, Samongilailai families residing on Sipora recognize that they have relatives residing in Taileleu and other places on Siberut, even though they have never met each other. Samongilailai families thus recognize the existence of other kin groups with which they share an ancestral connection, and this is because their family stories contain such information.

In other cases, I came across two or more kin groups that do not have any family relationship to each other whatsoever, even though they tell the same story. This is illustrated by the mango stories in Chapter 5. Each group tells a version of the mango story in which the family originally lived in the valley of Simatalu and departed from there. However, these kin groups did not suggest having connections with the other kin groups from whom I also heard the mango story. The storyteller of the Siribetug kin group, who told Story 7, did not mention the Satairarak kin group as their relatives, nor did the storyteller of Satairarak, who told Story 9, mention the Siribetug kin group as his relatives. The mango story is simple to remember, and it illustrates particular kin groups' early family conflicts. By closely reading each version of the mango story in Chapter 5, we may get the impression that the storytellers tend to indicate that their kin groups are not descended from the same ancestor, the same place of origin, and the same initial kin group. What I can think of that might explain this situation is that formerly there was perhaps only one family affected by the mango incident. Other kin groups in the same valley later adopted

the mango story and repeated it within their families. Over the generations, the kin groups no longer remembered which kin group was the owner of the mango story. The current generation is only familiar with the story of their ancestors departing from their homeland because of a conflict over mangos. The probable reason for other groups to adopt the mango story is that they also want to be recognized as residents of the valley where the mango incident took place. What we conclude about the mango story with regard to the ownership of the story may also be the case with the wild boar story.

During fieldwork I met a kin group called Sanene who told me the wild boar story. However, I did not include their story in my analysis, as it does not tell about the early expansion of the kin group from Simatalu. Before coming to Saibi Samukop, the two groups (Sanene and Siriratei) arrived from different places of origin. Siriratei and their related kin groups like Saririgka, Sakairiggi, Sakatsila and Satoko were initially from Simatalu. On the other hand, Sanene and their relatives like Tasiripeigu, Saporug, Sakarigi, Sabatti, Sarimau and Saeggeoni were originally from Berisigep. The two kin groups called Siriratei and Sanene are unrelated, yet both tell the same wild boar story. The version told by Sanene is similar to the wild boar story told by Saleleusi (Story 13) and Sakatsila (Story 14 in Chapter 7). The two kin groups (Sanene and Sakatsila) currently live in the same valley of Saibi Samukop.



Photo 8.1 Teu Boni Sanene

According to the wild boar story told by the Sanene storyteller, the Sanene kin group lived in Berisigep, situated in the northern part of Siberut, and the Siriratei kin group lived in Simatalu, situated in the western part of Siberut. Furthermore, Sanene and their relatives (Tasiripeigu, Saporug, Sakarigi, Sabatti, Sarimau and Saeggeoni) expanded from Bulaubog's family. The family existed as a kin group called Samaloisa. After a further expansion of the group, several kin groups with different names came into existence. Siriratei and their related kin groups (Saririgka, Sakairiggi, Sakatsila and Satoko) originated from Silango's family. It is obvious that Siriratei, Saririgka, Sakairiggi, Sakatsila, and Satoko do not share the same ancestors with Sanene, Tasiripeigu, Saporug, Sakarigi, Sabatti, Sarimau and Saeggeoni.

Yet ancestors of the two groups (Siriratei and Sanene) did not pursue the same migratory direction when they commenced to depart from their homeland. The Sanene departed from Berisigep and moved to Simalegi and further to Simatalu. Thereafter, the group entered the valley of Saibi Samukop. A few families settled there permanently while others kept moving southward in the Mentawai Islands. The Siriratei kin group, on the other hand, moved from Simatalu to Simalegi and further to Berisigep. The group moved again to Sikatirik, Tubeket and stopped in Saibi Samukop. Thereafter, part of the family moved to the southern part of Siberut. The two groups' migratory movements match up with plots of land found (claimed) in the course of the early migratory movements of the groups' ancestors. The two groups do not share the same ancestral land and plots of land claimed during migration. Nevertheless, this analysis does not answer the question of why unrelated kin groups sometimes tell the same story of origins and migratory movements.

In order to understand why two or more different kin groups tell a similar story, I turn to a Mentawaian traditional system structuring relationships of two or more kin groups. Several kin groups inhabit a valley. Families usually visit each other in order to set up trust among them and to build friendship. When a family gets in contact with other families, they frequently tell some of their family stories to each other. A kin group's family story may unintentionally be told in the presence of these neighbours. It is quite common for two families to decide to build a friendship (*siripo*). If two unrelated families agree to turn their relationship into a close friendship, they may also come to regard each other as relatives. They help each other in every respect. They exchange things, including a few stories.

Another possibility for a family story to become known and adopted by other families is through marriage. A female member of a kin group follows her husband's kin group after the wedding ceremony. Over time, the bride will certainly hear some of the family stories of her husband's kin group. Later, she might tell some of these stories to female members of her original kin group. In addition, a married woman might tell a story of her original kin group to



her children, who are in fact members of another kin group, namely their father's (her husband's) kin group. In this way, a story may spread to another family through marriage.

Another possibility for a family story to spread from one kin group to another is through adoption (*sinappit*). Mentawaians often adopt a child from another kin group, for instance if the parents die. An adopted child is treated like other children in the family. The adopting kin group hopes that the adopted child will remain with his new family and carry on his new identity after being adopted. However, this does not always go smoothly. In some cases, the adopted person later wants to return to his original kin group. He may freely do that, but he may not take along with him anything he got while living with his adopting kin group. He will not use the adopting kin-name anymore either. However, he cannot leave behind what he has heard, or been told or taught by his adopting family. If he heard the family stories of the adopting group, he will perhaps not forget them. By leaving the adopting family, the adopted person thus carries with him the family stories of the adopting group. So, one way or another, a family story of one kin group may end up being told by other kin groups and may even be manipulated for the storyteller's own ends.

Some of the essential elements of a story may change when it is told by a kin group to which the story does not belong. This is illustrated in the case of Story 6 in Chapter 5. The storyteller of Taikatubutoinan is familiar with the mango story. However, he acknowledges that the story does not belong to him or his kin group. The storyteller narrates the basic elements of the plot of the mango story such that listeners can easily recognize that the mango story told by the storyteller of Taikatubutoinan is a version of the mango story elsewhere. The storyteller does not, however, narrate the essential elements characterizing the identity of the kin group to which the mango story belongs. When told by a storyteller to whom the story does not belong, the story no longer serves its function as a historical account, because the storyteller does not know which points are essential for the owner of the story.

I came across a similar case in the wild boar story. In 1967, Schefold carried out fieldwork among the Sakuddei. This is a kin group residing in an upriver village called Sagulubbe. The village is located in the southwestern part of Siberut. Schefold recorded a story from a storyteller of Sakuddei named Aman Dumatkerei. The storyteller knew that the wild boar story belonged to a kin group called Satoleuru. The kin group dwelled in the valley of Rereiket, where the Sakuddei had once lived before moving away and settling the upriver place of Sagulubbe. The wild boar stories in Chapter 7 are told like a historical account. The stories recount the names of ancestors, places claimed in the course of migration, plots of land, kin groups arising from the initial one, and so on. The stories are told with not much dialogue, and without hilarious or entertaining words.

The storyteller of Sakuddei does not care about the exact content of the wild boar story. He does not mention where the place of origin was located or the name of the ancestor who was affected by the wild boar incident. He nevertheless narrates a series of actions that the father of the story undertook in order to stop his family from ridiculing him. Although a list of places where the father had migrated to is mentioned, the story does not function as a historical account anymore, as additional phrases meant to bring about hilarity have changed the purpose of the story. In the hands of the Sakuddei storyteller, it is turned into an entertaining story that listeners can laugh about. A wild boar story that serves as a historical account can be transcribed in one to four pages. But the story as told by the Sakuddei storyteller with its additional jokes and conversation has expanded the story to seven pages or more. I shall point out several passages of the wild boar story as told by the storyteller of Sakuddei to exemplify the changes which have been made compared to the versions of the mango story presented in Chapter 7. I give an example by quoting a few sentences of the story collected by Schefold in 1967. This quotation shows how a person who does not have any relationship to a family story might change the story.

The storyteller of Sakuddei realizes that the story does not belong to his kin group, because he says in the beginning: ‘This story belongs to the group called Satoleuru, telling about their ancestors.’ The first words give the background of an occurrence where a person called Sileppabatu and his brothers went to hunt in the forest. Soon, hilarious matters immediately come into the story in the following phrase: ‘While following the footprints, Sileppabatu’s brothers put a kind of ants called *obasoibo*<sup>17</sup> on his buttocks. They did that in order to annoy him and make fun of him. The annoyed brother said, “Why did you put on my buttocks these bloody *obasoiba*? They are going to bite and sting my buttocks.” But the brothers pretended that they had done nothing to him.’ This occurrence is told several times, as illustrated in the following sentences: ‘When they arrived at a place where they could take a rest again, they sat down there. While sitting, they again put *obasoibo* on Sileppabatu’s buttocks.’

Repetition not only describes people’s actions but also indicates how long an actor needs to accomplish a task. For instance, the storyteller says, ‘They searched, searched, searched, searched and searched.’ Or ‘He rowed, rowed, rowed and turned to follow the curve of the river.’ In a later passage, he says, ‘They ate, ate, ate, ate, and ate their meals until all meals were finished,’ or ‘He wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, wrapped, and wrapped those boars.’ Sometimes a story-

17 *Obasoiba* is a kind of ant. *Obasoibo* have a black colour and are fond of coming out at night from places where they hide during the daytime. Therefore, Mentawaians call this kind of ant *oba-soibo* (*oba* = be fond of, *soibo* = night). Although this kind of ant comes out at night, they can be seen and found during daylight as well.



teller uses repetition to emphasize a crucial action. Such repetition is meant to keep the story alive and entertaining.

Moreover, the Sakuddei storyteller adds a lot of conversation to the mango story, for instance:

Soon after arriving at his house, his family members asked Sileppabatu, 'What happened? Did you catch something out there, a deer (*sibeutubu*), perhaps?' 'Well, we caught a big one and a small one.' 'Is it true?' 'Yes! Certainly, we shot them.' 'You are not telling a lie to us, are you? Why have you returned earlier while the others have not returned yet?' 'Well, obviously we shot the animals but they were not instantly dead, they are still able to run away. When we all were searching for the animals, a few of us put *siobasoibo* on my buttocks.' 'Why is it such a big matter to you that people put *siobasoibo* on your buttocks?' 'Well, they did that more than once; they did that for fun, they made fun of me. And then they put *siobasoibo* not just on my buttocks, but also on my shoulders, my neck, my armpits, my body, and my testicles, and later my anus. Therefore, I felt insulted; they did not respect me and it seems like they did not count on me, so that I decided to return home earlier. Especially when the ants bit my testicles, it pissed me off badly.' He thus explained why he had returned home earlier.

In this passage, the storyteller obviously makes the wild boar story more hilarious.

The Sakuddei storyteller creates another hilarious passage when he describes the headhunting raid which the irritated man decided to carry out. The hilarity is not about the act of headhunting but about the description of a person who was assassinated during the headhunting raid. The storyteller says, 'The man decided to hunt people instead of animals. A ritual was carried out beforehand. The ritual is called headhunting (*mulabbara*). Thereafter, he went to carry out a headhunting raid (*mulakeu*). He killed an adult person in Muara Siberut. The person was really big and he had a long and hairy penis.'

The Sakuddei storyteller seems to recollect the course of migratory movements of the father who figures in the wild boar story. However, the storyteller is not allowed to reveal family links existing between the groups mentioned in the story and the group's relatives living in other places. He states: 'This story has a connection with groups of people who are currently living in Saibi Samukop. They probably had other names.' He does not mention these names.

In short, a family story belongs to a specific kin group and functions as a source of information about the group. Accordingly, the story is supposed to be told by certain assigned members of the group in order to maintain it as a historical account giving reliable information about the group's past. Other people that do not have any connection with a particular family story may not fully know the crucial points of the story. Other people who do not have

any relationship to the story may freely modify the story for entertainment or other purposes.

## 8.7 Concluding remarks

I have examined the characteristics of family stories, storytellers and listeners. In general, family stories can be regarded as historical accounts, relating events that happened in the past and events that caused of the splitting up of the original kin group. Family stories also contain traditional knowledge about how ancestors of particular kin groups dealt with social conflicts. The stories reveal several possible resolutions to a family conflict. For instance, a family may decide to separate from their relatives and seek a new place to live. Or an individual may be assaulted by members of another kin group before deciding to permanently leave for a new place. Moreover, I found that family stories have become an essential source of information about plots of land claimed by kin groups. A family story tells the location and borders of plots of land claimed by that kin group. It tells whether a plot of land was claimed or was obtained from another group as payment of a fine or a bride-price. In this way, a family story brings the past of a kin group to the present. Family stories transmit historical information but they are not necessarily historically accurate and do not include precise details like exact dates.

Moreover, family stories shed light on daily life and the social logic of people's behaviour. The stories demonstrate that Mentawaian men respect each other equally. Every member of a kin group has the same rights to what the group possesses collectively. If a group has a tree, then the fruits of the tree are to be shared equally. This even applies to trees planted by individuals. Each member of their extended family may claim a share of the tree's fruit. This also applies to an individual's actions in hunting or gathering foodstuffs in the surroundings. If an individual hunts deer in the forest, the meat is to be shared equally among all members of the kin group. One member of a kin group may feel unjustly treated if his share is less than what other family members receive. It is also unacceptable if one person's share is inferior in quality to what other members receive.

In addition, a family story usually mentions plots of land owned by that kin group. According to the traditional way of having entitlement to a plot of land, the owner of the story knows a lot of things about the land, such as its location, the ancestor who first found the land, events that happened concerning that land, the names of kin groups that own neighbouring plots of land. If a kin group can tell about these matters convincingly, other kin groups may have little chance to claim the land. The elders of a kin group therefore request the younger generation to remember precisely specific matters like the borders of the land and the ancestor's specific words about the land in order to avoid making a mis-

take if they have to defend their claim to the land. Storytellers have to maintain their family stories because they contain a lot of essential information.

Another important element of the family story that makes it different from other kinds of oral tradition in Mentawai is the assignment of members of a kin group that may or may not tell the story. Gender and adulthood are two categories that distinctly separate family members that may tell the family stories. Everyone else takes up a position as listener. The storytellers are a few people, and they maintain the family story and transmit it to individuals chosen by seniority or adulthood or talent of the candidates. Adult men get more chance to be a storyteller than adult women. Talented young members are usually taught to remember significant points of the family stories and they take up their position as storytellers when they become adults. Adult storytellers are seen by the group as reliable and wise persons to decide on what may and may not be told, because the family stories are part of the group's identity. Most of the stories recorded during my fieldwork, as well as stories found during archival research, tell about the growth of the early Mentawaian kin groups and their departure from a place of origin. According to the stories, one kin group decided to leave the place of origin because conflicts occurred within the group. Several families arose from an initial kin group. They dwelled in separate places in Mentawai, after the families split up and left for different destinations. Later, some of those families formed new kin groups with a new name. Ancestral connections among these groups nonetheless remain valid. They respect each other as relatives. Accounts of past occurrences were – and still are – maintained in the form of family stories. These stories are a basic part of Mentawaian oral tradition (see Mustafa, 1993).

# 9

## The expansion of Mentawai ancestors

### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the genealogical growth and geographical expansion of ancestors of a few current Mentawai kin groups. The discussion of geographical expansion is focused on the departure of particular kin groups from the place of origin located in Simatalu to other places in the Mentawai archipelago. To illustrate origins and destinations of the migrating kin groups, I present maps sketched according to information told in family stories.

Notions of topogeny and genealogy discussed by James J. Fox (1997) are relevant in the discussion of the geographical and genealogical expansion of early Mentawai kin groups. Applying the notions of topogeny and genealogy in the Mentawai cases, I look at the family stories presented in part two of this book. These stories describe the process of expansion of several kin groups. The main aim of this chapter is to examine the social logic of the geographical dispersion of Mentawai kin groups in order to gain an understanding of why Mentawaians moved to particular places and why they currently belong to different kin groups.

### 9.2 Places of origin

My initial understanding was influenced by stories telling that the earliest Mentawai ancestors formerly inhabited a place located in the valley of Simatalu, in the western part of Siberut. Similar stories about Simatalu as the earliest place of settlement in the Mentawai Islands are discussed by early scholars like Nooy-Palm (1968), Sihombing (1979), Schefold (1988), and Coronese (1985). Before starting my research, I thus assumed that Simatalu was seen as the only place of origin of Mentawaians. I was led by what local people told me and by literature written by scholars like Schefold, who researched the prehistory of the Mentawaians (Schefold, 1989).

According to the stories discussed by the above scholars, the first Mentawaians departed from Sumatra (directly, or indirectly via Nias) and arrived on one of the Mentawai Islands and settled in Simatalu. The first Mentawaians thereafter commenced to move out from their place of origin in Simatalu. They moved in a southern direction. After the valley of Siberut was occupied, early Mentawaians moved to other valleys. They kept doing that until all of Siberut island was claimed by one or another family, although the land was not fully occupied. Thereafter, the migrating families spread out over the other islands of the Mentawai archipelago. These migratory movements happened over a long period of time.

Although this accounts for the origins of the majority of the current population of the Mentawai Islands, it does not explain the origins of other groups of residents who regard themselves as Mentawaians. These other groups believe they originated from places other than Simatalu. After exploring ethnographic accounts of the Mentawaians and after separately interviewing Mentawaians residing in villages in the archipelago during fieldwork, I discovered several other places of origin, namely Simalegi, Berisigep, a valley in the southern part of Siberut island, and an unknown place on South Pagai island. Talukpulai is sometimes mentioned as the place on South Pagai where people from Muko-muko (on the Sumatran mainland) first came to settle.

By exploring villages in the Mentawai Islands and talking to elders of various kin groups, I became aware of the existence of these other places of origin. Several kin groups share the same opinion, seeing Simatalu as the place where their ancestors first commenced to live in the Mentawai Islands. Other kin groups believe that Simalegi is the place where their ancestors first arrived and lived. Other kin groups regard Berisigep as the initial place. A few groups believe their ancestors first settled in a valley in the southern part of Siberut. What all of the stories of these groups have in common is that after some time, the earliest ancestors started moving southwards.

According to a few other ancestral stories, in the southern islands of the Mentawai archipelago, some families had no connection to those who had migrated from Simatalu or other places on Siberut. These families migrated northwards. A few groups stayed on Sipora island, for instance in Sioban and Tuappeijat, while others continued moving further north, to the southern part of Siberut island. Although they moved northwards, the families apparently did not move as far as the northern part of Siberut.

I will not discuss further the migration of the population of southern Pagai, as I focus on the migratory movements of Mentawai families from the valley of Simatalu to elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands. The selection of Simatalu as the starting point in looking at the process of migration is motivated by the following reasons. First, it is because the family stories presented in part two of this book – the mango story in Chapter 5, the wild boar story in Chapter 6, and the pig story in Chapter 7 – talk about Simatalu. Second, it is because

ancestors of the current Mentawaians had departed from Simatalu. Third, it is because I was influenced by my initial familiarity with Simatalu as the first and only place of Mentawai origin. This affected the process of data collection during fieldwork. Consequently, my research looks mostly at one starting point of migratory movements, which is the valley of Simatalu.

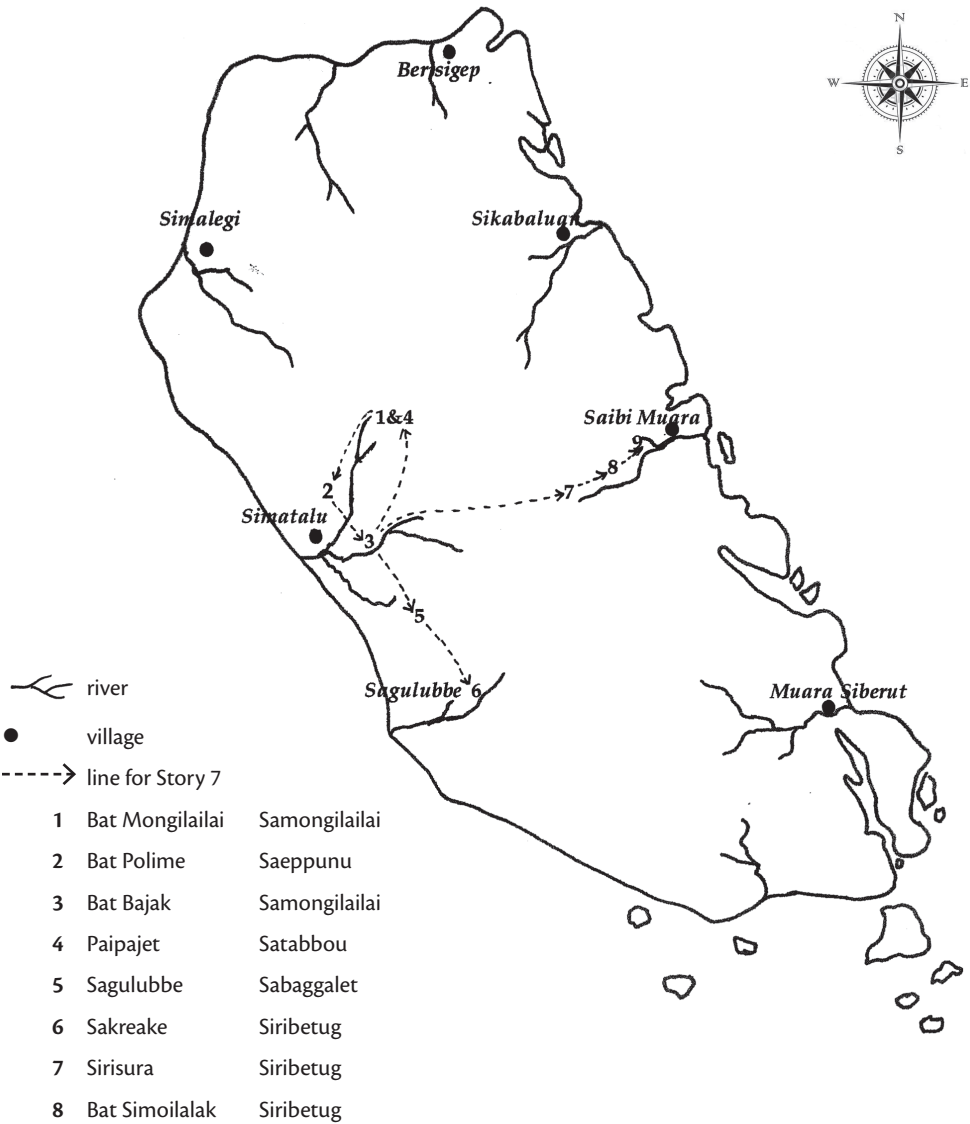
The three selected stories told by different kin groups in different places in the Mentawai Islands are discussed in the three following sections. The kin groups that tell the mango story are not related to each other. Several kin groups tell the pig story, which actually belongs to the Samongilailai kin group, and the wild boar story, which belongs to the Siriratei kin group. I provide sketched maps to help the reader follow the migratory movements described in the family stories. The sketches of migratory lines are not meant to indicate the exact locations where the migrating families passed through or the exact route taken by the migrating families. The maps, however, show destinations as well as a few of the places the migrating families passed through.

On the maps, numbers are given to reflect the places the migrating families once occupied. Sometimes a place-name has one number and sometimes more than one number, signifying that the migrating family returned to the place it once occupied. Each map is accompanied by a legend. The middle column gives the place of settlement indicated by the number in the first column. The last column gives the name of the kin group at the time they lived in that place, since some families during their migratory movements changed their kin-name.

### 9.3 Migration on account of a conflict over mangos

I chose three different kin groups that had migrated ‘because of mangos’, namely Siribetug, Salakkau and Satairarak. These three kin groups all claim to have been affected by the mango incident. Map 9.1 illustrates the migration of the Siribetug kin group from Simatalu to Sirisura. The information used for drawing Map 9.1 is drawn from Story 7, in Chapter 5.

According to this version of the mango story, members of the Siribetug kin group were relatives of the Samongilailai kin group. The group first dwelled in (1) Bat Mongilailai, therefore they were called Samongilailai. From Bat Mongilailai, they moved to (2) Bat Polime where they came to be called the Saepunu kin group. A few of the families moved to (3) Bat Bajak, while some families remained in Bat Polime. The families residing in Bat Bajak later returned to Bat Mongilailai. They did so in order to fulfil what their father wished and requested them to do. The father wanted his former family reconciled.



**Map 9.1** Migration of the Siribetug kin group to Sirisura (7) on Siberut island

However, the families that lived in Bat Polime refused the reconciliation, and they moved even further away. One group moved away to (4) Paipajet and acquired the name of Satobbou. This Satobbou kin group did not end their journey in Paipajet. They departed again for (5) Sagulubbe, where they acquired the name Sabaggalet. Meanwhile, the Saeppunu kin group in Bat Polime went away to inhabit the valley of Saibi Samukop. In this valley, they dwelled on the riverbanks called (6) Sakreake, where they changed their kin-name to Siribetug. This name was derived from the fact that the



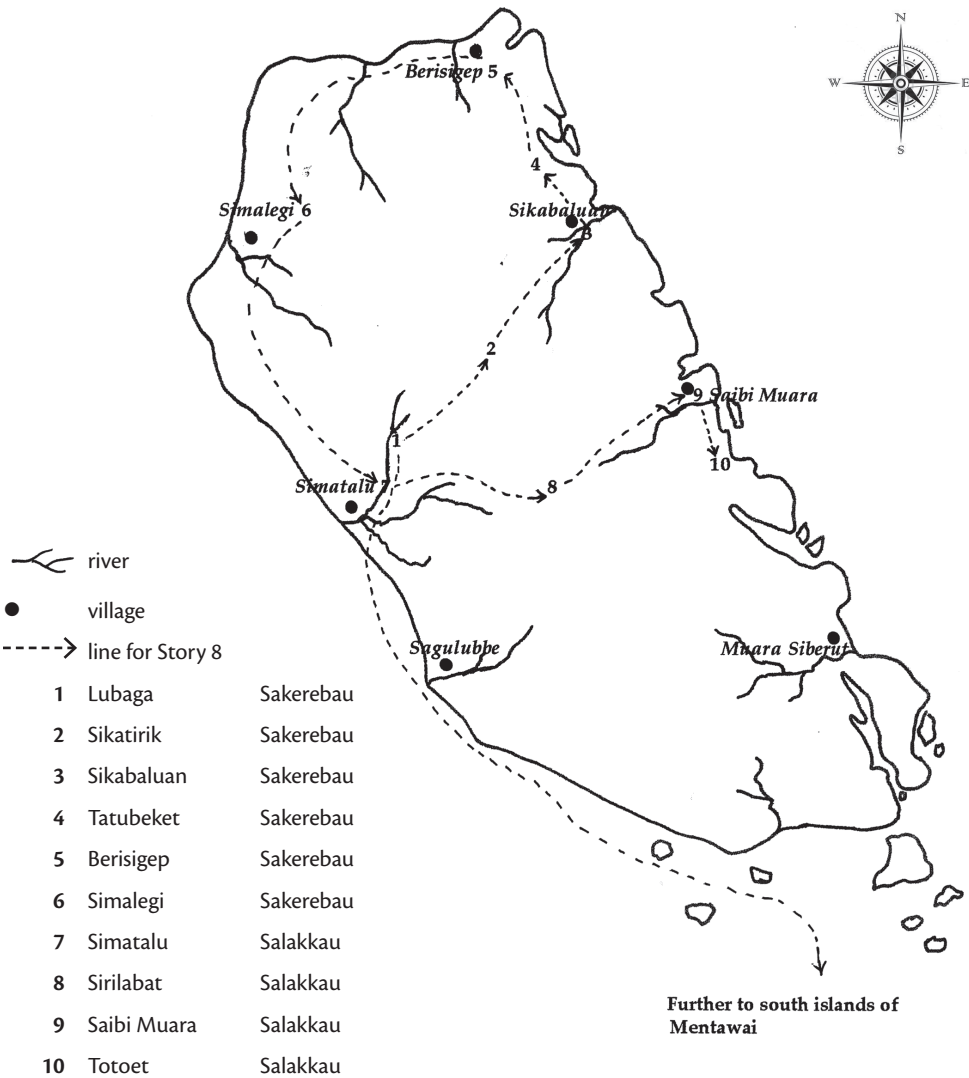
families built their communal house at a place surrounded by a kind of bamboo clusters called *betug*. Afterwards, the families moved to the place called (7) Sirisura. Most recently they came to live in the place called (8) Bat Simoilaklak.

Looking at Map 9.1, it may be clear to us that the ancestral family of Siribetug split into three groups. One group remained in the place of origin, one group migrated to Paipajet and further to Sagulubbe, and the third group migrated to the eastern part of Siberut island. Due to being separated from each other, these kin groups each began to create their own identity by naming their kin group differently. Although the families have been separated for several generations and currently live in separate places, the storyteller of Story 7 surprisingly remembers not only the places where his relatives had migrated to, but also which kin-names those relatives are using currently.

Another mango incident is described in Story 8. This is about the migration of the Salakkau kin group. Nevertheless, Story 8 also tells us about the Sakerebau kin group. This is because before the Salakkau kin group came into existence, it had been part of the Sakerebau kin group. That occurred when the group was still occupying the place of origin in Simatalu. Due to its being collected from the Salakkau, Story 8 tells more about the Salakkau than about the Sakerebau. To follow the migratory movements of the Salakkau kin group, see Map 9.2.

The Salakkau kin group was originally known as Sakerebau, when they were dwelling in the upriver place of (1) Lubaga in Simatalu. Due to the mango incident, the kin group dispersed in different directions, following several rivers. Two families moved away to the southern islands of Mentawai by means of raft, and occupied two places there: Matobe on Sipora island and Matobe on Pagai island. Other families moved to the northeastern part of Siberut. They arrived at a place called (2) Sikatirik and then went on to a downriver place called (3) Sikabaluan before settling in a place called (4) Tatubeket. There, they were still called the Sakerebau kin group. Because of the new conflict over mango fruit, which was locally called *bailoi* or *lakkau*, the families in Tatubeket split up into two groups.

One family moved away to a place called (5) Berisigep. As two other families kept following the migrating family, the migrating family kept going to find another place. They arrived at (6) Simalegi. From Simalegi, they moved on to (7) Simatalu, where the family acquired a new name: Salakkau. Because of the warfare occurring in Simatalu, the Salakkau kin group then moved again to the valley of Saibi Samukop. In the valley of Saibi Samukop, they settled in a place called (8) Sirilabat. They claimed two plots of land called Teitei Tabot and Bat Kurejet. While dwelling in Sirilabat, the group received two plots of land from Satoutou because Satoutou assassinated some ancestors of Salakkau. The two



Map 9.2 Migration of the Salakkau kin group to Saibi Muara and Totoet (10) on Siberut island

plots of land were given the names Sikuret and Simatet. They are also known as *porak segseg logau*, or land for stopping bloodshed. From Sirilabat, they moved to (9) Saibi Muara and (10) Totoet, where the group currently live.

According to Story 8, the Salakkau kin group chose the northeastern side of Siberut island, that is the opposite direction of the two brothers who had left for the southern islands of Mentawai. That happened when the group was still known as Sakerebau. In the new place called Terekan, a new conflict occurred, which compelled some members of the group to wander round on the north side of the island until they returned to the valley where they initially came

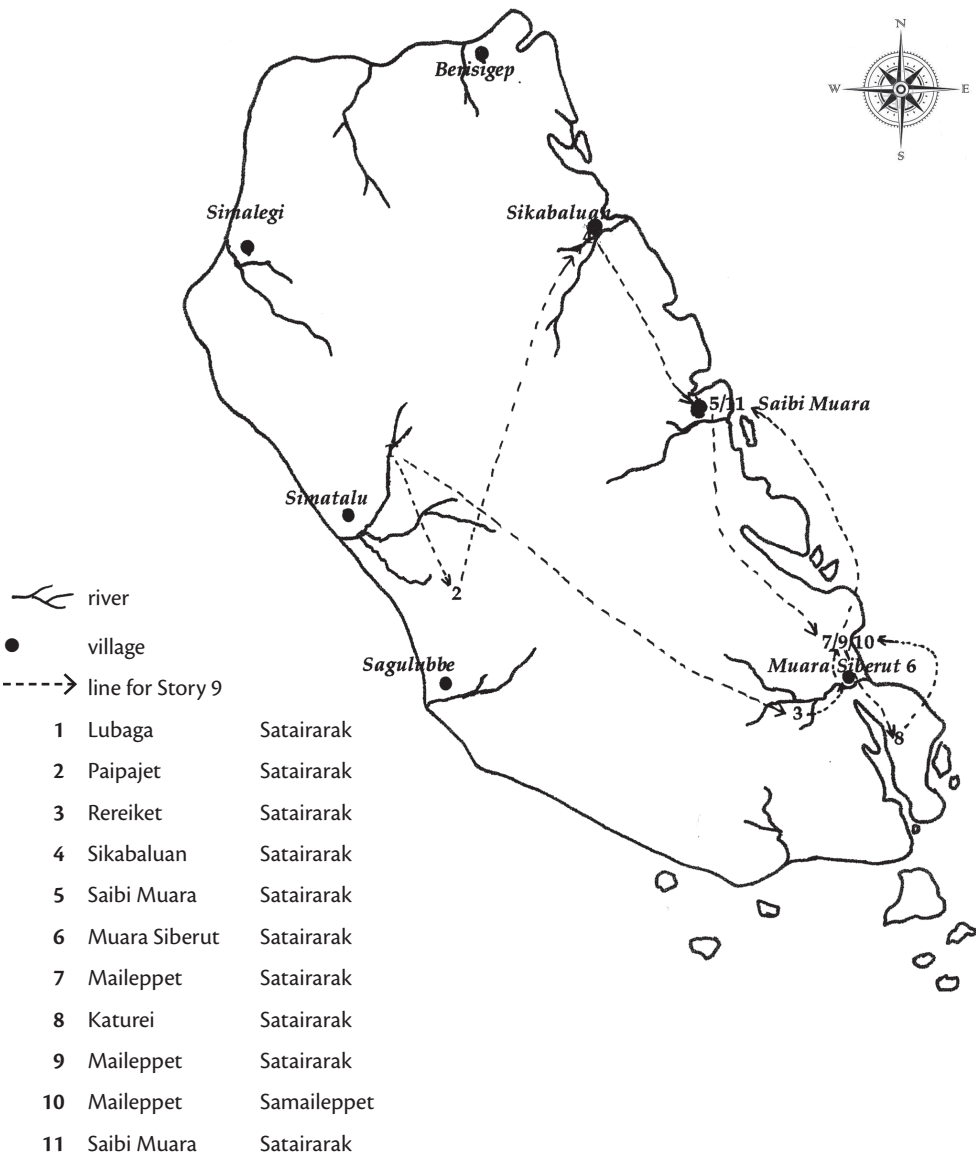
from. In Simatalu, the group was called Salakkau, and this group later migrated to the valley of Saibi Samukop. With reference to the migration of the Salakkau kin group to the valley of Saibi Samukop, we are told that the group had plots of land there and received some other plots of land from other kin groups. We are not informed about the land that the Salakkau owned when they were still called Sakerebau.

The third version of the mango story is Story 9. It is about a kin group called Satairarak, which had departed from Simatalu. This group currently lives in Maileppet and is therefore called the Samaileppet kin group. *Map 9.3* shows the journey of the Satairarak kin group after being affected by the mango incident. This incident split the group in two; therefore the migratory movements pursue two different directions. As the groups wandered around the same island, they met again with each other in a particular place. However, they were never again reunited as one kin group.

The Satairarak kin group had been called by that name since living in Simatalu at a place called (1) Lubaga. Because of the mango incident, the families split up into two groups. One group departed for (2) Paipajet and the other went to (3) Rereiket. From Paipajet, one family moved to a place called (4) Sikabaluan, and later to (5) Saibi Muara. Meanwhile, the families that went to (3) Rereiket moved to a downriver place called (6) Muara Siberut, but they did not stay there permanently. The families decided to live in (7) Maileppet. While in Maileppet, the families had the idea of looking for a place in (8) Katurei Bay. But because people in Katurei rejected the family, they eventually returned to (9) Maileppet. However, only some of the families returned to Maileppet and a few others remained in Katurei. In further migratory movements to the south, the families living in (5) Saibi Muara met the other families in (10) Maileppet. They stayed there temporarily because the group decided to return to (11) Saibi Muara after their houses were burned in Maileppet.

In the course of time, the Satairarak and other kin groups such as Sagulu, Samongan Abbangan, Sakaelagat, Sataiuma, and Samongilailai that were also living in Maileppet came together in order to create a new kin group called Samaileppet. As a result of merging, the Satairarak kin group was not commonly known as Satairarak anymore for several generations. Instead, the group was known as Samaileppet. The merger of the groups could not be maintained, however. A conflict over land in Maileppet split up the group. The Satairarak then resumed using the old kin group name. The other groups also reclaimed their former kin-names.

The Satairarak kin group did not move out from their place of origin all at once. One family commenced to leave the place of origin, and after a while another family left for a new place. Both groups tried to avoid meeting each other; therefore every family chose a direction different from the direction the other family had gone. Another thing the story tells us is that every time

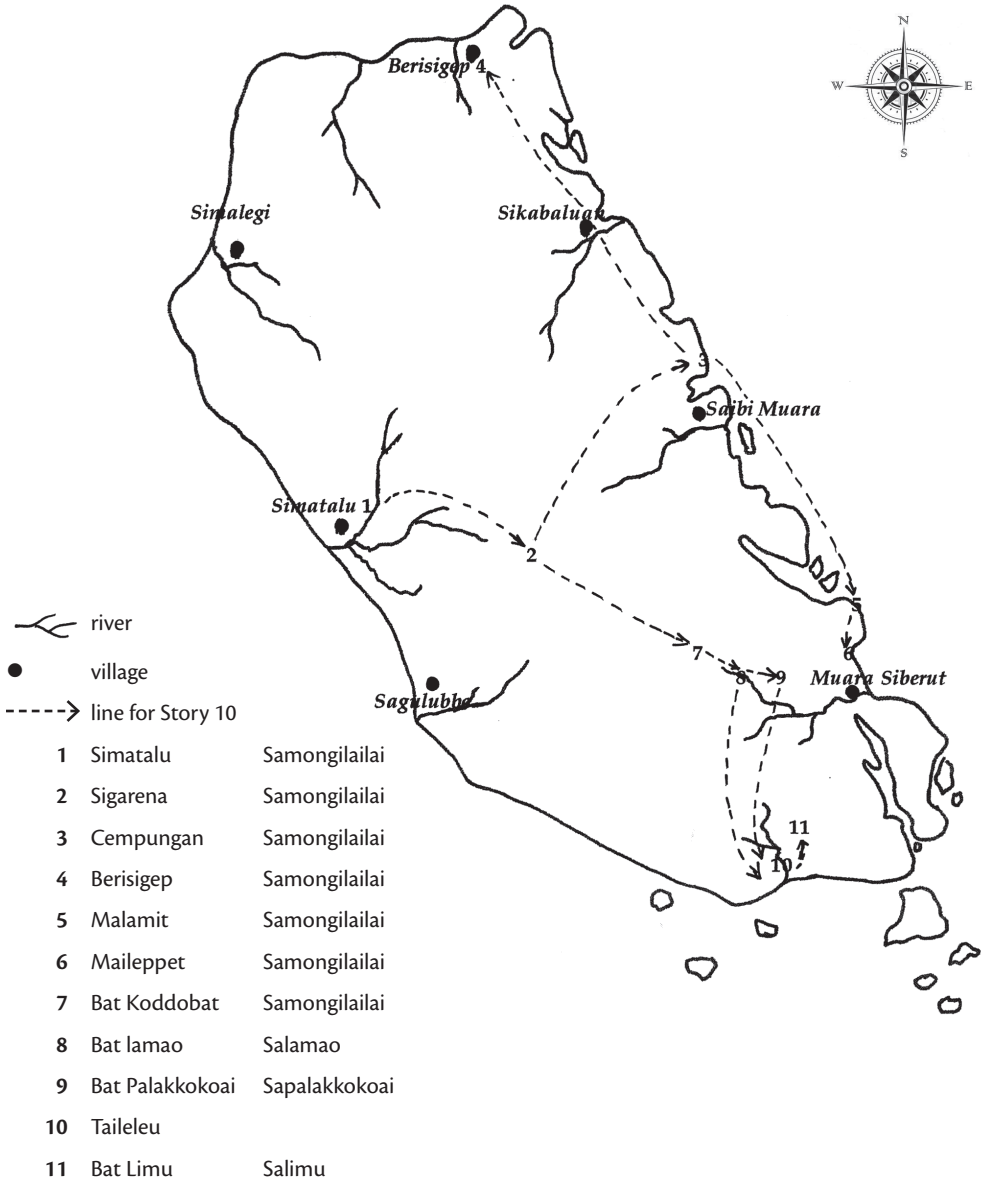


**Map 9.3** Migration of the Satairarak kin group to Maileppet (7, 9, 10) on Siberut island

the Satairarak occupied a place, one family remained in that place while other families departed to find a new place to live. Besides, the Satairarak descendants of two brothers did not reunite, although they met once in Maileppet. Descendants of the younger brother returned to the last place, which was Saibi Muara, before they met descendants of the older brother in Maileppet. Nevertheless, they continued to regard each other as relatives descended from the same ancestors, the same initial kin group, and the same place of origin.

## 9.4 Migration due to the pig incident

Three stories represent the pig incident, discussed in Chapter 6. They were collected from three different kin groups. According to these family stories, these groups are descended from the same initial kin group. In order to differentiate the stories of these groups, I present three maps. This is to show variant accounts of the same historical event. I begin with Story 10, with Map 9.4 as illustration.



**Map 9.4** Migration of the Salamao kin group to Tailaleu (10) on Siberut island

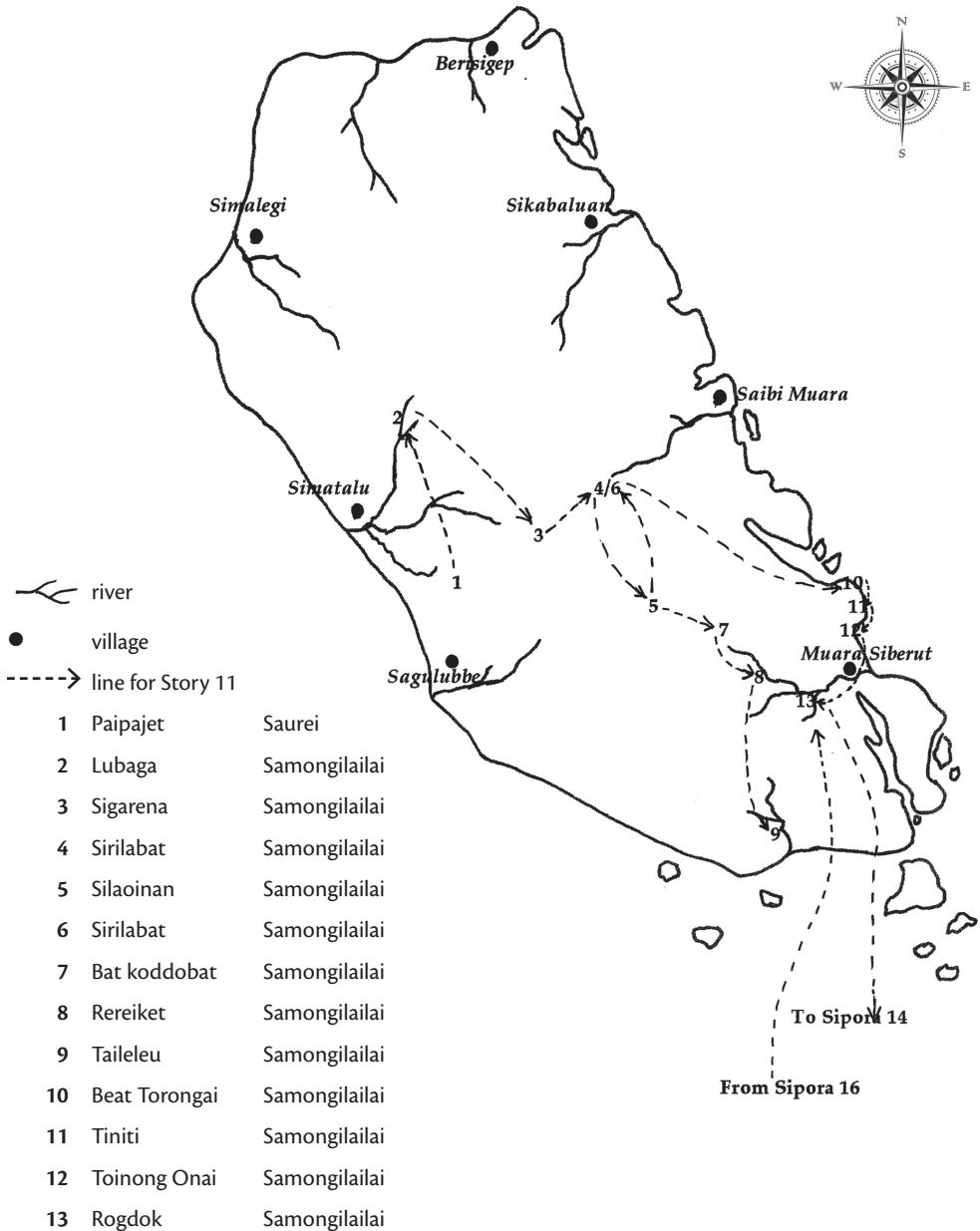
Story 10 tells how the Samongilailai family arrived at the village of Taileleu and became the Salamao kin group. According to the story, the family departed from (1) Simatalu and moved to a place called (2) Sigarena in order to avoid a kin group called Sapokka, with which the ancestor of Samongilailai had been involved in an assault. Before leaving the place of Sigarena, the migrating ancestor of Samongilailai returned to Simatalu for the last time. Thereafter, the migratory movements began. A few families moved to (3) Cempungan and (4) Berisigep. The families in Cempungan moved to (5) Malamit by passing through Saibi Muara. From Malamit, they went to (6) Maileppet and later migrated to Sipora island. A few other families in Sigarena moved to the valley of Silaoinan. They settled in a place called (7) Bat Koddobat. They became a new kin group called Sakoddobat. A few plots of land had been claimed by the group. Besides, while living there, they received a few other plots of land as payment of fines.

Two families of Sakoddobat decided to move away from Bat Koddobat in order to inhabit (8) Bat Lamao and (9) Bat Palakkokoai. At those places, they changed their kin-names to Salamao and Sapalakkokoi, respectively. Afterwards, the Salamao kin group departed from Bat Lamao, and together with their relatives from Sapalakkokoi and Samongilailai they went to populate a village called (10) Taileleu. In Taileleu, they occupied several riverbanks. As this happened several times, one family of the Salamao kin group decided to separate from the Salamao. This family created a new kin group with the new name Salimu, after the place they lived, (11) Bat Limu.

Map 9.4 shows the dispersion of the Samongilailai kin group, which began to separate from each other after the pig incident. The family separated again after one of the leading figures of the group left the place of origin and went to a place called Sigarena. After that, the group split into two groups. One group moved north and the other moved south. After the separation the two groups did not come together anymore. Each group eventually grew independently. The next set of migratory movements is sketched on Map 9.5 and Map 9.6. Information for these maps is taken from Story 11. As the story covers the expansion of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut as well as on Sipora island, I present two maps. The expansion of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut is shown on Map 9.5 and it continues with the expansion of the group to Sipora island, which is sketched on Map 9.6.

In Story 11, we are informed about a past event when the Samongilailai kin group was still known as Saurei (see Map 9.5). The group initially lived in (1) Paipajet. The families moved to Simatalu in (2) Lubaga, precisely in Siatsemi at the river mouth of Lubaga. The kin group had a plot of land in a place called Baibai. Afterwards, the pig incident occurred.

Sapokka, a neighbouring kin group of Samongilailai, shot a pig belonging to the Samongilailai kin group. In revenge, a Samongilailai man killed a few



**Map 9.5** Migration of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut island

members of the Sapokka kin group. Thereafter, he and his family began to move to other places. Before leaving for new places, the Samongilailai all made a clear agreement among themselves about the plots of land that ancestrally belonged to the group. The migrating Samongilailai ancestor and his family moved away to a place called (3) Teitei Sigarena. From that place, the migrat-



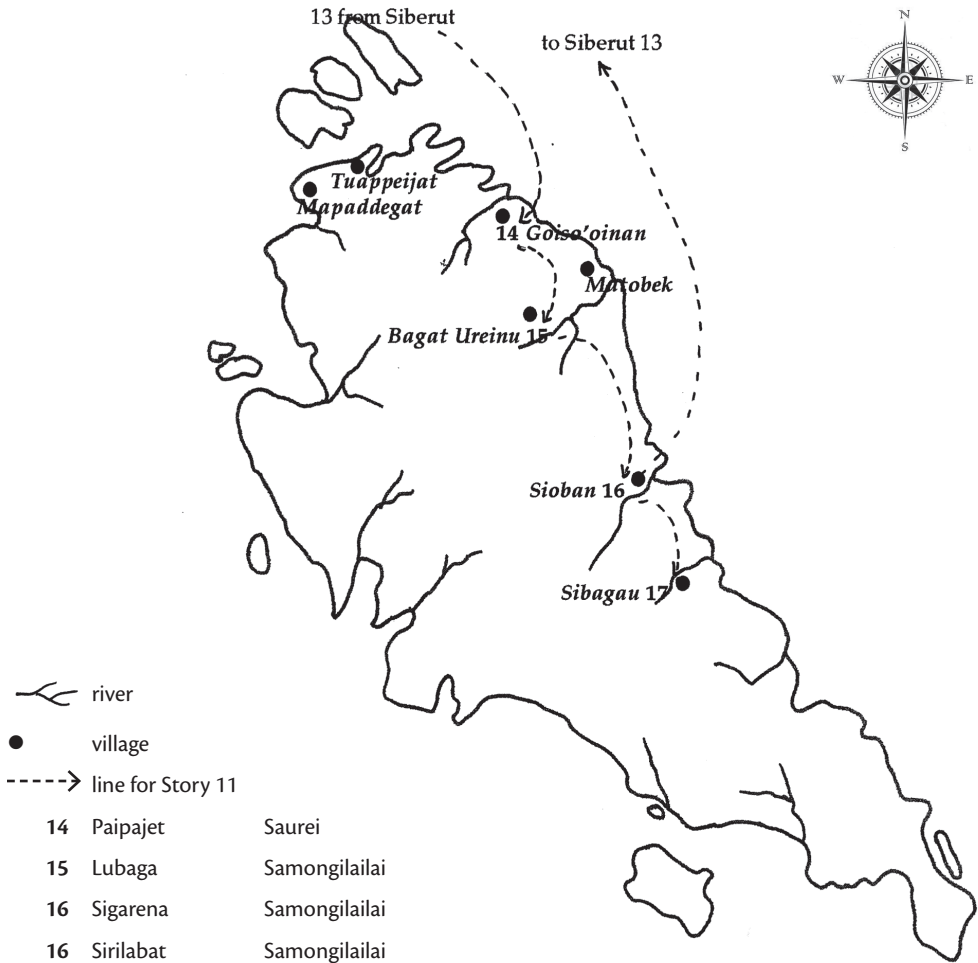
ing ancestor visited the valley of Saibi Samukop and stayed with his nephew in a place called (4) Sirilabat. The ancestor afterward moved on to the valley of (5) Silaoinan. In this valley, he received a plot of land as payment for threats. He got the land from his best friend.

Another plot of land was received from another kin group as payment for humiliating his female relatives while fishing in the river. All these plots of land were located in (8) Bat Koddobat. The migrating family in (5) Silaoinan returned to (6) Sirilabat. After the death of the ancestor, the Samongilailai families split up into several kin groups. One group remained in (5) Silaoinan. One group moved to the valley of (8) Bat Koddobat. A few families emigrated to (9) Taileleu, and the rest of the families migrated to Sipora island.

According to Story 11, the migratory movements of other Samongilailai families to Sipora island started from Silaoinan (on Siberut) (see Map 9.5). In this case, one particular Samongilailai family, after separating from other families that had migrated to other places on Siberut, began their migration from (6) Sirilabat and continued to the coastal area, passing through places called (9) Beat Torongai, (10) Tiniti and (11) Toinong Onai. On their journey, the family found (that is, claimed) several plots of land at these places, which are in the same valley, and in order to take care of this land, they settled in Beat Torongai. In further migratory movements, the family expanded into several families and some of them moved away to a place called (13) Rogdok in the Rereiket valley. From this place, the families went to Sipora island. Their further journey to Sipora is sketched in Map 9.6.

On Sipora island, the group stayed at a place called (14) Goiso'oinan for a short time. Thereafter, they went to dwell in a place called (15) Bagat Ureinu (currently called Saureinu), before eventually settling in a place named (16) Simatoraimonga (currently known as Sioban). A few families of the Samongilailai kin group residing in Simatoraimonga returned to (13) Rogdok, leaving their grandfather in Simatoraimonga. But they visited their grandfather regularly. Because they visited their white-haired (*ubat*) grandfather again and again, Simatoraimonga became known as Siubat (place of the white-haired man). After the Samongilailai kin group pioneered to inhabit Sioban, a few other families came to live there as well. The next migratory movement after Sioban is to a place called (16) Sibagau. From Sibagau, the Samongilailai kin group migrated to the Pagai islands.

What we see on Map 9.5 and Map 9.6 is that the Samongilailai kin group migrating to Sipora island kept contact with their families residing in Rogdok on Siberut island. However, they did not have any contact with the families that had migrated to other places on Siberut. Moreover, the group did not immediately occupy a place on Sipora permanently where they first arrived. The group occupied several other places before eventually deciding to live in Sioban, which was formerly known as Simatoraimonga. The Samongilailai kin



**Map 9.6** Migration of the Samongilailai kin group to Sioban (16) on Sipora island

group did not seem to remain in the place either. Map 9.6 shows that one or two families even moved to the southern part of Sipora island, where they currently live in Sibagau, and perhaps further to the Pagai islands, as I came across Samongilailai living in Taikako on Pagai in 2004.

The last story of Samongilailai's expansion caused by the pig incident is depicted in Story 12 and is shown on Map 9.7. The story was collected in Maileppet on Siberut. According to Story 12, I sketched Map 9.7 to show the detailed migratory movements of the Samongilailai. This kin group was formerly called Samaileppet. However, due to the conflict over land in Maileppet, the group decided to separate from other families of the Samaileppet kin group and thereafter they again called themselves Samongilailai. Therefore, we conclude that Story 12 tells about plots of land claimed by the Samongilailai kin

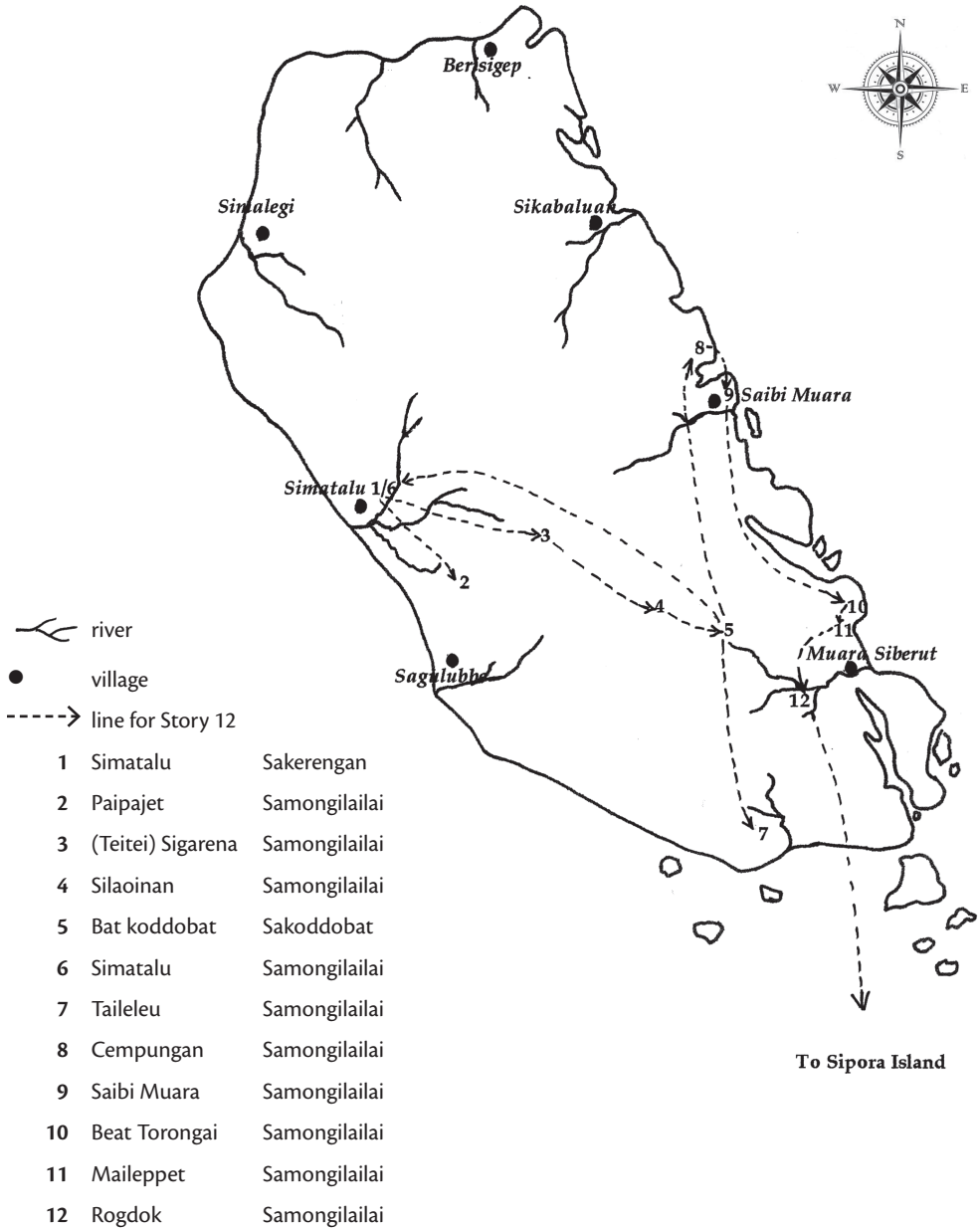
group's ancestors more than telling about the migratory movements of the ancestors.

Story 12 tells about Sakerengan, the ancestral kin group of the Samongilailai in (1) Simatalu. Three main families constituted the ancestral kin group of Samongilailai, as the ancestor of the kin group had three sons. One family moved away to (2) Paipajet, another family remained in Simatalu, and the third family migrated to the southern part of Siberut. The family that went to southern Siberut first settled at the hilly place of (3) Teitei Sigarena. From there, the kin group split up into several family groups. Each of those families took along a particular object in order that they might recognize each other by referring to that object. One group of families moved to the valley of (4) Silaoinan on the banks of the (5) Koddobat river. There, they came to be called the Sakoddobat kin group. The ancestral families had an extensive plot of land located in between Bat Kalea and Bat Masat. While dwelling on the riverbanks of Koddobat, they received two plots of land, the plots of land called Sirau and Mapopoalat.

The group received still two other plots of land. One plot of land was received from the Sakaelagat kin group because of the generosity of the Samongilailai's ancestor in providing the Sakaelagat with foodstuffs like sago and pork when the Sakaelagat ran out of food while fishing for sea turtles (*mubattau*). The land was called *porak sakit sakkoko* (land [*porak*] for the payment [*saki(t)*] of pork [*sakkoko*]). Another plot of land was received as payment for humiliating the family members of Samongilailai, which was done by the Sakaelagat. The land was called *monen pakaila* (planted land [*mone(n)*] for the payment of humiliation [*pakaila*]). Borders of both plots of land are delineated clearly in Story 12. The last plot of land that the Samongilailai families got in the valley of Silaoinan was called *porak tuilu* (land for sounding the wooden drums [*tuilu*]). The Samongilailai kin group received this plot of land as payment for threats. What happened is the following. Another family perceived the Samongilailai kin group as a serious danger. This family beat wooden drums to invite other families to gather in a house where they could agree to kill the Samongilailai together. Due to this threat, the Samongilailai received a plot of land. The prominent ancestor returned to Simatalu to inform his relatives about this plot of land.

The next generations of Samongilailai moved in different directions. One group moved away to (6) Taileleu. In the meantime, one group remained in Silaoinan. Another group moved to (7) Cempungan, but later left the place and proceeded to (8) Saibi Muara. Gradually, this group moved away to a place called (10) Maileppet. Before arriving in Maileppet, the leading ancestor of the group called Pajorot found a plot of land called (9) Beat Torongai, in which place the group lived. Thereafter, the group moved to the Rereiket river and settled in (11) Rogdok. The group had to surrender Bat Lakoko, Bat Simege

and Bat Labbaet to the people living in Rereiket as payment for assassinating some Rereiket people. Samongilailai's ancestor carried out this assault. The last migration of the Samongilailai kin group was to go to Sipora island. The group wandered to Katurei Bay and further to Sipora. Most of the Samongilailai today live in Sioban on Sipora island.



**Map 9.7** Migration of the Samongilailai kin group to Maileppet (11) on Siberut island

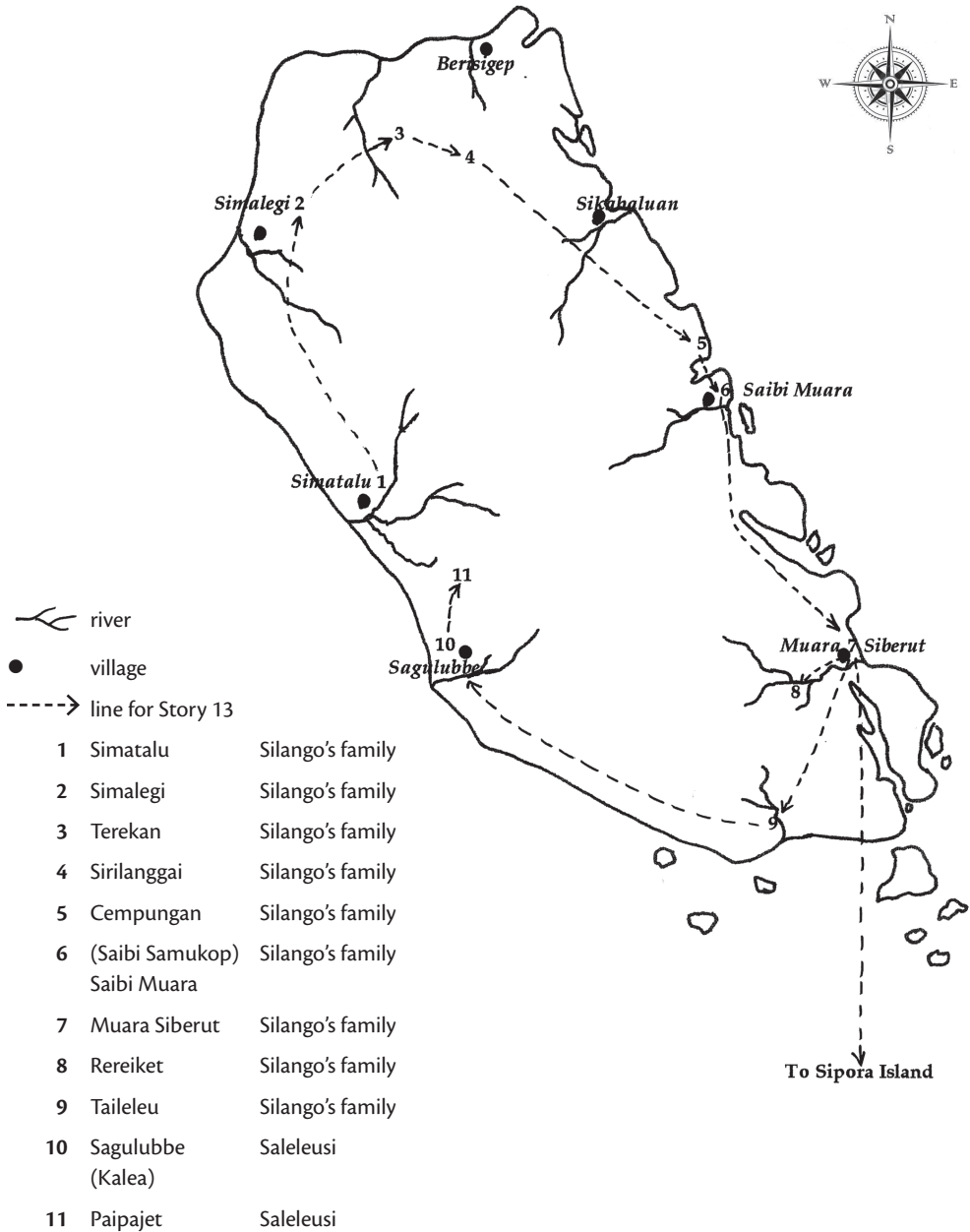
Looking at Map 9.7 carefully, it is clear that families of the Samongilailai kin group separated from each other several times. They began in the place of origin, where they divided into three groups. One of these three groups split into two groups. At first, one of the two groups migrated northward, and the other southward. But the first group reversed their journey and later migrated southward. After the separation, it seems the families did not meet each other anymore. Nevertheless, their knowledge of their relatives has stayed in their memory and is passed down to younger generations by means of family stories and particular ancestral objects like wooden drums or cooking pots that belonged to the whole kin group.

## **9.5 Migration as a result of the wild boar incident**

Family stories of three kin groups describe the wild boar incident. Like the pig incident, the wild boar incident affected only one kin group, namely the ancestral group from which all three kin groups are descended. Due to the wild boar incident, the ancestral family of the three kin groups began to leave for new places by wandering around the island of Siberut. In the course of migration several kin groups came into being, and they currently exist as new kin groups with a new kin-name for each.

I investigated three of these groups, Saleleusi, Sakatsila and Satoko. Each kin group shows a unique case of family separation. The Saleleusi took a long journey before permanently settling in Paipajet, where they currently live. The Sakatsila seem to be a group that came into being after the migrating ancestors arrived at the place Saibi Muara and reunited with the families from the place of origin. And the third is the Satoko, which is a kin group made up of two different families that merged to create a new kin group. I begin with the story of the Saleleusi.

Story 13 tells about the dispersion of Saleleusi. The kin group initially lived in (1) Simatalu. Because of the wild boar incident, the family split up into two. One family moved to (2) Simalegi, while the rest remained in Simatalu. After the migrating family settled in Simalegi, a few family members from Simatalu went to Simalegi in search of their migrating relatives. But in the meantime, this family had left for (3) Terekan, because they wanted to avoid meeting their relatives who had come looking for them. After Terekan, the family moved on to (4) Sirilanggai, and then to (5) Cempungan. Afterwards the family went to (6) Saibi Samukop, before deciding to move to the southern part of Siberut, where they claimed a plot of land located in a place called Boriai, while dwelling in (7) Muara Siberut. The family expanded and split up into several groups. Some families entered the (8) Rereiket river valley, while others continued their migratory movements to Sakalagat (southern islands



**Map 9.8** Migration of the Saleleusi kin group to Paipajet (11) on Siberut island

of Mentawai) and the rest moved to (9) Taileleu. Some of the families living in Taileleu pursued their journey to Sagulubbe, going to live at a place called (10) Kalea. In Kalea, they acquired the name Saleleusi, meaning 'a group residing in hilly land'. Afterwards, some of these Saleleusi families moved to (11) Paipajet, where they currently live.

Map 9.8 shows the migrations of the Saleleusi kin group. Ancestors of this kin group travelled around Siberut island, but Story 13 gives no information about the family separating during those travels. After reaching Muara Siberut, however, Story 13 tells that the ancestors split into several families that migrated in three different directions. One family moved to Taileleu and further to Sagulubbe. In Sagulubbe, the Saleleusi families became a new kin group. In the last migratory movement, the Saleleusi settled in Paipajet. Although the distance between Paipajet and Simatalu, as sketched in Map 9.8, is relatively short, the Saleleusi did not move there directly. The kin group had pursued a long journey through several places. In those places, presumably other relatives of Saleleusi currently live.

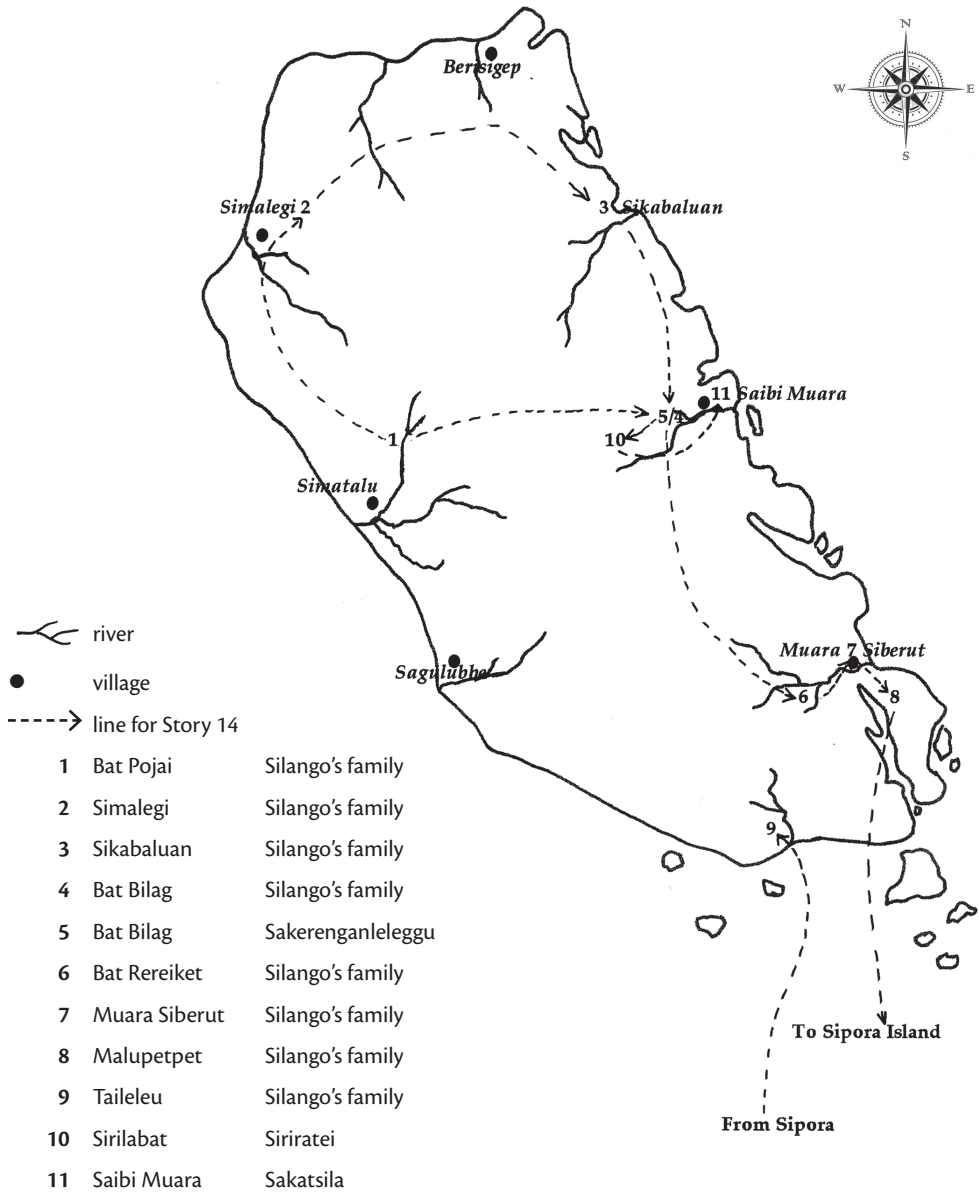
Besides telling about the Saleleusi kin group, the wild boar story relates the migratory movements of the group called Sakatsila. Both of these kin groups, as well as a third group mentioned in the story, are actually related, as all of them are descended from the same ancestor, Silango. First, I relate the journey of the ancestral family of the Siriratei kin group according to a storyteller from Sakatsila, in Story 14.

Story 14 tells how Silango's family became the Sakatsila kin group. According to the story, before dwelling in Saibi Muara, Silango's family inhabited a place called (1) Bat Pojai in Simatalu. They moved from Simatalu to (2) Simalegi due to the wild boar incident. Then, they moved further to (3) Sikabalu. On the way, they claimed a plot of land at a place called Teitei Saaleibagai. From Sikabalu, they entered a place called Bat Mukop (in the valley of Saibi Samukop). In this valley, they settled in (4) Bat Bilag. In this settlement, relatives residing in Simatalu came to join the ancestral family in Bat Bilag (5). It seems that, after being apart for a while, the family decided to reconcile. A great number of people lived in one communal house. They spoke loud like thunder. They were therefore called Sakerenganlelegu (group loud like thunder).

Afterwards the ancestral family moved again. They went to (6) Bat Rereiket by going upriver to Bat Mukop. From Bat Rereiket, the ancestral family went downriver to inhabit a place called (7) Mongan Sabirut (Muara Siberut). They had a plot of land located in the village of Muntei. They planted sago palms at a place called Duluidui. Afterwards, they settled in a place called (8) Malupetpet, where they found (that is, claimed) two plots of land named Malupetpet and Bat Sakkelo. From Malupetpet, they moved over to Sipora island.

However, Silango returned to Siberut island after being on Sipora island for some time. He thereafter lived in (9) Taileleu where he died. Meanwhile, the families living in Bat Bilag decided to move to a place called (10) Sirilabat and acquired the name Siriratei. Because they built a house near a graveyard (*ratei*), they were called Siriratei. While dwelling in Sirilabat, the families got a plot of land as payment for the assassination of their relatives done by a group of people from Tatubeket at the request of the Sabuilukkungan





**Map 9.9** Migration of the Sakatsila kin group to Saibi Muara (11) on Siberut island

kin group, which was the owner of the place (*sibakkat laggai*). The land they received is located in Saibi Muara (11). Afterwards, the Sabuilukkungan kin group moved away to the valley of Reriket, leaving their other plots of land unattended. They believed that the neighbouring kin group called Sataggau would take care of the land properly. Unfortunately, the Sataggau kin group in Saibi Muara vanished. The reason is unknown. As there was no other group of

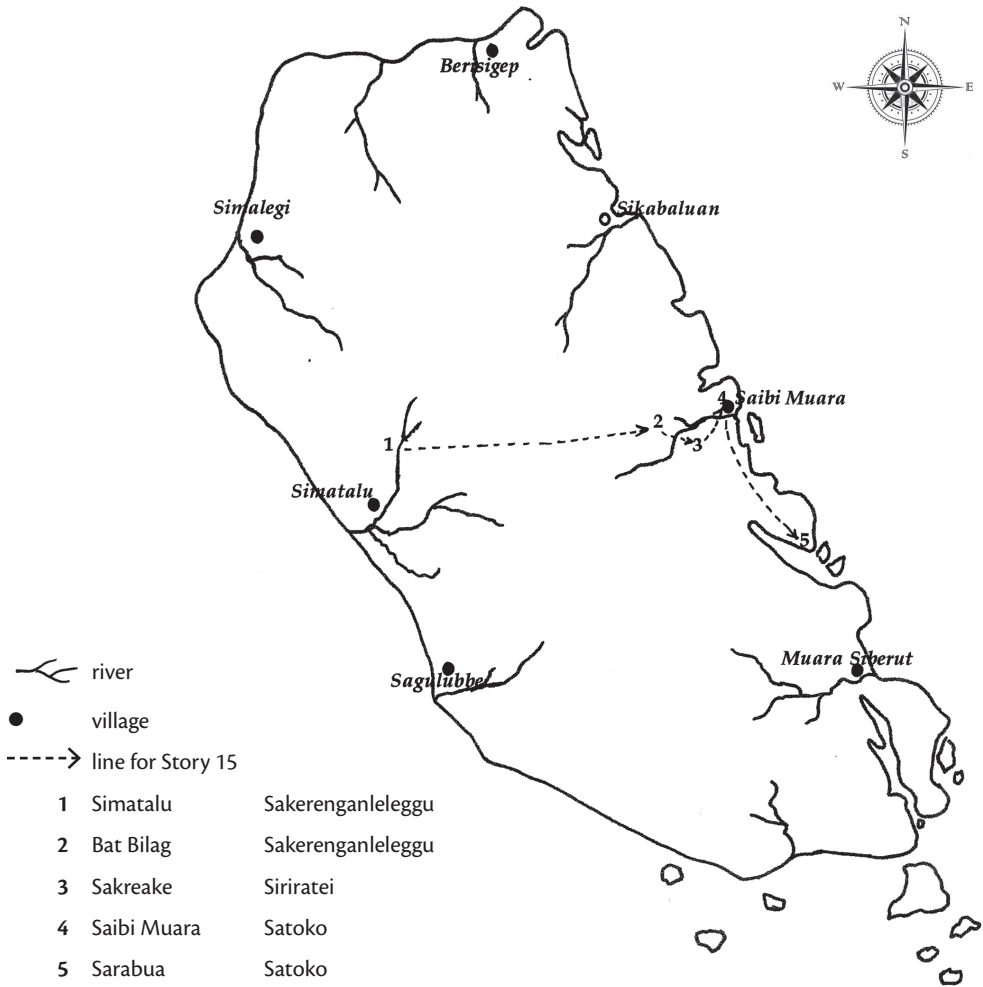
people that could claim the land in Saibi Muara, the Siritoitet and Siriratei kin groups took over the ownership of the land.

Map 9.9 shows that the ancestral family of Siriratei passed through several places located in the northern part of the island. The valley of Saibi Samukop was the central place where the migrating family and the families living in the place of origin met each other. In the same valley, the larger families eventually separated again and each of those families eventually carried out the next migratory movement in different directions. On the map it is seen that the ancestral family migrated over the island of Sipora, but that the family returned and stopped migrating in Taileleu. It seems that the storyteller has a great narrative about his ancestral family. He not only tells about his kin group living in Saibi Muara but also about relatives in other places.

The last account of migratory movements of the descendants of Silango is told in Story 15. The group departed from (1) Simatalu and was called Sakerenganleleggu. From Simatalu they moved to a place called (2) Bat Bilag. Afterwards, they inhabited the valley of Saibi Samukop. They dwelled in a place called (3) Sakreake, where the kin-name changed from Sakerenganleleggu to Siriratei. Thereafter, they moved downriver in Saibi Samukop valley. There, a few families set themselves apart from the others and formed the Saririgka, Sakairiggi and Sakatsila kin groups, leaving only a few families to continue the Siriratei kin group. The Siriratei families occupied the coastal area of Saibi Samukop.

In further developments, these families merged with other migrant families from Sumatra who had Chinese origins. Both groups combined to create a new kin group called Satoko. As they lived on other people's land, the Chinese families decided to buy a small plot of land for their homestead. Currently, some part of the Satoko kin group lives in (4) Saibi Muara while another part lives in (5) Sarabua near Saliguma. Story 15 is mainly about the growth of the Siriratei kin group. It starts with the wild boar incident and ends with the formation of the Satoko kin group. The storyteller does not tell about any long journey of the ancestor Silango.

Map 9.10 illustrates a simple and direct journey where the migratory line begins from a place of origin in Simatalu and ends up in Sarabua near Saliguma. Yet, if we compare the maps of the three versions of the wild boar story, the Siriratei kin group, the group currently known as Satoko, was one of the families who departed from the place of origin to Saibi Muara. Their ancestors seemingly did not migrate to the northern part of Siberut. So, Satoko families are descendants of Silango but migrated to Saibi Muara from the place of origin by another route.



**Map 9.10** Migration of the Satoko kin group to Saibi Muara and Sarabua (5)

## 9.6 Geographical expansion of Mentawaians

Reasons for moving away from the place of origin were quite varied among kin groups in Mentawai. This variety of migration history affects current Mentawai demography. According to family stories, most separations of early Mentawai families residing in Simatalu were caused by simple conflicts. When a separation occurred, some family members typically stayed at the place of origin while others moved away. When the migrating families kept moving from one place to another, separations also occurred within the migrating families. Meanwhile, members of the family who had remained at the place of origin

sometimes decided to move away as well. As members of a family or kin group separated out from another, they define their identity and qualities by taking a different name and living in a separate place. However, both groups keep remembering and respecting that they are genealogically related to each other. Migrations of kin groups occurred in different waves as well as in different places in the Mentawai Islands. If all families left the place of origin, the place sometimes was left unpopulated. In that case, other migrating groups came to the place recently depopulated and in the course of time claimed the place as their own, without knowing that an earlier group of settlers had once occupied the place.

The migrating pattern depicted on the maps shows that the migrating ancestors first occupied places near their place of origin and near rivers. If relatives from their place of origin came to join them in the new place, then they left and sought other places. This occurred several times. The migrating ancestors clearly wished to keep their distance from families or neighbours who lived in the place of origin or with whom they had had conflicts. Nevertheless, after passing through several places, the migrating ancestors eventually decided to settle permanently.

If they decided to move away from their place of origin, the migrating families did not have any contact with the families living in their place of origin anymore. This separation led to two or more related kin groups growing in different places. As told in the family stories, no migrating ancestors returned to the place of origin in order to stay there again permanently. They preferred to keep moving away. Returning to the initial place might remind the migrating families of the initial conflicts they had once faced. By moving away, they got away from the conflict as well as having the opportunity to occupy perhaps a more promising place. Furthermore, they certainly achieved a new status, which is to be the owner of a place (*sikabakkat laggai*). If they did return, as told occasionally in the stories, it was because relatives from the place of origin or another place they had once occupied succeeded in persuading them to return (see Maps 5, 9, 10 and 11).

According to the family stories, migrating families chose a place that had a rich variety of species available in the natural surroundings. A place with some flat land in the vicinity of a river, where the forest had plentiful fruit-bearing trees, bamboo clusters, and wild sago palm was considered an ideal place to live. If the place was not yet named, the migrating families gave a name to the place. This place-name was frequently used to identify the migrating families, and became the name of their kin group. It sometimes happened that other people had already named the place and the migrating families that came to occupy that place took on that place-name to identify their kin group. If the group used a new name, they no longer used their initial kin-name. This served to make a clear distinction among kin groups that formerly shared the same kin-name. In the course of time, those related kin groups did not have

any contact for a few generations. The current descendants of those ancestrally related groups might not recognize each other anymore. However, if they want to find out who their relatives are and where they currently live, they look for such information in their family stories.

Migrating families on Siberut did not traditionally return to the place of origin from where they departed. They kept looking for new places around the island. They even tried to change directions in order to deceive groups that tried to follow them. In fact, they did not want to meet those groups. As the migrating groups rounded a valley or two, they sometimes after some time returned to the area they had once occupied. Nevertheless, they did not stay there permanently. They moved again, in other directions, in order not to arrive at places that they had occupied before.

As migrating families moved around, one family sometimes met other families. Two or more families sometimes united in order to be better able to protect themselves. They defended their place together. However, the first settlers of a place, in general, disliked the arrival of newcomers coming to populate their area. They did not want their natural resources to be exploited by newcomers. In order to get rid of the newcomers, the first settlers rejected them immediately. If they were late in doing so, that is if they waited until long after the newcomers had built houses for themselves, then the first settlers requested the newcomers to pay for the plots of land where they had erected their houses. If they failed to pay, the first settlers sought other groups living outside the area to assassinate the newcomers.

This might happen if the newcomers were perceived as exploiting the natural resources of the area and the first settlers did not get any profit from them. Due to such a conflict, newcomers were forced to leave the place and to seek another place. As migrating kin groups had already claimed most of the land on Siberut, a few families decided to move over to Sipora. This island is small compared to Siberut and the Pagai islands. Some families stayed on Sipora and others moved further south to the Pagai islands. A few families might have decided to return to Siberut if they did not find a satisfactory place on Sipora. After passing through many places and many generations, a lot of things happened. A migrating group might not remember their relatives in other places, or in the place once occupied by their ancestors. In some cases, migrating families still have relatives living in those places. In other cases, a migrating group has no relatives left at the place once occupied by their ancestors, owing to the entire kin group having moved away from there.

By means of a family story, a migrating family may learn about their relatives and the places once occupied by their ancestors. By means of such a story, migrating families can sometimes reunite with their relatives and try to get access to their ancestral lands in the place once occupied by their ancestors prior to the migratory movements. As we have seen, a group of Samongilailai on Sipora island returned to Siberut in order to find their relatives. The family

sought their relatives by asking people there. They eventually found members of the Samaileppet kin group in Maileppet. Part of the Samaileppet kin group had originally belonged to the Samongilailai kin group. In fact, Samaileppet was the union of several kin groups. They told each other's stories of how their ancestors left a place on Siberut and moved to Sipora island. The relatives in Siberut recognized the story of some of their kin group's families leaving for Sipora. The family stories finally connected the broken relationship among the related families.

Family stories tell us that conflicts and harsh assaults happened frequently in places where migrating families tried to live permanently. There was seemingly no place where migrating families might live safely. Many migrating families therefore decided to separate from each other and pursue their destiny by migrating in different directions. After a place had been claimed, a family or two stayed there while others moved again. In case no family stayed, a neighbour was asked to take care of the land. Natural hazards and deaths of family members from unknown illnesses might have compelled Mentawaians to decide to leave a place. The process of migration kept occurring. Several descendants of ancestors who had settled at a place permanently kept changing their dwelling places even if it was only within the village. Some families occasionally decided to return to the place where their ancestors once lived.

In short, family stories show us the social logic of the geographical and demographical expansion of the Mentawai ancestors. The social logic of the migratory movements explains Mentawaians' understanding of ownership of places and land as well as how people acquire new status as owner of the place (*sibakkat laggai*) and/or owner of the land (*sibakkat porak*).

## 9.7 Genealogical expansion of Mentawaians

An important matter in the genealogical expansion of Mentawaians due to migratory movements is the formation of new kin groups originating from an initial kin group. As seen in the legends of the maps, one kin group split into two or more groups of families and created new kin groups residing in other places. Some of those kin groups kept using the initial kin-name, while others decided to use a new name. Each began to perceive themselves as separate from the others due to using a new kin-name. The kin-name was sometimes given to the new group by other groups residing in the same area where the new group settled. Siriratei is an obvious example, where neighbours were surprised to see that the new group was not afraid of building their communal house near a graveyard (*ratei*). Because of living near a graveyard, the new group was called Siriratei.

In some situations, a new group decided to use the name of their dwelling place for naming the kin group. In that case, the group first named the place and then used the place-name for their kin group's name. The Salamao, Sakoddobat and Sapalakkokoai kin groups, which settled Bat Lamao, Bat Koddobat, and Bat Palakkokoai respectively, exemplifies this situation (see Story 10 and Map 9.4). Unusual natural surroundings where a communal house was erected may be used to name a group. An obvious example is Siribetug. The group erected their communal house at a place surrounded by a bamboo cluster (*betug*) (see Story 7 in Chapter 5 and Map 9.1). A memorable event occurring in a place was also commonly used for naming a new kin group. Or a particular behaviour of the members of a kin group may be used to identify it. So, the name of a kin group may reflect a situation, a place, or a characteristic of the group.

A kin group in one place perceives itself as self-sufficient and independent of relatives living in other places. The group may survive while being away from their place of origin by cultivating plots of land owned by ancestors who had led the group during migratory movements. However, a group's independence and self-sufficiency do not erase the existence of another reality: the group shares the same ancestral connections with its related kin groups residing in other places. Although they each have a new kin-name, they are still one big family descending from the same ancestors who occupied their place of origin.

If two related groups decide to merge, they do not use their kin-names used while living in separate places anymore. Instead, they speak of the initial kin-name, which is the kin-name used by the ancestors in the place of origin before the ancestral group dispersed. Related groups also agree that they all share the same rights to the ancestral land located in the place of origin. All members may cultivate the land. As a consequence of the kin group's unity, plots of land found by any of the related groups during geographical expansion may be claimed as the property of all members of the kin group. They perceive each other as relatives because they descended from the same ancestral family.

Another significant aspect of Mentawai genealogical ideas is the concept of remembering and forgetting. Mentawaians recollect their ancestors' names inconsistently. What one family member remembers about his ancestors is not always the same as what is remembered by other family members. Some people have a strong relationship with their ancestors and maintain the memory of the ancestors by telling stories about them. By counting the ancestors' names in family stories, we may determine how far back Mentawaians go in their past. The stories indicate that Mentawai storytellers recollect their ancestors back to several generations. Some storytellers remember less than eight generations, while other storytellers of the same kin group recollect more than



ten generations. If we compare the order of the names according to family generations, it is also told erratically. An ancestor in a story perceived as a son by one storyteller may be mentioned as a grandfather in the same story told by another storyteller of the same kin group. Nevertheless, they give several similar names if we compare one list of ancestors' names to another list of ancestors' names, even though the names are incompletely and inconsistently counted up.

Details of someone's memory in remembering things that happened in the past are strongly influenced by tradition. In Mentawai, someone's name may change frequently as he or she goes through particular stages of social life. It begins when a baby is born. A baby girl is called *sijjik* and a baby boy is called *sikolik*. Then, at a certain age, she or he gets a 'real' name through a ritual. The name becomes an identity of the person, like Sikoibatei in the wild boar story, or like Emeiboblo in the pig story. Soon after Sikoibatei got married and got a baby, he needed to find a name for his child, Boalai for instance. His child's name would be his nickname. He would thus be called Aman Boalai (father [*aman*] of Boalai). However, since the occurrence of the wild boar incident, his nickname, which was Silango Siberi, was more popular than Aman Boalai. He was thus called Silango rather than Sikoibatei or Aman Boalai. As he got older, Silango would be called *teteu*, or for short *teu*, meaning 'grandfather'. This term is added in front of his current name. So he was called Teteu Silango. After Silango passed away, he would be addressed with the word *kalimeu* (deceased) before his name, Kalimeu Silango. In traditional rituals, his spirit is categorized as *ukkui* (ancestor's spirit). In the spiritual world he is perceived as living together with other spirits, and they are called *sanitu* (see Schefold 1973 for further discussion of religious conceptions in Mentawai). It becomes complicated to recognize someone's name when there are so many situational changes of a personal name.

After someone's death, that person's name is infrequently mentioned according to Mentawai traditional culture because they do not want to relive images and memories of the dead. Mentawaians believe that dead relatives have gone to live in the other world, in the spiritual world. The world is interpreted as a 'big village' (*beu laggai*). The ancestors are not supposed to be disturbed unless they are called upon to be present at family gatherings, for instance for rituals. In order not to mention someone who has died, relatives of the deceased use other words to refer to the dead person. *Sapunuteteu* is a common term used in family stories as the term for ancestors, and *kalimeu* is the term for those more recently deceased. In rituals, the ancestors are called *ukkui*.

In Mentawaians' viewpoint, dead people always live near living people invisibly. However, they should not be present in the world of the living. If living people mention a dead person's name again and again, the spirit of the dead may appear to living people in an apparition. When the appearance of a spirit of a dead person occurs in ordinary circumstances, a lot of family members

may get sick. In order to protect family members, shamans bless them. In this way, spirits of ancestors and living people may be present at the same ritual without knowing it. To show respect to the ancestors, their names are not mentioned. If it is necessary to do, Mentawaians purposely hide their ancestors' names.

In the mango story, we see the involvement of an older brother and a younger brother. The real names of the two brothers are unspecified. That means that current storytellers do not recollect the names of those ancestors. Perhaps these family stories were intended primarily to convey a particular moral. Some of the stories tell us about ancestors doing something malicious, or displaying a bad character. In order to limit disrespect towards ancestors, people hide ancestors' real names. However, there is an unwanted consequence to hiding ancestors' names from the public: the younger generation may fail to learn those ancestors' names. What often happens is that the ancestors are unintentionally forgotten by their current descendants.

In contrast, there are certain ancestors who are nonetheless remembered. Such a reason as being proud of having a few brave ancestors has encouraged Mentawaians to keep maintaining a few ancestors' names. It turns out that those ancestors deserved respect and are remembered in family stories because those ancestors put efforts into forming and expanding their kin groups. In the pig story in Chapter 6 about the Samongilailai kin group, for instance, names of the prominent ancestors are mentioned all the time. One of the ancestors defended his family pride and led his group out of the place of origin and eventually reached other places of the Mentawai Islands with great success. Such names as Emeiboblo, Pajorot, and Sikora are significant and heroic ancestors for the Samongilailai kin group. These names are more important than their other ancestors' names. Spirits of the heroic ancestors are purposely mentioned to protect the Samongilailai from any troubles.

Young members of the kin group are taught through family stories to show such leadership qualities. And the pride of having such ancestors is expressed in the happy faces of the storytellers when they enthusiastically told me about the fearlessness of their ancestors while dealing with other kin groups that wanted to harm them. The storytellers' voices became louder to express their ancestors' anger, and body language like wide-opened eyes and hand gestures portrayed a kind of murdering action. All this expressive body language indicates how important the ancestors whose names are mentioned are considered to be.

## 9.8 Concluding remarks

The family stories presented and discussed in this book describe migratory movements of the Mentawaians. Many kin groups of early Mentawai families had left their places of origin in Simatalu. Some families of a kin group left earlier than others, with a few families remaining in the place of origin. In such cases, not all family members left for a new place at once. The families remaining in the place of origin did not always stay there permanently either. They usually eventually left for a new place where there was less competition for land and other resources.

Migrating families followed rivers and coastlines and crossed over hills in order to arrive at a different place. The river was an important natural element in searching for a new place. Highly preferred was a valley with deep and long navigable rivers. Early migrants preferred to stay in the interior of the islands. Besides following the natural landscape, early Mentawaians sometimes moved from one place to the next by tracing the steps of migrating relatives.

Some kin groups just moved around on the island of Siberut, while other groups crossed over to the southern islands of Mentawai. Some of the groups that had migrated to the southern islands returned to Siberut. When they returned to Siberut, they did not always go back to their initial settlement but sought other places to settle instead. This kind of migratory movements often resulted in related families living in separate places. Due to contact not being maintained over the generations, it is not surprising that many families who are (distantly) related to each other but widely dispersed do not currently recognize each other.

As a migrating family group moved, they sometimes arrived at a new place that was not yet populated by other people. As they did not see other people living in such a place, they declared themselves to be the owners of the place (*sibakkat laggai*) and the owners of the land (*sibakkat porak*). If the family group decided to move again, they sometimes left the place unattended, thus giving later migrants of other kin groups a great opportunity to take over the place. In order to keep the place, some groups, as related in several of the family stories, would have a couple of families stay at the claimed place in order to maintain it and to protect it from being claimed by later migrants. If the whole group of families eventually decided to move away, they traditionally still keep their ownership of the place. They prove their ownership of the place by telling stories of the place as well as pointing out the planted trees growing on the place as theirs. Migrating families brought stories, memories and particular objects from the early places to the newly found ones.

Family stories also reveal genealogical ties among migrating kin groups. Every kin group has several identifying marks, namely stories, ancestral lands, ancestors' names, family and group names, and place-names of origins that

can be used to establish whether one kin group has ancestral and genealogical connections to another group. If members of several groups can find ancestral connections among them, they may agree to share their communal possessions. If they do not see any connection, they will refuse to recognize each other as relatives, and refuse to recognize joint ownership of communal properties as well. People who are not recognized as relatives will not gain anything from their ancestral heritage.

Regarding landownership, each kin group may possess land in just one place or several plots of land in different places. Entitlement to a plot of land is usually transmitted through family members exclusively; in this way the plot of land remains in the hands of the same family. Mentawai families do not simply allow other people to take over their possession to a plot of land. Other people who want to live in a place have to ask permission from the landowners before they may live on the land and exploit natural resources on the land. If they do not get that permission – for instance because the landowners do not like the newcomers – they have to look for some other place. Traditional cultural values do not allow other groups to claim a plot of land that has already been claimed. In order to respect that, other kin groups seek other places.

Traditional customs and family stories affirm a situation where a plot of land may not be claimed twice by two different unrelated kin groups. This is a way to prevent conflicts over land. Nevertheless, a plot of land actually quite often has been claimed by two or even more unrelated kin groups. That happens because of ancestors' migratory movements. Stories tell that after leaving a place, migrating families did not return regularly. In fact, most migrating families did not even return at all. Besides assaults and conflicts with family members or neighbours, another reason migrating families did not go back to the places they once occupied is because they were afraid of headhunting practices. Moreover, the distance between the currently occupied place and the old settlement is often great.

If the owners of a place did not look after their place due to migratory movements, then other groups of people who migrated more recently occupied the unattended place. The later migrants not only exploited the unattended land, but also tried to take over rights to the land. In the course of time, the later migrants begin to assume they had extensive rights to the land. In this way, conflicts over land rights sometimes occurred, although traditional customs and family stories confirm that the later arrivals do not have rights to the land that had once been claimed by an initial migrating kin group.

Nowadays, a great opportunity is available to visit the old places and settlements. Descendants of migrating ancestors can easily return to see their place of origin because it is currently safer and easier than a few generations ago. The Dutch colonial government stopped the tradition of headhunting raids in the early 1900s and the Indonesian government continues to forbid the tradi-

tion. People do not have to worry about being killed by headhunting, nor do they have to paddle their canoe for several days and nights. As contacts are made with relatives residing in old settlements and in the place of origin, migrating families eventually recover their rights to their ancestral plots of land. It is a simple reality that Mentawaians believe that a 'forgotten' land still belongs to the initial claimers, even though they do not maintain the land. The migrants' ownership of their ancestral land may once again be recognized. Some families return for a short period of time. Some return in order to live there permanently. A few families return to become acquainted with relatives. Others return to defend their plots of land from other kin groups that try to sell them to buyers. Sometimes, families return to sell plots of land to buyers. The nature of migratory movements of early Mentawai families is the most important underlying factor of current conflicts over land rights in Mentawai.

# 10

## Current conflicts over land

### 10.1 Introduction

During fieldwork I collected information about land disputes from different villages in the Mentawai Islands. In a few villages, I came across kin groups that debated their rights to a plot of land. In some places, kin groups argue about the borders of their land. In other places, I met landowners that defended their lands from voluntary newcomers in the villages. Some of the land conflicts occurred while I was carrying out my field research in villages. I directly witnessed how these conflicts were discussed. Some other cases I only heard about from local people. These were cases that had occurred a few years earlier.

I have selected two cases to discuss in this chapter. The conflicts chosen have relevance to the theme of the study, namely the role of family stories in resolving land conflicts, as well as factors that instigate conflicts. The aim of the chapter is therefore to describe the course of the two selected land conflicts as well as to find out how Mentawaians make use of family stories in resolving conflicting claims to a plot of land. In order to fully understand the whole story of each conflict, it is necessary to find links of the case to preliminary explanations given in a few family stories presented and discussed in part two of the book.

The selected land conflicts took place in two different villages, Saibi Muara and Maileppet. The land conflict in Saibi Muara is characteristic of a traditional situation where two or more kin groups try to occupy and claim a plot of land although the first settler had already claimed the land. The second case is the Maileppet case, a situation where the Indonesian government transformed a traditional village into a government village.

People told me various stories to describe the course of the land conflicts. By listening to people's stories, it is clear that conflicts over land rights are of many kinds. After talking to elders, kin-group leaders, and the village head in sev-

eral villages, I identified multiple factors that have caused land conflicts. Some cases shared the same characteristics where two or more kin groups disputed the same problems. Nevertheless, all cases have relations with past and traditional occurrences (I call it 'internal factor') and current circumstances (I call it 'external factor') in Mentawai. Both factors interplay in conflicts over land.

Regarding to the internal factor, most land conflicts are related to ancestors' early migratory movements. I am going to explain the conflicts later in this chapter by looking at two selected cases. Before that, I want to describe another factor that has a strong influence on the occurrences of conflicts over land among Mentawaians. The factor is external, which is the influence of government and non-government organizations that want to develop and carry out different projects on Mentawai Islands.

The Indonesian government declared the Mentawai Islands to be part of Indonesian territory under the supervision of the provincial government of West Sumatra in 1945. The government declared that the land in Mentawai belongs to no one. It is considered empty land where the government fully claims the land as state property. The government does that by referring to Article 33 of the Indonesian constitution (*Undang-undang Dasar*) of 1945, stating that the Indonesian government fully controls land and the natural resources in it and these shall be used for the prosperity of the Indonesian people. So the Indonesian government considers the land and natural resources of Indonesia, including Mentawai, as a potential source of income for the state.

In 1973, the government ratified logging concessions for a few big companies to log places on all four of the Mentawai Islands (Persoon, 1989: 203). After 1973, Mentawaians stood by powerless while standing forests were cut down. North and South Pagai were almost entirely deforested and Sipora too. The intensive exploitation affected Siberut less significantly. International organizations like Survival International (SI) and World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) tried to stop the expansion of logging companies on Siberut (Schefold, 1980; WWF, 1980; Persoon and Schefold, 1985; Persoon, 1989 and ADB, 2001).

In 1976 the Indonesian government, through Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry, agreed with the international organizations to conserve a small part of Siberut Island (6,500 hectares) as a wildlife reserve. In 1981 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) signed an agreement with the Indonesian government to protect the biodiversity of natural resources and characteristics of Mentawai culture in an area of 56,000 hectares on Siberut. This area was expanded from the initial area of 6,500 hectares. UNESCO gave the project the name Man and the Biosphere. However, after signing the agreement, UNESCO did not implement the programme in the field. Instead, other organizations like SI and WWF had been actively running their projects to stop the extensive natural exploitation in Mentawai.



However, their projects were not run continuously. SI, for instance, stopped working on Siberut as the Indonesian government terminated its permit due to SI's strong protests against Indonesian policies on Mentawai (WWF, 1980; Persoon and Schefold, 1985).

The departure of international organizations from Siberut in the late 1980s opened a great opportunity for logging companies to exploit Siberut. It was not only the logging companies already active on the other Mentawai Islands who seized this opportunity. Entrepreneurs created several new logging companies and they also obtained concessions from the central government in Jakarta and from West Sumatra's provincial government in Padang. Besides, a few companies from Jakarta were interested in acquiring land for oil palm plantations. The island was clearly in danger. Mentawaians started worrying about their land, and conflicts took place among different stakeholders on the islands (Persoon, 2003).

Before the logging companies carried out their plan, Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry launched a multimillion-dollar project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1992. It was called the Biodiversity Conservation Project and it was located in Flores and Siberut. A few Mentawaiian students joined the conservation project. Other Mentawaiian students established their own organization, and built a network in order to gain financial support for achieving their goals, including the desire to separate Mentawai from the district (*kabupaten*) of Padang Pariaman and to manage the natural resources themselves (Eindhoven, 2002; 2007; 2009). Besides, they wanted the ancestral lands of Mentawaians to be acknowledged as theirs.

When the government agreed to run the project, some logging concessions on Siberut were terminated. The conservation project was officially ended in 1999 (ADB's project compilation report, 2001). But it was already nearly inactive when I gathered preliminary data for UNESCO in 1997. UNESCO then decided to carry out its programme in order to replace the conservation project. This was the first time that UNESCO had actively implemented its programme in the field since the ratification of the conservation agreement with the Indonesian government in 1981.

Meanwhile, the Mentawaiian students keep struggling to gain their political and land rights. After years of political lobbying, the voice of Mentawaians was heard in 1998. After the fall of Soeharto in May 1998, the Mentawaiian students made use of the moment to urge the transitional government of President Habibie to recognize Mentawai as a new district (*kabupaten*) of Indonesia. According to *Undang-undang Nomor 49 tahun 1999* (Indonesian Law Number 49/1999) Mentawai Archipelago was formed as a new district of West Sumatra Province, being separated from Padang Pariaman. That happened on 4 October 1999. The government promised a change for better governance by delegating part of its authority to provincial and district levels. Under the new policy after the *reformasi*, the Indonesian government launched *otonomi dae-*

*rah* (regional autonomy), giving provincial governments in Indonesia extensive authority to run their provincial territory within the context of the unity of Indonesian state. Furthermore, as part of the political agenda of *reformasi*, the Ministry of Agriculture now acknowledges Indonesian ethnic groups' traditional land. Ancestral lands are now recognized by the state as *tanah ulayat* (kin-group land). This is stated in Law of the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture / National Head of Land Tenure Number 5 /1999 (*Peraturan Menteri Negara Agraria/Kepala Pertanahan Nasional Nomor 5 Tahun 1999*) (see Kansil and Kansil, 2002).

The current situation does not seem to have brought about significant changes in Mentawai. Conflicts over trees promoted by logging companies and waves instigated by surfing industries repeatedly take place in Mentawai (Persoon, 2003). Conflicts over land between Mentawai kin groups that attempt to get involved in these businesses occur frequently and the Mentawai government is not able to resolve them. The Mentawai government even takes advantage of the situation by promoting oil palm plantations as a great option for the local economy, leaving the Mentawai kin groups in a situation where a kin group has to defend their ancestral land from being claimed by other kin groups and from their own government. To become acquainted with this situation, I now examine the two selected cases of land conflict occurred in two different villages.

Two cases of conflicts over land are selected to illustrate the internal factor of the land conflicts. I begin with the case occurred in Saibi Muara. Then, I describe the case gathered in Maileppet. The land conflict in Saibi Muara illustrates an interesting traditional case of conflict over landownership. The conflict affected kin groups that have been living in the valley for generations.

## **10.2 Conflict over land in Saibi Muara**

To understand the conflict, I first explain the traditional situation in Saibi Muara in the period before the Dutch colonized Siberut island. Thereafter, I depict the social situation with regard to land tenure when the Dutch colonized Siberut by building a police station in Saibi Muara. After that, the recent growth of the Saibi Muara completes the background of the land conflict. Then, I discuss the land conflict as well as the resolution of the conflict.

### **10.2.1 Traditional situation in Saibi Muara**

According to family stories of kin groups living in Saibi Muara, the traditional settlement of Saibi Muara started small, with a few houses. The owner of the place and of the land in the valley was called Saleuru. The Saleuru kin group departed from Simatalu and explored in the downriver part of the valley of

Saibi Samukop and arrived at the river-mouth place called Saibi Muara. They lived there and therefore they were known as Saleuru (*sa* means 'group' and *leuru* means 'toward river mouth', the name *saleuru* means 'a kin group living near a river mouth'). The Saleuru families were the first to claim most of the land in the valley of Saibi Samukop. They declared themselves the landowner (*sibakkat porak*) and the owner of the settlement (*sibakkat pulaggaijat*).

Another kin group called Sataggau came to live in Saibi Muara. The Sataggau originally lived in the northern part of Siberut near the coastline at a place called Sirilogui. They lived from fishing, and frequently came to Saibi Muara to fish because the place has a bay where there was good fishing even though the sea was rough. After fishing near the Saibi Muara coast, the group usually returned to Sirilogui. However, due to the distance between Saibi Muara and Sirilogui, which by canoe was quite far, the kin group stayed for a short period of time on the Saleuru's land. As they frequently stayed on the Saleuru's land, the Sataggau eventually decided to ask permission from the Saleuru to build *alaman* (shelter while hunting or fishing). The Saleuru granted permission. As they felt fine to live there, the Sataggau decided to buy the small plot of Saleuru land with *ibat laut* (seafish, usually sea-turtle). Eventually, the Sataggau kin group became one of the Saleuru's neighbours.

While dwelling in the downriver settlement of Saibi Muara, such other groups as the Siriratei, Sanene, and Siritoitet followed the Saleuru's trail. However, these other kin groups were perceived as *sitai*, or newcomers (a term used for Mentawaians newcomers). The newcomers were not allowed to own the land but were only able to exploit the natural resources because the land around Saibi Muara had been claimed as the Saleuru's property. The newcomers were also seen as *sikokop*, which literally means 'eater' but may be understood as 'exploiter'. The presence of exploiters in the valley had inspired the owners of the place to call the area Saibi Samukop. The name means that the people who were from a place called Saibi in Simatalu (the name Saibi first existed in the valley of Simatalu) exploited the land. Consequently, the name Saibi exists in two valleys: Saibi Simatalu and Saibi Samukop.

The landowners were actually afraid of losing their rights to their land because the newcomers did not only occupy the land but they also cultivated it by planting crops and valuable trees. The landowners did not find it easy to use their land anymore, because they have to deal with the newcomers and their planted trees growing on the land.

The Saleuru decided to get rid of the Siriratei, a group living in the upriver part of the valley of Saibi Samukop. The Saleuru disliked the Siriratei families because the Siriratei women collected fish, shrimp, and shellfish in the rivers owned by the Saleuru. As told in the Sakatsila family story (Story 14 in Chapter 7), the Saleuru asked a kin group in Tatubeket (for personal reasons my informant did not want to mention the name of the group) to eliminate the Siriratei. A few people of Siriratei were killed. After finding out which kin

group had assassinated their family members, the Siriratei took revenge. They also figured out that the Saleuru had actually masterminded the killing. The Siriratei therefore discussed the situation with the Saleuru and received a plot of Saleuru land as payment (compensation) for the killing. The land was called '*porak segseg logau*'. After the payment was agreed, Saleuru and Siriratei lived in peace.

About the time of the assassinations, a family of another kin group called Taririsurat departed from a place called Tatubeket. They also lived in Saibi Muara. However, before being in Saibi Muara, they had first lived in Sarabua near the village of Saliguma. The land in Sarabua belonged to the Saleuru. The land had been received from another kin group as a bride-price. Without the landowner's permission, the Tasirisurat family cultivated a plot of land in Sarabua. Tasirisurat did not live there peacefully. The father of the Tasirisurat family believed that the land was haunted. The death of family members was perceived to be evidence that the land was haunted. The family therefore left the place and sought a new safe place in Saibi Muara.

In Saibi Muara, the Saleuru welcomed the Tasirisurat family. In Saibi Muara, the wife of Tasirisurat's father passed away when she reached old age. The father later married a daughter of the Saleuru kin group, and a son was born. According to the patrilineal system of Mentawai, the son was a family member of the Tasirisurat. To the Saleuru, the son was considered as a nephew (*buak*) of the kin group because his mother was from the Saleuru kin group.

The next significant event told by the storyteller living in Saibi Muara was a tragedy that affected the Saleuru. Lightning struck their house and the kin group lost everything. The Saleuru families thereafter split into two: one group moved to the valley of Rereiket and the other group moved to Cempungan. Before they left, they needed goods and food. The Sataggau provided the Saleuru with what they would need while looking for a new place to live. The Saleuru offered part of their land to the Sataggau as payment for these goods. The Saleuru nephew in the Tasirisurat kin group was asked to take over the maintenance of another plot of Saleuru land, as the group could not care for their ancestral land after moving away to other places.

During the time the Saleuru nephew took care of the Saleuru land, a lot of plots of land were used for bride-prices (*alat toga*) or for payment of fines (*tu-lou*). Some plots of the land were given as payments to different groups like the Siriratei and the Siritoitet. The nephew informed the Saleuru living in Rereiket and Cempungan each time. In doing so, both groups knew which plots of their land had been given away and to whom. The Saleuru forgave the nephew for surrendering a few plots of land to other people. The Saleuru considered it as compensation for his time spent taking care of their land.

After the nephew passed away, there was no one to take care of the land. The Sataggau therefore took over the maintenance of the Saleuru land, as they owned a few plots of land in the same area (Saibi). They had bought some plots

of land by paying the Saleuru with sea-turtles. and they had received some plots of land from the Saleuru because of providing them with goods and food when they left the area. Due to the absence of Saleuru on their land, the Sataggau thus owned several plots of Saleuru land.

However, this situation changed when all the Sataggau family members in Saibi Muara passed away due to an unknown epidemic. The people of Saibi Muara said that the Sataggau died like *laggug siboikboik ka bagat kali*, literally, 'cooked crabs in a wok'. They died all at once; none of the Sataggau survived the epidemic. As there was no one left of the Sataggau kin group in Saibi Muara, the Siriratei and the Siritoitet dwelling in Saibi Muara took over the land and both groups freely cultivated the land.

### 10.2.2 The Dutch in Saibi Muara

Official documents mention that the Dutch officially colonized the Mentawai archipelago in 1864. At that time, the Dutch irregularly visited the Pagai islands, but they did not dwell there. About other islands of Mentawai, there was not much information. Siberut for instance was hardly mentioned in Dutch reports of visits to the Mentawai Islands. Four decades later, Protestant missionaries from Germany settled the Pagai islands in 1901. The Dutch began to visit the coastal areas of Siberut island intensively. However they did not settle the island yet (Coronese, 1986: 22-26; Schefold, 1988: 97-100). After visiting several times, the Dutch decided to build a police station on Siberut. According to Van Beukering's research, that happened in 1905 (Van Beukering, 1947:33; Schefold, 1988: 98). However, the location was not mentioned.

A lot of stories are told by the Saibi Muara villagers about the arrival and settling of the Dutch on Siberut. An elder resident of Saibi Muara told me that Saibi Muara was the initial location where the police station was built in order to maintain peace on the island. Peace was a desirable goal as headhunting raids were actively practised in particular regions of Siberut at that time. The Dutch were asked by the residents of Siberut to stop the tradition, as they could not bring it to an end by themselves. Mentawaians were afraid of visiting other places because they alleged that they would be killed on the way. They believed that only a third party like the Dutch could stop the headhunting raids. The Dutch had a group of soldiers to use to bring the peace that had been long awaited by local residents.

In order to build a police station, the Dutch needed a plot of land. However, the actual landowners, which were the Saleuru, were not living in the area anymore. As told by local people, the Dutch invited a few groups of people who local residents had said were landowners in Saibi Muara to attend a meeting. However, the first owner of the land, which was the kin group called Saleuru, did not show up at the meeting, nor did the Sataggau come. At the meeting, the Siriratei and the Siritoitet were present. A few local people were

also invited to witness the event. The meeting was intended to establish who were the real landowners in Saibi Muara.

In the meeting, the Dutch decided a few points. They concluded that the absence of the initial landowner was proof of their extinction. The Dutch therefore acknowledged other groups living in the area, which were Siriratei and Siritoitet, as the new landowners. The use of the land where the police station was to be built was thus negotiated with the Siriratei and Siritoitet. The Dutch stayed in Saibi Muara until 1915. Thereafter, they had to leave the place due to lack of safe drinking water. They moved to Muara Siberut, leaving behind a few houses unoccupied in Saibi Muara. The residents of Saibi Muara demolished the houses and made use of salvaged building materials for their own houses.

One of the Dutch soldiers who was stationed on Siberut was of Chinese origin. He was married to a Malay woman from Sumatra. He worked for the Dutch as a KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger) soldier. After retiring, he decided to return to Saibi Muara where he had been stationed. He decided to live there because he had a good friendship with a Mentawai man there from the Siriratei kin group. He bought a plot of land of about twenty hectares from the Siriratei and Siritoitet to use for his house and garden. The land was located in Sigulugbaga, one of the parts of the village of Saibi Muara. He paid three pigs for the plot of land according to the price that the Siriratei and the Siritoitet kin groups had requested of him. A written document was not made of the transaction. The family of the Siriratei friend and the Chinese family decided to create a new kin group called Satoko. The kin-name was derived from the model of the house owned by the Chinese family. The house looked like a shop (*toko*) of Malay tradespeople because of its zinc roof. The Chinese family used zinc to cover the top of the roof instead of using of sago palm leaves. The new kin group living in the house was called Satoko (people living in a house like a *toko*). The two families did not see each other as unrelated anymore; they regarded each other as relatives. The new group was formed from a close relationship called *siripo*. The two families together – that is, the new Satoko kin group – opened a new settlement in Saibi Muara.

The Satoko opened their new settlement in Saibi Muara on the plot of land that had been bought by the Chinese family. In the course of time the traditional settlement of Saibi Muara expanded and transformed into a structured village. The Siritoitet dwelling in a place called Sigaitaligei joined the Satoko in Saibi Muara. In the course of time, more and more new kin groups joined the Satoko, for instance part of the Siriratei kin group residing in an upriver settlement of the valley of Saibi Samukop, and other relatives of theirs like the Sakatsila and the Saririkka (see Story 14 in Chapter 7 for the family relationship among these groups).



### 10.2.3 Land conflict in Saibi Muara

It has been several generations since the village of Saibi Muara was built. This village was built by different groups of Mentawaians in addition to a few families of traders that had come from the mainland of Sumatra. In the 1950s more and more kin groups joined the current residents of Saibi Muara. They came from upriver places of Saibi Samukop valley as well as from other places on Siberut. More families from Sumatra came to live there while some of the other Sumatrans returned to Sumatra. The families that came from upriver places of Saibi Samukop valley were of Siriratei origin. They were welcome to become part of the Satoko kin group. The Satoko, formerly consisting of two families, became a big kin group. Families of other kin groups such as the Sagaragara, Siribetug, Sanene, and Salabi, who were also from upriver settlements of the valley of Saibi Samukop, came to live in Saibi Muara. These newcomers brought significant numbers of people to the settlement. They needed extensive plots of land for gardens and homesteads. The Saleuru did not return to Saibi Muara, nor did the relatives of Sataggau show up. So the new groups freely used the Satoko land in Saibi Muara for the location of their houses and they exploited natural resources on the Saleuru land. The initial Satoko members were aware of current developments in Saibi Muara.

In the 1980s, the new generations of Satoko, which consisted of several different kin groups, began to claim plots of land in Saibi Muara. They even sold a few plots of the land for the homesteads and gardens of new other arrivals. They asked 500,000 rupiahs (about 50 euros) for each hectare of land. They kept the money for themselves. This situation occurred increasingly often in the last few years. The other inhabitants who had been living in Saibi Muara longer than the group that recently joined the Satoko disliked this development and began to confront them. Social tensions increased sharply between the Satoko and other kin groups living in Saibi Muara. However, these other kin groups were angry only at particular Satoko families, as not all Satoko families had been selling land. The group that sold the land was of Siriratei origin, which had recently come to live in the government village of Saibi Muara. The current Satoko realized that more and more families wanted to live in Saibi Muara; however, the majority of plots of land available were already being used for gardens by those who had come to the village earlier. In order to take advantage of the land, the current Satoko began to sell plots of land to the newcomers. Their actions were protested by other kin groups in Saibi Muara. In the further discussion of this case, I call the new Satoko families the 'Satoko' in order to distinguish them from the descendants of the initial members of Satoko.



#### 10.2.4 Resolution of the land conflict in Saibi Muara

In 2002 the Siritoitet organized a big meeting in Saibi Muara, where several kin groups were present. The Siritoitet also sought and invited current members of the Sataggau kin group, which residents of Saibi Muara considered to be the probable earlier landowners of Saibi Muara. These Sataggau families were dwelling in a village called Cempungan. The 'Satoko', the Sataggau, and the Siritoitet sat down together to find a resolution to the land conflict in Saibi Muara. Descendants of the initial Satoko kin group were not invited. The 'Satoko' defended their initial claim to certain plots of land in Saibi Muara. However, the Sataggau also claimed the same plots of land.

In the meeting, the 'Satoko' told family stories about the land in Saibi Muara. The major themes of Story 14 and Story 15 presented in Chapter 7 were told in the meeting in order to illustrate how the 'Satoko' kin group arrived in Saibi Muara and how the kin group has rights to particular plots of land in the valley of Saibi Samukop. According to the 'Satoko' family story, several plots of land in Saibi Muara were received from the initial owner, which was the Saleuru kin group, as payments for a headhunting raid and a bride-price. A group from Tatubeket carried out the headhunting raid at the request of the Saleuru. A 'Satoko' was killed. The 'Satoko' looked for the killers. They eventually found out that they were from a group living in Tatubeket. The 'Satoko' took revenge and also were informed who had masterminded the killing: it was a group living in Saibi Muara, the Saleuru. So, the Saleuru were in trouble. In order not to be killed by the 'Satoko', the Saleuru decided to surrender a plot of land to the ancestors of 'Satoko' (when the group was still known as the Siriratei).

The Sataggau also told a family story to describe their connection to the contested land. According to the story, the Saleuru's *uma* (communal house) was struck by lightning and burned down. The Saleuru therefore needed goods and food while going to seek a new place to live. The Sataggau offered the Saleuru the goods and food they would need during their. In return, the Sataggau received a few plots of Saleuru land.

Some of those at the meeting and representatives of other groups from Saibi Muara seemed to recognize and acknowledge the Sataggau story, but some of the 'Satoko' still attempted to reject the current Sataggau's claim to the land. According to the 'Satoko', the current Sataggau are not relatives of the initial Sataggau that once lived in Saibi Muara because the initial Sataggau families in Saibi Muara had died due to an unknown epidemic. This information was according to a story told by ancestors of 'Satoko'. Therefore, the 'Satoko' concluded that the current Sataggau were not related to the initial Sataggau. After an elder of the 'Satoko' ended his argument, an elder of the Sataggau stood up angrily. He pointed his index finger at the 'Satoko' family members and he spoke sneeringly about the 'Satoko's' knowledge of the land in Saibi Muara. He said that the amount of the 'Satoko's' knowledge was no more than a small

amount of dirt under his nails. He furthermore said that the 'Satoko' had actually been able to survive so far because of using land that belonged to Saleuru and Sataggau.

His statements made the 'Satoko' angry. The 'Satoko' young men challenged the Sataggau to a fight. They hit the wooden floor by using their bare hands in order to make an intimidating noise. A few young men left the meeting room and waited outside, ready for physical violence. As told by witnesses from other kin groups who were also present at the meeting, the Sataggau families stayed calm and were not afraid at all. Meanwhile, the Siritoitet elders added some information to both kin groups' stories when it was necessary to clarify certain points. Unfortunately, the Saleuru were not present at the meeting to witness whether matters told by both kin groups were truly relevant to the contested land.

Instead of fighting with the 'Satoko', the Sataggau challenged the 'Satoko' to undertake *tippu sasa*, which is a ritual to prove a truth by cutting a piece of rattan decorated with leaves and flowers. Before cutting the rattan, the two disputing groups have to swear by the names of their ancestors that their claims are true. The Sataggau believed that the only way to prove the truth of what the Sataggau said about the 'Satoko' and to establish the actual status of the land in Saibi Muara was through such a ritual. However, the 'Satoko' did not respond to the Sataggau's challenge, as the Sataggau had not accepted the 'Satoko's' earlier challenge to a fight. The presence of a lot of local people witnessing the meeting had calmed the tension between the two groups. Both parties eventually decided to seek a friendly resolution. After considering all testimonies and stories uttered at the meeting, the 'Satoko' lost the case and the Sataggau won the contested land.

In order to acknowledge the land rights to be in the hands of the Sataggau, the 'Satoko' and the Sataggau went to the office of the village head to sign a letter of agreement, consisting of significant points. The points are that the 'Satoko' and the Siritoitet do not have any rights to the disputed plot of land in Saibi Muara, therefore they cannot sell the land anymore. Rights to the disputed plot of land in Saibi Muara are given to the Sataggau. However, Saibi Muara residents are not forbidden to cultivate the land, as they have already planted most of the land. But they do not have the right to sell the land. If they want to sell their own garden to someone else, that is possible, but the land itself is still owned by the Sataggau.

In order to legitimate the agreement, the village head of Saibi Muara on behalf of the local government was asked to mediate the dispute. After the meeting, the residents of Saibi Muara were still talking about the case. An opinion came from the descendants of the original Satoko kin group, who were not surprised that the 'Satoko' had lost rights to the land because they (the 'Satoko') clearly did not know many of the important details concerning the contested plot of land. The Satoko suggested that the 'Satoko' should ad-

dress a question to the Sataggau. If the current Sataggau were relatives of the Sataggau who owned the contested land in Saibi, the question is: why did their ancestors not show up in the meeting organized by the Dutch?

The actual Satoko were referring to an event in 1905 when their ancestors were involved in a meeting organized by the Dutch. According to the Satoko, the Sataggau families were absent at the meeting in 1905 when the status of the land in Saibi Muara was discussed. The absence of Sataggau at that meeting was evidence of the death of the Sataggau. The actual Satoko concluded that the current Sataggau are not related to the Sataggau that had owned the land in Saibi Muara. So the Siriratei and Siritoitet were recognized as the landowners according to the meeting organized by the Dutch in 1905. The Sataggau were quite happy to see that no descendants of the original Satoko were present at the meeting in 2002.

### **10.2.5 Analysis of the land conflict in Saibi Muara**

The description above illustrates a common situation where several kin groups tried to appropriate for themselves a plot of land, although that plot of land had once been claimed by the first settlers to arrive there. This could happen because the first settlers did not remain on their land permanently. After the first settlers moved away, other kin groups came to live on their land. The first settlers sold a few plots of land to buyers from these kin groups, and surrendered some plots of land as payments for headhunting raids or bride-prices. By surrendering and selling land, the first settlers encouraged a situation where more and more people came to live in that area. The growing population meant increased competition in exploiting natural resources. New arrivals in the area needed plots of land for homesteads and gardens. The new arrivals eventually took over the maintenance of the land and even claimed it as theirs. They divided the plots of land among them. However, the claiming of land done by new arrivals increased the land conflicts in the area.

One group disregarded other groups' claims and commenced to sell the land to other buyers who had recently arrived in the area. As the conflict continued, the current residents sought a solution by inviting kin groups that had some connection to the disputed land. However, the groups did not invite representatives of the first settlers to the meeting. Nor did they invite members of other kin groups that might be familiar with the case. The story of the land in Saibi Muara was therefore incomplete. Two opposing groups involved in the land conflict in Saibi Muara tried to defeat each other. The 'Satoko' group accused the Sataggau group of not being the real landowners and the Sataggau did likewise. However, members of 'Satoko' could not prove that they were the real landowners. During the meeting they did not show a great deal of knowledge of the land. They failed to prove that the current Sataggau are unrelated to the initial Sataggau kin group that once owned the land in Saibi Muara. On the

opposing side, the Sataggau convincingly accused the 'Satoko' of taking over the maintenance of the land in Saibi Muara and exploiting it without asking permission from the Sataggau.

As the 'Satoko's' knowledge about the land was lacking, they could not disprove the claims of the Sataggau. In order to win the case, the 'Satoko' sought another way. They provoked a physical confrontation. However, the Sataggau handled the situation wisely by staying calm. They later won the case by challenging the 'Satoko' to carry out a particular ritual to establish the truth of what they were fighting about. The 'Satoko' realized that their knowledge of the story of the land was not strong enough to protect them in the face their ancestors. Therefore they did not dare to undergo the *tippu sasa* ritual. After they rejected the Sataggau's challenge, the 'Satoko' acknowledged the Sataggau as owners of the land.

### 10.3 Conflict over land in Maileppet

My familiarity with the conflict over land rights in Maileppet began when I carried out a preliminary survey for a UNESCO project on the village in 1997. Maileppet is a coastal village in southeastern Siberut. According to Samongilailai family stories (Story 11 and Story 12 in Chapter 6), the Samongilailai kin group were the first inhabitants of the area. The majority of kin groups currently in Maileppet agreed with this. They acknowledged the ownership of the Samongilailai to particular plots of land in Maileppet. A kin group called Sarubei did not agree with this. The Sarubei claimed to have rights to particular plots of land in Maileppet as well, including a few of the plots claimed by the Samongilailai. This had brought the two kin groups into disputes in recent years.

Below, I tell how the conflict commenced and how both groups tried to bring the conflict to an end. I first describe the traditional situation, drawing on information gathered from family stories of several kin group. Thereafter, I describe the workings of governmental programmes aimed at modernizing the area. Then, I describe the land conflict thoroughly, and then the resolution arrived at by the disputing kin groups.

#### 10.3.1 Traditional situation in Maileppet

According to Samongilailai family stories about the pig incident (Chapter 6), a Samongilailai ancestor had some plots of land in the area of Maileppet after departing from Simatalu. Before settling the village of Maileppet, the ancestor had lived in several other places, like in Silaoinan valley. The ancestor is related to other family members of Samongilailai that had migrated to other places of Mentawai. Thus, over time, the Samongilailai families had expanded

into several kin groups living in separate places on Siberut and other islands of Mentawai. Some kin groups acquired a new kin-name while one group kept using the initial kin-name, which was Samongilailai. Even though the groups have different kin-names, they continue to recognize each other as relatives genealogically. They are all descended from the same ancestors.

Of these groups, one group still uses the name Samongilailai. The Samongilailai were the first people to arrive and settle in Maileppet. The Samongilailai kin group was therefore known as the owner of the land (*sibakkat polak*) and the owner of the settlement (*sibakkat pulaggaijat*) by those who came to live in Maileppet later. The Samongilailai ancestor lived in Maileppet and opened a garden. However, at some point, he and a few families decided to move away. They sought a new place in the upriver area called Rogdok in the valley of Rereiket. A few Samongilailai families remained in Maileppet. The same ancestor later decided to move to Sipora island without leaving any families in Rereiket. The kin group still calling itself Samongilailai currently live on Sipora. After the dispersal to different places, social contact among Samongilailai families residing in separate places in Mentawai was very limited.

A few Samongilailai families remaining in Maileppet took care of their ancestral land and gardens. These Samongilailai consisted of only a few families. With such a small number of people, the Samongilailai could not take care of the extensive land. In the course of time, more and more families from other kin groups such as Satairarak, Sagulu, Samongan Abbangan, Saseppungan, Sarubei, Saleleubaja, Sapataddekat, and Samalaggasat came to live in Maileppet. The Samongilailai apparently did not have any objection to the arrival of these kin groups. The various newly arriving groups occupied plots of land in Pasakiat, the initial settlement in Maileppet and later a traditional hamlet within the village of Maileppet.

In order to lessen competition with the other kin groups living in Maileppet, the Samongilailai decided to invite a few of the larger kin groups to merge with them, namely the Samongan Abbangan, Sagulu, Sakaelagat, Satairarak, and Sataiuma. There were several reasons for the merging of the groups. For instance, they needed to defend the area from attacks by other kin groups from other villages. The different groups all together formed a new kin group called Samaileppet. The name was taken from the name of the river as well as the name of village: Maileppet. The Sarubei did not merge with the Samongilailai. The Sarubei group did not perceive themselves as Samaileppet even though they lived in Pasakiat in Maileppet. The group remained Sarubei. It seems that the Sarubei could defend their land in Maileppet by themselves.

A few elders of Samaileppet older than seventy believe that the merging of groups happened before the Dutch colonists arrived on Siberut in the early 1900s. However, a few literate Mentawaians in Maileppet believe that the merging occurred in the 1950s. The Samongilailai in Sipora and other places of Mentawai did not know that their relatives in Maileppet had merged with

other kin groups in order to create a new kin group. As the Samaileppet had replaced the Samongilailai as kin-name, the name Samongilailai consequently disappeared from the area and the maintenance of Samongilailai land in Maileppet was put in the hands of the Samaileppet.

### 10.3.2 A government village for Maileppet

In the 1970s, the governor of West Sumatra Province decided to improve the quality of Mentawaians' lives from traditional and primitive circumstances to civilized and modern conditions. The governmental organization called Otorita Pengembangan Kepulauan Mentawai (OPKM), literally 'development authority of the Mentawai archipelago', was assigned to accomplish this task. Some of this organization's tasks were to build 800 houses in archipelago, to structure the village according to the government system by introducing elections of the village head, who was then to appoint staff members to manage the social life of the village. In this way, the government expected to civilize and modernize Mentawaians to become like their fellow citizens elsewhere in Indonesia (Persoon, 1994: 240-241).

In 1980, the government commenced to build 100 houses in Maileppet. This program was not the first such initiative in the area. In the 1970s, the Social Department of Indonesia had built a few houses in the small village Pasakiat. In 1980, the government wanted to resettle Mentawaians living in the interior in villages near the coast. Therefore, they decided to expand Pasakiat into a larger village by building 100 houses there, and establishing Maileppet as a government village. For these 100 new houses an extensive area was needed, so the OPKM asked permission for a particular plot of land from the Samaileppet. Several Samaileppet elders represented the rest of the family members in a meeting with the OPKM. Some members of the Sarubei kin group were present and witnessed the meeting. In the meeting, the Samaileppet elders permitted the government to build 100 houses on Samongilailai land and signed a document that stated that the group agreed to surrender a particular piece of land in Maileppet for building 100 houses. The land, however, actually belonged to the Samongilailai – meaning to all those descended from the original Samongilailai ancestors. The Samongilailai on Sipora island did not know that the Samaileppet had surrendered their land to the government.

After the 100 houses were completely built, the families in Maileppet were divided into nuclear families in order to occupy the houses, but they could not fully occupy all the houses. Therefore, the government had to mobilize some kin groups from the interior of Siberut to fill Maileppet. The arrival of these other groups had some consequences. The groups not only occupied houses, but they also needed plots of land, mostly for gardens. These resettled people opened new gardens and extracted natural resources on Samongilailai land. After a few years living on the land, a few of the new families who were actually

using the land began to claim the land as theirs. Some of them even sold plots of land to newcomers in the village if they decided to migrate to other places. It was about a decade after the 100 houses were built when the Samongilailai on Sipora eventually found out that their land in Maileppet had been surrendered by the Samaileppet to the OPKM for the 100 new houses, and that new settlers had been selling plots of land in Maileppet. They assumed that the Samaileppet should be blamed for surrendering Samongilailai land to the government for the resettlement project in Maileppet. In 1995, the Samongilailai on Sipora sent letters to the Samaileppet in Maileppet. The Samongilailai wanted to get the sold land back. They moreover requested the Samaileppet to take financial responsibility if the buyers insisted on compensation for giving up the land.

Instead of responding to the letters, some of the kin groups that had formed the Samaileppet decided to split up from each other in 1996. The Sagulu, Samongan Abbangan, Sataiuma and Satairarak started to go back to using their initial kin-group names. This forced the initial Samongilailai families in Maileppet to do likewise. A few families did not want to return to the name of their former kin group and continued to use the name Samaileppet. This group declared itself to be the new Samaileppet. However, these families did not take any responsibility for what the initial Samaileppet had done, nor did the other members of the initial Samaileppet.

After the Samaileppet kin group split up in 1996, the Samongilailai residing in the village of Sioban on Sipora found out that a few families among those who had merged to create the initial Samaileppet were their relatives. They considered these relatives living in Maileppet to have the responsibility to take care of their ancestral Samongilailai land and gardens in Maileppet. The rebirth of the Samongilailai kin-name in Maileppet offered a great opportunity for the Samongilailai in Sioban on Sipora to travel to Maileppet and reunite with their relatives on Siberut. In Maileppet they could be hosted by their relatives, and stay for an extended period of time. This added support for the Samongilailai kin group in Maileppet generated new power and encouragement for the kin group to defend their rights to plots of land surrendered (in 1980) by the then-existing Samaileppet for the resettlement program and also to plots of land claimed by the Sarubei kin group.

### **10.3.3 Land conflict in Maileppet**

My informants stated that the Samongilailai in 1996 could not find any kin group willing to take responsibility for having surrendered the land in 1980 to the government for the resettlement program in Maileppet, so there was no kin group from which they could reclaim their land. So they had to turn to the government. But the current local government did not want to take responsibility for what OPKM had done, because the project had been completed. So



the Samongilailai could not get help from the local government to regain their rights to the plots of the land. The local government suggested the group to go to Padang, the capital of West Sumatra province. Perhaps the group could talk to the provincial authorities about regaining their land rights. Unfortunately, the group did not have enough money to make a trip to Sumatra.

They then found another idea to regain possession of the land in Maileppet. The group decided to ignore the local government and rejected the agreements made in the 1980s between the Maileppet community and the provincial and district governments. They began to request the Maileppet villagers to pay for their homestead, an amount of money for each hectare of land they used. The first year, 2000, some families who had enough money paid the Samongilailai. After paying for the plot of land they were using for their homestead and garden, the buyers got a piece of paper stating that the land currently belongs to them as it had been bought from the Samongilailai. Some other families rejected the Samongilailai's request. They mostly argued that the government had invited them to Maileppet when the resettlement program was run in the 1980s. The Samongilailai, according to those families, should ask the government to pay for the land. Other villagers, for instance the Sarubei, instead of paying for their homestead, questioned the status of the land in Maileppet. The Sarubei families believed that particular plots of land claimed by the Samongilailai belonged to them (to the Sarubei). Therefore, they concluded they did not owe any money to the Samongilailai.

The Samongilailai were surprised to find out that the Sarubei believed they owned some plots of land. This situation did not correspond to the family story of their ancestors about land in Maileppet. According to the Samongilailai family story, a few plots of land had been surrendered to other kin groups for bride-price or the payment of fines; they did not know whether the Sarubei had received a plot of land from the Samongilailai in that way. However, the Sarubei believed that their ancestors had found the land first. Both groups did not want to lose their precious heritage. To the Samongilailai, the success of defending their land rights would mean to preserve a symbol of their ancestral identity. To the Sarubei, to win the land conflict would mean to ensure a financial source, as they planned to sell logging rights to the land.

### 10.3.4 Resolution of the land conflict in Maileppet

In order to find a resolution to the problem, both parties – the Samongilailai and the Sarubei – met each other in a series of meetings organized by the local authority. The local authority is regarded as the third party in the conflict. The third party is called *sipatalaga*, mediating between two disputing kin groups. The tasks of the *sipatalaga* can also be performed by a group consisting of several individuals from different kin groups that have no connection with the two disputing kin groups. As mediator or negotiator in a conflict, the

*sipatalaga* tries to help the two opposing groups to find a friendly resolution of their conflict. The *sipatalaga* does not make a final decision on the case. However, the *sipatalaga* can suggest some ideas and give his opinion as to which kin group has presented a stronger case. In the end, the two opposing groups themselves make a decision based on the facts and arguments discussed in the meeting.

The meetings began in the hamlet (*dusun*), and took place in the house of the hamlet head, as he has no office. His house is usually his office. In the meeting, the Samongilailai wanted to know how the Sarubei kin group had acquired a plot of land in Maileppet. The Sarubei elder told a story about the land. According to the story, the Sarubei departed from Simatalu. The kin group arrived in Maileppet and claimed a small plot of land. They made social contacts with other kin groups. The Sarubei received a few other plots of land because a few female family members married family members of other kin groups. For instance, one of the Sarubei's female ancestors married one of the Sakeletuk's male ancestors living in Muara Siberut. For this marriage, the Sarubei received a particular plot of land as the bride-price.

My informants who witnessed the meeting reported that the Sarubei did not tell their story convincingly. They said they knew the borders of their land; however, those borders were not familiar to kin groups sharing borders with the land claimed by the Sarubei. The other kin groups present at the meeting did not support the Sarubei's claim. The Sarubei were in a weak position.

However, the Samongilailai recognized some of the plots of land in the Sarubei kin group's story. In their opinion, those plots belonged to the Samongilailai. The Samongilailai kin group told in the meeting how their ancestors arrived in Maileppet and they became the first settlers in the area.

The Samongilailai immediately responded to the arguments of the Sarubei by saying that the Samongilailai ancestors had initially claimed the land because they were the first to arrive at the place. At that time, there were no other groups living in the area. The Samongilailai ancestors planted sago palms and durian trees. The inhabiting process of Maileppet was depicted as told in Story 11 and Story 12 in Chapter 5. However, the Samongilailai did not reveal all the significant information at once. A few important points were hidden, waiting for subsequent arguments from the Sarubei.

After hearing the Sarubei's story, the Samongilailai elder addressed a few questions to the Sarubei. The questions were quite crucial; for example, whose sago had the group eaten, and whose land had the Sarubei families been planting in Maileppet. The Sarubei did not give clear answers. One of the Samongilailai elders made use of the situation to strongly state that the Sarubei were not the owners of the contested land, and were not the owners of the settlement either. The Sarubei, however, did not want to be denied rights to some land in Maileppet; they kept insisting that they had rights to land. The witness-

es of the meeting explained that after a few hours, the two opposing parties did not come up with a clear decision.

As the meetings did not bring a satisfying result for both parties, they agreed to take the case to the village level. The village head (*kepala desa*) and his assistants (*perangkat desa*) in Maileppet facilitated the next meetings and drew up the agenda. A day was given to the Sarubei to tell their stories of how the group may have a link to the contested land. Another day was given to the Samongilailai to do likewise. The stories mostly depicted how the kin groups may have claimed the land. And these stories were quite different.

Afterwards, the case was discussed in the village, and some people from other kin groups living in Maileppet came forward and said that they were familiar with the contested land. Some of them had some convincing opinions about the contested land. However, they were not allowed to interfere in the conflict, unless they were asked by one of the disputing parties to give statements. The disputing kin groups eventually decided to ask several individuals from other kin groups in Maileppet to give their testimony regarding the contested land. Most of them were leaders of kin groups (*sikebbukat uma*). Each of the disputing kin groups expected that these elders would support them to win the case. However, it turned out that the statements of these leaders of other kin groups did not change the case much.

All witnesses who knew about the land had been invited to give their testimony as well as to witness the course of the meeting. There was no new statement or evidence presented at the meeting. The result of the meeting lasting several days was that the Samongilailai were the actual owners of the contested land. The Sarubei families, however, still did not want to give up their claim. So they did not acknowledge the Samongilailai's ownership of the contested land. After two weeks passed, the meetings did not come to an acceptable result for both parties. This situation frustrated members of both parties and some members began to show violent behaviour by striking the wooden floor of the building during the meeting. Their words also began to irritate each other. The tone of their voice was higher and louder than during the earlier meeting days, indicating the rankling tensions and intimidation. Above all, the head of Maileppet village and his assistants had failed to successfully arbitrate the dispute. Subsequently, all parties continued the conflict and decided to meet at the sub-district office of South Siberut situated in Muara Siberut.

Policemen, government representatives, and church elders were asked to be present at the meeting in order to mediate the conflict, as both kin groups tended to act aggressively. It was accordingly discussed in Muara Siberut, the sub-district capital of South Siberut. However, this involvement of government officials from the sub-district offices in Muara Siberut did not bring the conflict to an end either, although most of the important information, stories and testimonies had been repeated in the meeting. As the two parties were unable to agree on a final solution, the government representatives decided to

divide the land between the two kin groups. Each would have a plot of land and the borders were clarified by using rivers and hills as the major borders. In order to end the conflict, the Samongilailai accepted the agreement. However, the Sarubei kept rejecting the decision, as they believed they were the only group with rights to the contested land. So, tensions between the two groups were rising, and even today the case is not closed yet.

The Samongilailai did not want to spend more time on the case. They had spent a lot of money and time being in Siberut, leaving their families in Sipora. In order to bring the conflict to an end, the Samongilailai decided to challenge the Sarubei to conduct the Mentawai ritual called *tippu sasa*. Mentawaians believe that the *tippu sasa* ritual is the only way to attest a factual truth. In *tippu sasa*, members of the groups involved in the conflict had to swear upon their ancestors' names while cutting (*tippu*) rattan (*sasa*) in order to testify whether their claim was absolutely true.

In such a ritual, after swearing and calling their ancestor names, both parties cut a piece of rattan bound with fetish flowers and leaves. The flowers and leaves are wrapped with snakeskin. Fetish flowers and leaves are believed to represent life and death, and the snakeskin is used to represent the commitment that the kin group losing the case will not claim the land anymore. It is like a snake that sheds its skin and will never reuse its skin. The rattan-cutting process is done at the request of both parties involved in the conflict, and both parties attend the ritual to witness it. The ritual is performed at the location of the disputed land. If two groups dispute a plot of land, they may also chop the ground of the contested land instead of the decorated rattan.

The Sarubei, however, did not want to accept the Samongilailai's challenge to carry out this ritual because they believed the Samongilailai coming from Sipora were Sakalagat – southern Mentawaians who were known or assumed to be familiar with practising black magic. The Sarubei suspected that the Samongilailai might manipulate the *tippu sasa* ritual (with black magic) such that it would not affect them. Instead of *tippu sasa*, the Sarubei challenged the Samongilailai to swear on the Bible, seeing the fact that both groups were Christians. However, the Samongilailai kept insisting on performing the ritual of *tippu sasa*, as they believed it to be the only way to resolve the problem.

The Samongilailai did not show up to swear on the Bible at the office of the sub-district head in Muara Siberut in order to comply with the request of the Sarubei, nor did the Sarubei comply with the request of the Samongilailai to carry out *tippu sasa*. Instead, each kin group performed its own act separately. The Sarubei swore on the Bible at the sub-district head's office, and the Samongilailai chopped the ground of the contested land in the *tippu sasa* ritual. In both cases, the act was witnessed by policemen, church elders, and other local people.

After a few weeks passed, three members of the Sarubei from Maileppet mysteriously passed away. One person drowned in the river mouth of Muara

Siberut. Another person was bit by a deadly poisonous snake. The third person died after he got fever. Some Mentawaians presumed that the peculiar deaths were a sign that the Sarubei kin group were not the actual owners of the contested land. Other people in Maileppet believed that the Sarubei had suffered the consequences of swearing an untruth on the Bible. Most Maileppet people concluded that the land absolutely belonged to the Samongilailai and wanted the conflict to end.

However, the Sarubei believed that the Samongilailai from Sipora had used magical formulas (*tae*) to harm some members of their group. They believed that the death of their relatives was not because of the consequences of swearing on the Bible, but because of the magical formulas used by the Samongilailai. However, the group could not prove their accusation towards the Samongilailai, nor could they prove their entitlement to the contested plot of land. According to public opinion in Maileppet, the Samongilailai were the winner of the case. However, the Sarubei kept rejecting the final resolution of the conflict.

### 10.3.5 Analysis of the land conflict in Maileppet

The conflict over land rights in Maileppet between the two kin groups is an intriguing case. The conflict was started by the fact that the first settler to occupy the place and land in Maileppet had allowed kin groups that came later to live on and use the land. Additionally, the first settler decided to merge with those other groups to create a new one. Consequently, the identity of the first group disappeared. This affected the maintenance (use) of the land, which was delegated from the initial kin group to the newly created merged group. However, ideally, the *ownership* of the land did not change, was not delegated to the new merged group. Decisions to sell the land could therefore not properly be made by the merged kin group. In reality, however, plots of land were sold by some of the individual kin groups that had merged.

The conflict over land rights in Maileppet became complicated when the government transformed the traditional settlement into a structured village. The new structured village required extensive land for the houses and gardens of its inhabitants. The government negotiated with members of a kin group that did not have ancestral rights to the land. The majority of members of the group were from other kin groups that did not have ancestral connections to the land. The initial landowners living on another island of Mentawai later realized that they were about to lose their ancestral land and so they asked the group to give the land back to them. Instead of responsibly responding to the request of the initial landowners, the merged group decided to split up, leaving the problem to the relatives of the initial landowners.

By means of family stories, related members of a kin group that had been separated eventually reunited. Their ancestors were the first Maileppet inhab-

itants. After being reunited, they decided to try to regain their rights to the land in Maileppet that had been sold to the government and to other local buyers. Another group in the village had claimed plots of land that were actually part of the ancestral land of the kin group descended from the first settler. Family stories of both groups and testimonies of other kin groups were stated, and different levels of meetings and various stakeholders became involved in order to resolve the case. However, the other group kept insisting on their rights to the land. In the end, most local people believed that the descendants of the first settler should have the ownership of the contested land. However, the other group kept denying the first settler's rights. What I may conclude is that the family stories of both groups indicate a connection to the disputed land. As each group does not acknowledge the validity of the other group's story, the dispute between them over land rights remains unresolved.

#### **10.4 Concluding remarks**

The current conflict over land in Saibi Muara illustrates an interesting traditional situation. The first settlers had claimed an extensive area of land after departing from Simatalu. They built a house near the river mouth and became the landowners of the valley of Saibi Samukop and the owners of the settlement in Saibi Muara. In principle, this eliminated the opportunity for other kin groups to have a direct entitlement to any land in this valley. But the initial kin group was small, and did not use all of the land.

The landowning kin group could not hinder the arrival of newcomers in the area because the land was extensive. New kin groups arriving in the valley freely exploited the land, but according to tradition they could not claim the land as owners. Nevertheless, some of those kin groups acquired plots of land by buying them from the owners or by receiving them as payment for a fine or bride-price. In this way, the newcomers had the opportunity to occupy and live in the area without worrying about being rejected by the landowners. However, in the course of early migrations, more and more kin groups arrived in the area. This provoked tensions among the residents of Saibi Muara because there was increasing competition for the opportunity to own a plot of land. The first owners of the land felt threatened. They attempted to eliminate one kin group by asking a kin group living in another village to undertake the assassination. However, this did not solve the problem. The landowners had to surrender a plot of land to the kin group of the victim. This opened a great opportunity for the victim's kin group to come live in the valley because they now owned a plot of land there.

The situation changed when the landowning kin group totally left the valley and handed over the maintenance of their land to another kin group that they regarded like relatives because of a marriage between the two kin groups.

However, this related kin group could not maintain the land after the death of the prominent member of the kin group. Another kin group took over the land. Later, they claimed they owned the land because they claimed their ancestors had bought it from the initial owners before the latter left the area.

However, this group died out due to an unknown illness. This left the land without a landlord. Other kin groups in the area attempted to gain rights to this land, and those living there eventually believed they owned rights to the land. A few generations passed until the moment arrived that relatives of the initial landowning kin group decided to try to regain rights to the land. However, they could not simply take over the land rights. They first had to prove a genealogical link existing between them and the initial kin group that had once owned the land. The way to prove this was by listening to family stories. However, the other kin group did not want to give up rights to the land. They impeded the attempts of the relatives of the initial landowners by denying the relatives' claims to be related to the kin group that first owned the land.

In the Maileppet case, several kin groups merged with the kin group of the first settlers to create a new kin group. Other kin groups that arrived in the valley later tried to claim some of the land. In examining this conflict, I see a situation where the landowners made efforts to reject their opponents' claims to their land.

At the meeting held to resolve the conflict, both kin groups encountered difficult arguments from their opponents. Nonetheless, the case was not resolved properly because the kin group who did not want to accept the truth of the other group's family story had stopped any efforts to resolve the case.

The land conflicts described in this chapter, which occurred in two different places on Siberut, reflect the functioning of family stories in defining the land-ownership of the various kin groups. By means of family stories, genealogical relationships between current kin groups can also be established.

In conflicts over land, one kin group made use of a family story to justify their connection to the disputed land. However, the family story is a weak indicator to sort out which group the land belongs to. A family story is an unwritten document, told by a group of people who believe they own the land. It conveys only that group's perspective, and the family story of one kin group does not always match the family stories of other kin groups. It turns out that a family story is not easy to use in resolving a conflict. So, the land conflicts described in this chapter not only concern the land but also family stories about land.

Moreover, I observed that a family story about land is perceived by kin groups as a historical account, as a source of information about past happenings. However, the family stories do not give enough detailed information about the land to be able to resolve conflicts. The stories lack demographic



data regarding the number of family members in the related kin groups that share the same ancestor. In the conflict, two disputing groups sat next to each other in the same building. They represented unknown numbers of relatives. If people fail to reach their aims by making use of family stories, it is not necessarily the failure of family stories in serving as sources of information. Sometimes people purposely reject the information told in family stories. As happened in the conflicts described in this chapter, one kin group sometimes denies the truth of information told in family stories of other kin groups and refuses to accept the situation of failing to gain its aims. By doing so, the group runs the risk of facing another challenge by the other group. In Mentawai, to deny the truth of a family story may result in the deaths of family members, unless the kin group sincerely believe that their family stories are undeniably true.

Land disputes do not always pertain directly to the land itself. Members of a kin group argue about their shares of the money earned from the selling of their ancestral land. Sometimes, the confrontation serves individual interests and sometimes it expresses the voice of the whole kin group. The worst result of a conflict is that the related families eventually decide to separate from each other.

# 11

## Conclusions

Three aspects of Mentawai culture and society have been discussed extensively in the preceding chapters: preservation and transmission of Mentawai oral tradition, especially family stories; early migratory movements of Mentawaiian ancestors and their inhabitation of different places as told in family stories; and traditional landownership and the resolution of current conflicts over land. These three themes are closely interrelated and they are all related to Mentawaians' memory of the past.

### 11.1 Oral tradition and stories of origin

Vansina states that 'without oral traditions we would know very little about the past of large parts of the world and we would not know them from the inside' (Vansina, 1985: 198). He also writes, 'oral tradition is so rich that one cannot study all its facets in single short study' (Vansina, 1985: 201). Responding to those words, I have attempted to understand the multifaced aspects of oral tradition by taking an opportunity to get familiar with a type of oral tradition, which is a group of Mentawai family stories. Family stories in Mentawai have never been evaluated beforehand.

To Mentawaians, their oral tradition explains how they came to belong to different kin groups, and it talks about other social matters pertaining to the different kin groups – the genealogical bonds existing among related kin groups, and the kin groups' ancestral lands. As told in family stories, ancestors of different Mentawai kin groups departed from different places of origin. According to the family stories, social conflicts sometimes occurred within a kin group or between two kin groups residing in the same valley.

In order to prove their connection to their ancestral land, current members of a kin group try to recollect what their ancestors have told them about neighbouring kin groups when their ancestors still lived in previous places, and to remember the descriptions of the natural surroundings of their ances-

tral lands. Since there is no written evidence of ancestral land claims, family stories are frequently used as evidence of a claim to a particular plot of land. In Mentawai, storytellers communicate their understanding of a past occurrence with particular gestures, facial expressions, and changes in tone of voice, indicating tension, anger, sadness or happiness. Mentawai storytellers express the feelings and thoughts of their ancestors as if they were the ancestors themselves. They vividly bring the perspective and thinking of their ancestors to their audience. Storytelling in Mentawai conveys the significance of the past to the present, comforting reassurance about the kin group's existence. Family stories not only provide a particularly rich source of knowledge, but also express a group's communal identity.

Regarding the content of their stories, Mentawaians have a category of mythical narratives telling about the origins of human beings, plants, earth, sun, stars, animals, and so on. Mythical stories about the origins of Mentawaians as an ethnic group are also part of this category. These mythical narratives are all called *pumumuan*. The stories are shared by all Mentawaians, and tell how the first Mentawaians occupied the Mentawai Islands. However, they do not tell us the factual places of origin of current Mentawaians. The mythical stories of origin just mention some places where the first people came from before populating the Mentawai Islands and which valleys in the Mentawai Islands they settled in.

The origin of Mentawaians is recounted not only in the mythical narratives called *pumumuan*. In addition, there is a category of narratives, which I call family stories. Each kin group has one or more stories of origin of their own kin group. The stories are part of their collection of family stories. Such stories can be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Some of the family stories belonging to individual kin groups also mention the origin of their more distant ancestors. Some kin groups share the same ancestral origin, referring to a particular valley where their ancestor commenced to live and where members of the current kin groups believe their ancestral lands to be located. The family stories comprise features of the kin groups.

## 11.2 Mentawai family stories

To Mentawaians, family stories are important historical accounts. In Chapter 8, I have described the characteristics of Mentawai family stories by examining several versions of three family stories. The differing versions remind us of the complexity and diversity of family stories in Mentawai.

In daily practice, a few crucial elements of family stories are often hidden from particular members of the kin group and from members of other kin groups. This is done in order to protect the family members of a kin group as

well as to protect particular secrets of the kin group from other kin groups' interest. However, this manner alters listeners' attitude towards a family story, as they do not get the complete information of the family story. Members of a kin group thus have different views of a family story. Some listeners are interested in specific conflicts in order to understand why their ancestors departed and split into different families and currently exist in different kin groups.

Others focus on location of plots of land as they view land currently as important for the economy. A few others regard the genealogical links existing among the related kin groups as the important point of the family story; the stories may help them find relatives living elsewhere on the Mentawai Islands. Several families want to become acquainted with cultural values told in the family stories because they can learn from them and make use of them as guidelines for social conduct. A storyteller may focus on a certain theme because of some current situation.

Elder members of a kin group transmit family stories to the younger generations. Several youngsters who have listened to the stories will some day take over the tasks of the older storytellers. Then it will be the youngsters' turn to tell the same stories to upcoming generations. Because of their ability in speaking and telling family stories, these individuals are frequently regarded with respect and admiration by other family members. Because of their talent and their position, a few individuals have a great opportunity to tell family stories. In Mentawai, skilled and talented storytellers also hold a special status in their kin group, being called *rimata* (ritual leader) or *sikebbukat uma* (elder of a kin group). This small number of people are the leading individuals in social and ritual events. Males are more often chosen to be storytellers of family stories than females.

In Mentawai, what storytellers tell about a past event reflects more than their personal interpretation of the event, it also reflects their understanding of the environmental surroundings. While the storytellers narrate an event, their detailed description of the place shows their familiarity and knowledge of the place. Storytellers' personal experience enriches their presentation and enhances their narrative. Mentawaian storytellers first mention the place name. Sometimes, they mention the names of individuals who found and claimed that place. And then, they describe the landscape of the place in order to communicate the quality and importance of the place.

The appearance of differing versions of a family story in Mentawai shows that storytellers differ in their aptitude for recollecting and recounting past events. The existence of different versions of a family story reflects the fact that storytellers' ability to recollect past events varies. Some storytellers have a good memory for remembering details of past events. Other storytellers only remember the general outline of a past event. Particular storytellers focus on telling the entire historical journey of their ancestors. They often remember lit-

tle more than place-names and destination of the migration. Storytellers with extensive knowledge and a good memory tell a longer story. They not only remember place-names and the direction of migration, but also know how their ancestors came to possess certain plots of land and what verbal agreements were made about them. Family stories function as a source of information that can be interpreted in different ways by storytellers and listeners. Members of a kin group consult their family stories to find the resolution of particular social problems as well as learning good social and cultural manners from the stories.

### 11.3 Family stories about ancestral migration

Mentawaian oral tradition – family stories – functions as evidence of reuniting and splitting up of kin groups living in different places after separating from each other. In the ancestral migration of Mentawaians as discussed in Chapter 9 and as told in the family stories presented in Part Two, two major things occurred during the early migratory movements: kin groups split up and kin groups claimed plots of land.

In the process of genealogical expansion, some families remained in the place of first settlement while others looked for other places to live. The families in the place of origin or first settlement sometimes created a new kin group. Meanwhile, the migrating families who had left for a new place rarely returned to the first place, especially if their decision to depart was instigated by a crucial or sensitive conflict like the humiliation of particular family members.

When migrating families decided to pursue different directions, they sometimes decided to split up again even though they had created a new kin group. Later, in new places, these families created new kin groups. As discussed in Chapter 9, genealogical and geographical or topographical expansions of Mentawaian kin groups are depicted as a process of family diffusion. The notions of topogeny and genealogy (Fox 1997) are both used in Mentawai family stories. Genealogy in Mentawai is not only an ordered succession of personal names but also an ordered succession of kin group names. Family stories report changes in kin group names. Family stories preserve such important information in structured words. As discussed by Fox (1979), to be a history, a narrative (or a family story) must establish a chronology (in the course of time) and a location (in place-names). Family stories reflect specific reflections of the past.

In the course of migration, kin groups found some plots of land. After claiming an area, a kin group sometimes divided into several families who all migrated to different destinations. At the new places, these families sometimes found empty (unclaimed) land. Today, many generations later, current mem-

bers of a kin group may be living in different places and have several plots of (communal) land located in widely separated places. Mentawaians give names to newly claimed places in order to maintain the kin group's identity and association with those places. Although related kin groups were separated from each other long ago, they often continue to remember who their ancestors and relatives are and where their relatives are currently living and what their kin group names are, as well as remembering where their ancestral lands are located. Information about such matters is currently captured in their family stories.

After living in several different places and passing through many generations, related kin groups sometimes find each other again and re-establish connections. We cannot easily recognize the genealogical link between related kin groups, because each kin group has its own name. The different kin group names do not indicate their ancestral connection. However, by listening to each kin group's family stories, we can figure out how one kin group relates to other kin groups. And sometimes a kin group has no ancestral connection to other kin groups.

#### **11.4 Family stories and social conflicts over land**

A comparison between the current size of the population of the Mentawai Islands and the availability of land indicates the islands are still sparsely populated and that land is still widely available. One might then conclude that current Mentawaians should not have any problem finding a plot of land to occupy. However, this is not the case, because every single plot of land on the islands already belongs to a kin group. The ancestors of the various kin groups claimed one plot of land after another in Mentawai ever since departing from their places of origin, until all the land on the islands had been claimed. Land-ownership is passed on through the family from one generation to the next. This all means that other people and kin groups who have arrived more recently in Mentawai have very limited access to acquiring a plot of land.

Land means much more to the Mentawai community than common cultivable ground where they can open gardens and plant valuable trees and crops. As described in Chapter 3, in traditional land tenure in Mentawai, land means the life of the kin group. Most of the time, land is owned collectively by all male members of a kin group. Some kin groups own extensive land while others possess only a few small plots, just enough for a homestead.

Family stories not only provide kin groups with the necessary information for resolving social conflicts, but also precisely define the family relationships existing among related kin groups and their rights to particular plots of land. There are cases of kin groups who are related ancestrally, as they are descended from the same ancestral family, but who nevertheless do not share the same

ancestral land because the ancestor who originally found and claimed the land is not the ancestor who has a direct genealogical connection to the other relatives. Only direct descendants of the ancestor have a clear entitlement to such plots of land. Other relatives may use the land, while recognizing that the land actually belongs to the relatives who are descended from the ancestor who first claimed the land. These matters can be clearly arranged without conflict as long as all the kin groups correctly remember the family stories of their ancestral land and their ancestral connections.

Traditionally, male members of a kin group, especially those who are married, have equal rights in the ownership of their kin group's ancestral land. Male members are responsible for upholding their kin group's identity and maintaining their kin group's inheritance, in such a way that the inheritance can be completely passed on to the next generation. Mentawaians do not entitle female members to own rights to ancestral lands. Nevertheless, female members are fully allowed to take advantage of these lands by freely exploiting them, planting and harvesting crops on them.

After several generations, social transactions remain in Mentawaians' memories. However, human memory can be deficient in preserving all significant details of past occurrences. This is a major factor in conflicts over land. This is caused by what Carsten (1995: 318, 329-330) and Geertz and Geertz (1964) mean by the word 'amnesia'. 'Amnesia' refers to the phenomenon of crucial information fading in people's memory. People can forget important things and in Mentawai this sometimes happens naturally and sometimes happens politically. People's memory cannot retain all details of past occurrences. For example, the precise location of far-away plots of land and their boundaries are often incompletely recollected. The group currently using the land (while not owning the land) frequently claims ownership of the land or claims exaggerated boundaries for their land. Halbwachs (1992) has noted that the forgetting or deformation of certain recollections is explained by the fact that the frameworks of memory change from one period to another in order to meet the different needs of communities.

Although imperfect human memory may result in incomplete recollection of the past, family stories became an important medium for preserving knowledge of significant matters of the past. The important task of maintaining the stories is delegated to particular individuals, usually those who have proven abilities in telling stories and who have experience, talent and knowledge. Prominent storytellers have to tell correctly about the land and the migration of their ancestors. I therefore agree with Steedly (1993: 239) that, 'Stories are not simply products of individual imagination; nor are they transparent reports of "what happened" to a certain person at a certain time and place. They exist within socially constituted patterns of domination and subdomination, and within culturally defined patterns of meaning.'



The comprehensive knowledge of storytellers from a kin group involved in a social conflict over land will be a great advantage for their kin group in defending their ancestral land from being reclaimed by other kin groups. The memory of knowledgeable storytellers plays noteworthy roles in preserving these important historical accounts. The way Mentawaians maintain their ancient traditions, memories of their ancestors, and their families' past experiences are a systematic attempt to remember features, contents, forms, meanings, and purposes of family events. Family stories are actually the verbal form that expresses a Mentawai kin group's identity. To Mentawaians, family stories are a source of inspiration in coping with current circumstances.

## 11.5 Role of family stories in conflicts over land

In current conflicts over land rights affecting Mentawaian kin groups, family stories and people's memory of the past play an important role. I have presented and discussed two cases in Chapter 10 to examine the role of family stories in resolving conflicts over land. These two cases illustrate the situation where family stories provide kin groups involved in disputes with the necessary information for understanding their conflict and finding possible resolutions of the conflict.

In the case of conflict over land in Saibi Muara, family stories make it possible for the descendants of the initial landowners to claim particular plots of land in Saibi Muara, and reject the attempt of other kin groups that tried to claim the land after the initial owners left it unattended. Because the latter kin groups do not have a complete story supporting their claim to land in Saibi Muara, they had to give up their claim to the land. So, family stories clearly are important accounts for distinguishing Mentawaian kin groups from each other and for establishing who may or may not have rights to particular plots of land.

In a conflict, a kin group needs prominent storytellers who can accurately remember detailed information about the group's land claims and ancestors. I observed that the majority of storytellers are able to recollect eight to twelve generations of ancestors' names, along with the names of several places that their ancestors passed through during migration.

In a land conflict, if a storyteller can tell a set of family stories pertaining to the contested land convincingly and in great detail, it helps his kin group defend their rights to the land. Usually, an individual or two of the group are appointed to represent the rest of group members in order to negotiate the dispute that the group is dealing with. That individual is not necessarily the oldest member of the group. A person considered to have talent and charisma to debate and respond to any questions from the other group is usually an appropriate person to represent the rest of his relatives. The person has to speak

forcefully, expressively, and persuasively in public. The person should have experience dealing with an opposing group. Sometimes the opponents try to put the other group in the corner in the meeting by asking difficult questions. The group representative does not stand alone in the face of these questions. He can ask other members of his group to give necessary support during the meeting. The family stories told in the course of resolving the current land conflicts are thus highly politicized in order to suit the interests of each group involved in the conflict. Different kin groups, different personal names, different place-names and a series of events involved in the conflict make these cases complex in Mentawai. Regarding the politicizing of storytelling, I therefore agree with Ernst (1999: 88) saying that a (family) story can be messy, contested, and full of ambiguities.

During the process of resolving a conflict, an external party, consisting of one or more individuals from other kin groups, mediates between two opposing groups. This person or group is called *sipatalaga* (mediator). They guide the process of resolving the conflict and judge all the accounts presented during the meeting. The head of the village or other official authorities can also take on the role of *sipatalaga*. They have traditional knowledge of dealing with social conflicts. They are acquainted enough with the case and what is more important, they are accepted by both opposing groups to mediate the conflict. The *sipatalaga* deals not only with members of the two opposing groups but also with storytellers with a great knowledge of their kin groups' history. The two storytellers are chosen to represent their respective kin groups in order to win the dispute. To wisely deal with these people is an essential task of the *sipatalaga*.

The third party does not declare which group is the winner of the case. They evaluate all the evidence and information and then return to the opposing groups with a recommendation and ask those groups themselves to discuss and decide which kin group is the winner. If the two opposing groups accept the recommendation of the third party, the case is closed, but if one of the groups keeps denying the truth of the stories, they look for another way to resolve the problem. Most of the time, if the groups cannot agree, they undergo a particular truth-finding ritual called *tippu sasa* as a final attempt to resolve the conflict.

In this last resort for resolving a conflict, even if the groups decide to carry out this ritual, it does not guarantee that the group will be able to end the conflict. In the end, it depends on the people themselves whether they accept or deny the information presented in the meeting. In one of the cases I studied, the groups never came to agreement about their competing claims to land.

I conclude that family stories about land are indeed useful in establishing which plots of land a kin group owns and which kin groups share rights to ancestral land.

## 11.6 Family stories and Mentawaians' memory

Oral tradition and people's memory of the past play an indispensable role in contemporary Mentawai society in dealing with questions about place of origin, the notion of belonging, and discourse about land and land rights. Mentawaians view a family story as a source of information about crucial elements of their tradition and about features of their identity. Mentawaians consult their family stories for guidance about good social and cultural manners. They take care of their family stories just as other societies value written accounts. Mentawai family stories serve as historical accounts, and comprise important social agreements as well as important conversations and noteworthy events in their ancestors' lives.

While telling their stories, Mentawai storytellers reproduce ordinary conversations, which they believe to be the words of their ancestors. Sometimes, they illustrate how their ancestors acted while accomplishing the particular actions like killing their opponents in a headhunting raid. For example, they repeat and imitate the performances of their ancestors and they retell their ancestors' words. In that sense, Mentawai oral tradition fits the concepts of the verbal formulations, performances and events described by Bauman (1986).

One circumstance where memories of the past are particularly relevant is in conflicts. A conflict reminds people of events that happened in the past. Storytellers are called in. A storyteller remembers place-names, ancestors' names, cultural objects, borders of ancestral land, their ancestors' migratory movements, and the crucial issues and reasons for past family conflicts. By means of stories, Mentawaians turn to past events and learn something from them in order to effectively cope with their current situation.

However, the recollection of the content of a family story is not always systematic and consistent. Sometimes, a storyteller can only remember the names of his great-grandparents. Another storyteller of the same kin group may recollect seven to ten generations of ancestors. 'There are people in many communities across the world who can recite a genealogy or their ancestors back ten generations or more, and yet others who can barely remember their grandparents. This is not because they have a good or bad memory' (Tonkin 1992: 110). However, in my experience, a storyteller's recollection of past events may not be complete if we look only at what the storyteller immediately remembers when a researcher asks about historical matters. The storyteller's recollection of the past becomes more structured and more complete if he is given more time to recollect what he has been told.

Mentawaians preserve their historical occurrences by repeatedly telling their stories to younger generations in order to be able to use them when needed in the future. Bruner (1986a: 18) argues that stories serve as meaning-generating interpretative devices which frame the present within a hypothetical

past and an anticipated future. However, Mentawaians not only verbalize past happenings in storytelling, but also live with them in their daily activities. For example, when hunting in the forest, an older hunter may remind the younger ones that this is ancestral land of their kin group, and tell stories connected to that land. As Tonkin says, 'To tell history is to act, but in a verbal mode' (Tonkin, 1992: 11). Nonetheless, I agree with Confino who writes 'Not everything is a memory in the same way' (Confino, 1997: 1387-8), because people live their lives through historical occurrences and a variety of current realities.

In opposition to remembering, forgetting also plays an important role in Mentawai oral tradition. Mentawaians sometimes hide particular events from other people. In this way, the events may be forgotten. It may happen unintentionally if a storyteller does not completely tell how an event occurred. An example is information about a headhunting raid or an interfamily assault. Mentawaians do not often talk about assaults and headhunting raids that their kin group has carried out towards other kin groups (Schefold, 2007). By hiding details of the event, the elders are trying to protect the rest of the family from being hunted by the kin groups that were the victims of these raids. As long as the victimized kin group is not aware of the identity of those who carried out a raid or assault, they will not know who to take revenge on and the descendants of the kin group who carried out the raid will be safe. But if this information becomes known, then there is the chance that revenge will be taken. So storytellers may omit details of raids and assaults carried out by their ancestors. As children hear only part of the details of the event, they may not know how to defend themselves when descendants of the victims come to take revenge.

Mentawaians thus do not want to remember particular events if they think these events could have bad consequences for their family members. This is frequently the case with the recollection of shameful actions or vicious headhunting raids. Another category of information that is often forgotten is information about ancestors who are not related directly. Current generations of kin groups remember ancestors from whom they are directly descended. But they often forget details about ancestors who separated from the original kin group and created new kin groups for themselves. Even some ancestors in the line of direct descent may be forgotten: Mentawaians frequently declared to me that they do not know the name of the father of their prominent ancestor. Some ancestors are forgotten because they did not make any significant contribution to the group. In short, Mentawaians recollect the names of their ancestors irregularly.

Notions of forgetting and remembering discussed by Janet Carsten (1995) and Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn (1989) resemble the cases I have come across in Mentawai. Mentawai kin groups deliberately preserve the memory of a significant number of elements of the past because these el-

ements are important to them. And they simply forget other elements that are insignificant to them. Present landowners do not forget details about their land because the land is their life, their identity and their inheritance from their ancestors. Forgetting and remembering is closely related to social and political intentions. So, to remember or to forget particular historical events has to do with a kin group's political survival strategy.

In short, what do family stories mean for Mentawaians? A group of family stories is one of the elements forming the identity of a kin group. Other elements are plots of ancestral land and genealogical ties that the kin group shares with other kin groups. Storytellers make an effort to remember details of family stories and the different events that comprise the stories. Contents of family stories explain a lot of things, like ancestors of contemporary Mentawai kin groups, their places of origins, and past family conflicts. Family stories also describe the migratory movements of those ancestors, as they commenced to move out from different places of origin to current settlements.

Moreover, family stories tell about plots of land located in the homeland as well as other places the ancestors claimed during migratory movements. They tell about the splitting up of the kin group into new kin groups in separate locations, as the families migrated and expanded genealogically from a few initial families to tens of kin groups currently. Family stories furthermore reveal the relationship of related families. Family stories tell the locations as well as the way a kin group acquired possession of particular plots of land. Family stories also clarify why two similar kin groups do not necessarily share the same ancestral family. Themes of the stories differ from one kin group to another, because kin groups experienced dissimilar past events and they may have had different origins and destinations of migration. Family stories contain dissimilar elements and thus serve to distinguish one kin group from the other.

Mentawaians' conflicts over land exemplify a situation where family stories reveal people's relationship with their dwelling-places, natural surroundings, ancestors, and past events. Family stories also signify how far people are able to recollect their memory of past events. Mentawaians consider family stories and other verbal arts as an essential and major form of culture as well as a source of information about historical occurrences. They maintain their verbal culture by telling their family stories properly. Mentawaians carefully transmit their verbal culture to the next family generation.

Finally, Mentawai family stories represent the high potential of human consciousness. Family stories in Mentawai reflect contemporary people's memory of the past as well as their political need when faced with the current changes in Mentawai to be able to decide which of the kin groups share genealogical bonds and ancestral land. Mentawai kin groups greatly appreciate their family stories as a key element of their identity.



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## Summary

This is a study of oral tradition. In this study, I draw attention to family stories related to historical events and social issues of contemporary Mentawai kin groups. I give descriptive answers for the central research question of how and to what extent oral narratives are involved in dealing with current issues about place of origin, the notion of identity, and discourses about land and land rights in Mentawai society.

During fieldwork, I collected family stories telling about the lives of ancestors of contemporary Mentawaians, including their geographical and genealogical expansion. The family stories also tell about the origins of those ancestors. During archival study at libraries in the Netherlands and Indonesia, I also focused on stories of origin. In Chapter 4, I look at stories of origin describing different places where the various family groups first settled in the Mentawai Islands. The current owners of the family stories indicate the first location of their earliest kin as their own place of origin. That place is also presumed to be the location of their ancestral land.

According to these family stories, starting from the different places of origin, the ancestors of current Mentawai kin groups began to expand to other places in the Mentawai Islands. The stories presented in Chapters 5 (the mango story or *sipeu*), 6 (the pig story or *sakkokok*), and 7 (the wild boar story or *siberi*) in this book were recorded from kin groups living in several different villages of the Mentawai Islands. These family stories exemplify three different aspects of traditional Mentawai culture. The mango story (*sipeu*) belongs to several kin groups. The kin groups proclaim to have no family connections to each other. In the various versions of the mango story as presented in Chapter 5, each version places the blame on a different individual for having caused the mango incident. Due to this incident, the ancestors migrated to other places in Mentawai. Differences in the versions of the mango story as told by the different kin groups signify the separation of the kin groups, even though the groups all claim to have started from the same origin, the valley of Simatalu.

A second story, described in Chapter 6, is the story about a dispute about a pig (*sakkoko*) between two kin groups. This story is also known by several different, genealogically connected kin groups who were initially settled in the valley of Simatalu. Due to the dispute about the pig somebody was murdered, whereafter one of the rivalry kin groups left the valley, fell apart in various smaller kin groups and were scattered all over the island of Siberut and later also spread to the southern Mentawai islands. All versions of the family story about the pig dispute point at the same ancestor as the instigator of the fight, but after the kin group that left the valley became dispersed the family stories

also start to show significant differences. This is certainly due to the fact that the different sub groups migrated in different directions and to different islands, claiming places that have not been occupied before.

The last story is about the wild boar (*siberi*). It originally belonged to one initial kin group. The versions of the wild boar story discussed in Chapter 7 were recorded from kin groups whose ancestral family initially lived in the valley of Simatalu. The wild boar story tells of the older kin member's failure hunting wild boar in the forest. The old man did not succeed in catching and bringing home any wild boars although he had found several wild boars lying unconscious under a tree in the forest. Female members continuously humiliated the man by laughing and singing, over and over again reminding him of his failure. When the man can no longer bare the humiliations he and his nuclear family leave the kin group and start their wanderings all over the island of Siberut. The old man eventually dies in Taileleu. His offspring has continued to migrate until they eventually ended up in the places where they still live today.

Of course, the initial kin groups do not migrate all at the same time. Some sub groups left earlier than others did. Especially during these earlier migratory movements, the ancestral groups claimed the places they occupied for longer or shorter periods of time as theirs. Because of these migratory movements, the various kin groups were after a certain amount of time, able to claim various plots of land, sometimes at rather long distance from each other, as their property. Today, only some of these plots of land are still occupied and lived on by their initial owners. Much of the land the Mentawai Archipelago is nowadays occupied and used by kin groups who migrated at a later stage in history. However, all plots of land, even those not directly occupied or used, are still considered the property of the initial settlers. Due to the various migratory movements the different subgroups regularly came into contact with each other again, causing not only hostilities but sometimes also new alliances as a result of which new kin groups were sometimes created.

In order to preserve information about family matters, Mentawaians keep telling their family stories through generations. By doing so, the significance of family stories is ensured to reach the current generation. A limited number of family members are seen as the storytellers of a kin group. The rest of the family members are seen as listeners. For them, the purpose of listening to the storytellers is mainly in order to be acquainted with the past events described in the stories. However, they are not responsible for telling the family stories to the next generation of storytellers. This is the task of the storytellers themselves. Storytellers have ample knowledge of their family stories and they know what to tell and what to hide, on a given occasion, while keeping in mind what the essential interests of their kin group are.

As discussed in Chapter 7, a family story in Mentawai has a number of features characterizing it as a separate genre within the Mentawaiian oral tra-

dition. Mentawaians take care of their family stories better than other kinds of oral narratives. Mentawaians regard their family stories as different from myths and legends, which also exist. Family stories are sources of information about past occurrences. Family stories serve as historical accounts, because Mentawaians do not have a written tradition. They rely on family stories for defining their rights to particular communal heritages (especially land) and for distinguishing relationships among related kin groups that became separated from each other long ago.

In Chapter 9, I examine two essential matters transmitted through the family stories; the geographical and genealogical expansion of Mentawaian kin groups and their claims to ancestral land. Several places mentioned in the family stories are used to chart the course of migration and the separation of the initial families into several kin groups.

As explained in Chapter 10, family stories are still frequently used in gatherings where conflictious claims with regard to certain plots of ancestral land are about to be solved. Such conflicts primarily emerge when two or more different kin groups claim rights to the same plot of land. In order to determine which of the kin groups is the rightful owner of the land involved, their storytellers should present their family story as convincingly as possible. In a number of cases, the information distilled from the family stories can indeed be used to indicate the rightful owner to the land. In other cases, sometimes even despite the information in the family stories is enough to indicate the rightful owner, the problem remains unsolved after which the different kin groups often remain in conflict with each other for a long time.

In the concluding chapter, I focus on the role played by family stories in resolving social conflicts among kin groups in Mentawai. The power of human memory plays an important part in maintaining and transmitting the significance of past events. As a historical account, a family story must be properly preserved by its owners by carefully transmitting the content and significance of the story to following generations. For particular reasons, like clarifying the relationship of kin groups that were separated long ago, a family story cannot be simply changed and manipulated by its owners because it is an important identity marker of the kin group.

The Mentawaian family stories carry various features that distinguish them from other forms of oral narratives. A family story tells the history of a certain family group according to historical events and the strategic use of place names. In this sense the family stories are an important meaning according to which certain claims with regard to ancestral land can be justified. Simultaneously the family stories are an important source of information with regard to identity, thus forming a verbal reflection of the kin groups' identity. In the field of oral tradition, family stories can thus be regarded as a specific genre of oral narratives. When studying oral narratives it is, in my opinion, important

to pay special attention to family stories. Not in the last place so, because the communities still using family stories frequently consider them indispensable.

## Samenvatting

Deze studie handelt over orale traditie. In deze studie, besteed ik aandacht aan Mentawaaise familie verhalen gerelateerd aan bepaalde historische gebeurtenissen en sociale vraagstukken. Door middel van beschrijving en analyse van een aantal van deze familie verhalen zal ik antwoord geven op de centrale onderzoeksvraag die ten grondslag ligt aan deze studie: Hoe en op welke manier zijn de Mentawaaise familie verhalen betrokken bij hedendaagse vraagstukken met betrekking tot plaats van herkomst, identiteit en onderhandelingen rondom land en landrechten.

Tijdens het veldwerk heb ik tientallen familie verhalen van verschillende Mentawaaise familie groepen, handelend over de origine en de genealogische en geografische expansie van hun voorouders, verzameld. Middels een literatuurstudie in bibliotheken in Nederland en Indonesië heb ik mij zorgvuldig ingelezen op orale tradities met betrekking tot origine. In hoofdstuk 4 kijk ik naar familie verhalen die beschrijven hoe en waar verschillende familie groepen zich op de Mentawai eilanden vestigden. Veelal is het zo dat de 'eigenaren' van deze familie verhalen deze eerste vestigingsplaats van hun voorouders ook erkennen als hun eigen plaats van origine, terwijl de grond rondom deze locaties wordt beschouwd als voorouderlijk domein en dus als eigendom.

De Mentawaaise familie verhalen vertellen niet alleen over plaats van origine, maar ook over hoe de verschillende voorouder groepen zich over de Mentawai eilanden begonnen te verspreiden. De verhalen die ik presenter in de hoofdstukken 5, 6 en 7 zijn afkomstig van familie groepen die vandaag de dag leven, verspreid over meerdere dorpen op de Mentawai eilanden. Deze familie verhalen presenteren drie verschillende aspecten van de traditionele Mentawaaise cultuur. Een van deze verhalen is het zogenaamde 'verhaal van de mango' (*sipeu*). Verschillende familie groepen kennen dit verhaal. Hoofdstuk 5 presenteert de verschillende versies van dit verhaal waardoor duidelijk wordt dat de verschillende familie groepen een ander idee hebben over wie verantwoordelijk gehouden zou moeten worden voor het 'mango-incident' dat en-passant beschreven zal worden. Als gevolg van dit incident viel de voorouder groep uiteen en migreerde naar verschillende regio's op de Mentawai eilanden. Feit blijft dat alle hedendaagse familie groepen die dit verhaal 'bezitten' de Simatalu vallei nog steeds claimen als hun plaats van origine en voorouderlijk domein.

Een tweede verhaal, dat ik beschrijf in hoofdstuk 6, is dat over een dispuut tussen twee familie groepen over een varken (*sakkoko*). Ook dit verhaal is in handen van verschillende, genealogisch verwante groepen die zich aanvankelijk tezamen hadden gevestigd in de Simatalu vallei. Naar aanleiding

van de ruzie over het varken vond er een moord plaats waarna een van de rivaliserende familiegroepen de Simatalu vallei verliet, in verschillende subgroepen uiteen viel en zich verder over het eiland Siberut en later ook over de zuidelijke Mentawai eilanden verspreidde. Voor dit familieverhaal rondom het 'varkensdispuut' geldt dat alle verhalen dezelfde voorouder aanwijzen als de veroorzaker van de ruzie, maar dat de verhalen na de separatie duidelijk verschillend zijn. Dit hangt zeker samen met het feit dat de verschillende subgroepen migreerden in verschillende richtingen en zo nieuwe, nog niet eerder geclaimde grond, aan hun bezit konden toevoegen.

Het laatste verhaal handelt over een wild zwijn (*siberi*). Ook dit verhaal behoorde oorspronkelijk tot een familiegroep afkomstig uit de Simatalu vallei. De verschillende versies van het verhaal die ik in hoofdstuk 7 heb opgetekend zijn dus ook afkomstig van hedendaagse familiegroepen wiens voorouders afkomstig zijn uit Simatalu. Het verhaal over het wilde zwijn vertelt over de onsuccesvolle jacht van de clanoudste. Ondanks dat de wilde zwijnen bewusteloos liggen onder een boom slaagt de man er niet in om een van de zwijnen mee naar huis te brengen. Bij thuiskomst tracht hij zijn falen te verbloemen, maar hij wordt herhaaldelijk en aanhoudend bespot door enkele vrouwelijke leden van de clan. Als hij deze kleineringen niet langer kan verdragen verlaat hij met zijn gezin de clan en start zijn omzwervingen over het eiland Siberut. Uiteindelijk komt hij te overlijden in Taileleu. Zijn nakomelingen zijn blijven migreren totdat zij uiteindelijk terecht kwamen op de plaatsen waar zij vandaag de dag nog wonen.

De oorspronkelijke familiegroepen migreerden uiteraard niet allen gelijktijdig. Sommige subgroepen vertrokken eerder dan anderen. Juist gedurende deze vroege migratiebewegingen claimden deze vooroudergroepen de grond waarop ze zich voor langere of korte tijd vestigden. Juist door de migratiebewegingen waren de verschillende groepen na verloop van tijd in staat om verschillende stukken land, soms op aanzienlijke afstand van elkaar, als hun eigendom te claimen. Vandaag de dag worden nog slechts enkele stukken grond door deze initiële eigenaars bewoont en bewerkt. Veel land wordt tegenwoordig bewoont en gebruikt door familiegroepen die in een later stadium begonnen te migreren. Echter, al het land, ook dat wat niet bewoont of bewerkt wordt, wordt nog steeds als het eigendom beschouwd van de eerste settlers. Door de vele migratiebewegingen kwamen de verschillende subgroepen ook weer regelmatig met elkaar in contact waardoor soms vijandigheden ontstonden, maar waardoor soms ook weer nieuwe groepen werden gevormd.

Om informatie met betrekking tot familiezaken te preserven dragen de Mentawaiers hun familieverhalen over van de ene generatie op de volgende generatie. Op deze manier zijn vele van deze verhalen goed bewaard gebleven en worden nog zeer intensief gebruikt door de huidige bevolking van de Mentawai eilanden. Slechts een klein aantal leden van een clan worden gezien als

de verhalenvertellers van de clan. De overige leden van de clan zijn toevoerders en, anders dan de verhalenvertellers, worden zij niet verantwoordelijk gehouden voor het overdragen van de familieverhalen op de volgende generatie. De verhalenvertellers hebben gedegen kennis van de familiegeschiedenis en zij weten precies welke informatie zij bij bepaalde gelegenheden wel en niet openbaar maken. Zij verliezen het belang van de clan in zijn algemeenheid daarbij nooit uit het oog.

Zoals besproken in hoofdstuk 8, bezitten de Mentawaaise familieverhalen een aantal karakteristieken waardoor zij een speciaal genre vormen binnen de Mentawaaise orale traditie. Van alle orale overdragingen gaan de Mentawaiers het meest zorgvuldig om met hun familieverhalen. De familieverhalen hebben een duidelijk andere positie binnen de orale traditie van de Mentawaiers dan de mythen en de legendes die ook thuishoren in de Mentawaaise orale traditie. Omdat de Mentawaiers geen geschreven traditie kennen, functioneren de familieverhalen niet alleen als geschiedkundig overzicht, maar dienen zij ook om bepaalde specifieke gebeurtenissen uit het verleden te duiden. Tevens zijn de Mentawaiers afhankelijk van hun familieverhalen voor het definiëren van hun gemeenschappelijke eigendomsrechten (voornamelijk met betrekking tot land) en het vaststellen van relaties tussen van elkaar verwijderde, maar in het verleden aan elkaar verwante familiegroepen.

In hoofdstuk 9 onderzoek ik twee essentiële zaken die door middel van de familieverhalen worden overgedragen; de geografische en genealogische expansie van de Mentawaaise familiegroepen en hun claims ten aanzien van voorouderlijke grond. Het zijn vooral de plaatsnamen die in de familieverhalen worden gebruikt die de leidraad vormen voor het achterhalen van de migratiestromen en het opsplitsen van de oorspronkelijke familiegroepen in meerdere kleinere groepen verwanten.

Zoals uitgelegd in hoofdstuk 10 worden familieverhalen nog steeds veelvuldig gebruikt in bijeenkomsten waar strijdige claims ten aanzien van voorouderlijke grond opgelost dienen te worden. Dergelijke conflicten ontstaan vooral wanneer twee verschillende groepen verwanten rechten claimen over hetzelfde stuk grond. Om te bepalen welke van de twee rivaliserende groepen nu de rechtmatige eigenaar is van het betreffende stuk grond, dienen beide groepen hun familieverhalen zo overtuigend mogelijk te vertellen. In een aantal gevallen kan de informatie in de familieverhalen inderdaad gebruikt worden om de rechtmatige eigenaar van de grond vast te stellen. In andere gevallen kan het probleem, ondanks dat de informatie in de familieverhalen soms wel voldoende is, niet worden opgelost, waarna de groepen vaak nog lang met elkaar in conflict blijven.

In het afsluitende hoofdstuk, focus ik op de rol die familieverhalen spelen bij het oplossen van sociale conflicten. Het menselijk vermogen zich bepaalde gebeurtenissen uit het verleden te herinneren speelt een belangrijke rol in het bewaren en overdragen van deze gebeurtenissen. De familieverhalen



en de daarin gebruikte historische gebeurtenissen dienen door hun eigenaren zo zorgvuldig en feitelijk mogelijk te worden overgedragen aan de volgende generaties. Dit is vooral belangrijk bij het identificeren van verschillende familiegroepen die middels de familieverhalen terug te traceren zijn tot een gemeenschappelijke vooroudergroep. Met dergelijke informatie kan en mag niet lichtzinnig worden omgesprongen omdat deze belangrijke identiteitskenmerken vormen voor de betrokken groep.

De Mentawaaise familieverhalen beschikken over verscheidene kenmerken die hen duidelijk doen verschillen van andere vormen van orale vertellingen. Een familieverhaal vertelt aan de hand van geschiedkundige gebeurtenissen en het strategisch gebruik van plaatsnamen de geschiedenis van een bepaalde familiegroep. Zo vormen de familieverhalen een belangrijk middel aan de hand waarvan bepaalde claims (met name die ten aanzien van voorouderlijke grond) kunnen worden gerechtvaardigd. Tevens zijn de familieverhalen een zeer belangrijke bron van informatie rondom vraagstukken met betrekking tot identiteit. Zo vormen de familieverhalen een verbale afspiegeling van de identiteit van de clan. In het veld van orale traditie kunnen familieverhalen dus worden gezien als een specifiek genre orale vertellingen. Het is naar mijn mening belangrijk om bij het bestuderen van orale vertellingen speciale aandacht te besteden aan familieverhalen, juist omdat zij door de gemeenschappen die de familieverhalen nog veelvuldig gebruiken, als onmisbaar worden beschouwd.

## Ringkasan

Tradisi lisan adalah sebuah kajian yang memiliki cakupan yang luas dan dipraktekkan oleh berbagai masyarakat di dunia. Tradisi lisan menjadi perhatian utama dalam buku ini. Untuk mendalami lebih baik dan terarah, saya memusatkan perhatian pada tradisi lisan yang hidup dan berkembang pada masyarakat dan kebudayaan Mentawai di Indonesia. Masyarakat Mentawai memanfaatkan tradisi lisan sebagai sumber informasi yang dapat menjelaskan beberapa persoalan yang muncul di dalam kehidupan mereka sehari-hari. Lebih khusus, tradisi lisan yang dimaksud adalah kumpulan dari cerita-cerita keluarga yang dimiliki oleh kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan pada masa ini di Mentawai. Cerita-cerita itu mengisahkan tentang sejarah perkembangan keluarga atau kelompok kekerabatan masyarakat Mentawai. Oleh karena itu, saya menyebutnya sebagai cerita keluarga (*family story*).

Dalam penelitian ini, saya menjawab pertanyaan utama: Bagaimana dan dalam hal apa cerita-cerita keluarga dipergunakan oleh kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan untuk menyelesaikan persoalan-persoalan yang mereka hadapi dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Lebih khusus penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tentang asal usul, gagasan tentang kedirian (jati diri), dan perdebatan yang terjadi diantara kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan yang menyangkut kepemilikan tanah ulayat atau tanah leluhur di Mentawai.

Selama penyelidikan kepustakaan di beberapa universitas di Belanda dan di Indonesia, saya memusatkan perhatian pada koleksi cerita-cerita tentang asal usul dan kisah-kisah kekerabatan dari masyarakat Mentawai. Menyangkut tentang asal usul orang Mentawai yang pertama, saya mengalisis cerita-cerita tentang asal usul dari orang-orang yang dipandang oleh orang-orang Mentawai kisah tentang orang-orang Mentawai yang pertama yang menghuni kepulauan Mentawai. Penjelasan tentang orang-orang pertama di Mentawai ini, saya ulas pada Bab 4, mengisahkan bahwa ada beberapa tempat pemukiman awal yang dihuni oleh orang-orang pertama di Mentawai. Daerah-daerah pemukiman itu juga diyakini oleh beberapa kelompok kekerabatan saat ini sebagai daerah-daerah dimana lokasi dari tanah leluhur mereka berada dan darimana leluhur mereka mulanya mulai berkembang dan menyebar ke daerah-daerah lain di kepulauan Mentawai.

Menurut kisah-kisah tentang kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan di Mentawai tersebut, para leluhur dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan itu bermigrasi dari pemukiman awal mereka karena disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor. Keinginan untuk mencari lokasi pemukiman baru, karena lokasi lama kurang memberi keuntungan dan kemakmuran, atau karena digugah untuk menjadi orang pertama menduduki sebuah tempat baru adalah beberapa faktor pen-

dorong untuk meninggalkan daerah pemukiman yang lama. Selain itu, sengketa yang melibatkan dua atau lebih kelompok kekerabatan dalam sebuah lembah atau pertikaian yang terjadi dalam kelompok kekerabatan itu sendiri menyebabkan anggota kekerabatan itu memutuskan untuk berpisah satu dengan yang lain. Sebuah keluarga dapat memutuskan untuk mencari tempat pemukiman baru jauh dari pemukiman semula, meninggalkan anggota kerabat mereka yang lain yang tetap berdiam di pemukiman semula. Secara bertahap mereka menjelajahi tempat-tempat baru. Mulanya mereka menjelajahi wilayah di sekitar pemukiman awal mereka. Lalu mereka pergi lebih jauh dengan menelusuri sungai-sungai, lembah-lembah dan perbukitan. Akhirnya, mereka tidak kembali lagi ke tempat asal mereka. Penyebaran mereka itu terjadi dalam wilayah Kepulauan Mentawai.

Proses migrasi itu digambarkan dalam tiga kisah penyebaran kelompok kekerabatan yang berbeda. Ketiga kisah yang dipilih tersebut dibeberkan di dalam tiga bab yang berbeda dalam buku ini yakni dalam Bab 5, 6, dan 7. Ketiga jenis cerita itu direkam dari beberapa kelompok kekerabatan yang tinggal di permukiman-pemukiman yang terpisah satu dengan yang lain di Kepulauan Mentawai. Cerita-cerita keluarga yang dibahas dalam buku ini memberikan tiga contoh yang menggambarkan tiga situasi tradisional yang berbeda di Mentawai.

Salah satu cerita adalah cerita tentang sengketa buah mangga (*sipeu*). Semua kelompok kekerabatan yang bermigrasi karena sengketa buah mangga ini terjadi di lembah yang sama yakni di Simatalu. Cerita keluarga ini yang disajikan dalam Bab 5 adalah milik beberapa kelompok kekerabatan yang tidak memiliki hubungan keturunan atau mereka tidak dapat mengenali kembali apakah mereka memiliki ikatan kekeluargaan satu dengan yang lain. Namun demikian, kisah-kisah yang mereka tuturkan menggambarkan kejadian yang serupa. Kemiripan dari kisah-kisah itu terlihat pada penjelasan tentang konflik yang menjadi penyebab perpisahan dalam kelompok kekerabatan. Konflik antara kakak dan adik atau ibu mertua dan menantu perempuan dalam keluarga yang sama tentang besar atau kecilnya buah mangga yang jatuh dalam lingkaran di bawah pohon mangga menjadi awal perpecahan dalam kelompok kekerabatan. Lingkaran-lingkaran yang dibuat oleh tiap keluarga dalam sebuah kelompok kekerabatan di bawah sebatang pohon mangga untuk menjamin agar buah-buah mangga yang terjatuh dalam lingkaran itu menjadi milik keluarga yang memiliki lingkaran tersebut tidak menjamin kepemilikan tiap-tiap anggota keluarga tersebut. Ketidak-puasan salah seorang anggota keluarga yang menemukan kalau buah mangganya lebih kecil daripada buah mangga milik kerabatnya menimbulkan niatnya untuk mengganti buah mangga yang kecil miliknya dengan langsung buah mangga yang besar milik kerabatnya. Penggantian itu tidak diketahui oleh anggota kerabat sipemilik mangga yang besar. Akan tetapi kerabat yang berhak atas mangga yang besar

akhirnya menemukan bahwa buah mangganya telah diganti saat dia menyelidiki kenapa buah mangganya berukuran kecil terletak dalam lobang jatuhan yang besar. Karena pertikaian ini, nenek moyang dari kelompok kekerabatan yang memiliki kisah tentang buah mangga itu bermigrasi ke tempat lain di Mentawai.

Cerita berikutnya yang dipilih adalah kisah tentang perkara babi peliharaan (*sakkoko*). Kisah itu diulas dalam Bab 6. Seperti kisah sebelumnya, kisah tentang babi ini juga terjadi di lembah Simatalu. Kisah ini milik salah satu kelompok kekerabatan yang berangkat dari lembah Simatalu untuk menghindari konflik yang lebih besar dengan tetangganya. Tiga versi dari kisah tentang babi ini menceritakan tentang nenek moyang dari kelompok kekerabatan yang sama. Leluhur dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan yang memiliki kisah ini melakukan pembunuhan pada sebuah kelompok kekerabatan yang baru saja menjadi kerabat mereka lewat pertalian perkawinan. Babi yang diterima dari kelompok kekerabatan yang lain sebagai belis perkawinan. Tetapi kelompok kekerabatan yang lain tidak ikhlas memberikan babi tersebut dan mengembalikan babi itu dengan cara membunuh dan memakan dagingnya. Setelah mengetahui kalau babi dari belis perkawinan telah dibunuh dan dimakan oleh sipemilik awal, kelompok kekerabatan yang menjadi pemilik baru dari babi itu tidak menerima dan meminta penggantian. Akan tetapi permintaan dari sipemilik baru dari babi tersebut tidak dipenuhi oleh sipemilik lama dari babi itu. Karena rasa tidak senang, sipemilik baru babi itu membunuh salah seorang anggota keluarga dari pemilik lama dari babi belis perkawinan. Sejak kejadian itu, keluarga-keluarga dari si pemilik baru babi yang telah mati itu berbisah satu dengan yang lain. Masing-masing keluarga menuturkan arah migrasi dari leluhur mereka yang berbeda-beda. Berbeda-beda arah migrasi dari keluarga-keluarga dari kelompok kekerabatan yang sama menyebabkan isi cerita mereka juga agak berbeda. Karena proses migrasi itu, kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan yang berpindah itu menemukan dan memiliki beberapa bidang tanah dan mengklaim tanah-tanah tersebut sebagai milik mereka.

Kisah yang lain adalah tentang babi hutan (*siberi*). Versi dari cerita babi hutan yang dibahas dalam Bab 7 direkam dari kelompok kekerabatan yang leluhur keluarga awalnya juga tinggal di lembah Simatalu. Kisah babi hutan bercerita tentang kegagalan seorang ayah dalam berburu babi liar di hutan. Dia tidak berhasil menangkap babi hutan meskipun babi hutan tergeletak sadarkan diri di bawah sebatang pohon yang disebut pohon *laggure* setelah gerombolan babi hutan itu makan buah beracun dari pohon tersebut. Anggota keluarga yang perempuan dari kelompok kekerabatan tersebut mempermalukan si ayah terus menerus dengan menyanyikan lagu yang sama yang berisi tentang kegagalan si ayah dalam menangkap babi liar yang telah tak sadarkan diri. Ayah tersebut mencoba pelbagai cara untuk menutupi kegagalannya. Namun, anggota kerabat perempuan terus menerus memperoleh

ayah tersebut. Karena tidak tahan diperolok terus menerus, akhirnya si ayah tersebut bersama keluarganya meninggalkan keluarga besarnya dan mencari tempat tinggal baru. Itulah awal dari perpecahan dan penyebaran dari kelompok kekerabatan ini. Si ayah bersama keluarga intinya terus bergerak dari satu tempat ke tempat lain sampai akhirnya dia meninggal di daerah Taileleu di Pulau Siberut. Keturunan dari ayah tersebut terus bermigrasi sampai mereka menetap di lokasi-lokasi dimana mereka berada pada saat ini.

Setelah pembeberan ketiga cerita itu, pada Bab 8 saya menganalisis karakteristik dari cerita keluarga dan bagaimana cerita tersebut berguna bagi kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan di Mentawai. Orang-orang Mentawai memberi perhatian khusus kepada cerita keluarga mereka lebih baik daripada jenis-jenis tradisi lisan lainnya. Orang-orang Mentawai menganggap bahwa cerita keluarga mereka berbeda dari mitos atau legenda, yang juga ditemukan dalam kebudayaan mereka. Bagi mereka, cerita keluarga merupakan sumber informasi tentang kejadian-kejadian di masa lalu. Cerita keluarga menjadi sumber informasi yang mengandung muatan sejarah, karena masyarakat Mentawai tidak memiliki tradisi tulis. Mereka tidak mencatat kejadian penting apapun. Pencerita memiliki pengetahuan yang banyak tentang berbagai cerita keluarga dan persoalan sosial budaya yang dihadapi oleh keluarga mereka dan mereka tahu apa yang harus dikatakan dan apa yang harus disembunyikan. Pemilihan informasi untuk disampaikan kepada publik tidak terlepas dari cara kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan tersebut memenuhi kepentingan mereka. Seringkali mereka menanam pohon tertentu atau mengukir dinding rumah atau batang kayu tertentu dengan motif tertentu untuk mengingatkan mereka kepada kejadian-kejadian tertentu. Cara-cara ini tidak lebih sakadar memberi kepada mereka sebuah gagasan tentang kejadian tersebut, bukan memberi indikasi waktu yang tepat dan jelas.

Orang-orang Mentawai mengandalkan kisah-kisah keluarga untuk mengartikan dan mendefinisikan batasan-batasan apa yang menjadi hak-hak mereka dan apa yang bukan hak-hak mereka terhadap warisan tertentu misalnya tanah leluhur. Kisah-kisah dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan di Mentawai juga berfungsi untuk menjelaskan hubungan kekerabatan yang terjalin di antara dua atau lebih kelompok kekerabatan yang bermukim di beberapa tempat yang terpisah. Dengan bantuan kisah-kisah keluarga tersebut dua atau lebih kelompok kekerabatan dapat menemukan kembali kerabat mereka, dengan siapa mereka berbagi leluhur yang sama dan berharta-pusaka yang sama karena mereka memiliki asal usul yang sama. Sebaliknya, kisah-kisah kelompok kekerabatan juga berguna membedakan kelompok-kelompok keturunan yang memiliki kisah penyebaran yang serupa atau nama kekerabatan yang sama. Kemiripan isi penceritaan dari dua kelompok kekerabatan yang berbeda tidak selalu mencerminkan ikatan kekerabatan kedua kelompok tersebut.

Kisah keluarga menyediakan informasi yang diperlukan untuk menjelaskan hal demikian.

Dalam Bab 9, saya gambarkan bagaimana penyebaran awal dari masyarakat Mentawai seperti yang dikisahkan dalam cerita-cerita keluarga. Dua hal penting dilukiskan dalam cerita keluarga ialah penyebaran kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan awal secara geografis (*topogeny*) dan perkembangan dan pertambahan dari jumlah kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan tersebut (*genealogy*). Mulanya kelompok kekerabatan itu hanya terdiri dari beberapa keluarga atau kelompok saja, kemudian menjadi puluhan kelompok kekerabatan pada masa sekarang. Kedua hal penting tersebut mempunyai hubungan yang erat kepada kepemilikan tanah leluhur yang menjadi hak milik bersama dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan yang berasal dari leluhur yang sama. Dalam proses penyebaran secara geografis, beberapa tempat yang disebutkan dalam cerita keluarga digunakan untuk memetakan perjalanan dan penyebaran serta perpisahan dari beberapa kelompok kekerabatan yang dibicarakan dalam buku ini.

Cerita-cerita keluarga berperan mempererat hubungan kekeluargaan dan juga memperjelas dengan kelompok mana sebuah kelompok kekerabatan memiliki ikatan keluarga dan dengan kelompok mana sebuah kelompok kekerabatan memiliki ikatan sosial karena perkawinan atau penyatuan dua atau lebih kelompok kekerabatan menjadi satu. Cerita-cerita keluarga itu juga mempertegas anggota kelompok kekerabatan yang dapat hak dan yang tidak memiliki hak atas harta pusaka yang diperoleh dari leluhur mereka. Bila pertikaian terjadi baik di dalam kelompok kekerabatan maupun dengan kelompok kekerabatan yang lain, cerita-cerita keluarga berperan penting memilah dan memberi pilihan untuk menyelesaikan pertikaian tersebut. Saat konflik terjadi, anggota-anggota keluarga yang merasa memiliki tanah ulayat bercerita secara meyakinkan dalam sebuah pertemuan untuk menyelesaikan konflik atau perseteruan terhadap kepemilikan warisan leluhur yang coba dikuasai oleh kelompok kekerabatan yang lain.

Pada Bab 10 dua contoh dihadirkan. Konflik atas tanah terjadi di dua tempat yang berbeda yang melibatkan beberapa kelompok yang tidak memiliki ikatan kekeluargaan. Untuk menentukan yang mana dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan adalah pemilik tanah yang sebenarnya, tiap kelompok kekerabatan bercerita tentang kepemilikan mereka atas tanah yang diperebutkan. Dalam beberapa kasus, informasi dalam cerita keluarga dapat digunakan untuk menyelesaikan konflik dan mengidentifikasi satu kelompok sebagai pemilik tanah yang sebenarnya. Dalam kasus lain, meskipun cerita keluarga terdapat informasi yang cukup untuk menyelesaikan konflik, kedua kelompok terus berdebat dengan menyangkal atau menolak informasi dari kelompok lain.

Dalam bab penutup buku ini, saya menyimpulkan bahwa cerita-cerita keluarga mengandung karakteristik tertentu yang membuatnya berbeda dari berbagai jenis tradisi lisan lainnya. Untuk memelihara informasi tentang kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan di Mentawai, para anggota dari kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan itu menyampaikan informasi tentang leluhur mereka dari generasi ke generasi. Informasi itu ialah tentang leluhur, tanah leluhur, perseteruan awal dalam keluarga dan di luar keluarga tetap terpelihara, sehingga generasi sekarang dapat mengetahui apa yang terjadi dengan leluhur dan kekayaan ulayat mereka. Anggota-anggota keluarga yang mendapat kesempatan untuk menjadi pencerita tidaklah banyak dan mereka memiliki wewenang lebih luas daripada anggota keluarga yang lain. Mereka memelihara dan menceritakan kisah kerabat mereka kepada anggota keluarga yang lain. Mereka juga bertanggung jawab untuk mempertahankan warisan leluhur mereka dari upaya kelompok kekerabatan yang lain yang ingin memilikinya. Sementara itu, anggota-anggota keluarga yang lain dipandang sebagai pendengar. Namun demikian, kelak beberapa dari pendengar akan menjadi penutur cerita keluarga berikutnya.

Sebagai salah satu komponen dari tradisi lisan, saya menilai cerita keluarga dapat dianggap sebagai sebuah jenis tersendiri. Hal ini penting untuk memberikan perhatian khusus pada cerita keluarga dalam wahana pembahasan tradisi lisan Mentawai. Sebuah cerita keluarga berisi peristiwa sejarah dari keluarga-keluarga atau kelompok-kelompok kekerabatan di Mentawai. Sebagai sebuah penuturan sejarah yang tidak tercatat, cerita-cerita keluarga dipelihara oleh pemiliknya dengan sungguh-sungguh dengan meneruskan isi dan makna dari cerita itu kepada generasi berikut. Isi dan makna dari cerita keluarga mengandung jati diri dari kelompok kekerabatan yang memiliki cerita tersebut.

Peranan dari cerita-cerita keluarga itu tidak terlepas dari kemampuan manusia dalam mengingat peristiwa-peristiwa penting yang terjadi di masa lalu, dimana peristiwa-peristiwa itu menjadi tema utama yang diceritakan dalam cerita-cerita keluarga. Anggota-anggota keluarga tertentu mendapat peranan yang penting dalam mempertahankan dan meneruskan peristiwa-peristiwa penting dan mendasar itu kepada generasi berikutnya.



## Glossary

It consists words, phrases or terms of Mentawai and Indonesian [indicated by the letter (I)] used in this book.

**Abat** or **paabat** a peace festival

**Abbangan** mango

**Abut kerei** the place in the house where people make a fire for rituals

**Alat toga** bride-price

**Ama** father

**Aman** the father of

**Arat** customs, habits and religious matters

**Arat Islam** Islam

**Arat Katolik** Catholicism

**Arat laggai** or **arat pulaggaijat** norms regulating social cohesion in a village or settlement

**Arat pangureijat** wedding ceremonial

**Arat Protestan** Protestantism

**Arat puaranan** any or all of the world religions

**Arat pubakkanan ka porak samba ka mone:** management of land tenure and landownership

**Arat sabulungan** the term used for the traditional belief system of Mentawai, contrasting with such other terms as *arat Islam*, *arat Protestan*, and *arat Katolik*

**Arat tubu** human behaviour

**Asaat** whetstone

**Bajou** radiation

**Bat oinan** river

**Batik** marking a territory

**Beri** a lot or (otherwise) none

**Beu laggai** large settlement

**Bolaik** friend

**Buak** nephew or niece

**Buluat** offering

**Camat** (I) head of sub-district

**Desa** (I) government village

**Dusun** (I) sub government village or hamlet

**Fakir miskin** (I) poor Islamic people

**Galai tubu** both positive and negative behaviours referring to someone's skill in producing something that is useful for oneself or for the community

**Gobbui leleu** story of hilly forest

**Gobbui mone** story of garden mostly planted by durian trees

**Gobbui** or **tiboi** talk or story

**Gobbui porak** story of land

**Gobbui teteu** story of ancestor

**Ibat pangureijat** wedding meal

**Kabupaten** (I) district

**Katubaga** inside of house for women's sleeping room

**Kebbu** older brother or older sister

**Kecamatan** (I) governmental sub district

**Kepala desa** (I) head of government village

**Kepala kampung** (I) head of traditional village

**Kerebau** a tie beam supporting the upper construction of a communal house

**Ketsat** the term may be translated as 'spirit'

**Labbra** the ritual during which the headhunters decide where to go and what to expect during the raid

**Laibokat** veranda at the front of the communal house

**Lakkau** mango

**Lalep** a nuclear family and the house where the family lives

**Leleggu** thunder

**Leleu** hilly forest

**Lia** familial specific ritual

**Liat uma** the name of payment due to headhunting raid, which is a large pig for the lost of a family member

**Lulag** puiringan shamanic wooden plate

**Luluplup** a trap for wild animals

**Lulut pangurau** costs of raising the individual adopted by a kin group

**Mane** objects surrendered by mother's relatives acting as sipangurei to the sons of the deceased mother

**Manua** sky

**Mapaddegat** many palm trees

**Mone** garden mostly planted with durian trees

**Monen kamaman** the garden of mother's brothers

**Monga** river mouth

**Mulabbra** a ritual for headhunting

**Muntogat** the relationship among descendants of several related kin groups that share the same ancestor and place of origin

**Nganga** language or dialect

**Ngangan** simatalu Simatalu dialect

**Ombuk** bamboo

**Onaja** swampy area

**Otonomi daerah** (I) regional autonomy

**Paddegat** palm tree

**Palukkehek** mating for animals

**Parurukat uma** or **pauma** a relation of friendship among different kin groups in a region

**Pasaggangan** assault or civil war

**Pasilepa** or **mulepa** ritual for completing a headhunting raid

**Patura** or **pasailukat** quiz or puzzle

**Pepple** the payment of a penalty, referring to the machetes used to kill the victim.

**Pito** spirits staying in graveyards

**Porak** land

**Porak alat toga** land for bride-price

**Porak katukaila** land paid for humiliation

**Porak mane** land representing the deceased

**Porak muntogat** inherited land

**Porak pukisi** land for payment for the threat

**Porak punuteteu** ancestral land

**Porak sangauma** land belonging to one kin group or family

**Porak segseg logau** land for preventing bloodshed

**Porak siappo** found land

**Porak sibatik** land marked by cutting trees off at irregular distances

**Porak sinaki** paid land

**Porak sinese** found land

**Porak sisiau** land marked by clearing trees and passing through

**Porak suku** communal land

**Porak tulou** land given as payment for misconduct

**Porak tulou kisi** land for assault

**Porak tulou pakaila** land for sexual humiliation

**Porak uma** land belonging to one kin group or family

**Pulaggaijat** hamlet or settlement

**Pulaleman** the place where nuclear family houses are erected

**Pumumuan** mythical stories

**Punen** activity, festivity, ceremony or ritual

**Pungungan** oral narratives resembling legends, fairytales, and fables that may be hilarious, heroic or educational

**Punuteteu** founding fathers or ancestors or otherwise grand children

**Pusabuat** or **pujaujaubat** migration or dispersion

**Pusabuat sabeu** great expansion

**Puturukat** dance floor

**Puumaijat** complex of buildings surrounded by several gardens planted with coconut and sago palms, fruit trees, taros and other edible plants

**Ratei** graveyard

**Reformasi** (I) reformation

**Rimata** a social leader and ritual leader of a kin group

**Rourou** a bow

**Rura** season

**Rura sabeu** great season

**Rura siboitok** small season

**Rusuk** a hut where young unmarried people, young married couples or widows may spend their leisure time

**Sabulungan** traditional belief system of Mentawaians

**Saggri** chopping trees

**Sakkoko** pig

**Sangalalep** a family

**Sanitu** ghost of human death

**Sapou** a house for a nuclear family

**Saraina** relatives or siblings

**Sarauma** foreign kin group

**Sasareu** foreign people

**Seeming** a price or penalty because of using spears to kill a victim in headhunting raid.

**Sesere** a special rope that is purposely made to ensnare animals

**Sholat** (I) Islamic praying five times a day

**Siagailaggek** herbalist or medicineman

**Siappo porak** land finder

**Siau** clearing

**Sibakkat porak** landowner

**Sibakkat pulaggaijat** the owner of settlement

**Siberi** wild boar

**Sigep** ant

**Sikameinan** crocodile spirits or river spirits

**Sikebbukat** elder

**Sikebbukat uma** elder member of a kin group

**Sikokop** the eater

- Silogui** arrows  
**Simagere** soul or an essence for living beings  
**Simata'** uncooked, raw or immature  
**Sinappit** adopted  
**Sipangurei** someone in charge of organizing a wedding ceremony  
**Sipasijago porak** caretaker of land  
**Sipatalaga** mediator or negotiator in a conflict  
**Sipeu** mango  
**Sirimanua** human being  
**Siripo** best friend  
**Sitoi** newcomer  
**Sitoi ka laggai** newcomer in a village  
**Sopak** a small river  
**Sukat** or **bujai** blessing  
**Suksuk** flat natural surface  
**Suku** kin group
- Tai toi** newcomer  
**Taikabaga** chthonic spirits  
**Taikabagatkoat** sea spirits  
**Taikaleleu** forest spirits  
**Taikapata** or **taikamanua** sky or celestial spirits  
**Taliku** daughter-in-law or son-in-law  
**Teitei** uma neighbour  
**Teteu** grandparents or grandchildren  
**Teu** a shortened form of **teteu** (grandfather or grandmother). **Teu** also means 'poor' in the sense of losing someone  
**Tiboi tubu** story of oneself  
**Tinambu** small hill  
**Tippu sasa** a ritual to prove a truth by cutting a piece of rattan decorated with leaves and flowers while calling spirits of ancestors to witness the swearing of the truth  
**Titiboat** most types of Mentawai oral tradition  
**Tuddukat** three different sizes of wooden drum  
**Tulou** a set of punishment or fine  
**Tulou kisi** a set of punishment due to threats  
**Tulou pakaila** a set of punishment because of sexual humiliation  
**Tulou saina** fine paid with a pig
- Ukkui** or **kalimeu** spirits of the dead  
**Ulaumanua** the supernatural essence that has a powerful light  
**Ulou** snake  
**Uma** communal house

**Uman kateuba** a set of three different sizes of drum made out of palm trees

**Undang-undang** (l) regulation or law

**Undang-undang dasar** Indonesian constitution

**Unou** plate made out of jackfruit wood

**Urai** song

**Urai kerei** shamanic song

**Urai simata** or **leleiyo** ordinary people's songs

**Ute'** a compensation paid with a big pig by a kin group to another kin group's relative who was murdered during headhunting raid

## Curriculum vitae

Juniator Tulus was born on June 24th, 1975 in Muara Siberut, Mentawai – Indonesia. After finishing his junior high school in Muara Siberut in 1990, he continued his education at a senior high school in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatra. After completing senior high school in 1994 he went to seminary in North Sumatra for one year. Later in 1995 he decided to study social anthropology at Andalas University in Padang. In 1999, he was rewarded as a young scientist and environmentalist, in 'Man and Biosphere (MaB) Certificate' by UNESCO Jakarta Office and LIPI (Indonesian Institute of Sciences). A year later, he obtained his bachelor in social anthropology in 2000 and awarded as one of the best students at Andalas University. He then worked as field consultant for UNESCO-Jakarta office's project on Siberut Biosphere Reserve for eighteen months. In 2002 he decided to get a higher education in the Netherlands. In 2003 he obtained his advanced master degree at the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian studies in the Advanced Master's programme at Leiden University. His academic adventure was begun by carrying out his PhD project in 2003-2007. After his contract with Leiden University officially ended, he part-timely works at Body View in Katwijk, a private company, selling sport supplements on the Internet. He continued writing his PhD thesis until it was complete in 2012. His academic interests are oral tradition, shamanism, medicinal plants, social impacts of natural disasters and arts like tattoo art of Mentawai and other tribal Mentawai art.



