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Products and producers of social and political change: elite activism and politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia
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Products and Producers of Social and Political Change

Elite Activism and Politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia

Myrna Eindhoven

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Products and Producers of Social and Political Change

Elite Activism and Politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia

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Prof.dr. Henk Schulte Nordholt (Universiteit Leiden)

Dr.ir. Jacqueline Vel (Universiteit Leiden)

***Walaupun tak sama suku kita
Walaupun tak sama agama kita
Walaupun tak sama tempat tinggal kita
Kita satu tujuan***

"Aban Katobbou Mentawai"

Raymondus Sababalat 2002

*Although we are from different clans
Although we do have different religions
Although we live in different places
We have one goal*

(Songtext)

"Aban Katobbou Mentawai"

(By) Raymondus Sababalat 2002

(My translation)

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1 Introduction

Introduction

This thesis deals with a generation young, formally educated and politically engaged Mentawaians and their strive for more access to the resources of the local state. Due to the increased analytical power of this group of Mentawaians that I indicate as a local elite, they increasingly acted against their exclusion of political decision-making processes with regard to the Mentawai Archipelago (Map 1).

The Indonesian central government has long excluded the Mentawaians from formal local politics and administration because they were regarded as backward people who had missed out on modernisation and development. They were considered a-political primitives and therefore incapable of occupying political and/or administrative positions. This all changed when, as a result of the pan-Indonesian switch to a more decentralised form of authority, the Mentawai Archipelago was granted autonomous district status in late 1999. The political rearrangements that were triggered by this event marked a milestone in the political history of the Mentawai Archipelago that had been ruled by the mainland oriented Minangkabau and Batak for decades.

This momentum formed an important window of opportunity for the elite group of Mentawaians as the new power constellations allowed them to take over from the political establishment in the archipelago. This self-appointed political elite then plunged into the complexities of the political and administrative reorganisation of the Mentawai Archipelago. On paper their main objective was to uplift the Mentawai Archipelago from its perceived underdeveloped status while maintaining or even reviving their Mentawaian identity. What followed was a period characterised by intense politicking during which ethnic and religious sentiments were mobilised in order to achieve goals that were personal in many cases and often bypassed the main objective to develop the Mentawai Archipelago in a joint effort.¹ Renewed conflicts over the use of the environment and quickly spreading corruption, collusion and nepotism were also part of the political processes.

¹ Politicking is a term I borrowed from Davidson (2005, 2007). I use the term politicking in order to hint at activities directed towards acquiring power and influence, and activities undertaken for political reasons or ends such as campaigning for votes, making speeches, or otherwise promoting oneself or one's policies in order to achieve one's own goals.

While this thesis oversees some 20 years of politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago, its main focus is on the period 1997-2004. This time-span allows me to gain insight in the background of the Mentawaian elite and simultaneously covers the first, most crucial and politically turbulent years of regional autonomy and decentralisation also called the era of *Reformasi* (reformation). Rather than testing whether or not the rearrangement of existing force fields brought about by decentralisation and regional autonomy has been the long awaited panacea to cure the negative effects of the Indonesian strive for unity in diversity – which it is not – this thesis offers an in-depth portrait of a generation of Mentawaians that is as much a product as well as a producer of social and political change. The compilation of data presented in this thesis has been informed within an anthropological and scientific context, where certain questions are considered more relevant or worthwhile than others. This thesis furthermore builds on an extensive amount of mainly anthropological literature about the Mentawai Archipelago and its inhabitants. Instead of sifting and deepening all this literature, this thesis makes use of the information presented in these writings and I will provide the reader with adequate references whenever needed.

Background

It was in 1997 that I went to Indonesia for the first time. After a two-month intensive *Bahasa Indonesia* language course at the governmental Universitas Andalas (UNAND) in Padang, I went to the Mentawaian island of Siberut in order to conduct field research for my master thesis (Leiden University). During my stay in Padang, however, I had already come across several Mentawaians residing in Padang more or less permanently. In preparation for my upcoming research on Siberut I befriended several of these generally young Mentawaians. I visited their houses, boarding schools, offices and got myself involved in their leisure activities and sports, building quite intense relationships with some of them.

While I saw many of these young and educated Mentawaians struggling with their paradoxical position as forward migrants in an alien context that regarded them as second-class citizens at best, I also recognised that several of them were obviously involved in a, yet ill-defined, strive for more access to the resources of the local state. Although I was certainly not the first to notify the presence of this specific group of Mentawaians residing in the city of Padang, it was only during the second half of the 1990s that their acting against the appropriation of their local government and the ill development planning for their region by the Indonesian nation state, denying the Mentawaians full Indonesian citizenship and the returns of the exploitation of the natural resources within their archipelago, started to show the contours of a social movement. Although my master thesis (Eindhoven 1999) handled a fairly different topic, my interest for this group of young people was certainly awakened and I found myself able to also note down some of my observations with regard to this group of people during this first seven months stay in Indonesia.



The Mentawai Archipelago, West Sumatra²

Only few months after my return to the Netherlands in January 1998, president Suharto was forced to step down from power. After more than thirty years of authoritarian rule Suharto's *Orde Baru* (New Order) regime gave way to the era of *Reformasi* (Reformation), signing a pan-Indonesian switch to a more decentralised form of authority subsequently followed by the introduction of *otonomi daerah* (regional autonomy). Even before Law 22/1999 on decentralisation of the state administration became operative in 2001, then-president Habibie granted the Mentawai Archipelago autonomous district status in October 1999. This event marked a milestone in the political history of the Mentawai Archipelago and triggered immense turbulence at all levels in the local bureaucracy. Before I was admitted as a PhD student to the Amsterdam School for Social Science

² Source: https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Straat_Mentawai#/media/File:Mentawai_Islands_Map.png (visited 25 september 2018).

Research (ASSR – University of Amsterdam) in November 2000, I went back to Padang and Mentawai two times. The first time as a tourist in 1998-1999 and as an Advanced Master Class student attached to the Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS – Leiden University) in March 2000. It was during these visits that I was able to witness ongoing events first hand. I became aware of how the changes in the political climate in Indonesia had broadened and accelerated the ethno-political agenda of the young, educated Mentawaians residing in Padang. I then realised that the administrative independency of the Mentawai Archipelago was not just an occurrence in its political history being thrown at the Mentawaians. It were these young and educated Mentawaians that had been actively involved in the acquiring of the archipelago's detachment from the mainland oriented district of Padang-Pariaman. It was there and then that I decided that my PhD research would be devoted to the ethno-political activities of this particular group of Mentawaians.

When I again returned to Padang and Mentawai as a PhD student in 2001, the politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago had come to a full swing. Many of the young and educated Mentawaians I had become familiar with during previous years, now occupied political and administrative positions that had never before been available to the Mentawaians on such an overwhelming scale. People were falling over each other in order to secure the available positions for themselves and their protégées. The situation was tense and chaotic. People were either in- or excluded from partaking based on various ethnic and religious sentiments. They struggled with politicised notions of identity and the old issue of how to progress and foster development while maintaining their cultural identity. What, in my opinion, makes this group of Mentawaians so worthwhile to study is the fact that these people operate right on the intersection of a number of important discourses. First, these people are responsible for localisation: the reinforcing and emphasizing of local cultural identity further reinforced by processes of decentralisation and regional autonomy. Second, they have to deal with the forces of Indonesianisation: the promotion and unification of the country's mainstream culture, political system and economy. Finally, there is the discourse of globalisation, which consists of an assortment of discourses concerning various aspects of culture and society, the global biodiversity conservation discourse being the most important for this thesis.

Literature review and conceptual framework

From the perspective of the state

In his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (2010) Eriksen argues that people otherwise known as first nations, aboriginals, ethnic minorities, hill tribes, scheduled tribes, tribal or isolated people, fourth world, autochthonous, and cultural or national minorities are in fact products of processes of modernisation, the spread of the capitalist mode of production and consumption and their integration into a system of nation states. States have a tendency to create nations – bounded entities of ethnically more or less homogeneous populations living in circumscribed territories over which the state wishes to exert absolute power. The very process of nation building requires all living within state

boundaries to become 'citizens'. In order to create a save, national unity all residents have to subsume to the processes of nation building aiming at a national, modern culture, not disturbed by deviating ethnic loyalties. (Bodley 2011; Eriksen 2010; Scott 1998, 2009). Nation states, especially post-colonial nation states are furthermore constantly seeking for prestigious levels of progress and development. Based on quantitative development theories of the 1960s and 1970s, many developing countries and countries in transition measure levels of development along indicators solely translating economic growth such as income per head and gross national product (Duncan 2004: 3-5; Nicholas 2000: 43-46). Some people, however, do not automatically fit into these dominant discourses of national unity and modernisation and have turned into a disturbing factor in the nation building process. Those people that do not meet the acquired levels of development considered necessary to contribute to nation building, are considered 'traditional' and / or 'underdeveloped'. These traditional communities are believed to have cultures that are antagonistic towards the competitive values of capitalism and the privatising logic of entrepreneurship (Brown 2003). Traditional communities furthermore have ethnic loyalties perceived as deviating and are generally considered a hazard to the sovereignty of the nation state. When nation states are under the impression that they cannot modernise effectively with communities like these in their midst it is likely for state resentment against these people to intensify (Duncan 2004; Endicott & Knox Dentan 2004; Niezen 2003). The peculiar and pressing attachment that many traditional communities tend to have towards their lands is furthermore particularly disturbing to nation states wishing to exploit natural resources available on these lands (Nicholas 2000: 60; Persoon *et al.* 2004; Scott 2009). As Maybury-Lewis (2002) has made explicit, it is especially when the state meets with obstructions in the exploitation of natural resources available within the territories of these people that governmental pressure on these people to assimilate into broader society increases (see also Bodley 2008).

Traditional communities are assumed to lack initiative and innovative power to develop on their own and therefore have to be developed. Many postcolonial nation states worldwide have developed various policies with regard to traditional communities. The often significantly different lifestyles of traditional communities, considered not worthy of participation in a modern nation state, have triggered nation states to implement levelling policies in order to alter or even eliminate these lifestyles (Duncan 2004). Besides downright genocide and enforced displacement, Eriksen (2010) mentions policies of assimilation, domination or segregation and the more complicated strategy of adopting an ideology of multiculturalism - where citizenship and full civil rights need not imply a particular cultural identity, or a decentralized federal model providing a high degree of local autonomy - in order for nation states to gain control over those people prominently representing worrisome ethnic and cultural variety.

Especially the policies aiming at assimilation, widespread in Southeast Asia, are generally understood as a strategy that should lead to equal rights and improvement of the social position of the targeted minorities. Reality, however, shows that policies of assimilation often lead to suffering and loss of dignity on the part of the traditional communities because in the process they are taught to understand themselves, their culture and

lifestyles in mainly negative terms (Bodley 2008). The causes for the widespread disintegration of traditional communities within the nation state are quite paradoxically to be sought in the efforts of that very same nation state to attach citizenship to all its residents. The current marginalised position of traditional communities and their coming into existence as a category are believed to be caused by their, often unfortunate and incomplete, integration into the nation state (Bodley 1999; Endicott & Knox Dentan 2004; Eriksen 2010). It is due to states' efforts to integrate their minorities into the nation state and into the capitalist mode of production and consumption that traditional communities have come into conflict with their respective nation states most seriously (Niezen 2003). Minorities acting against what they perceive of as violations of human rights and the denial of the right to self-determination, soon came to be stigmatised as antagonists of modernity, as opposed to development, non-progressive, and anti-governmental accordingly.

An act of denial

Over the past five decades traditional communities all over the world have been united under the globally recognised term 'indigenous peoples'. This politically charged category enabled the international community to speak on behalf of these socially and politically marginalised people (Niezen 2003; Sawyer & Gomez 2012). Indonesia's legal system, however, does not meet an equivalent for the internationally recognised and highly politicised category of indigenous people (Li 2000). While the Indonesian government has claimed all Indonesian citizens – except for the Chinese, Arabs and Westerners residing in Indonesia – to be indigenous to the country, Indonesia does not acknowledge indigenous peoples as defined by international institutions, laws, and conventions (Persoon *et al.* 2004). Whereas Indonesia does not acknowledge the internationally recognised concept of indigenous peoples applicable to the country, the Indonesian government subsequently has – quite dissimilar from the situation in the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand – no official body dealing with indigenous ethnic minorities, nor does it recognise certain ethnic groups as having special legal privileges on the basis of their indigeneity (Duncan 2004: 92). Those people in Indonesia that could classify as indigenous people were, according to Suharto's *Orde Baru* regime, in official documents referred to as *masyarakat terasing* (isolated communities). Being classified as *masyarakat terasing* was foremost a statement about a group's socio-economic status and level of incorporation into the nation-state. Unlike the Malay *Orang Asli*, being classified as *masyarakat terasing* was not associated with any particular legal status or limitation on civil liberties (Endicott 2016; Nicolas 2000). Technically and legally, individuals labelled as *masyarakat terasing* enjoyed the same rights and privileges as every other Indonesian citizen (Duncan 2004: 92; Persoon *et al.* 2004). Cleverly omitting foreign interference within domestic affairs, Indonesia has never ratified neither of the conventions by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), nor has it partaken in the 1993 United Nations Year of the Indigenous Peoples and the subsequent United Nations International Decades of the World's Indigenous Peoples.³ To the surprise of many Indonesia did vote in favour of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights

³ The United Nations organised two successive Decades of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004) and the second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-2014).

of Indigenous Peoples, but also simultaneously stated that the use of the term indigenous peoples rendered the declaration inapplicable to the Indonesian context.⁴ The fact that many of the international treaties and conventions have not been ratified by Indonesia has severely paralysed the internal discussion around indigenous peoples and has limited the direct impact of the guidelines and principles offered by these treaties to a minimum. The topic has, however, continuously and increasingly been on the agenda of large international institutions. Many of these institutions – of which the most important and influential are the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) – have expressed their concern with regard to the position of indigenous peoples in Indonesia and have issued policy statements regarding indigenous peoples.⁵ Despite the impact being minimal, it is precisely through the policy guidelines of these multilateral development agencies that the trickle down effect of the international discourse on indigenous peoples within Indonesia has been most influential (Persoon *et al.* 2004: 37).

Significantly different: masyarakat terasing

Soon after the Japanese capitulation in 1945, Indonesia declared independence. Eager to construct a coherent unitary nation, everybody within the former Dutch colony was forced to take on an identity as an Indonesian citizen. Whereas the new leaders considered the abundant ethnic diversity present within Indonesia a potential threat to the country's sovereignty, they started to promote and emphasise an invented national ideology with subsequent values and goals immediately after independence (Holtzappel 2003). This national culture project promoted the creation of a national identity worthy of a modern state; a process in which as disturbing regarded ethnic attachments were transformed into proper citizenship. In contrast with the attitude of denial of ethnic diversity prevailing in the Sukarno era, the *Orde Baru* regime – installed after the 1965 coup attempt - used the more devious strategy of disempowerment and incorporation.⁶

The national culture project, however, proved to be a discriminatory process. While some cultures were actively stimulated and supported to partake in and contribute to the process of nation building, others were forcefully excluded. The lifestyles of the latter, among which we can find Dayak (Kalimantan), Kubu (Sumatra), Baduy (Java), Asmat and Dani (Papua), Minahasa (Sulawesi), and also the Mentawaians (West Sumatra) were considered backward and unworthy of partaking in the national culture project. These people were considered to have lost track from the mainstream of national progress and development. As a result these people had to cope with outdated self-sufficient

⁴ Plenary report on vote 13 September 2007 (United Nations 2007).

⁵ See for instance ADB (2002) Country Report Indonesia and ADB (1999) Policy Report on Indigenous Peoples.

⁶ In order not to get into conflict with ethnic loyalties the *Orde Baru* regime did not only 'domesticate' (Scheffold 1998: 260) and de-politicise ethnic identities; their aestheticised 'peaks' were being enlisted to contribute to the process of nation building (Picard 1997). By actively supporting a certain selection of regional cultural expressions, morality and political correctness were controlled while ethnic ways of life were reduced to tourist friendly manifestations. (Yampolsky 1995). The ethnic variation present within the country thus became the main feature of Indonesian national culture, very well disseminated by the national motto: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

modes of production and consumption, unacceptable animistic belief systems, narrow-minded social systems in which contact with other ethnic groups is virtually absent, (semi) nomadic lifestyles, primitive clothing, low quality food, little food security, simple housing, poor healthcare systems, illiteracy, ill developed sense of beauty and art, non-monetary economic systems, little consciousness of state and nation, poor defence strategies, and little opportunity to develop. Their geographic isolation was supposed to be the main cause of their backwardness and also the reason why these people became eventually known as *masyarakat terasing* (isolated communities).

Masyarakat terasing became classified as a social, religious and agricultural problem, hampering the effective modernisation of the nation state itself (Persoon 1994: 67).⁷ It was therefore that Indonesia's most repressive assimilationist policies were directed towards *masyarakat terasing*, forcing them to give up their traditional lifestyles and reunite with the national mainstream of progress (*kemajuan*) and development (*pembangunan*). The design of the various development and civilisation programmes that were to transform *masyarakat terasing* into respectable Indonesian citizens, was foremost the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and to a lesser extent that of the Ministries of Forestry and Religion.⁸

In a country as ethnically diverse as Indonesia, it remained rather vague who exactly qualified as *masyarakat terasing*. The term *masyarakat terasing* as described in the Social Minister's decree 5/1994 referred to 'groups of people who live or are nomadic in geographically remote and isolated areas and are socially and culturally alienated and/or still underdeveloped compared to other Indonesian communities in general'. The underdevelopment in the definition referred to health, education, housing, clothing, and lifestyle. The Indonesian National Agency for Development Planning (BAPPENAS) has also put forward some characteristics of the so-called isolated people: they 1) live as nomads or are scattered in small groups, 2) are dependent on nature through hunting, fishing, gathering, and swidden farming, 3) have low healthcare and environmental standards, 4) have a low standard of housing, 5) have limited knowledge and technology, 6) have animistic belief systems, and 7) are strongly tied to their culture and beliefs which isolates them from the rest of society (ADB 2002: 4).⁹

The Indonesian Department of Social Affairs has over different periods in time classified 1-1.7 million people – divided over 80 to 100 different ethnic groups – as *masyarakat terasing* (Li 2001; Persoon *et al.* 2004: 22). The spread of *masyarakat terasing* over the country is a very uneven one. A disproportional part of the *masyarakat terasing* is living

⁷ Indonesia's stance and policies towards *masyarakat terasing* have certainly not been unique. Nicholas (2000: 46) explains how the Orang Asli in Malaysia have been subject to what he calls the 'cultural-assimilationist approach'. Similar to Indonesia, Malaysia regards the lifestyles of Orang Asli, and the attachments they have to their territories impediments to modernisation.

⁸ Until 1983 the Ministry of Forestry has been part of the Ministry of Agriculture. It has been acting as an independent ministry ever since (Persoon 1994)

⁹ See also Persoon (1994: 65-67) and Duncan (2004) for an elaborate discussion of the terminology.

in the Papuan provinces (an estimated 600,000 individuals) and the province of East Kalimantan (400,000 people). The remaining half million people are scattered all over the country.¹⁰ In official documents some 80-100 differing groups of *masyarakat terasing* are mentioned.¹¹ Regardless of how *masyarakat terasing* were counted and classified, it was generally agreed upon – not only among policy makers, but also among anthropologists, linguists and other scientists – that this group of people represents an enormous cultural diversity. Included are dispersed hunters and gatherers (Orang Rimba or Kubu, Punan, Sakai), sea nomads (Orang Suku Laut or Bajau), and various types of shifting cultivators (Dayak, Dani, Mentawaians).

The highly divergent lifestyles of these peoples were considered especially not worthy of partaking in the national culture project. The Indonesian state, constitutionally obliged to guarantee all its citizens access to general processes of progress (*kemajuan*) and development (*pembangunan*), has issued various policies in order to guide these people back into the mainstream of national progress and development, the rationale for which is rooted in the state ideology of nation building, development and modernity. The subsequently developed civilisation and development programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs thus aimed at permanent settlements in sufficiently large social units, increase in production capacity, expansion of societal life outside the direct family group, increase of the rationale and dynamic mental capacities, erasure of the tribal worldview and way of life, development of norms similar to the rest of the country, increase consciousness of state and nation, and the development of a monotheistic religious life (Persoon 1994). To guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of the governmental civilisation and development programme, people were gathered together in permanent settlements – so-called resettlement villages – where proper houses built according to a uniform design, healthcare and religious facilities, and educational institutions were made available simultaneously. As soon as people were transferred from their former settlements to the new resettlement village, additional projects aiming at the total abandoning of tribal practices set off. Formal education was introduced. Shifting cultivation and hunting practices were replaced by an agricultural system aiming at the production of cash crops and rice. Social life was to be expanded beyond family ties through the introduction of a social system based on the so-called principle of *gotong royong* (solidarity, cooperation). After five years, when transformation towards the new modern lifestyle was considered satisfactory, resettlement villages lost their status as project villages and became normal villages under regular bureaucratic rule.

The agricultural problem is rooted in the fact that a considerable number of *masyarakat terasing* is practising swidden agriculture – better known as shifting cultivation. Extensive

¹⁰ Officially there are only six provinces that do not harbour *masyarakat terasing* of their territories; these are Lampung, Bali, Central and East Java, and the two urban provinces of Jakarta and Yogyakarta.

¹¹ These countings are, however, not taking into account the highly complicated situation in Papua for which it is estimated that this province alone harbours some 200 dissimilar ethnic groups that classify as *masyarakat terasing*. The Papuan diversity is, however, for the sake of clarity often reduced to a more manageable number of ethnic clusters in which several smaller ethnic groups are gathered together.

literature on this agricultural practice has indicated that this agricultural practise – as long as it is practiced in a sustainable, non-pioneering manner – proofs to be an excellent way to minimise soil erosion and general depletion of the ecosystem (Conklin 1961; Dove 1983; Schieffelin 1975). The Indonesian government, however, believes that these practices lead to a serious loss of precious timber growing in the area – timber which could otherwise be used for the gathering of national revenues.¹² In Indonesia, land under swidden agriculture was considered not to be cultivated in a proper manner and was therefore considered *tanah kosong* (empty land). *Tanah kosong* was furthermore automatically considered state-owned land. As a result, people living on these lands were denied the acknowledgement of ownership over lands they, according to their customary laws, perceive as their property (Bakker 2009). From a governmental point of view these people are thus using land and timber illegally. This is the reason why these people also became to be known as *peladang liar* (wild, uncontrolled, undomesticated agriculturalists) or *penebang liar* (illegal, uncontrolled loggers) (Acciaioli 2001: 61). The Ministry of Forestry has been responsible for a lot of the resettlement projects, especially popular during the 1970s, that should have changed the shifting cultivation practices of these people into sedentary agricultural systems bound to the market. People were encouraged and sometimes even forced to produce cash crops. The selling of their products would automatically introduce *masyarakat terasing* to the monetary economy. Precious timber would at the same time be saved from illegal exploitation and could thus be put under legal logging concessions.

The first principle of Indonesia's national philosophy called *Pancasila* – that is the belief in a supreme God – is considered extremely important.¹³ Nowadays Indonesia knows six officially recognised religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.¹⁴ Whereas a lot of *masyarakat terasing* did not adhere to either of the five religions that were recognised during the New Order, they became classified as *suku suku yang belum beragama* (ethnic groups that do not have a religion yet) (Persoon 1994, 2004). The belief systems of these people are often qualified as inferior superstitions and people practising these belief systems are therefore subject to, sometimes forceful, projects of conversion. Soon after Indonesian independence a decree was issued stating that everybody should adhere to a proper religion. This call for religion (*agama*) was simultaneously an implicit call for and thus the acceptance of progress, modernisation, and other nationalistic ideals (Atkinson 1983: 633). While the Ministry of Religion itself was barely involved in processes of conversion, the Indonesian

¹² One of the most important national development strategies adopted by Suharto's Orde Baru government to increase foreign exchange revenues, was through the sale of timber obtained from logging concessions issued by the (Gunawan et.al. 1999: XV)

¹³ The Pancasila consists of five principles. These are: the belief in a supreme God, humanitarianism, national unity, democracy and social justice (Holtzappel 2003).

¹⁴ During the New Order Era, Confucianism was not recognised as an official religion as it was regarded as being closely related to Chinese culture – not to be promoted during the New Order era. Presidential decree 6/2000 has once again included Confucianism in the list of officially recognised religions in Indonesia (Binawan 2011: 371)

government has encouraged missionary activities (usually Christian) among *masyarakat terasing*. The Indonesian government of course aimed at the total elimination of the as inferior perceived local belief systems, but while the nominal acceptance of a new religion was in many cases realised without real obstructions, the erasure of all encompassing conceptions with regard to the acquaintanceship with contemporaries, the natural environment, and ancestors was in many cases less convincing. In many cases old and new belief systems tend to coexist as more or less separated domains from which individuals can yield according to experienced needs. The allowed level of syncretism is then again heavily depending upon the permissiveness of the missionary organisation. Islamic and Protestant organisations have in this regard been much less tolerant towards traditional religious expressions than Hindu and Catholic organisations. The Karo Batak (North Sumatra), Ngaju Dayak (Central Kalimantan), and the Toraja (South Sulawesi) have even been able to modify their traditional belief system in such a way that they were accepted as variants of Hindu Dharma (Ramstedt 2004). Although some internal restructuring has certainly been needed in order to obtain this new status, these people were at least no longer perceived as pagans in urgent need of conversion.

Shifting political contexts

Although the eventual downfall of Suharto's *Orde Baru* regime can largely be explained by looking at the dynamics of Indonesian domestic politics, the importance of external influence in the country's affairs cannot be denied (Van Dijk 2001). Anwar (2001) for instance explains that the ending of Suharto's rule can partly be explained by fundamental changes in the international system after the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 deprived Indonesia – known for its strong anticommunist ideology – from its function as shield against communist expansion to the south. The political and strategic importance attached to Indonesia by the United States did not only materialise in large scale economic loans and grants, but was also manifested in political support for president Suharto and the Indonesian military. The international Cold War dynamics thus provided a permissive environment within which an authoritarian political system, such as Indonesia's *Orde Baru* regime, could flourish. The collapse of communism considerably diminished Suharto's value as a de facto ally of the United States and the West as a whole. The post Cold War international agenda, which prioritises democratisation, human rights, environmental protection, transparency and good governance all directly went against Suharto's political and economic interests. Instead of adapting to the major global changes, the *Orde Baru* rulers took on a defensive attitude towards the criticisms that were increasingly being levelled against them. External pressures on Indonesia to reform its political system and improve its human rights practices were regarded by the government in Jakarta as interferences in Indonesia's internal affairs that had to be rejected by all means. This attitude put Indonesia in an increasingly difficult situation, particularly as international donor organisations started to link economic assistance with human rights and other non-economic issues.

Supported by the post Cold War agenda, intellectual discourses about democratisation and human rights became increasingly prominent and sophisticated in Indonesia. The since the early 1990s expanding clusters of pro-democracy and human rights groups

became increasingly active in facilitating anti-governmental street demonstrations and protests (McVey 2003).¹⁵ Describing the *Orde Baru* regime as totalitarian and fascist, these groups attempted to unite all forms of pro-democracy movements in order to increase pressure against Suharto's government and his family business interests (Aspinall 1995: 34). From the mid 1990s onward NGOs, openly challenging the government by demanding political liberalisation, started to mushroom all over Indonesia giving witness of what Appadurai (2000) has called 'globalisation from below'. This 'grassroots globalisation' consists of the emergence of institutions concerned with mobilising highly specific local, national, and regional groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution. These organisations have complex relations with the state, with the official public sphere, with international civil society initiatives, and with local communities. Sometimes they are uncomfortably complicit with the policies of the nation state and sometimes they are violently opposed to these policies. Sometimes they have grown wealthy and powerful enough to constitute major political forces in their own right and sometimes they are weak in everything except [or even in] their transparency and local legitimacy' (Appadurai 2000: 11-12). While there is no accurate data on the exact number of NGOs in Indonesia available it is believed that the number of NGOs has grown from some 10,000 in 1996 to around 70,000 in 2000 (Hadiwinata 2003: 1).

Though not very outspoken yet and certainly not very influential at a political level Indonesia's indigenous peoples also saw an increased number of opportunities to express their views at international forums and to contribute to policy decisions by important multilateral development banks like the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) during the 1990s. Despite the increased opportunities, Indonesia's indigenous peoples had no national organisation through which they could address the international community. Furthermore there was no representative body at the national level that could draw Indonesia's indigenous peoples together in order to take a more powerful stand in political negotiations with the state. There was a clear need for a pan-Indonesian organisation supporting the indigenous peoples in the country. It was in 1993 that a first step in this direction was taken.

Jaringan Pembelaan Hak-Hak Masyarakat Adat (JAPHAMA), the Indigenous People's Advocates Network grew out of a workshop organised by Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI), Indonesia's leading environmental organisation. During this 1993 meeting held in South Sulawesi it was decided that indigenous peoples in Indonesia needed a network to help protect, defend and study their rights. More than 30 NGOs, individuals and community groups joined the network ever since. JAPHAMA was responsible for a re-entering of the terminology of *masyarakat adat* within the public

¹⁵ Among which we find INFIGHT (Indonesian Front for the Defence of Human Rights), LPHAM (Institute for the Defence of Human Rights), Aldera (Alliance for People's Democracy), PIJAR (Information Centre and Action network for Reform), PIPHAM (Centre for Human Rights Information and Education), and PRD (People's Democratic Party) (Aspinall 1995: 34)

arena.¹⁶ Although the *masyarakat adat* discourse was used within the Indonesian bureaucracy throughout the 1970s, 1980s and even somewhat into the 1990s, the term was only partially accepted. The bureaucratic interpretation of the term excluded nomadic people from the definition, automatically implying that these people did not have rights over their territory and the natural resources therein. The ability of self-governance, which constitutes the core of *masyarakat adat* was, however, an insurmountable thorn in the eye of the Indonesian administration. Therefore the term never really popularised. Using the term, raising underlying issues with regard to autonomy and autochthony of particular groups within Indonesian society remained to be interpreted as subversive, a threat to national unity and integration, and as against development throughout the 1990s. JAPHAMA was, however, one of the first institutes that dared to use the term more openly again, encouraging its underlying notions of autonomy and autochthony. JAPHAMA defined *masyarakat adat* as ‘groups of people who have intergenerational origins in a certain geographic territory and also have their own value system, ideology, economy, politics, culture, society and territory’ (ADB 2002: 5). Throughout the 1990s JAPHAMA has been active in four fields of work: 1) the strengthening of the indigenous community by organising meetings with and between *masyarakat adat*, conducting strategic planning and jointly studying their use and management of local resources; 2) the building of support by identifying relevant participants for the network, promoting the network’s ideals, spreading information and forming an alliance to support *masyarakat adat*; 3) the critical analysis of policies with regard to indigenous peoples’ rights, the relationship between the state and *masyarakat adat* and the simultaneous drafting of alternatives and; 4) the building of capacity of network participants (DTE 1999b).

Regional autonomy and the upsurge of identity politics

The shifting international political context and the developments it caused in the Indonesian domestic sphere coincided with a deep monetary crisis that swept through Asia from mid 1997 onwards. Suharto and his authoritarian *Orde Baru* regime, fostering corruption, collusion and nepotism (*korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme* - KKN), were held responsible for the fact that Indonesia was the country hardest and longest hit by the crisis. The economic crisis took a turn for the worse when the Rupiah collapsed in late 1997, thereby further eroding the legitimacy of the *Orde Baru* government in general and Suharto in particular (Anwar 2001; Holtzappel 2009). In a number of incidents in major cities in Java and Kalimantan, urban popular protests turned into mass violence against

¹⁶ The term adat community originally stems from a legal discourse that goes back to the Dutch lawyers Van Vollenhoven & Ter Haar (1962) who introduced the term *rechtsgemeenschappen* (literally: legal communities) in the early 20th century. The term is interchangeably translated as ‘autonomous group’ or ‘autonomous community’. Indonesian law experts translated the term later into ‘adat community’ or ‘adat law community’. The term *rechtsgemeenschappen* was used to indicate those communities in the Dutch East Indies who had established their own local legal regulations and social control system. These communities were considered able to govern themselves and their environment according to local rules and regulations. The adat or self-governing community is thus autonomous, but also autochthonous; the latter referring to the fact that the existence of such groups is not derived from an external power, but from these communities themselves (ADB 2002: 4-5).

the Christian and Chinese minorities (Van Klinken 2003, 2007). Concurrent mass student demonstrations in the streets of Jakarta, culminating in their occupation of the Peoples' Consultative Assembly building, eventually forced Suharto to step down from power in May 1998, handing over his position to vice president Habibie (Anwar 2001).

After the fall of Suharto's *Orde-Baru* regime, Indonesia entered into a turbulent political era that was called *Reformasi* (reformation). This period (1998-2004) was characterised by a wider range of political freedoms, but at the same time also by high political instability (Holtzappel 2009).¹⁷ The most important reformative measures taken during this period were taken by the Habibie presidency (May 1998- October 1999). Press freedom, the freedom to establish political parties and free national elections were amongst these reformative policies (Vel 2008). The Habibie government furthermore pushed two important laws through parliament in the last months before the June 1999 elections, which set in motion a process of administrative decentralisation (Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007: 12). Law 22/1999 on decentralisation of the state administration involved the actual transfer of formal administrative and political authority from the centre to lower levels of government. Decentralisation made the *kabupaten* (districts) and municipalities responsible for various areas including infrastructure, healthcare, education, culture, trade, agriculture, industry, investment, tourism, employment, environment and land issues formerly administered by Jakarta. Jakarta continued to oversee foreign affairs, national defence and security, monetary and fiscal policy, religious affairs, macro-economic policy, justice and religion. The second dimension of regional autonomy enacted under law 25/1999 concerned the balance of finances between the centre and the regions. Law 25/1999 stipulated that 25% (90% of which had to be allocated to the districts and municipalities) of the net domestic revenue would be channelled to the regions. This meant that decision-making power over 75% of the state revenues would remain with Jakarta (Schulte Nordholt 2012: 230). Resource rich regions were to profit from decentralisation, because law 25/1999 allowed them to keep 15% of oil, 30% of gas and a whopping 80% of logging, mining and fishing revenues. Districts and municipalities poor in natural resources had to manage on the annual allowance from Jakarta, *dana alokasi umum* – DAU, which counted on average for 80% of the total revenue at the district level (Schulte Nordholt 2012: 230). Provincial governors were described to act as coordinators of the decentralisation processes (Sakai 2003).

The actual transfer of formal administrative and political authority to the lower levels of government at the provinces, districts and municipalities was implemented within twenty months only between April 1999 and January 2001. Whereas many districts lacked the capacity to meet with the demands of this large-scale and far-reaching operation many scholars consider it a small miracle that this massive operation did not lead to a total collapse of the Indonesian nation state (Schulte Nordholt 2012). The hasty introduction

¹⁷ Despite the fact that there is no official closing of the era of reformation, many consider the age of Reformasi terminated with the direct election of president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2004. The spirit of radical reform that drove the process of democratisation had reached its highest point with these direct elections.

of regional autonomy had everything to do with the political unrest in the country. Strengthened demands for independence in Aceh and West Papua were joined by calls for a federal system from Riau, Maluku, North Sulawesi and East Kalimantan (Down to Earth 2000). These alarming and potentially disrupting claims for greater political and financial autonomy at the provincial level were cleverly omitted by the central government's decision to target a lower administrative level, the *kabupaten* (district) and the *desa* (village) as the key levels for regional autonomy (Von Benda-Beckmann & Von Benda-Beckmann 2001).

Decentralisation and regional autonomy, however, also triggered a rather unexpected intensified request from many regions in Indonesia that wished to become autonomous provinces and *kabupaten* (districts). This process, called *pemekaran* (literally: blossoming), ensued the rapid increase in the number of administrative units. In only a few years time seven new provinces were carved out of the existing twenty-seven and the number of *kabupaten* (districts) and municipalities increased from 300 to 440 (Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007). The pan-Indonesian process of administrative fragmentation - some have even characterised *pemekaran* as 'administrative involution' - was largely driven by the interests of local elites who often used ethnic and religious repertoires to express their personal ambitions, achieve their political goals and mobilise popular support (Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007: 19).

The upsurge of local elites caused an overall increase in exclusive regional identity politics often related to and derived from older (colonial) concepts and categories, sometimes expressed in a peaceful revival of *adat* (custom, tradition), sometimes erupting into violent conflicts (Schulte Nordholt 2008; Van Klinken 2003).¹⁸ Phrased in modern terminology like 'grass root mobilisation', 'bottom up development' and 'community empowerment', the widespread revival of *adat* consciousness triggered by regional autonomy was seen as a moral alternative for the corrupt *Orde Baru* regime. The legal recognition of *adat*-based rights was furthermore seen as device to reclaim ancestral land that had been claimed by the state (Davidson & Henley 2007). This expectancy was also the reason why the introduction of regional autonomy was received with great enthusiasm, especially in international circles of environmental agencies. Convinced of the idea that the lifestyles of *adat* communities were intrinsically sustainable, rendering the decision-making power over natural resources in the hands of local communities would be a powerful incentive for local communities to care for and make use of these natural resources in a sustainable manner (DTE 2000a; DTE 2000b). Regional autonomy, enacted under law 25/1999, however, also enhanced the partial withdrawal of subsidies from the centre. Simultaneously, the power to seek income-generating activities was laid with the district authorities, creating an arena in which a struggle for resources was virtually guaranteed (Eindhoven 2009). Regional autonomy indeed triggered an Indonesian-wide rush for the natural resources available at the local level.

¹⁸ Van Klinken (2007) has described how in West and Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, the transition to decentralised rule led to the eruption of violence. Violent conflicts fuelled by ethnic and religious sentiments caused 10,000 casualties and 1.3 million refugees (Van Klinken 2007: 4).

Several NGOs have taken up the opportunity to voice their claims towards greater legal recognition of *adat* (tradition, custom) and *adat*-based rights to natural resources (Acciaoli 2000). An important example of this development is the creation of the new pan-Indonesian organisation AMAN (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*), officially translated as the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago.¹⁹ AMAN was the result of a week long ‘Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago,’ which was held in the prestigious Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta.²⁰ According to a report written by Down to Earth (1999b), a London-based support organisation, ‘this congress marked a milestone in the development of the indigenous peoples’ organisations in Indonesia, as this was the first time that so many representatives of indigenous peoples from all parts of the archipelago came together.’²¹ In the previous era such a meeting would have definitely been looked upon as subversive and anti-governmental. Major elements of the declaration, which was issued at the end of the meeting argued for less repressive governmental policies, the recognition of the right to cultural identity, to ethnic language and religion, and most of all the right to the land and its natural resources and protection of intellectual property rights. These rights were argued to be of universal validity, comparable to the rights of individuals as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (AMAN 1999; DTE 1999b). AMAN’s membership is open to any community identifying itself as *masyarakat adat* and collectively agreeing with the principles, vision, and main objectives of AMAN. That these criteria have led to a number of subscribers to AMAN that far exceeds the number of *masyarakat terasing* as classified by the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs is remarkable (Li 2001). By the end of 2001 AMAN claimed to represent at least 5 million people indicating themselves as *masyarakat adat*.²² As mentioned before, although the terms *masyarakat terasing*, *masyarakat adat*, and indigenous peoples are certainly not

¹⁹ AMAN is an independent organisation acting as a medium through which *masyarakat adat* can reinforce their rights, existence and autonomy. AMAN’s main objectives were noted down as follows: 1) reviving *masyarakat adat* rights to manage their own socio-economic, legal, and cultural systems, including control over their land and natural resources as well as other livelihoods through advocating appropriate government acts, 2) mainstreaming *masyarakat adat* aspirations in political processes, 3) urging the government to withdraw any law that denies the existence of *masyarakat adat*, 4) renegotiating management of *masyarakat adat* resources that have been used for public as well as private sector based projects, 5) eliminating military involvement in civil society, 6) informing the government in taking decisions in disputes concerning *masyarakat adat* rights in self determination, 7) rehabilitating victims of human rights violations, and 8) encouraging the government to sign and respect international treaties ensuring *masyarakat adat* rights such as the ILO Convention 169 and the UN Draft Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights (AMAN no date; DTE 1999b).

²⁰ JAPHAMA played a major role in the planning and organising of this first Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (KMAN I).

²¹ Down to Earth is a London based NGO preoccupied with issues concerning ecological justice in Indonesia. Down to Earth monitors and campaigns primarily on the social and human implications of environmental issues in Indonesia. They aim to support civil society groups and provide an international voice at the levels of national governments, foreign companies, aid agencies and international funding institutions. Their main focus is the right of the rural poor and indigenous peoples of the ‘outer islands’, which are all other islands but Java, to determine their own futures.

²² Early in 2017 AMAN mentioned that 2304 *adat* communities, with a total of some 17 million individuals, were registered to AMAN as members (AMAN 2017).

mutually exchangeable categories, because they stem from different sources and their respective utilisation pursues different goals, it might be called striking that there is such an increase in voluntary membership. During the first Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago, AMAN has called for the recognition of the cultural diversity and the particular territorial attachment of *masyarakat adat*. It is precisely this call for recognition of certain cultural features and practices, deemed illegal and subject to harassment and displacement during the *Orde Baru* regime, that has triggered people to rally themselves under the banner of *masyarakat adat*. These developments once more indicate that boundaries of more or less defined parts of society are much more permeable and changeable than they might seem to be at first glance (Li 2001).

Decentralisation was believed to lead to transparency and accountability on behalf of local governments (Antlöv & Cederroth 2004). But decentralisation did in many instances not result in good governance. This was partly caused by the general lack of administrative expertise at the local level. But the decentralisation of corruption and other (bad) *Orde Baru* practices, that also characterised regional autonomy, were certainly debit to the larger part of the disappointing performance of local governments. Lucrative private-public arrangements in which bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen participated were the rule rather than the exception. Especially the establishment of new districts involved the construction of new administrative centres. It was here in particular that the connections between bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen proved profitable (Schulte Nordholt 2012). Government construction contracts, especially at the local level, are considered one of the primary methods of distributing patronage (Hidayat 2009).

Whereas until 2005 local parliaments (DPRD) elected the new administrators, the former had a strong bargaining position vis-à-vis the latter. Candidates running for office often had to pay large sums of money in order to win the majority of votes. In many cases candidates did not have these funds themselves, turning them into playthings in the hands of those willing to invest in the election. These elections were often accompanied by violence and intimidation (Hadiz 2003; Hidayat 2007; Schulte Nordholt 2007). Once elected, mayors and *bupati* were still influenced by extortion by the local parliaments who made them pay for the passing of local regulations and the approval of budget proposals and annual accountability reports. Steadfast administrators could count on an impeachment by the DPRD on their behalf. A revision of Regional Autonomy Law 32/2004 resulted in direct elections for governors, mayors and *bupati* (Buehler 2007; Mietzner 2009: 345-9; Schulte Nordholt 2008a: 234-7). Direct elections would strengthen the position of governors, mayors and *bupati* and would reduce the corrupt practices of local parliaments vis-à-vis local administrators. The new law gave administrators a popular mandate, released them from the obligation to present annual accountability reports to the DPRD and took away the parliamentary power to impeach the administrators (Buehler 2007; Schulte Nordholt 2012: 236).

In the literature the process of decentralisation in Indonesia is often equated with democratisation and a rise of civil society (Antlöv 2003; Aspinall 2000; Aspinall & Fealy 2003; Kingsbury & Arief Budiman 2001; Liddle 2001). Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken (2007:1), however, argue that the decentralisation of a former authoritarian central

government does not automatically lead to democratic rule at the local level or a strengthened civil society. However, the elite capture of local power can not nearly be equated with democratisation, but should rather be understood as a rearrangement of existing force fields (Choi 2011, Kingsbury & Aveling 2003; Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007). The new political niches that ensued from regional autonomy have created new power constellations and reformulated modes of representation that are not necessarily democratic. Decentralisation was believed to bring the state closer to the public, but the clientelistic practices of the elites seem to have refrained local communities from full participation in the political processes that were key during *Reformasi*. Local elites display a tendency to act in their own interest and in that of their protégées, excluding others on the basis of kinship and ethno-religious sentiments (Vel 2008). Local communities were more often than not left out of all this politicking. Local communities were at best unsatisfied spectators who were mobilised every now and then, when the political elite was in need of their votes (Von Benda-Beckmann & Von Benda-Beckmann 2009).

The introduction of an electoral system was believed to increase democratisation in Indonesian politics. But as soon as political support becomes a currency of patron-client transactions in which money-politics play a major role, democratisation can be questioned (Simandjuntak 2013: 99). During the era of *Reformasi*, money-politics became applied on a much larger scale than before and got a second boost when direct elections were introduced in Indonesia in 2005. Barker & Van Klinken (2009) argue that regional autonomy and electoral democracy have blurred the boundaries between state and society. Some scholars have used the term ‘patronage democracy’ to describe the new power constellations in the regions (Van Klinken 2009: 145). Patronage democracy combines patron-client relations with electoral democracy, putting greater emphasis on the bargaining power of clients (common people) vis-à-vis their patrons (political elite). But patron-client relations are often embedded in ethnic and religious terms and specific regional settings that strongly emphasise differences instead of unifying characteristics, therefore erasing the possibility of the rise of a strong, relative autonomous civil society (Schulte Nordholt 2012).

Indigenous elites

According to Eriksen (2010) it is only during a process of profound cultural change that ethnic minorities may start to assert their identity and reflect systematically on their culture. Here we touch upon what Eriksen has called the paradox of ethno-politics. Modernisation may be believed to reduce the scope of cultural variation. But at the same time the emerging self-consciousness or cultural reflexivity brought about by literacy, various forms of sustained interethnic contact and rapid social change engendered by modernisation has inspired the genesis of ethnic identities stressing cultural uniqueness. It is this very process that Eriksen indicated as ‘ethnification’, but could also be referred to as the ‘politicisation of culture’. The outlined paradox is laid in the fact that ‘the leaders of a dominated group must master the cultural codes of the dominant group in order to present their case efficiently’. As Eriksen has put it: ‘in order to save a culture, one must first lose it’. It is this elite group of leaders that needs to deal with this seemingly impossible issue for which they constantly have to position themselves somewhere on the

continuum of which total alienation and complete affiliation constitute the outer limits.

This almost automatically leads us to the problem of authenticity that is involved in ethnogenesis. To effectively mobilise politically, elite groups need allies. Indigenous elites worldwide have benefitted tremendously – though not without pitfalls – from international support networks of ecologists and indigenous rights activists. In accordance with transnational discourses valid within these circles of human rights lobbyists and environmentalists, indigenous elites have used essentialism in defining their identity, securing their recognition and the valorisation of their diverse and distinctive traditions. In Eriksen's (2010) words: 'they have reified their culture in order to use it in political and other strategic negotiations'. The reification of indigenous cultures is for the greater part based on what is perceived as their authentic tradition by outsiders. This sharply pictures the question of (indigenous) identity being determined by the group itself or by other institutions, such as foreign donor institutions and/or influential researchers. With the concept of 'indigenous peoples' being a postcolonial product stemming from the West, indigenous identity is heavily inspired by romantic western notions of the 'noble savage' and the 'intrinsically ecologically sustainable primitive' (Kuper 2003; Li 2007). As Conklin (1997: 711-15) explains in her article on Amazonian activism, these western-based images and concepts related to so-called indigenous peoples and environmentalism have become effective symbols in native activism. According to Conklin these 'transnational symbolic politics propel native activists to present themselves and their causes in terms of essentialisms that fit into the narrow imaginative space allowed for indigenous activists in popular Western imaginations'. Despite the fact that this stance has served many indigenous elites well, the fact remains that many of the most influential arguments for indigenous rights rely on invoking idealised and homogenised images of static cultural traditions in which, according to Western ideas, authenticity is located. Kuper (2017) is even taking this argument a little further by stating that indigenous elites represent a world that is the opposite to our own – imagined as rapaciously materialist. This ideal world is, according to Kuper, solely constructed to suit the 'Greens' and the anti-globalisation movement. Spokesman of indigenous peoples might thus very well be products of political parties and NGOs advocating the agenda's of those movements (Kuper 2017: 216-218).

Representativeness and accountability are two more issues indigenous elites have to deal with. Indigenous activists represent their group of origin in both national and international negotiations, but often lack a defined mandate by that group to act and make decisions on its behalf. As a result of their forward position within society, indigenous leaders often stand at relative distance from the group they represent and are as a result often self-appointed. This automatically leads to questions with regard to their representativeness. Local communities, governments and donor agencies alike are often occupied with the question of representativeness of indigenous leaders. To either support or discredit an indigenous leader or activist, community members, donors and governments use representativeness, or lack thereof, as a way of expressing their agreement or disagreement (Dahl 2012). Members of indigenous elites moreover often disagree among themselves about representativeness. They may disagree between themselves about

strategies, tactics, means and objectives of their cause and question the integrity and accountability of others. Bitter conflicts coloured with mutual suspicions are the result. When the opinion of the group they represent is not sought after, the representative becomes an entrepreneur seeking personal win or the realisation of one's own (political) goals. Barth (1969) already emphasised the entrepreneurial role in ethno-politics: 'the mobilisation of ethnic groups in collective action is effected by leaders who pursue a political enterprise and is therefore not a direct expression of the groups' cultural ideology, or the popular will'.

The position of masyarakat adat in post-New Order Indonesia

The establishment of AMAN has certainly increased public awareness around the issue of *masyarakat adat*. In all AMAN's official documents the term *masyarakat adat* is used. Based on the definition used by JAPHAMA, AMAN defines *masyarakat adat* as those communities whose lives are based on customary rights to certain lands which have been handed down through generations. These communities exert sovereignty over these lands and the natural resources it encompasses. Their societies and cultures are regulated by *adat* law and *adat* institutions which sustain the continuity of these communities. (AMAN 1999). In an effort to push for the recognition of the new *masyarakat adat* terminology it was stated during the first Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (KMAN I) that *masyarakat adat* would no longer recognise the state if the state was not willing to recognise them as such and grant them the specific rights that pertain this status (DTE 1999b). In a reaction to this announcement both a presidential and ministerial decree were respectively issued in September and October 1999 stating that the term *masyarakat terasing* would be changed into *masyarakat adat terpencil* (remote *adat* communities). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs this switch in terminology proclaimed a new vision and a more participatory approach in the development of these communities (Duncan 2004: 91). The inclusion of the word *adat* is certainly to be understood as a kind of recognition that these people are more than just isolated; the principle that founded earlier governmental policies towards *masyarakat terasing*. These people were now acknowledged to have customs, a culture, and a particular way of life. Although this change in terminology is certainly a sign of governmental willingness to come to terms with *masyarakat adat*, the indigenous peoples movement in Indonesia is still disturbed by the fact that the idea of indigenous peoples being peripheral is still pertained in the official terminology. According to the indigenous peoples movement in Indonesia the change of the negative term *terasing* (isolated) into the more neutral *terpencil* (remote) is just a cosmetic modification. The renewed terminology still ventilates the idea that Indonesia's indigenous peoples are both physically and mentally too far away from the centre, where development, modernity, and mainstream society prevails (Duncan 2004: 91).

Another important change that ensued as a result of increased pressure from societal organisations working on behalf of Indonesia's indigenous peoples is the political breakthrough that occurred during the 1999 elections when five seats in the *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Republik Indonesia* (MPR, or People's Consultative Congress)

were reserved for representatives of *etnis minoritas* (ethnic minorities), one of the societal groups represented within the MPR.²³ All five positions have been taken by representatives of ethnic groups that were classified as *masyarakat adat terpencil*: that is a Baduy, an Orang Rimba (formerly known by their colonial name: Kubu), a Papua, a Dayak, and a Sangir. Although political impact remained limited (representatives of ethnic minorities only occupy five out of a total of 695 seats in the MPR), it was significant that indigenous peoples, though under the banner of ethnic minorities, were included in this governmental body.²⁴ But while hopes were set on these five representatives, it is also believed that these people (some of them well known to and formerly actively involved in AMAN) have shown some unexpected shifts in attitude. Once in power, some of them have easily forgotten the cases and issues for which they had been fighting not so long ago (Personal communication with Abdon Nababan, 2003, head office AMAN, Jakarta). It is only after the fall of president Suharto's authoritarian *Orde Baru* regime in May 1998, that Indonesia's indigenous peoples have entered the international arena where indigenous peoples issues are debated. Indigenous peoples in Indonesia have little experience in expressing themselves under the banner of indigeneity and their participation in international forums and networks often does not go unproblematic. Such we can read from the Papuan participant to the 2005 first Workshop of the Regional Network for Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia, who was denied permission to leave the country by the Jakarta authorities.²⁵ The very fact that only few days after the workshop an international solidarity meeting on West Papua was to be held in Manila had alarmed the authorities and made them decide to refrain Papuan citizens from travelling abroad until further notice.²⁶

The Indonesian government still struggles with the question of how to relate and react to the alternative (mediated) imaginations and manifestations of communities within society. While the Indonesian state has certainly tried to develop new structures and procedures

²³ Article 1 of the 1945 Constitution states that Indonesia is a republic with sovereignty vested in the people to be fully exercised by an elected People's Consultative Assembly, which is the highest political institution in the state. Since the Assembly holds the supreme power in the state, the people voice their political and social aspirations through this body. The major tasks of the Assembly are to sanction the Constitution, decide the Guidelines of State Policy, and elect the President and Vice-President for a term of office of five years.

²⁴ Societal group representation in the MPR was eliminated in 2004.

²⁵ The 1st Workshop of the Regional Network for Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia was held from 18 through 22 April 2005 in Cabagan, the Philippines. The network was an initiative by the joint research and education programme (CVPED) of the Isabela State University (The Philippines) and Leiden University (The Netherlands).

²⁶ The Fifth International Solidarity Meeting on West Papua was held in Manila over the weekend of 29 April – 1 May 2005. Although the Indonesian government had tried to convince the Philippine government to cancel the meeting, the event went ahead. Representatives from some fifteen, mainly Asian countries attended the meeting which called for an intensification of the international campaign supporting the aspirations of the West Papuan people, a ban on all military cooperation and arms sales to Indonesia, the release of all West Papuan political prisoners, and stronger support for West Papuan women's rights and empowerment groups.

that are supportive of the nation-wide call for democratisation, the introduction of regional autonomy probably the most influential measure, some issues have remained poignant. On 9 August 2006, the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his barely groundbreaking but nevertheless remarkable speech, acknowledged that the traditional rights of *masyarakat adat* have often been ignored, even violated and disrespected. He said that arrangements for these communities needed to be better and that they should be given their traditional rights. The greater interests of nation and state should, however, not be forgotten and *masyarakat adat* needed to be motivated in order to play an optimal role in national development (DTE 2006b). The very fact that the president paid some attention to this issue is positive, but at the same time his speech was basically reiterating the opinion that both the nation and the state take precedence over the interests of individual communities. It is precisely this stance that has been used to justify the systematic exploitation of natural resources, whilst impoverishing those people claiming to hold customary rights over these resources. Especially the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights to land have remained extremely weak under Indonesian law.²⁷ As mentioned earlier, Indonesia did vote in favour of the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but simultaneously rendered the declaration inapplicable to the Indonesian context. Indonesia, however, stated that it would continue to promote the collective rights of indigenous peoples (United Nations 2007).

While tangible progress is still slow, the growing collective awareness of indigenous peoples in Indonesia and their increased level of organisation has certainly given them the confidence to stand up for their rights. Due to the fact that Indonesia, like any other country, can no longer deny the influential power of the transnational public sphere, the Indonesian state can no longer suppress ethnic groups' utterances of identity without attracting immediate negative attention of the international community. The Indonesian government is increasingly forced to initiate policies that guarantee the right of ethnic minorities to participate in the post-Suharto restructuring of the Indonesian state and nation.

Research questions and methodology

Ever since the first time I went to West Sumatra in 1997, I have been intrigued by the unique generation of young and educated Mentawaians and the extraordinary position they occupy within society. Educated and cradled in a context where sustainable development and democracy were highly shared values, many had high expectations of this extra-ordinary group of Mentawaians, I chose to call the Mentawai elite, taking over from the political establishment in 1999. With little to no experience in politics and administration they plunged themselves into the complexities of the political and

²⁷ In May 2013, the Indonesian Constitutional Court determined that customary forest (*hutan adat*) is no longer part of the state owned forests. This ruling came in response to a judicial review submitted by AMAN. This means that *masyarakat adat* are now recognised as rights bearing subjects entitled to land, resources and territories (Rachman & Siscawati 2017).

administrative reorganisation of the Mentawai Archipelago. During this process they were bound to meet difficulties measuring up to the not necessarily congruent expectancies of both outsiders and fellow Mentawaians. So in 2002 I went to Indonesia again with the wish to understand the dynamics of local politics in the Mentawai Archipelago during the first years after the introduction of regional autonomy. What actually happened on the ground, who was involved in what manner, leading to what kind of power constellations? I decided to approach these research questions by focussing on the on the daily activities of various members of the Mentawai elite involved in this politicking. This approach raised subsequent research questions about the elite itself. What constitutes the background, composition and nature of this elite stemming from a strictly egalitarian but otherwise highly diverse and fragmented society? How did this elite exploit the opportunities created by encroaching global discourses and profound changes in the national political context? How did they localise these changes and discourses by giving them their own cultural stamp? Based on what considerations did they make what kind of decisions? And how did this elite cope with the challenges and dilemmas attached to their new, self-acquired political position during the first turbulent years of regional autonomy and decentralisation, also called *Reformasi*?

Field research

This thesis is based on several extensive field research periods conducted in 1997-1998, 2000, 2001, 2002-2004, 2007 and again in 2014. The longest non-intermittent field research periods specifically undertaken for this thesis were conducted from January 2002 through March 2003 and from February 2004 until January 2005. Field research was conducted in the city of Padang as well as on all of the four Mentawai Islands. A minimum of research was conducted in Jakarta.

The largest part of the data on which these writings are based was gathered in Padang, for the simple reason that my research subjects were most of the time also residing in this provincial capital. Conducting fieldresearch in Padang was rather easy. Due to the fact that I had lived in the city before in 1997-1998, I rather easily found my way around and also got in touch with people quite straightforward because I was already acquainted with many of them.

Due to my earlier visits and various intensive language courses, my conduct of *Bahasa Indonesia* had reached higher levels of fluency by the time I got involved in field research again in 2002-2004. Therefore, in Padang I was able to conduct research completely independent without the help of an interpreter or an assistant. Fieldwork on the Mentawai Islands, however, is of a different kind. It is intensive, physically trying and much more expensive than research in an urban context such as Padang. On the Mentawai Islands, I almost always worked with one or more assistants. Most of the data and research insights as well as most of the more practical do's and don'ts within the Mentawai context I obtained from working with various assistants. It is therefore that all of my field assistants, some of whom have become very close friends over time, are of indispensable value. My assistants often assumed more than one role at a time, as they acted as my host, guide, interpreter, cook, boat operator and moral support. The

latter task might sound like a joke, but it most certainly is not. Conducting anthropological field research in a context like the Mentawai Archipelago is not only a physical and methodological quest, but simultaneously a psychological encounter with least expected and sometimes highly annoying personal characteristics of both the researcher and the researched. Despite the annoyances, in Mentawai I felt included and inspired while having a tremendous amount of fun at the same time.²⁸

As a female researcher in a male dominated research context I never felt uncomfortable or left out. Most of my informants saw no harm in sharing information with me, probably because they never really perceived me as a foreign female researcher, but rather as the partner of a fellow Mentawaian. I met Juniator Tulus in Padang in 1997 and we have been partners and colleagues ever since. We were married until 2014. Being Juniator's partner has probably opened doors that otherwise would have remained closed for a white, somewhat tomboyish woman from the Netherlands.

Official permits for conducting research in both Padang and Mentawai were obtained from the concerning authorities through the intervention of Andalas University under whose supervision my research fell officially. Obtaining a research permit for the Mentawai Islands met with some difficulties in the sense that the office from which I should obtain such a permit was non-existent at that time. Eventually I obtained a research permit from the *kabupaten's* secretary in person, because he was at that time the only person with access to a computer and a printer. Officially I should have then obtained similar research permits from every sub-district (*kecamatan*) office of every *kecamatan* I visited and from all the village heads of every village I visited, but I thought that a bit too laborious.

My field research combines the qualitative anthropological research methods of participant observation, unstructured interviewing and direct, reactive observation (Bernard 2006). People thus always knew I was there and why I was observing them. The fact that I had built up trust and familiarity in the field, convinced me that people were not likely to change their behaviour while I was around. It probably would also have been impossible for people to never let their guard down during the two years I was around. I travelled around, visited places and talked to people in an informal way. Apart from some of the government officials and bureaucrats I almost never made official appointments for interviews. I never recorded any of the interviews or informal talks on tape. Sometimes I noted down some of the information while conducting the interviews, but most of the time I systematically worked out the newly gathered information afterwards. Following people around, talking to them while they were going about their daily routine offered me information in the most unconstrained way. I spent considerable time in the offices of local

²⁸ A smile still comes to my face when I think about the time that I attended this 3-day meeting in Tuapeijat where I was lodged in a newly built family house that, in time, was supposed to be rented out to one of the encroaching civil servants. Unfortunately, the house was not yet equipped with some proper sanitary facilities as a result of which one of my temporary roommates somewhat sheepishly confessed to me and my husband that he, realising that he was out of other options, had been swinging his excrements sealed in a plastic bag out of the window the previous night.

NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri and Yayasan Laggai Simaeru and more than once I was part of fieldtrips, protest actions, social gatherings and official meetings organised by these NGOs. In the course of time I noted down the life histories of some 25 Mentawaians who occurred prominent in the field to me. These life histories offered me insight in their individual background, education, career, perceptions, dilemmas and dreams for the future. Though interesting as life histories may be, I have not used this methodology in the same way as, for example, Grallert (2000), who dedicated her whole research to the life story of one Mentawaiian youngster, Levi.²⁹ For me, the life histories I recorded served as a means to get insight into how Mentawaians residing in Padang experience daily life, of how they perceive themselves, their stance in wider society, their relationships with others (both Mentawaiian and non-Mentawaiian) and their perspective on the future of the Mentawai Archipelago. These 25 individuals are very much part and parcel of what I call the Mentawaiian elite in this thesis. The Mentawaiian elite, however, consists of many more individuals than the 25 persons I looked into in more detail. The Mentawaiian elite is not a bounded group in a sociological sense, but rather a category of independent individuals with fairly divergent backgrounds and ideas about the future. I have chosen to call them an elite because they form a small group within Mentawaiian society that stands apart because of their educational qualifications. Their increased analytical power eventually allowed several of them to take over from the political establishment and become a political and administrative elite themselves.

Written sources

While being in the field I gathered almost everything being written about Mentawai in the local newspapers. The Padang-based NGO, Yayasan Citra Mandiri supported me a lot in this process of gathering written sources, because they were also scanning over the local newspapers, extracting whatever articles about Mentawai, and collecting them in handy finger-thick compilations called *clippings*. People at Yayasan Citra Mandiri were happy to allow me to make photocopies of their *clippings* as I every now and then helped them out scanning the newspapers for more articles.

In May 1999 Yayasan Citra Mandiri came with their own newsletter; an A4 sized leaflet of some 10-12 pages, soon replaced by a real tabloid sized newspaper that initially appeared only once a month. At a later stage this newspaper called Puailiggoubat appeared every fortnight, which it still does until this very day. With the appearance of Puailiggoubat, a newspaper by and meant for a Mentawaiian public, but nevertheless written in *bahasa Indonesia*, my life as a collector of data became a true feast. Data and information were now readily available and the only thing I now needed to do was to read, absorb and crosscheck. Apart from being a source of information and a guide in field research, Puailiggoubat itself also became subject to research, findings of which can be found in chapter 4 of this book.

²⁹ Levi Sirirui unfortunately died only shortly before Bettina Grallert was able to finish her master thesis devoted to the life of Levi. As I myself have known Levi only for a short period of his life, Grallert's thesis offers valuable insights in the political aspirations of this inspiring young Mentawaiian.

The Internet

Puailiggoubat has also been online since 2003. Information on the website was, however, dated and incomplete. It was only in 2010 that Puailiggoubat online made a major leap forward, publishing every story that had appeared in the printed version. In October 2015, YCM launched a new web portal called MentawaiKita.com. This web portal replaced Puailiggoubat.com, but still presents an electronic version of the newspaper every fortnight. MentawaiKita.com is a fairly professional website that brings the latest news from Mentawai including pictures and often critical analyses. These online developments have enabled me to follow the latest developments within the Mentawai Archipelago more easily than ever before. Apart from Puailiggoubat, which kept me posted long after I had left the field, various social media platforms, of which Facebook is probably the most influential, kept me in touch with my research topic. Although, over the last few years I have only superficially held track of the lives, activities and careers of my former research informants, the Internet did enable me to keep track of the main developments.

The process of writing

For various reasons the process of writing this thesis has been long and can hardly be called straightforward. The fact that the writing of this thesis has taken such a long time can be considered both positive as well as negative. Negative in the sense that over the course of time certain finesses may have gone lost. The focus on and the in-depth involvement in my research subjects simply are no longer as sharp as it used to be 10-15 years ago. However, being slow in noting down research results can also result into something positive. I have been able to follow my research subjects over an extended period of time. Such has given me the opportunity to write a thesis that, rather than depicting an issue pinpointed in time, describes people and events and the way in which they have developed over time.

The frequent and extensive periods of fieldwork allow this thesis to be a 'thick description' of my observations. According to Geertz (1973) thick description in anthropology offers detailed and contextualised descriptions of observed events relevant for the research at hand. Thick description is furthermore composed of commentary and interpretation. Following Geertz, this ethnography shows, rather than tells, what I have been able to observe while being in the field. I, quite straightforward, offer a comprehensive picture of human behaviour and the circumstances and mechanisms responsible for its taste and colour. Whereas some may classify the behaviour I describe as less amiable, I would like to stress that it is not my intention to discredit anyone whose conduct is discussed in this thesis and neither should it be read with such a desire.

Some notes on the text

In this thesis all of my informants are mentioned by their real name. As Mentawai covers a relatively small community and most informants are, or have become public persons over time, using pseudonyms would be futile. In some cases I have chosen to present sensitive or non-confirmed information in such a way that it cannot be traced back to specific persons. While my research quite straightforward highlights several less

envious aspects of human behaviour (dishonesty, egocentrism and deception) and dirty politicking (corruption, collusion, nepotism and money politics), my research explicitly offers no value judgement. My research simply tells about the everyday practices of a generation of politically engaged Mentawaians as they appear to me. It is not my wish to discredit anyone whose behaviour is discussed in this report and neither should my thesis be read with such a desire.

Italics are used for both Mentawai as well as Indonesian words.

Research locations

My research includes two localities: the city of Padang and the Mentawai Archipelago. While my research is foremost focussing on Mentawaians residing in Padang, as a result of which my fieldwork was mainly concentrated in this city, I have, as already indicated above, also spent considerable time on all four of the Mentawai islands. In the following section I will briefly describe both localities in terms of their most important historical, geographic, administrative, governmental, economic, demographic and cultural features.

The Mentawai Archipelago

The Mentawai Archipelago, consisting of four large islands (Siberut (4480 km²), Sipora (845 km²), North Pagai, and South Pagai (together 1645 km²) and several smaller islets, is situated in the Indian Ocean approximately 100 kilometres off the west coast of West Sumatra. The Mentawai Islands are characterised by a rough topography with hills rising steeply, the highest 'peak' located on Sipora rising some 450 metres above sea level. The coastline on the eastern side reflects the continuing tectonic movements in the region, contributing to a very irregular coastline with many bays, capes, islets, coral reefs and mangrove forests. By contrast, the more stable west coast is straight and lined with virtually unbroken broad sandy beaches, but steep cliffs and rough seas make it difficult to access the islands from the west coast. The rough seas that surround Mentawai have only recently turned the Mentawai Archipelago in one of the world's most spectacular surfing hotspots. Though the surfing industry is mainly off-shore and foremost in the hands of Australian businessmen, the locals benefit sideways by selling the surfing tourists locally produced food and souvenirs and sometimes offering them lodging when they come ashore. Due to the fact that the Mentawai Archipelago is located within a seismological active area, the island chain is characterised by frequent earth tremors and occasional earthquakes, sometimes accompanied by tidal waves (WWF 1980). On 26 December 2004 a massive undersea earthquake with a magnitude of 9.1 centred in this zone west of Sumatra, triggered a large tsunami that inundated coastal areas throughout the Indian Ocean region and caused widespread death and destruction. Quite surprisingly, the Mentawai Archipelago was, apart from some damaged houses on Siberut's north coast, barely affected by this catastrophe that was mediated at length. The more recent earthquakes of 2007 and late 2010, with magnitudes of respectively 6.8 and 7.7 gained little media attention but did cause quite severe infrastructural damage on all Mentawai Islands. Moreover, over 500 people lost their lives in the 2010 quake (Puailiggoubat 11/2010).

All four Mentawai islands have originally been bedecked with lowland dipterocarp forest.³⁰ Due to large-scale commercial logging during the last five decades the forests on all four Mentawai islands have been seriously affected, but those on Sipora and the Pagai Islands in particular. The forests on the island of Siberut have long been protected by various conservation efforts where leading international conservation agencies like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Conservation International (CI) have been involved in. Logging was even totally banned from Siberut by presidential decree in between 1993-1999. Regional autonomy, however, lifted the ban, resulting in international conservation agencies withdrawing from Siberut while loggers rushed in to strip the remaining forests on Siberut (DTE 2000a). Since 2000 two large-scale commercial timber companies have been operative on Siberut, Koperasi Andalas Madani (KAM) and PT Salaki Summa Sejahtera (PT SSS) with concession areas of 45,650 ha and 49,440 ha respectively. Due to community opposition and pressure from conservation activists KAM was forced to close down in 2007. PT SSS, active in north Siberut is currently still operative (Syofiardi Bachyul et al. 2015). Apart from the large-scale commercial logging operations, local government has since 1999 also issued dozens of so-called *Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu* (IPK) concessions to local companies (DTE 2006a).³¹ In order to regulate the sprawl in IPK concessions, Jakarta withdrew the issuing of these concessions again from local governments in 2005.

With a total population of 76,000 individuals, the autochthonous Mentawaians form with an estimated number of nearly 70,000 people still a majority within their own territory (BPSKKM 2011). An estimated 10% of the total population is of non-native origin. Amongst these migrants we find Batak, Minangkabau, Javanese and Niassans, most of them residing in the five larger harbour villages of Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Sioban, Tuapeijat, and Sikakap. Although various popular mediations may make us believe otherwise, only a very small part of the population is still residing in their elevated communal longhouses (*uma*) scattered along the riverbanks. These 'traditional' communities, consisting of an estimated 3000-5000 individuals in total, are residing in the up-river areas of Simalegi, Simatalu, Sagulubbe and Rereiket; all located on the relatively remote western half of the island of Siberut. Whereas only on Siberut patches of relatively undisturbed forest are still standing, allowing these people to live a more or less traditional forest-based lifestyle, it is only in these forested areas on Siberut that we can encounter with these traditional communities.

The majority of the Mentawaians nowadays lives in one of the 43 official *desa* (villages) or *dusun* (hamlets). Although 20 out of these 43 villages are located on Siberut, this island is still the least densely populated island with only 9-10 people per square kilometre. With only 13 villages, the island of Sipora is with 27 people per square kilometre the most

³⁰ Lowland dipterocarp forests are composed of an exceptionally high number of plant species and are furthermore characterised by the presence of a variety of tropical hardwood trees (mostly Dipterocarpaceae and Euphorbiaceae), much sought after by the timber industry (WWF 1980).

³¹ IPK is a wood utilisation permit, allowing its holder to harvest timber from areas that have been slated for conversion. IPK concessions most often do not exceed 100ha each.

densely populated island within the archipelago. The most densely populated area (34 people per km²) within the archipelago is, however, still to be found in the sub-district of Sikakap on North Pagai (BPSKKM 2011). From the 1970s onwards this area is the centre of the logging business on the Mentawai Islands, attracting not only local people, but also a lot of migrants from outside the Mentawai Archipelago.

Having been Christianised ever since the beginning of the 20th century, nearly half of the Mentawaians, the majority of them residing on Sipora and the Pagai Islands, are nowadays officially registered as Protestants. A little over 30% of the total population adheres to Catholicism, the majority of them living on Siberut. Only 19% of the total population, half of which – some 7,500 individuals – belonging to the migrant population, is registered as Muslims (BPSKKM 2011).³² Whereas *arat sabulungan*, classified as a local animistic faith, is officially prohibited since 1954, figures with regard to practitioners of this local cosmological system do not appear in the statistics. Forming the core of Mentawai culture, the sphere of thoughts and attitudes that constitute *arat sabulungan* or parts thereof is – despite repression and radical change – still traceable in many practices of daily life.

The traditional livelihood system of the Mentawaians is based on simple but effective agriculture and animal husbandry supplemented by hunting, fishing and the collecting of forest products (Persoon 1994). Despite various changes made in the settlement patterns of the Mentawaians, 87% of the population is until this very day still primarily involved in agriculture, horticulture, forestry and/or fishery (BPSKKM 2011). The fact that these apparent independent sectors of economic activity are clustered as one in the statistic overviews of the Mentawai Islands, points at the fact that these different economic sectors are currently still integrated in the livelihood system at household level. Hunting, the collection of forest products and the care for the semi-wild, free roaming pigs have lost their significance to most communities who transferred to the villages (Persoon 1998b). Traditionally only coconuts had commercial value in the Mentawai context, but later copra and also rattan and agarwood were bartered with the traders in the harbour villages in return for articles that could not be produced locally (machetes, iron cooking pans, gongs, knives, tobacco, textiles, glass-beats, and salt) (Persoon 1991). From the 1950s onwards, the introduction of cash crops (cloves, nutmeg, betel nuts, patchouli oil and cacao), pelagic fishing and seasonal and temporary jobs in the logging sector and tourist industry provide the Mentawaians with a modest, yet uncertain and irregular cash income. Their inclusion within the monetary economy has simultaneously evoked their taste for modern and luxurious products such as canned food, sunglasses, flashlights, radio's, chainsaws, outboard engines and more recently: TV sets with the accompanying dish antennas, CD players, mobile phones, (motor)bicycles and even cars.

Until the turn of the century the only more permanent paid positions available within the Mentawai Archipelago were those created by the church. Some of the Mentawaians

³² Both Islam and Catholicism were introduced in the 1950s as opposed to Protestantism; introduced already at the beginning of the 19th century.



Rattan in Salappa, Siberut.

who enjoyed the education offered to them by the church have become pastoral workers, reverends, nurses, or primary school teachers themselves, gradually replacing their mainly Batak and Javanese predecessors. Positions within the local bureaucracy have only sparingly been available to the Mentawaians. Lack of interest, exclusion and the fact that adhering Islam has long been obligatory in order to be able to apply for those positions, have withheld the Mentawaians from these occupancies. Since the turn of the century, however, the expanding administration within the politically autonomous archipelago has given many Mentawaians the opportunity to become a civil servant within the Mentawai Archipelago.

Both geographically and administratively the Mentawai Archipelago is part of the province of West Sumatra. Since October 1999, the Mentawai Archipelago forms one of the twelve autonomous *kabupaten* (districts) that constitute West Sumatra. The harbour village Tuapeijat located on the island of Sipora is since then serving as the district's administrative and governmental centre.

Regional autonomy has particularly spurred infrastructural development within the archipelago. Over the last 15 years local government initiated the construction of government offices, roads, harbours, hospitals and schools all over the archipelago. The most radical change took place in Tuapeijat. In less than two years time Tuapeijat was changed from a small and relatively insignificant coastal village into the archipelago's political and administrative capital. A completely new governmental complex was built just

outside the village centre, consequently bringing in hundreds of government officials and civil servants all seeking for residence, transportation and public facilities.

Transportation facilities between the Mentawai Islands and the Sumatran mainland have been very poor until the late 1980s.³³ When the Mentawaian government transferred to Tuapeijat in 2001, transportation services between Padang and Mentawai as well as those in between the Mentawai Islands have significantly increased.³⁴ It was also then that the Mentawaian government introduced several polyester ferries meant for the transportation of passengers only. Just lately, the airstrip on the island of Sipora has been revived.³⁵ Since early 2014 charter flights to and from Padang are offered up to three times a week. While the airfare is still beyond the reach of most Mentawaians, this means of transportation is almost solely used by tourists and some government officials.

Transportation on the different islands has long been on foot along one of the many trails or logging roads or by dugout canoe only. Local government has made a start with the construction of a road network in order to ease transportation. The roads built are, however, often of inferior quality and are subject to little to no maintenance. As a result the new roads quite easily fall prey to wet weather conditions and the correspondingly soggy soils. To the disappointment of all, many roads have quickly turned into mud trails again. With the recent construction of cemented roads and paths in and in between villages and settlements many people have bought themselves a bike or a motorcycle. While only very few people in the harbour villages now own a car, intensive traffic is still absent on the Mentawai Islands; if only because one cannot go anywhere beyond the paved roads within the villages.

Electricity and running water can until this day only be found in several larger harbour villages like Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Tuapeijat, Sioban and Sikakap. Muara Saibi finally received government sponsored electricity in 2017. A landline connection was already available in the 1980s in Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Sioban and Sikakap. Mobile telephone connections can nowadays also be found in these villages as well as in several of the main sub-district villages, such as Tuapeijat and Muara Saibi. Basic banking and postal facilities are still only available in Muara Siberut, Tuapeijat and Sikakap.

The city of Padang

Padang, officially labelled as *kota yang tercinta* (the beloved city) is located on the west coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Apart from the landmass on the mainland, the municipality also includes 19 small offshore islands mainly used for recreational purposes.

³³ It was only in 1987 that a wooden ferry, equipped for the transportation of both cargo and passengers came into service between Padang and Mentawai (Persoon 1994: 261).

³⁴ Despite the fact that Siberut, Sipora, and the Pagai Islands are all part of the Mentawai Archipelago and inhabited by Mentawaians, these islands have long been rather isolated from each other. Contact, interaction and transportation between the Mentawai Islands have always been minimal.

³⁵ The airstrip created in the 1970s in order to conveniently fly in logging personnel, fell out of business from the 1980s onwards.

Padang is located on a floodplain that borders the Indian Ocean and is intersected by several rivers. On the south side the city is bordered by forested hills and in the east by the Bukit Barisan mountain range, which enables the city to expand in northern direction only (Colombijn 1994).

With an average of 4300mm of rain per year Padang is one of the wettest cities in Indonesia and, because of its location on the floodplain, prone to inundations. The geographic location of the city near the so-called Java Trench, a deep and seismically active subduction zone, where the seafloor of the oceanic tectonic plate is being forced towards and under the more stable continental shelf, renders Padang extremely vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis. Colonial reports make notice of the fact that in both 1797 and 1833 Padang was completely inundated by tsunamis that followed heavy earthquakes. On 30 September 2009, Padang was again hit by an offshore earthquake, fortunately not followed by a tsunami. But this 8.9 magnitude earthquake caused some 25% of Padang's infrastructure to be destroyed, especially hitting the densely populated city centre. Most of the damage caused by this hazard has been cleared or repaired. But in some instances people have simply continued their daily activities right on top of the rubble caused by the quake, seemingly ignorant of the potential danger they are in.

Currently the city is inhabited by a little over 830,000 people, the majority of which belongs to the Minangkabau ethnic group. Though scattered all over Indonesia, the Minangkabau consider West Sumatra their homeland (*ranah Minang*) and are proud of Padang; a city that is considered to be one of the cleanest and best organised cities in Indonesia. With the Minangkabau forming the overwhelming majority in Padang, their cultural habits and religious choices are most influential in the city. The Minangkabau are strongly Islamic with a tendency to cling on to more strict traditions of sharia.³⁶ The Tionghoa (ethnic Chinese), who migrated to Padang soon after the Dutch installed the first trade post there in the 17th century, form the second largest ethnic group in Padang. They have clustered together in Chinatown located in the southwestern part of the city where many old buildings constructed by the Dutch traders over 200 years ago are still standing. Under the New Order regime public expressions of their culture, religion, and language were forbidden. As a result many ethnic Chinese adopted Christianity, but secretly continued to hang on to various Buddhist and Confucianist traditions. As elsewhere in Indonesia, the Chinese are mainly involved in trade and business. As an outstanding, often successful non-indigenous ethnic minority, the ethnic Chinese have triggered ethnic violence against them several times in history (Jacobsen 2005). The latest and rather severe nationwide outburst of ethnic violence inflicted upon the Tionghoa dates from May 1998 when people from the wider public, unsatisfied with the speed with which political changes at the national level were made, molested, raped and even murdered members of the Chinese ethnic community while simultaneously destroying their properties (Coppel 2008). While violence against the Tionghoa in Padang remained limited, the Padang Chinese have in fear of more ethnic violence more or less imprisoned

³⁶ As opposed to secular legislation, Sharia refers to a body of moral and religious laws derived from religious prophecy (particularly the Quran and the Hadith) (Binawan 2011).

themselves in their houses now further fortified with high, barb-wired concrete walls and bubble-locked iron gates. The era of *Reformasi* has, however, also brought many new freedoms for the Tionghoa who now more openly display their cultural, ethnic and religious features. Sadly, the 2009 earthquake also destroyed the old See Hin Kiong temple in China town. Due to the more permissive atmosphere of the post-New Order administrations, the Padang Chinese have rebuilt a truly magnificent temple.

Due to its large deep-sea harbour, Teluk Bayur, Padang has always been a trade centre. Apart from the harbour that simultaneously supports the produce of agricultural products in the rural hinterlands of the city, Padang's economy is also one of industry and service. A cement plant, located in the hills to the southeast of the city, producing cement since 1910 is the oldest cement plant in Indonesia extracting some 5.2 million tons of cement a year through open-pit mining. Harboursing five large universities and several higher educational institutions Padang certainly serves as an educational centre for the West Sumatran region.

Outline

In the following six chapters of this thesis I describe how a group of formally educated, politically engaged Mentawaians have used the opportunities brought about by regional autonomy and decentralisation in order to serve their political and personal agenda's. Despite the fact that the constitution of this group is rather heterogeneous, throughout this thesis I call this group the local elite.

Chapter two describes several ethnographic features of the Mentawaians which I consider important for the informed understanding of the choices made and identity politics used by the local elite in their negotiations. Chapter two furthermore gives an overview of how the Mentawaians have been perceived by outsiders and how these views have influenced the stance of the Mentawaians in broader Indonesian society. Understanding this background will lead to a greater understanding of the way in which Mentawaians think about themselves, of how they present themselves and of how they handle the difficult question of whether they should choose the path of progress and modernisation or hang on to a traditional forest-based lifestyle.

Chapter three consists of an explanation of how formal education as an important part of modernisation processes taking place in the Mentawai Archipelago can be seen as the main factor in the emergence of the local elite.

Chapter four investigates how and why the local elite was involved in the establishment of various local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The influence that the global discourse on biodiversity conservation had on these local NGOs is also part of the descriptive elements of chapter four.

The introduction of regional autonomy formed the window of opportunity for the local elite to finally access the resources of the local state. Chapter five describes how

Mentawai was one of the first regions to separate from the administrative unit they had been part of during the previous *Orde Baru* period.

Chapter six documents how the local elite has governed the politically and administratively independent Mentawai Archipelago during the last years of the period called *Reformasi*. The end of the reformation period coincided with the end of my last field research. This is also where the descriptive elements of this thesis end. Politicking in Mentawai, however, has certainly not come to an end. In an attempt to bridge the years that lay between the end of the period described in this thesis and the present day, the last chapter is followed by an epilogue.

In the epilogue I address contemporary issues with regard to politics and administration and development, the two main issues of this thesis.



2 Development and Identity

Introduction

Try entering 'Mentawai' in Google, click for 'images' and find yourself confronted with an overload of paradisiacal images of blue skies, turquoise seas, white beaches, emerald green forests and an even more colourful local people covered in full body tattoos. These images give prove of the fact that the Mentawai Archipelago is, even today, still perceived as a pristine and isolated region. Its carefree inhabitants seemingly untouched by the hustle and bustle of modern life. These images, however, pleasant as they may be, only touch upon a very small (and often staged) part of reality. These images bypass current day questions and issues the Mentawaians have to deal with and moreover deny the Mentawai Archipelago and its inhabitants a history. According to these images nothing ever changes within the Mentawai Archipelago.

The Mentawai Islands and its inhabitants, however, have a long and rather intense history of foreign interference pushing for change, development and modernisation. Ranging from Dutch colonial government, missionaries of several world religions, post-colonial governments, researchers of various disciplines, photographers, cinematographers, travellers, tourists and various conservation agents, these outsiders have all put their cultural stamp on what they believe the Mentawai Archipelago and its inhabitants should look like and how they should be represented to the outside world. Regardless of how the Mentawaians perceive themselves, these outsiders have successively portrayed the Mentawaians as primitives in need of civilisation and a proper religion, as backward, isolated communities in urgent need of an upgrade towards full Indonesian citizenship, as a-political noble savages or indigenous people, and as intrinsic environmentalists trying to carve out a living in an Eden otherwise considered to be under serious threat. As a result, during the last century the Mentawaians have seen themselves confronted with christianisation, islamisation, the introduction of formal education, forced resettlement, levelling cultural policies of the postcolonial state, commercial logging, conservation efforts by large international conservation agencies, (ethno)tourism and the popular and scientific mediation of selected aspects of their culture and natural environment. This chapter briefly describes these outsider interventions from the irregular precolonial contacts through the intense postcolonial policies of the twentieth century. This chapter describes how the Mentawaians live, internalise, adapt to or refrain themselves from these (often conflicting) developments and opportunities, creating an almost endless heterogeneity amongst them, ranging from more or less traditional forest based communities to well educated city-dwellers. Chapter two furthermore describes how these outsider ideas about Mentawaian culture and identity have affected the way in

which the Mentawaians think of and perceive themselves. The description of these interventions and their consequences end in 1999, the year in which regional autonomy came into effect. The remaining chapters of this book deal with more recent developments and the way in which they have evolved in the years after 1999.

Precolonial contact and the making of Mentawai

In the absence of a written culture, pretty much everything that has been written about the history of the Mentawai Archipelago and its inhabitants is done so by outsiders. Although Minangkabau, Chinese, Buginese and other local traders have probably frequented the Mentawai Islands long before the Europeans did in the early 17th century, it were the earlier European ship journals that first mentioned the islands. In 1600 admiral Van Neck landed his ship on the shores of the Pagai Islands, naming these islands the Nassau Islands. Neumann (1909) tells us that Van Neck, without getting into detail, made notice of signs of human inhabitation of these islands. Shortly after Van Neck visited the Pagai Islands, the island of Sipora was named 'Goe Fortuyn' (Good Fortune). This promising name had, however, not much to do with the characteristics of the island of Sipora itself. The island was given this name because the sick and dying crew of the drifting VOC vessel *Vlissingen* was luckily rescued by another VOC vessel accidentally passing by (Persoon 1994: 211). In an account dated 1621 by a French sailor we can read that he understood from Mentawaians residing on the Sumatran mainland that Siberut, in those days referred to as Matana or Mintaon, was the only island in what is nowadays known as the Mentawai Archipelago, inhabited by humans. This idea stands in contrast to the earlier observation with regard to inhabitation by Van Neck.

Reeves (1999) describes how 'Mentawai' and its concomitant identity categories 'Mentawaiian' and 'the Mentawaians' became comprehensive identifiers for all of the four Mentawai Islands and its inhabitants only in the early 19th century literature authored by traders, travellers, scholars and missionaries. From this period onward the written accounts about the islands and their inhabitants become more ethnographic. It is probably Crisp (1799) who introduced the precursor of the term into western discourse. In his account about the Poggy Islands (Pagai Islands) he notes that the inhabitants of these islands refer to themselves as "Poggy", whereas the people of Sumatra refer to them as "orang Mantawee". Crisp considers this term to originate from the "natives" own language in which the word "Mantao" is used to indicate a man (Crisp 1799:81). Crisp furthermore mentions that "Porah" or "Fortune Island" (Sipora) is inhabited by people of the same race (Crisp 1799: 83). Few years later Marsden (1811) reports that the inhabitants of the "Pagi islands" (Pagai Islands) derive their origin from the "orang mantawei" of some island to the north called "Si Biru" (Siberut). He then, leaning on Crisp's account, somewhat bluntly summarises, that the "Pagi islands" (Pagai Islands) as well as the island of "Si Porah (Sipora) and "Si Biru" (Siberut) are all "inhabited by the mantawei race" (Marsden 1811: 479).

Later writers of the 19th and throughout the 20th century have despite the fact that they

did recognise differences and variation further fixed the position of the inhabitants of the different islands, furthermore attaching a language, a culture and an identity to them. Due to this fixing – according to Reeves, a habit inspired by the desire for meaningful comparison and the encompassing of localities within overarching structures – the idea of Mentawai as a bounded cultural area inhabited by a homogeneous ethnic population solidified. Nowadays, ‘Mentawai’ is a commonly used term in both popular and scientific literature, seemingly effortless representing a certain territory, a people, a culture, an identity and a language all at the same time. Why this discursive construction of the identity of the Mentawaians may be considered problematic has been discussed at length by Reeves (1999).³⁷ Just doing away with the essentialist categories so much detested by Reeves, however, does not seem to be a viable option. Not so in the last place because these terms are also used as identifiers by Mentawaians themselves in both everyday language as well as in their political rhetoric.

About origin and identity

Schefold (1988, 1989) ascertains that there is no clear prehistoric record about the actual origin of the Mentawaians. Mentawaians are believed to represent one of the earliest populations – referred to as proto-Malay – to colonise Indonesia. It is therefore assumed that they may have arrived in the archipelago some two thousand years ago. Mentawaians themselves tell several stories explaining how their ancestors have arrived on the islands. What these stories, collected and written down by various traders, travellers, scholars and missionaries, teach us is that the early inhabitants of Simatalu (northwest Siberut) – in some versions originating from or travelling through the island of Nias – originated from north Sumatra and beyond. Both southeast Siberut and the Pagai Islands were visited by first settlers from Padang and Muko-Muko (Bengkulu) respectively.³⁸ Assuming that both migration flows have actually occurred, we may conclude that the ethnic group nowadays considered Mentawaians is not necessarily of the homogeneous ethnic constitution as it is generally believed to be (see also Tulus 2012a: 90-91). None of the stories mentions Sipora as the first place for the earliest inhabitants to settle. Sipora, so it seems, only became inhabited by people from Siberut migrating southwards and by people from the Pagai Islands travelling north. The dispersion of the early inhabitants all over the archipelago is the topic of recent research by Tulus (2012a) who through thorough investigation of various family stories traced the migratory movements of these families

³⁷ Reeves argues that with the use of these generic categories, variation, details, differences and local particularities will get lost, while on the other hand, particularities attached to certain localities are at risk of becoming representative for the generic categories. Another important argument suggested by Reeves is the fact that, in the construction of the generic categories, indigenous representations of identity are often given no space at all. This is according to Reeves the main reason why these categories tend to obscure more than they illuminate (Reeves 1999).

³⁸ See for instance Neumann 1909, Morris 1900, Hansen 1915, Kruyt 1924, Sihombing 1979, Nooy-Palm 1968, Schefold 1976, 1980a, 1988 and Tulus 2012 for more detailed information about Mentawaian stories of origin.

over several generations. His research shows that people have been migrating back and forward in all directions, spreading themselves over all river basins on all four islands. From his observations we may furthermore conclude that in general, the history of the dispersion of the Mentawaians is one of conflict. Seemingly trivial disagreements about mango harvests, domesticated pigs and wild boars have more than once caused the initial kin groups to split. Rather than addressing the problems, disagreements were more often evaded by the simple withdrawal of one of the disputing factions. Part of the kin group thus left the settlement and went to live elsewhere, so gradually forming the some 170 principal clans that exist today.³⁹

One historic story about a particularly violent conflict (*pasaggangan*), that exceeded the level of the domestic disputes mentioned above, is worth mentioning here. The story tells about a clash between inhabitants of Simatalu and those living in an adjacent area called Simalegi. Things went seriously out of hand as a result of which large numbers of people started migrating from this area in northwest Siberut. Part of the migrants went in southern direction where they after some time stumbled upon the Sakalagat, pushing part of this population further southward and even onto the island of Sipora.⁴⁰ It is believed that the practice of headhunting also dates back to this particular incident. In order to revenge family members killed during the initial hostilities, people occasionally organised headhunting raids to Simatalu ever since. Although the Dutch colonial power has successfully abolished headhunting in Mentawai since the early twentieth century, the sharp variation in local dialects as well as the still prevailing mutual distrust between the different clans is often ascribed to this earlier violent conflict (Persoon 1994: 218).

On general terms Mentawaians refer to themselves as *Simattaoui* (Mentawaians). *Simattaoui* or *Mentawai* is the term Mentawaians use to differentiate between themselves and all others. All others, that is the local migrants of other ethnicity, the people living on Sumatra, fellow Indonesians, and foreigners are indicated with the term *sasareu* (literally: those from afar). In some parts of Mentawai, especially those areas where tourists (backpackers and surfers) are often seen (e.g. the Rereiket area (Siberut), Taileleu (south Siberut) and Katiet (north Sipora), foreigners, regardless of whether they are actually tourists or not are often indicated as *turi* (tourists).⁴¹ Despite the existence of the homogenising indicator *Simattaoui*, the population from the southern Mentawai islands often refer to the inhabitants of Siberut as *Sabirut*. The population on Siberut on their turn refers to the people on the southern islands as *Sakalagat*. The people on the Pagai Islands again differentiate between themselves and those people on Sipora, calling them *Sakalelegat* (those who we left (on the island of Sipora), but are still of our kind) or *Sakobou*.

³⁹ The literature is ambiguous about the exact number of family clans, which is understandable if we realise that the clan is not a fixed entity. Clans split, merge, and dissolve constantly, continuously changing their numbers. I follow Tulus' (2012) count of around 170 clans.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Juniator Tulus 2013.

⁴¹ As Bakker (1999) explains in his masters thesis, researchers like ourselves are often also indicated as *turi*, because just like tourists we are white, carrying heavy backpacks and cameras while we, on top of all that, also have big noses.

All are categories that may come along with strong negative stereotypes. *Sakalagat* are the cowards (they migrated from Siberut in earlier ages), the ones that are driven away, the losers, the ones from whom we have to fear black magic, the ones that eat the as inferior perceived *gette'* (taro).⁴² *Sakalagat* are the ones that renounce their Mentawaian culture and identity, the ones that became more or less similar to the Minangkabau. *Sabirut* then, of course, are the ones who stayed, the passive ones, the ancient (*kuno*), outdated, old-fashioned and conservative part of the Mentawaians. They are rude, harsh, traditional in the negative sense of the word and above all savage. The *Sabirut* like to kill. They are known for cutting your head off for no particular reason (*simateggele*). Sometimes people also refer to themselves according to the above-mentioned categories. Then of course the negative stereotypes accompanying the terms are bended towards more positive characteristics. The *Sabirut* perceive of themselves as fierce, authentic people, while the *Sakalagat* consider themselves *maju* (developed or modern). Instead of presenting themselves as *Sakalagat*, people originating from the Pagai Islands more often refer to themselves as *Sikakap* or *orang Sikakap* (people from Sikakap), using the name of South Pagai's principal harbour village as a substitute for all inhabitants of both Pagai Islands regardless of whether they indeed reside in the village of Sikakap. The terms *Sabirut*, *Sakalegat* and *Sakalegat* are used to differentiate, on a general level, between the populations of the different islands.

About suku and settlements

For Mentawaians, however, more important than differentiating between themselves according to island, is identification according to clan. Mentawaian society is organised along exogamous, patrilineal clans called *uma* (clan). One is member of an *uma* by blood (all male members of a clan are genealogically connected to one another through a common ancestor), by marriage and sometimes by adoption. The women that marry into the clan of her husband, however, will always retain their double status. Apart from becoming part of the clan of her husband she will also remain to be a member of the clan of her father and brothers.⁴³ Schefold (1988) explains how these *uma* in earlier days consisted of some 10-15 nuclear families (*lalep* or *sapou*) or 80-90 individuals. Traditionally, these kin groups lived together in large communal houses, also called *uma* (house/home). With the rivers (apart from walking) as the only means of transportation the Mentawaians built these *uma*, that were fairly large in size, at irregular distance from each other along the riverbanks.⁴⁴ Nowadays few of these large elevated communal houses are still to be found in the interiors of Siberut. On average, the communities

⁴² While most Mentawaians nowadays eat rice on a daily basis, sago – a starch obtained from the sago palm (*Metroxylon sagu*) – has long been the staple on Siberut. On the southern Mentawai Islands on the other hand, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) has long been the staple while unprocessed sago was considered food for their pigs and chickens only.

⁴³ By the rule of patrilineality children are thus members of their father's clan and, though exceptions are multiple, women will have to leave their children to the care of her husband's family in case of a divorce or the untimely death of her husband. The women themselves, though here again exceptions often occur, have to return to their fathers and brothers.

⁴⁴ See Schefold (1988, 2003) for details on the construction and the (ritual) function of the *uma*.

inhabiting these houses nowadays comprise of not more than 15-20 individuals only. Due to this decline in inhabitants, the size of the *uma* has also decreased, but their interior, structure and function have remained more or less the same (Persoon 1994: 223).

Traditional settlements and settlement patterns on the southern Mentawai Islands were different from those on Siberut. On Siberut early settlements, *puumaijat* - that is the large communal house, the gardens, fields and rivers surrounding it, as well as all other additional constructions (e.g. *lalep*, nuclear family field houses) in its near vicinity - consisted of only one kin group. On the southern islands, though, it was quite common that the members of several *uma* settled together in the same area (*laggai*), suggesting a village like structure. This settlement pattern had everything to do with the length and depth of the rivers on the southern Mentawai islands being significantly shorter and shallower than those on Siberut (Nooy-Palm 1968: 170). As a result of this shortage of suitable space on the riverbanks, the different *uma* on the southern islands were thus

Traditionally,
transportation was
done by dugout
canoe (By Matthijs
Eindhoven).



automatically located closer to one another and relatively more close to the coast. As a consequence of the aberrant settlement patterns on the southern Mentawai islands, people there had to accept that potentially hostile members of other *uma* practically lived on their doorstep. People still feared each other because of possible headhunting reprisals that were still quite vivid then and the practice of *taek* or *guna guna* (harm inflicting black magic) that was, and still is, a rather common threat amongst the inhabitants of the southern islands.⁴⁵ In order not to live in fear of the near residing neighbours constantly, people on the southern islands started to create new social alliances. Small sections of different kin groups clustered together in new social alliances called *parurukat uma*, living in the same communal house. As a result, the *uma*, as a clearly bounded local kin group closely connected to a particular plot of ancestral land (*porak punuteteu*), as was the case on Siberut, gradually lost its principal differentiating power on the southern islands. Instead of using the *uma*, people started to identify themselves according to their *muntogat* (group of descendants genealogically connected through an initial common ancestor). Whereas the *parurukat uma* encompassed various individuals of different kin, marriages with members from within the same *parurukat uma* became fashionable in order to strengthen this new social alliance from the inside out, diminishing the social suspicion and distrust still prevailing amongst the different kin groups. This is one of the reasons why it is believed that the *uma* on the southern islands grew in size and as a result became largely endogamous (Persoon 1994: 304). Such is explicitly not the case, for members of the same *parurukat uma* were definitely still not allowed to marry a member of their own *uma* or *muntogat*.⁴⁶ Apart from being a focal point to determine who is a potential marriage partner and who is not, the *uma*, *muntogat* and *parurukat uma* were and remain to be guiding social structures in considerations about who can be perceived as an ally and who as a potential enemy; who can be trusted and who should better be avoided.

The term *muntogat* is less well-known on Siberut. On Siberut, however, we can distinguish the so-called *rakrak*. Like the *muntogat*, this social alliance, connoting sociability, togetherness and solidarity, is based on a shared relationship through a common ancestor. Where the *muntogat* like the *uma* is indicative on an individual level, the *rakrak* is rather an indicator of ancestral ties for the kin group as a whole. While spatial distance between the different clan on Siberut might thus be considerable, their social connection is preserved in the *rakrak*.

Despite the fact that most *uma* have been dismantled and the majority of the Mentawaians nowadays live according to nuclear or extended family in one of the villages, dispersed all over the Mentawai Islands, the *uma* (or the *muntogat*) as a socially organising concept has remained. In contemporary daily language both the terms *uma* and

⁴⁵ It was in 2004 that I on the island of Sipora quarrelled with one of the locals over my outboard engine that he had “borrowed” without my permission. Later my field assistant, visibly anxious, instructed me not to get into any further heated debates with these people. ‘Nanti diguna-gunai’ (you could be affected by black magic), he said. He was dead serious.

⁴⁶ Personal communication with Juniator Tulus 2013.

muntogat are commonly replaced by the Indonesian word *suku* (literally: 'ethnic group'). *Suku* or *suku bangsa* normally refers to an ethnic group as a whole; *suku bangsa Mentawai* for instance would thus be a correct phrase if one wished to indicate the Mentawaians as a distinct ethnic group. The Mentawaians, however, started to use the term *suku* to indicate the various kin groups *within* the Mentawaian ethnic group. A habit they might have copied from the mainland Minangkabau who traditionally also use the term *suku* to differentiate between kin groups (Von Benda-Beckmann 2001, 2007).

Nowadays some 170 different clans are distinguished from each other by their names. Despite their differentiating names, some of these clans may have very close kinship ties. Mentawaians know about these kinship ties and are able to recollect them through an elaborated oral history of family stories.⁴⁷ The naming of the different clans dates back to the moment when kin groups split. Part of the group left, installed in a new settlement and took on a new family name. These new family names were often derived from names connected to certain features of the new settlement (e.g. *suku Siriratei* – a clan that settled close to a graveyard (*ratei*), from the name of the river that the new settlement was closely connected to (e.g. *suku Samongilailai* – a clan that settled close to the river called Mongilailai), or from distinguishing characteristics of the new clan itself (e.g. *suku Satoko* – a clan that, probably as one of the first, owned a house with a zinc plated roof like that of a trade store (*toko*), or *suku Sababalat* – a clan known for the fact that everywhere they went they brought their daggers (*babalat*) with them). The clan names served on the one hand as identity markers to differentiate between the new clan and the initial family group, while on the other hand they were (and still are) used as a genealogical track record that positions the clan in a spectrum with both contemporary kin and ancestors (Tulius 2012a: 58-59). Furthermore, clan names have strong associative powers and therefore reveal important aspects of an individual's identity, simultaneously positioning that person within an otherwise messy social (one that is nowadays also highly political) playground filled with needed allies and possible opponents.

Politics of the clan

Originally the *uma* was an economically and politically autonomous community above which there existed no traditional law-enforcing structure. Each *uma* was to a large extent economically self-sufficient and never produced surplus intentionally. Wealth, in the traditional Mentawaian setting was expressed in the number of domestic pigs that male members of the clan owned individually.⁴⁸ The Mentawaians were never able to create substantial economic differences amongst them because of the generally

⁴⁷ See Tulius (2012a) for more information about oral history, family stories and the art of recollecting.

⁴⁸ The domesticated pigs did and do not play a major role in the daily protein intake while they are only being slaughtered at special occasions, like healing rituals, wedding ceremonies and honoured guests attending the house. Both pigs (and chickens) are used as a part of bride prices (*ala'toga*), dowries (*iba pangurei*), serve as payments of fines (*tulou*) and healing rituals. Pigs furthermore used to play an important role in land transactions. With the move into the villages (were the traditionally free roaming pigs were often not allowed) and the introduction of cash the pig lost some of its principal position, but has certainly not yet left the stage.

accepted norms for the dividing and the redistributing of possible benefits deriving from exceptional personal qualities. In the traditional context it was food, especially meat that was subject to the equalising obligation to share. Not sharing or eating meat secretly would irrevocably lead to punishment by the water spirit (*sikameinan*) who would appear before the offending person(s) in the form of a crocodile (*sikaoinan*) (Schefold 1973, 2002). Nowadays, the sharing of foods and goods is still a highly valued expression of friendship, togetherness, of belonging to the same group, the same clan. Belonging to a clan thus automatically means that one will always have access to the basic needs of food, shelter and security. Although the estuarine crocodile has gone extinct for the Mentawai Archipelago, its spiritual counterpart is still very much alive making sure that people recall their moral obligation to share with and care for fellow clan members.⁴⁹

In this respect special attention should be paid to the relation between mother's brother (*kamaman*) and his sister's children (*punubuak*). This relationship is one of explicit care and reciprocity. Requests from one party to the other can actually never be turned down (Schefold 1986). A more or less similar relationship is that of the *siripo*, indicating an individual bond or close friendship between two individuals of the same sex. *Siripo* relations between individuals of the opposite sex do not exist. Such is called marriage. Different from the *kamaman-punubuak* relationship, the *siripo* is not based on kinship ties and can thus be started with basically everybody (Tulius 2012a: 64).

Traditionally the *uma* represented an egalitarian structure without any strict forms of political hierarchy or organised leadership. The only two outstanding positions within the traditional setting were those of the *kerei* (medicine man, shaman) and the *rimata* (ritual leader).⁵⁰ But despite their slightly different position both the *kerei* and the *rimata*, these people still had no decisive political power and only little opportunity to accumulate wealth (Persoon 1994). Within the *uma*, decisions were normally made on a basis of mutual agreement in which all male, married members of the clan have a voice. Such is in principle still the case, but one can imagine that with clan members now living dispersed all over the Mentawai islands decision-making negotiations have become rather complicated. This is why the *rimata* is nowadays often pushed in the forward position of *kepala suku* (head of the clan) which sometimes allows him to speak on behalf of the entire clan. However, the *rimata* still has no decision-making powers attached to his newly acquired role as spokesman. And thus often there are instances where other members of the clan get into a quarrel because they feel that the decisions (predominantly about land) made by the *rimata* are not obtained through mutual agreement.

⁴⁹ Despite repeated reportings of the estuarine crocodile spotted upriver in southwest Siberut, it is generally believed that this crocodile has gone extinct for the Mentawai Islands.

⁵⁰ While the clan may harbour more than one *kerei*, the clan only knows one *rimata*, which is probably also the reason why the *rimata* was often erroneously identified by outsiders as the clan leader. Furthermore, both the *kerei* and the *rimata* are always men. Cf. Nooy-Palm (1968: 198) suggesting that on the southern Mentawai Islands both men and women could become *kerei*. An assumption that basically all of my informants rejected.

While today there are various authoritative political and bureaucratic structures (e.g. the village, the sub-district, the district, the province, the state, the police and the military) that officially surpass the legal power of the *suku*, contemporary social organisation as well as political and economic life is no longer solely, but to a large extent though still concentrated around the clan. The clan remains the basic, most directly relevant social group. To Mentawaians 'home' is their *suku*, to this very day.

Colonial interventions

The Mentawai Islands came under Dutch colonial rule in 1825 when the British decided to trade their Sumatran territory, including the Mentawai Islands to the Dutch in return for the supremacy over the Strait of Malakka. The Dutch, like the British did not seem to be overwhelmingly interested in the Mentawai Islands. The islands were, however, of importance from a strategic point of view and therefore it was decided in 1864 that the islands should become subject to more effective rule (Persoon 1994: 212-14). Dutch colonial intervention initially remained limited to a small military base stationed in Muara Saibi in 1905. At a later stage this base was, due to a lack of clean water Muara Saibi, moved to Muara Siberut, turning this village into the bureaucratic centre of the Mentawai Archipelago. When the threat of a Japanese invasion became urgent in 1942 it was decided to move the centre once more. The village of Sikakap on Pagai was chosen due to the fact that large ships could always moor in Sikakap, whereas Muara Siberut could not be reached at low tide.

Negatively triggered by the savage nature of the locals, one of the first measures by the Dutch was the abolishing of headhunting practices still prevalent on Siberut in those days.⁵¹ To the surprise of basically all involved, the eradication of headhunting practices went swift and successful (Schefold 2007). Simultaneously with the abolishment of headhunting, the Dutch colonial powers requested German Protestant missionaries to further civilize the Mentawaians. Protestantism has been particularly influential on the southern Mentawai Islands. At a later stage Protestantism also went to Siberut, but has never been similarly influential there (Persoon 1994). Apart from bringing the Mentawaians to faith the missionaries also introduced formal education. This education, for which Batak missionary teachers from the Sumatran mainland were introduced to the islands, was limited to the basics of reading, writing and calculating (Persoon 1994: 214). In their effort to maintain peace and order, the Dutch financially supported the missionary activities and offered protection to Chinese and Minangkabau traders frequenting the islands. For the rest they hardly interfered with daily affairs. It was generally believed that prospects for development were virtually absent on the Mentawai Islands. The British had failed to cultivate pepper on the islands and the locals had proved difficult to be motivated

⁵¹ Under pressure from the Dutch colonial powers, headhunting had already disappeared from Sipora and the Pagai Islands at an earlier stage (Persoon (1994: 214).

to start cultivating rice (Persoon 1988).⁵² With the prospects of development lacking and a population still in a primitive 'natuurstaat' (pristine state), the Dutch must have considered the development and implementation of programmes and policies leading to change, progress and development untimely and premature. From various colonial reports we can, however, deduce several policy issues that in all likelihood occupied the local colonial administrators. Among these issues we find the establishing of local government/administration through the appointment of village heads, the constraining of local justice, the construction of roads and paths and the banning of pigs from the villages (Persoon 1994: 214).

More about religion

Arat Sabulungan

The traditional forest-based lifestyle of the Mentawaians is centred around a complex cosmological system based on the belief of a spirited environment that came to be known as *arat sabulungan*. *Arat*, Mentawaian for *adat*, refers to local tradition and customs inherited from the ancestors. Unclear is whether the word *sabulungan* is, etymologically speaking, derived from the word *bulu(n)g* (leaf of leaves – frequently used in various ceremonies), the word *bulu* (to offer), or the words *sa* (group) and *bulungan* (essence) referring to the spirits of the ancestors.⁵³ *Arat sabulungan* consists of an elaborated set of conceptions, customs, and regulations with regard to the acquaintanceship with contemporaries, the natural environment, and the ancestors. Social organisation, customary law, dispute resolution, the regulation of land titles, fines, bride prices and dowries, traditional clothing and tattooing are amongst the more mundane aspects of *arat sabulungan*. Many of these laws and regulations are nowadays indicated as *arat laggai*, which is inclusive of the regulations of the village as laid down in the *peraturan desa* (village regulations).⁵⁴

It are, however, the spiritual aspects of *arat sabulungan* that this all-encompassing cosmological system came most strongly identified with. In the absence of indigenous terminology for religion, missionaries, government officials and later also the Mentawaians themselves started to use the term *arat sabulungan* in order to indicate the set of spiritual ideas and proceedings based thereon. *Arat sabulungan* so became reduced

⁵² During the course of history, rice has repeatedly been introduced as a food source and agricultural crop. Persoon (1988) explains how and why rice has more or less replaced the staple foods sago and taro but also the reasons why rice has never become a popular agricultural crop on the Mentawai Islands.

⁵³ Personal communication with Juniator Tulus 2013.

⁵⁴ The *peraturan desa*, prepared by the *kepala desa* and the *Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* (village parliament), consists of a set of laws and regulations that are applicable to the territory of the village (e.g. the obligation of *gotong-royong* (communal work), the prohibition of free roaming pigs, and the payment of fines (*tulou*) and certain taxes). The *peraturan desa* is characterised by a greater attention for the specific socio-cultural features of the local community living within the *desa*. *Peraturan desa* therefore differ from each other from place to place.

to a local animistic faith that stands in contrast with *arat puaranan* (religions from outside; e.g. *arat katolik* (Catholicism), *arat protestan* (Protestantism) and *arat islam* (Islam)). *Arat sabulungan* has been under a lot of pressure. Christianity and Islam have, often with force, tried to replace *arat sabulungan*, while the Indonesian government has tried to do away with it all together by simply abolishing it. In 1954 the local religion, *arat sabulungan*, was officially prohibited. During the so-called *Rapat Tiga Agama* (meeting of the three religions) it was decided that every Mentawaian had to forswear *arat sabulungan*, and had to embrace either Islam or Protestantism (Sihombing 1979:99). Later Catholicism was also added as an official choice. Probably as a result of the highly valued activity of pig-raising – the pig being an extremely important animal within the Mentawaian culture – the majority of Mentawaians then choose to convert, at least nominally, to Christianity.⁵⁵ The underlying attempt, however, to radically do away with Mentawaian cosmological perceptions by forced conversion is much less convincing. The new religions simply could not offer a replacement for the all-encompassing conceptions with regard to the acquaintanceship with contemporaries, the natural environment and the ancestors. Therefore, not surprisingly, many elements of *arat sabulungan* continued to co-exist alongside the newly introduced religions (Persoon 1994: 230-231).

Despite the fact that many aspects of *arat sabulungan* proved resilient, *arat sabulungan* certainly lost some of its significance to Christianity and Islam. Authentic Mentawaian culture is often equated with the physical manifestations of *arat sabulungan*, which are most explicitly present amongst the few remaining traditional communities in the interiors of Siberut.⁵⁶ It is therefore generally believed – both amongst outsiders as well as amongst most Mentawaians themselves – that *arat sabulungan* and Mentawaian culture for that matter are changing and even disappearing at fast pace.

Protestantism

The Mentawaians have been Christianised ever since the beginning of the 20th century. Although the first German Protestant missionary, who embarked on North Pagai in 1901, found himself murdered by the locals in 1909, Protestant missionary activities went on and steadily grew in scale and influence, covering not only the Pagai Islands but Sipora also. The Mentawai Christian Protestant Church (*Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai – GKPM*) originated already in 1916 from the Batak Christian Protestant Church (*Huria Kristen Batak Protestan - HKBP*) located in the Batak highlands in North Sumatra where protestant missionaries have been active ever since the early 19th century.

The stringent Protestant missionaries were eager to completely erase *arat sabulungan*, and ban the medicine man (*kerei*) they perceived of as the core of the apparently lazy

⁵⁵ According to Islam the pig is, together with the dog (also not an unfamiliar domestic animal in the Mentawai Archipelago) considered *haram* (forbidden) for reasons of their perceived impurity.

⁵⁶ With 'authentic Mentawaian culture' I aim at the life in the forest in general, the habitation of large, communal houses (*uma*), the wearing of loincloths (*kabit*), tattoos (*titi*) and glass bead jewellery (*manik-manik*), the practice of hunting, eating sago starch obtained from the sago palm and a (otherwise swiftly disappearing) unfamiliarity with the monetary system.

Mentawai lifestyle and the source of the annoying superstition prevalent among the Mentawaians. Until this very day the *kerei* are not welcome as church members and anyone making use of the services of the *kerei* runs the risk of being expelled from the church.⁵⁷ In their efforts to release the Mentawaians from their superstition and create an easier-to-comprehend dichotomous understanding of the cosmological arrangements, the Protestant missionaries translated the bible in the local dialect used on the islands of Pagai and Sipora, causing the people on Siberut difficulties reading and understanding it.⁵⁸

With their initial point of reference located in Nemnem Leleu on North Pagai, it was also there that the Protestant missionaries started their activities in the fields of formal education and healthcare. With the help of the Protestant stronghold in North Sumatra, Batak teachers from North Sumatra were recruited to provide the Mentawaians with education.

Initially many Mentawaians, at least nominally, converted to Protestantism. But due to internal problems, diminishing support from the German mission and the rigid regulations of the church imposed on the locals, many Mentawaians left the church during the second half of the 20th century. Most of them transferred to the Catholic Church or live their lives detached from whatever official church (Persoon 1994: 234). Nevertheless, some 50% of the Mentawai population nowadays adheres Protestantism, the majority of them living on the southern Mentawai Islands. Apostates are currently little in number. Probably due to the threat of banishment and the fact that the church is not particularly cooperative in granting people the necessary paperwork when people wish to discontinue their church membership.⁵⁹

Catholicism

Catholicism was introduced to the Mentawaians only in 1954 (Coronese 1986: 29). Catholicism has been particularly influential on the island of Siberut. Due to the relatively late introduction of world religions on Siberut, the people on Siberut have been able to live a rather undisturbed life, while those on the southern islands had already endured some fifty years of rather aggressive religious and cultural policies. Therefore many aspects of the traditional lifestyle were still present on Siberut when the Catholic missionaries arrived there. Under the inspired leadership of Italian missionaries, Catholicism, proved to be less strict and repressive than Protestantism and has allowed for an interesting coalescence between the Catholic faith and *arat sabulungan* to ensue. The Catholic missionaries have managed to encompass parts of *arat sabulungan* within

⁵⁷ With the healthcare facilities, especially in the more remote areas lacking behind, people in need of medical care not available in their vicinity often make use of the *simata siagai laggek* (herbalist). The *simata siagai laggek* is a herbalist with only limited healthcare knowledge and no shamanistic qualifications. Different from the *kerei*, both men and women can become a herbalist.

⁵⁸ The simplified translation of the bible, among other contemplations, made the Mentawaians reassess their *sanitu*, a set of intrinsically helpful, but potentially harmful spirits, as just pure evil for *sanitu* became the word used to translate 'satan' (personal communication with Panulis Saguntung 2003).

⁵⁹ In Mentawai it is rule that the wife follows her husband in his faith. Furthermore, it is the religious marriage, rather than the civilian marriage that is legally binding in Indonesia. As a result many Protestant women experience difficulties when they wish to marry a man of different faith.

the Catholic faith, while their teachings became increasingly adapted to Mentawaiian circumstances.

The Catholic missionaries have rewritten the translation of the bible (*buko sipunenan*) and have furthermore produced various prayer and hymn books using a mixture of the various Mentawaiian dialects. The catholic missionaries have built their strongholds in the four capitals of the former *kecamatan* (administrative sub-districts): Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Sioban and Sikakap. Not only churches, but also schools, boarding houses and healthcare clinics were built in these harbour villages enabling children from the remote hinterland to enjoy formal education up to a level of SMP – *Sekolah Menengah Pertama* (primary level secondary school). For those children that wished to further their education beyond the level of SMP there were several church supported possibilities in both Padang and Siantar. The choice in further education was however limited to training in religious matters, healthcare and teaching.⁶⁰

In contrast with the repressive measures of both Protestantism and Islam, the Catholic church has proved supportive of the strengthening and revival of Mentawaiian culture and identity. The Social Commission (KOMSOS – *Komisi Sosial*) and the Catechetical Commission (KOMKAT – *Komisi Kateketik*) are responsible for the appearance of a monthly magazine and a weekly radio programme produced by and for the Mentawaiian public. A foundation under the wings of KOMSOS is focussed on the aspirations of mainly young Mentawaians residing in Padang.

Islam

Islam was in first instance brought to the Mentawai Islands by the frequently visiting traders and the Moslem migrants from the Sumatran mainland that settled on the Mentawai Islands. According to the literature the first Islamic missionaries arrived in the Mentawai archipelago in the early 1950s (Sihombing 1979; Persoon & Schefold 1985: XV). The organised dissemination of Islam, however, only got going with the organised activities by *Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*, which started in the late 1960s (Mas'ood Abidin 1997).⁶¹ Although a modest number of Mentawaians, particularly on Sipora and to a lesser extent on the Pagai Islands and Siberut, have converted to Islam, their numbers have always remained low.

The main reason for the small number of Mentawaians converting to Islam is probably laid in the fact that the pig, which holds a central position within the Mentawaiian context, is fairly incompatible with Islam that considers the pig and the consuming of pork as *haram* (sinful or not allowed). Another factor is, that different from the Christian missionaries who came to settle on the Mentawai islands and guide new adherents on a day-to-day basis, the Islamic missionaries (*da'i*) implemented a hit-and-run conversion policy. With

⁶⁰ Higher levels of education, as well as a more extensive range in choice, became available within the Mentawai Archipelago from the 1990s onwards only.

⁶¹ *Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia* is a pan-Indonesian organisation responsible for the spread and maintenance of the Islamic religion within the Indonesian Archipelago.

their funding based on numbers of converts only, most of the *da'i* never stayed longer than strictly necessary.

In earlier days, the mainly Minangkabau or Batak *da'i* were, for their own safety it was said, accompanied by the police or even the military giving their attempts to convince the Mentawai community of the advantages of converting to Islam a rather grim image. In exchange for consumer goods (rice, petroleum lamps, sugar, instant noodles, canned sardines) and tempting presents (clothing and domestic animals like cows and goats) people were converted to Islam. Some even went as far as undergoing circumcision. But many found it hard to give up the old ways of life. This phenomenon is often jokingly referred to as 'Islam Matotonan', Matotonan referring to a particular village in the interior of south Siberut where Islam was adhered to on an impressive scale, but where people continued to domesticate their most valued animal, the pig and eat pork simultaneously. With the deterioration of the presents handed out by the *da'i* many have lost their new faith as quickly as they had embraced it.

In Indonesia, Islam – rather than the other four officially recognised religions – is generally perceived as the religion of progress. Therefore anyone adhering or converting to Islam is simultaneously perceived as *maju* (progressed), while those of different belief (*khafir*) or dropping out from Islam (*murtat*) are thus automatically supposed to be less progressed or even unwilling to progress. People converting to Islam gather a great deal of goodwill from the authorities as with their conversion they show to be willing to take on progressive lifestyles and to let go of all traditional and conservative activities that are believed to hamper development. Adhering to Islam has even long been a premise for a career in the governmental bureaucracy.

For a still growing number of mainly young Mentawaians this prospect of being perceived as modern as well as the tempting everything-paid-for scholarships recently on offer by various Islamic organisations, persuades them convert to Islam. It is this group of Mentawaians that perceives their conversion to Islam as more than just a convenient nominal choice typed on their identity cards. Most of these youngsters reside in Padang where they enjoy the hospitality of Minangkabau host-families. In return for their adhering to Islam, these young Mentawaians receive free education and enjoy job opportunities that would otherwise probably not have become available to them. These youngsters, grateful for the opportunities given to them, are so much incorporated within the Islamic community, taking over various cultural features of the Minangkabau, that they can barely be distinguished as Mentawaians. Though understandably tempting, their choice comes with a price. The spatial, physical and moral consequences of their conversion to Islam and their subsequent shift to the cultural codes of the Minangkabau has confronted many of the converts with the incompatibility of their cultural and religious identities. While they perceive of themselves as Islamic Mentawaians, their fellow Mentawaians no longer perceive of them as proper Mentawaians. Within the Islamic community mainly dominated by Minangkabau they are still perceived of as second-class novices and Mentawaians withal.

Nowadays an estimated 15-20 percent of the total Mentawaian population (Islamic migrants included) adheres to Islam (BPSKKM 2011). By far the majority of the Mentawaians sees Christianity, although also a foreign entity forced upon them, as an integral part of their identity. Islam and processes of Islamisation are generally perceived of as dangerous influences from which one has to abstain in order to avoid detachment from the Mentawaian self.

Postcolonial policies

The Mentawaians became classified as *masyarakat terasing* (isolated community), unfit to partake in and contribute to the process of nation building, soon after the Indonesian postcolonial government came into power. It was also then that governmental efforts to do away with the Mentawaian culture and lifestyle intensified. The Mentawaians became subject to various development and civilisation programmes of which general development policies, cultural policies and unbridled exploitation of the natural resources present within the Mentawai Archipelago were part.

Probably one of the most important elements of the cultural policies was the formation of villages in order to open up the secluded *uma*-structure. During the first fase of village formation, considered complete in 1956, all *uma*, traditionally located at considerable distance from one another in the interiors, had to be united and replaced to a central location, preferably one near the river mouth. Independent *uma* were no longer tolerated. Houses in the new villages were built by the Mentawaians themselves, according to their own ideas, using local materials, giving these early villages an authentic atmosphere. Many family clans built a completely new *uma* in the village, dismantling the old one in order to use the building materials for the new *uma*. Others just built *lalep*, small houses meant for a nuclear family and left their original *uma* intact in order to use it for feasts, ceremonies and a place for the pigs to stay. The banning of the pigs from the villages simultaneously led to an understanding of the village as a clean (*bersih*) place. Leaving the traditional, unfenced settlements outside the village to become classified as dirty (*kotor*). Even today many Mentawaians still use the word *berasih* (a phonetic degeneration of the Indonesian word *bersih*) to indicate the village (Persoon 1994: 229).

Very much in line with the conviction of the Protestant missionaries, the postcolonial policies also aimed at the erasure of *arat sabulungan*, expressed in its prohibition in 1954, and the outlawing of *kerei* (medicine men) who were perceived of as an informal undermining of the development efforts undertaken by the government. The *kerei* were forced to renounce their activities and hand in their ritual equipment. Ritual objects were gathered and publicly burned during raid-like actions especially frequent in the early 1980s causing commotion and fear amongst the Mentawaians. A third element in the cultural policies implemented was the altering of the traditional legal system and the system of bride prices. The Mentawaians were believed not to be able to keep measure in handling their disputes and establishing their bride prices, thereby enriching themselves at the expense of weaker others. Both fines as well as bride prices became standardised.

Again, the cultivation of rice, considered a more civilised staple than sago and taro, was introduced. The growing of rice was supposed to alter the work ethic of especially the Mentawaian men who were perceived of as particularly lazy and increase the overall level of development (Persoon 1988). Finally, several external features (e.g. glass-beaded jewellery, long hair for men, loincloths, tattoos, banana leaf skirts, and the custom of chiselling the incisors into a point) seen as marks of unindonesian primitiveness were prohibited (Persoon 1994: 228-9; Schefold 1998: 271).

Otorita Pembangunan Kepulauan Mentawai (OPKM)

In 1970 the governor of West Sumatra installed an extraordinary authority solely occupied with the development of Mentawai, OPKM – *Otorita Pengembangan Kepulauan Mentawai*. This organisation was established in order to implement development and civilisation policies among the Mentawaians while simultaneously smoothening and securing the ongoing extraction of timber from the area. Whereas a certain percentage of the income generated by the logging sector had to be invested in the area from which the wood originates, OPKM invested these revenues returning from the Ministry of Forestry in eight resettlement villages: five on Siberut (Malancan, Maileppet, Simalegi, Sirilogui, and Muntei), one on Sipora (Rokot), and two on Pagai (Muara Taikako I and II). Invariably these villages consisted of 100 houses, a mosque, a church, a healthcare centre, a school, a market building, and a community centre. Every household received basic agricultural equipment and some financial aid during the first nine months in the village. The village community as a whole received some medicines, a television, some sport equipment, a generator, and a civil servant responsible for the further sound development of the village. In 1981 Jakarta discontinued OPKM, because it was considered to be of untenable nature (Persoon 1994: 240-241). Whereas Mentawai, however, remained to be seen as an unacceptably backward part of *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman, an assistant *bupati* (head of *kabupaten*) completely in charge of the development of the Mentawai Archipelago was installed soon after OPKM was abolished.⁶²

Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Terasing (PKMT)

In the meantime the Ministry of Social Affairs had effectively formulated an integrated development and civilisation programme: PKMT (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Terasing*). The PKMT programme aims at the total alteration of the traditional lifestyles considered objectionable of *masyarakat terasing*. In order to guarantee the effectiveness and efficiency of this programme, project activities always started with the gathering of people in permanent resettlement villages. The first PKMT resettlement village was built on Siberut in 1971. Different from the OPKM, the PKMT programme only focussed on the island of Siberut. Resettlement villages under the banner of the Ministry of Social Affairs have never been built on either Sipora or the Pagai Islands. In the course of time a few tens of these PKMT villages have been built on Siberut, the most recent one built in 2004.

⁶² Already then it was suggested that Mentawai would detach itself from Padang-Pariaman and would form its own *kabupaten*, but this was never realised at that time.

Resettlement village
of Simoilaklak,
south Siberut
(By Juniator Tulus).



These resettlement villages, most of them located along the coast and the main rivers, consist of 25 to 125 houses built according to a uniform design. Healthcare and religious facilities and educational institutions were also made available simultaneously. Similar to the OPKM resettlement villages, people living in traditional *uma* had to resettle as soon as the new, decent and controllable villages were ready for use. As soon as people were transferred from their former settlements to the new resettlement village, additional projects aiming at the total abandoning of tribal practices set off. A civil servant responsible for the implementation of the various project activities was stationed in every village. Formal education was introduced. Conventional agricultural and hunting practices were replaced by an agricultural system aiming at the production of cash crops and rice. Social life is to be expanded beyond family ties through the introduction of a social system based on the so-called principle of *gotong royong* (communal works bringing about cooperation and a sense of solidarity). After five years, when transformation towards the new modern lifestyle is considered satisfactory, resettlement villages may lose their status as project villages and then become normal villages under regular bureaucratic rule. Due to increased social pressure, mainly geared by Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN), the Ministry of Social Affairs has changed the PKMT programme in the *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Sosial Komunitas Adat Terpencil* - PKAT programme. Despite the change of the programme's name and terminology, its goal and content has remained fairly similar (Duncan 2004: 91). The most recent resettlement village constructed under the banner of PKAT was built on south Siberut in 2004. Both the PKMT programme and the PKAT programme did not take local understandings of landownership into account. This has led to lingering conflicts between the inhabitants of the villages and the *sibakkat*

laggai (initial settlers; owners of the land) who are quite often not the same. Seemingly unsolvable disputes over land under villages already built in the late 1970s and the early 1980s are still day-to-day business.

Logging and oil palm plantations

It was furthermore believed that the most effective way to relieve the Mentawaians of their as backward branded forest based lifestyle was to alter their environment. In other words: the exploitation of the Mentawai forest would provide the state with high quality export timber, while it would simultaneously contribute to the swift modification of the Mentawai lifestyle. The clearance of the forests would force its inhabitants to take up ways of life outside the forests considered more modern. Besides, areas being cleared by commercial logging activities would expose arable land that on its turn could be used for the cultivation of cash crops and rice.

Without taking into account other values of the forests on Mentawai – for instance its high degree of endemism, commercial logging closely related to national development considerably grew in scale and intensity from the 1970s onwards.⁶³ During the early 1970s the Department of Forestry granted logging concessions to half a dozen of companies, effectively dividing the whole Mentawai archipelago in concession areas, some immediately issued to mainly foreign logging companies (Persoon 1994). The second largest logging company in Indonesia, PT Minas Pagai Lumber Corporation (MPLC) was given a 90,000 ha concession – the largest concession at that time – for the Pagai Islands. MPLC is still in operation today. During the twenty years that followed logging activities have seriously affected the forests on all islands, but those on Sipora and the Pagai Islands in particular. Most forest related activities such as hunting and the collecting of forest products have lost their relevance to the local communities on these islands. Apart from being a source of a wide variety of products, to the Mentawaians the forest is also ‘a world beyond’, the habitat of ancestral spirits (Schefold 1980a, 2002). The loss of the forests has thus also further eroded local understandings and adherent activities with regard to the cosmological constitution of the environment and the position of humankind therein. Apart from the obvious negative effects of commercial logging, it has also brought about a set of opportunities for the local communities that would otherwise not have ensued. Several young Mentawaians have earned some cash income working for the logging companies, while the base camps of the logging companies proved to be good purchasers of locally produced food products. Some of these opportunities were obviously so attractive to the local population that they have formed various local settlements in the vicinity of the base camps. These spontaneous settlements not only benefited from the opportunities offered by the logging companies (e.g. trade, but also newly cleared land that could easily be used for the creation of new gardens), but simultaneously offered local communities a chance to escape the official governmental resettlement (Persoon 1994: 249).

⁶³ The sale of timber obtained from logging concessions issued by the central government was one of the most important national development strategies to increase foreign exchange revenues adopted by Suharto's *Orde Baru* government (Gunawan *et.al.* 1999: XV).

In 1992, all logging concessions for Siberut were withdrawn by presidential decree. As a result commercial logging on Siberut ceased between 1993-1999. The Minister of Forestry then issued a permit that stipulated changes in the function and status of forest areas. These changes paved the way for a second phase of commercial logging in Siberut. Several months after the permit was issued, 11 concessions for logging and oil palm plantations were proposed for an area of 274.500 hectares, covering almost 70% of the island (PASIH 2009). Since 2000, two timber companies have been granted logging concessions for Siberut.

During the last decades there has been a lingering threat of Mentawaians regenerating forests to be converted once more into oil palm plantations. Already in 1995, the governor of West Sumatra gave 'permission in principle' to two oil palm plantation companies both associated with Suharto's daughter and the Minister of Employment. Completely bypassing the locals, a workforce for these plantations was to be created through transmigration (DTE 1999a).⁶⁴ Local protests, backed by national and international NGOs, frustrated the combined oil palm plantation/transmigration plan. To the surprise of many the plans then disappeared as sudden as they had emerged. Despite the ongoing resistance of both local NGOs and a significant proportion of the local population against the conversion of land into plantations, plans for oil palm plantations have never fully disappeared from the development agenda until this very day.

Interethnic animosities

While Mentawai was still part of district Padang-Pariaman, the Mentawai archipelago covered nearly 80% of the territory of the district and produced almost three quarters of the district's total revenue – the export of copra, rattan, and especially tropical timber being the most important sources of income. Although insignificant in numbers, migrants almost completely controlled the trade on the islands, leaving the Mentawaians as ill-paid suppliers of rough materials only. With the migrants having their family and business interests abroad, most of the proceedings generated on the islands never returned to Mentawai. This together with the unequal redistribution of taxes and reforestation budgets turned Mentawai into an area where only exploitation was vivid while structural investments were absent.

Political power in the Padang-Pariaman district has invariably been in the hands of the Minangkabau – the dominant ethnic group in West Sumatra. Due to a lack of education, and experience Mentawaians were not able to take up positions in the administrative machinery. Besides, there have never been attempts by the government to facilitate Mentawaians access to these functions (Persoon 1994: 227). The number of Mentawaians involved in local government thus remained low and where Mentawaians were granted the opportunity to take up a position in the bureaucracy, they did so at the lower, non-influential administrative levels.

⁶⁴ Earlier transmigration schemes aiming at the rapid integration of the Mentawaians into Indonesian society through intermarriage between young, mainly Javanese bachelors and Mentawai girls had triggered an (international) protest campaign (Persoon 1996: 12).

Government offices were located on the Sumatran mainland and administrative matters for the Mentawai Archipelago were dealt with on the mainland in either Padang, West Sumatra's capital, or in Pariaman, some 60 kilometres north of Padang. In those days a trip from one of the Mentawai Islands to the mainland took at least a fortnight and was too costly for most Mentawaians. This left many Mentawaians without proper administrative documents like birth certificates, leading to problems when travelling or seeking higher education outside the Mentawai region.

With the responsibility for the governing of the Mentawai Archipelago in the hands of the Minangkabau, it were to a large extent also the Minangkabau that were responsible for the implementation of the state-instigated development and assimilation programmes. Convinced of their cultural and religious superiority, the Minangkabau were eager to implement the governmental civilizing programmes among the Mentawaians, but preferred to do so from safe distance. The abundantly free roaming pigs, harsh environmental conditions, and the image of an unfriendly and potentially dangerous population turned the Mentawai Archipelago into a very unwelcoming place for the predominantly Islamic Minangkabau (Persoon 2002a; Persoon & De Jongh 2004). Consequently not many Minangkabau traders dared to expand their business into the hinterlands and Minangkabau civil servants were rarely present on the Mentawai Islands. Various development projects in the fields of infrastructure, agriculture and education were finished in considerable haste and with inferior materials, prematurely abandoned, or never even implemented at all. In practice, the development of the area was basically tuned in with the needs of the Minangkabau community mainly residing in the harbour villages. As a result the physical development of the Mentawai archipelago was confined to the construction of sub-district governmental offices, mosques, schools, healthcare facilities, and some infrastructural facilities in the harbour villages. This led to enclaves of migrants residing in harbour villages surrounded by local communities, which were basically unaccounted for.

The decades long cultural, political and economic hegemony of the Minangkabau over the Mentawaians has lead to an intensive, but fairly antagonistic relationship between these historically intertwined ethnic groups. Influenced by the *Orde Baru* government rhetoric, the Minangkabau tend to see the Mentawaians as backward, dirty and poor people, still in close contact to nature and the spiritual forces it may encompass (Persoon 2002a). It is of this perceived closeness to nature that many Minangkabau are convinced of the potentially dangerous spiritual powers of the Mentawaians. The Minangkabau belief the Mentawaians to be harsh and therefore prefer to avoid open conflict and overt aggression with regard to the Mentawaians. Coming at close quarters with a Mentawaian is something better circumvented, because the Mentawaians are believed to display uncivilised, even barbaric ways of acting during a scuffle, expressed in the Minangkabau saying: *lego Pagai* (fighting as a person originating from Pagai; hinting at uncompromised and ruthless acting).

The idea of the Mentawaians being dirty is foremost based on their habit to raise pigs and eat pork; something which is perceived as *haram* (declared prohibit by ways of Islamic

religious law) by the Islamic Minangkabau. Dirt is furthermore associated with the general circumstances in Mentawai. Especially on Siberut, where most settlements and villages, due to the lack of cemented roads and paths, can only be reached by walking along unpaved muddy trails.

According to the perception of many Minangkabau, Mentawaians do not have proper cloths. While nowadays only a few Mentawaians in the interiors of Siberut still go around bare-chested, dressed only in skirts (women) and loincloths (men), the idea that the Mentawaians are too poor (*miskin*) to buy proper clothing remains. According to the view of the Minangkabau, the Mentawaians are *khafir* (of different belief) or, a conviction in tune with the *Orde Baru* perception of these people, not (yet) in the possession of a proper religion (*belum beragama*) (Persoon 2004). The fact that the majority of the Mentawaians nowadays adheres Christianity and also present themselves as such, has not yet provoked a significant change in this Minangkabau view of the Mentawaians.

The Mentawaians on their turn also have a series of ideas and prejudices about the Minangkabau. The Mentawaians know the Minangkabau especially from their activities on the Mentawai Islands as traders, teachers, tourist guides and government officials. In an overall sense the proceedings of the Minangkabau on the Mentawai Islands have not left a particularly positive impression with the Mentawaians. In the opinion of many Mentawaians the Minangkabau cannot be trusted. They are thought of as having a 'long nose', meaning that they are liars and that you can never really know what to expect from these people. Due to their illiteracy and the inability of many Mentawaians to calculate, they have often been cheated, or at least felt cheated by the Minangkabau traders and tourist guides.

Apart from being unreliable, the Minangkabau are also believed to be a murderous people. Minangkabau are known for their ability to inflict disease and even death upon weak or unprotected persons. Rumours and stories about Minangkabau being out for a member of the Mentawai community to murder or at least cause adversity *secara halus* (by means of magic) are omnipresent. Though I sometimes found these explanations for unfortunate events taking place a bit far fetched, for many Mentawaians these stories function as unquestioned, socially accepted rationalisations of illnesses, traffic accidents, and other misfortunes that people come across with in daily life. Many Mentawaians tend to protect themselves against such dangerous forms of magic by embroccating themselves with lard-based *nenenei* or *o'olei*.

The Minangkabau in their capacity as government officials have long been the face of the much detested repressive and levelling cultural and religious policies, the *Orde Baru* regime has released upon the Mentawaians. The Minangkabau, convinced of their cultural and religious superiority over the Mentawaians, were on the one hand eager to condemn the as backward perceived lifestyle of the Mentawaians, but on the other hand never really invested in the proper economic and political development of the Mentawai Archipelago and its inhabitants. It is for this reason that many Mentawaians perceive of the Minangkabau politicians and government officials as unscrupulous profiteers. The Minangkabau are the first to be held responsible for the unbridled exploitation of Mentawai's natural resources;

the revenues of which never returned to Mentawai. The fact that Mentawai never came to successful development has, in the opinion of the Mentawaians, everything to do with the ill management and the corrupt policies of the Minangkabau.

Lastly, the Mentawaians perceive of the Minangkabau as religious fanatics. In the perception of many Mentawaians, the Minangkabau and the Islam are two inseparable sides of the same coin. And indeed is Islam an important part of the Minangkabau identity that is both vigorously promoted and proudly displayed by them. With Christianity nowadays internalised as an intrinsic feature of the identity of many Mentawaians, the expansionism of the Minangkabau culture and religion at the expense of the Mentawaian identity has become an annoying identity undermining threat to many Mentawaians.

Developing an identity of shame

Affected by the radical governmental policies, rampant in the 1980s, many Mentawaians have learned to understand oneself in mainly negative terms. Carrying a primitive lifestyle that should be done away with as soon as possible, they started to feel ashamed about their identity. Though in name constituents of the unitary nation state *Republik Indonesia*, reality shows that the Mentawaians – among other, similar indigenous ethnic groups in Indonesia – had to give up large part of their cultural and religious specificity in order to comply to the standards of modern Indonesian citizenship.⁶⁵ The Mentawaian lifestyle was done away with as being *terbelakang* (backwards), *kotor* (dirty), *lugu* (ignorant), and *bodoh* (stupid). Mentawaian culture was never allowed to contribute officially to the diversity of the national culture as discussed above. On the contrary, almost all expressions of their culture were repressed, sometimes even by force. Besides the agricultural adjustments, people in the resettlement villages had to comply with countless new regulations that addressed basically every aspect of their daily lives; from housing to government, from livelihood to animal husbandry, from clothing to kitchen utensils, from food to education, from religion to healthcare, and from marriage to customary law. Basically every aspect of their lives had to be adjusted, changed, improved or done away with. A key word in the discussions about the past, present and the future of the Mentawaians and their environment is *pembangunan* (development). The word *pembangunan* has its origin in the word *bangun*, which means ‘to construct’, but also ‘to wake up from a state of unawareness’. In the latter meaning we can find the connection with the governmental point of view that the *masyarakat terasing* can be brought back into the mainstream of national progress (Porath 2010). Instead of presenting oneself as *terbelakang* (they consider that an insult) most Mentawaians prefer to refer to themselves as *kurang maju* (less progressed) or *belum maju* (not yet progressed), expressing the hope that one day in the near future they will be progressed. *Kemajuan* (progress) implies

⁶⁵ Following Duncan (2004) I use the term ‘indigenous ethnic minorities’ to refer to local societies with a specific relationship towards the state. The more simple phrase ‘ethnic minorities’ would be confusing, because this would also include other minority populations such as the ethnic Chinese for example. Although these people also face serious problems in their relationship with the Indonesian nation state and in various other countries all over Southeast Asia, they are usually subject to different types of state intervention as the groups under discussion here.

a forward motion towards something, that something being modernity. Being modern comes in a multitude of variations dependant on current circumstances. Modernity implies having asbestos roofed houses, schools, roads, prestigious infrastructure, churches, plastic kitchen utensils, western clothes, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, outboard motors, computers and mobile telephones.⁶⁶ The term *maju* is used in an interrelated sense for a way of life, which involves using manufactured goods and having the knowledge that pertains to them. Travelling by motorcycle for instance is considered *lebih maju* (more modern) than paddling along the river in a dug-out canoe. The level of modernity is usually measured by the amount of material objects obtained. This is automatically leading to the fact that Mentawaians sometimes refer to oneself as *miskin* (poor) when they are lacking the finances to pay for materials preferred. Mentawaian individuals sometimes refer to themselves as *bodoh* (stupid) with respect to any failure in producing what might be expected from modern people, such as not knowing their age, or not knowing how to operate modern devices. More recently the word *bodoh* is also used as an expression for the political infancy of the Mentawaians.

Conservation efforts

From the late 1970s onwards several international conservation agencies have been active on the Mentawai Islands. Amongst others, more established (donor) organisations like Survival International, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and Conservation International (CI) have been – and some of them still are – implementing various conservation programmes in the Mentawai Archipelago. The interventions of these institutions stand in great contrast to the development and civilisation efforts of the postcolonial powers. While the Indonesian government perceived of the Mentawaian forest based lifestyle as an impediment to modernisation, international conservation agencies tend to perceive of people carrying such lifestyles as allies in their conservation efforts. Where the Indonesian ministries aimed at the fast and profound erasure of the Mentawaian lifestyle, foreign conservation interventions have mainly focussed on the safeguarding of the indigenous Mentawaian lifestyle and the simultaneous conservation and protection of their natural environment. Their efforts have certainly slackened the furthering of the large-scale exploitation of the Mentawaian forests, especially on Siberut.

Survival International (SI)

Survival, short for Survival International (SI), founded in 1969, aims to help what they call tribal peoples to exercise their rights to survival and self-determination, to ensure that the

⁶⁶ In the interior of the Rereiket area, I encountered with two 4-5 year old boys named Lapon and Litik. Later I understood Lapon, short for telepon (telephone), was given this name by his father who remembered his first encounter with a telephone (one of the first land lines in Muara Siberut) as something truly magical. Litik then, short for politik (politics), was born in 1999 when everybody in the archipelago was talking about politics. In order for his family to have their own politics, they called their youngest arrival Litik.

interests of tribal peoples are properly presented in all decisions affecting their future, to secure for tribal peoples the ownership and use of adequate land and other resources and to seek recognition of their rights over traditional land.⁶⁷

Hanbury-Tenison, the founder of this London based organisation visited Siberut during a week in 1973. During this week Hanbury-Tenison developed some ideas with regard to the conservation of Siberut's wildlife and the role of local communities therein. Whereas he had learned through conversations with the Sakaliou clan that the concept of a reserve in order to protect some of the wildlife on Siberut was not only of no appeal to these people, but even bluntly refused (Hanbury-Tenison 1975: 50), Hanbury-Tenison introduced the idea of rather than installing a wildlife reserve based on hunting restrictions, Siberut's wildlife would probable gain more when the local need to hunt would be gradually reduced by improving the agricultural, animal husbandry and fishing techniques of the Mentawaians (Hanbury-Tenison 1975: 62).

Survival's intention to work together with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on a wildlife reserve was probably undermined by Hanbury-Tenison's idea not to install a reserve but rather to spend the funds on a gradual shift in the Mentawaiian livelihood system: 'Unfortunately, after initial enthusiasm, certain sections of the conservation world [...] have found the whole idea rather too novel for their taste' (Hanbury-Tenison 1975: 62).

Apart from IUCN and WWF, but in tune with the main goal of the organisation, Survival International implemented a project on Siberut from 1979 to 1982 aiming at the strengthening of local land rights and fighting the logging companies which were operating on the island (Schefold 1980b). Despite the fact that Survival International had extensive experience with similar communities in Latin America they experienced severe difficulties in implementing their project on Siberut. The political climate in Indonesia proved to be radically different from the situation they were used to in Latin America. Especially Indonesia's pertinent denial of indigenous people being present within the Indonesian borders made working in Indonesia particularly difficult (Persoon 1998a, 2002b: 33). Although it was Survival International's intention to further broaden their scope within Indonesia, their activities in Indonesia came to an abrupt end after they had been put on the Indonesian black list of international NGOs because of an article they published in *The Ecologist*, entirely devoted to the dubious role of the World Bank in the contested transmigration policies of the Indonesian government (Persoon 1996).

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

Based on a famous research about Siberut's gibbon population by Whitten, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) came in 1980 with a conservation master plan for Siberut: *Saving*

⁶⁷ See: Survival International

Siberut.⁶⁸ This Conservation Master Plan for what WWF calls ‘an island paradise’ (WWF 1980: xi) had three main objectives: 1) to promote the socio-economic development of the people of Siberut in such a way that they maintain their traditional harmony with their environment, 2) to maintain a functioning tropical rainforest ecosystem where all species are conserved, with special emphasis on the four endemic species of primates, and 3) to utilise Siberut’s unique qualities to their best advantage through education, research and tourism (WWF 1980: 79). Although the Conservation Master Plan is said to meet the needs of local people through conservation thereby ‘providing for certain human groups to maintain their culture and to become modernised only at the rate they themselves desire’, the most particular aim of the plan – indicated by the list of prescriptions to be followed in order to achieve the objectives – is obviously the protection of Siberut’s ecosystem, and the four primate species in particular (WWF 1980: 77).⁶⁹

The nucleus of the plan consisted of a land use proposal recommending a 50,000 hectares nature reserve, buffered by a 100,000 hectares so-called ‘traditional use’ zone, again surrounded by a development zone, covering the remaining 250,000 hectares of the island. Every zone came with a package of rules and regulations, mainly expressed in terms of prohibitions and restrictions. Commercial logging was not allowed in the reserve and the traditional use zone. Carefully controlled logging in the development zone was allowed, but commercial plank sawing was prohibited as well as the logging of slopes over 35 degrees. The collecting of forest products as well as hunting for domestic purposes was allowed in all zones on the condition that these activities were executed by means of traditional extraction and hunting methods. The primate species, especially the *bilou* and *simakobu* enjoyed full protection and were not be hunted in neither of the zones. Although the plan introduced socio-economic development of the people of Siberut as one of its objectives, the explanation of how to realise this only referred to the Survival International project as described above and did not mention any additional activities to be implemented by WWF itself. The plan only mentioned some four guidelines for socioeconomic development, but how this was to be realised through what kind of activities was very poorly elaborated upon in the WWF master plan. Project activities described for the other eight sectors of the plan also remained quite general.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁸ Siberut knows four endemic primate species: *Bilou*, the Kloss gibbon (*Hylobates klossii*), *Joja*, the Mentawai leaf monkey (*Presbytis potenziani*), *Bokkoi*, the Mentawai macaque (*Macaca pigensis*), and *Simakobu*, the Pig-tailed langur (*Simias concolor*) (WWF 1980: VIII).

⁶⁹ Ever since Whitten’s research, it is almost commonly believed that only Siberut is inhabited by these four endemic primate species. As is acknowledged by WWF (WWF 1980: 43) the same primates, though probably a separate subspecies, do also inhabit the southern Mentawai Islands. In a study by Lisa Paciulli (1995–1996) it became clear that the *simakobu* on the island of North Pagai had somehow survived the extensive logging and were now engaged in a remarkable comeback in dispersed plots of regenerating secondary forest. Unfortunately, large part of the Betumonga area where Paciulli conducted her research was – despite protest by Paciulli herself – logged over in 1997 wiping out the recovering *simakobu* population (personal communication with Koen Meyers 2002).

⁷⁰ The nine indicated sectors are: 1) socio-economic development, 2) land use, 3) nature reserve, 4) biosphere reserve, 5) forestry, 6) tourism, 7) wildlife management, 8) education, and 9) evaluation, monitoring and control.

prescriptions for each of the sectors indicated possible problems, while solutions to the problems indicated were sought after in the implementation of the plan itself. Project activities have remained restricted to the assigning and training of park staff and the conduct of feasibility studies.

Governmental policies aiming at conservation

The policies of the Indonesian government with regard to the management of Mentawai's natural resources have been Janus-faced. While at first all governmental activities were aimed at pure economic development and the total erasure of the as backward branded lifestyle of the Mentawaians, it were especially the policies of the 1990s that were increasingly confusing.

Geared by developments in the international conservation scene the whole island of Siberut and the direct marine surroundings with its coral reefs was announced a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB) already in 1981 (Persoon & Eindhoven 2006).⁷¹ Before the actual implementation of the Siberut MAB, for which activities only started in 1998, all logging concessions for Siberut were withdrawn by presidential decree in 1992. A 190.000 hectares national park, including Teitei Batti – a 6,500 hectare game reserve already established in 1976 – that covers almost half of the island was established in 1993. With the help of an international team of consultants, Ditjen Perlindungan Hutan dan Pelestarian Alam (PHPA) or Directorate General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation from the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, Menteri Kehutanan (MENHUT) prepared a so-called Integrated Conservation and Management Plan (ICMP) in which the management of the in 1993 established Siberut National Park is the prime issue.

The project, part of Indonesia's five-year Biodiversity Conservation Project in Flores and Siberut, was financed with a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Flores and Siberut were chosen for this project because of their uniqueness, representativeness of the biographic region, economic potential, priority in the National Biodiversity Action Plan, and complementarities with other regional development programmes. The main objective of the project was to assist the government in their efforts to conserve tropical forest ecosystems and biodiversity within protected areas such as the parks on Siberut and Flores. The project made use of the so-called Integrated Protected Area System (IPAS) approach, later termed Integrated Conservation and Management Plan (ICMP), aiming at the improvement of the policy, planning, implementation, and monitoring capabilities of the institutions responsible for biodiversity conservation. Project activities

⁷¹ Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems nominated by national governments and when admitted to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves internationally recognised under UNESCO's MAB programme. Though internationally recognised MAB reserves remain subject to the sovereign states of which they are part. The MAB Program in Indonesia has a long history, started in 1972 after UNESCO the MAB Program inception by UNESCO in 1968. Structurally the Indonesian National MAB Committee is attached to the Office of the Deputy for Life Sciences of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). The program is implemented in collaboration with the International MAB Program of UNESCO and the Indonesian National Commission for UNESCO.

were divided according to two major components of the project: 1) the development of the IPAS/ICMP approach through biophysical and socioeconomic surveys, preparation and implementation of integrated conservation management plans, development of buffer zones and areas adjacent to the park through agroforestry, soil conservation, and livelihood activities; and 2) the provision of support activities involving institutional strengthening (training and consultant support), applied research, database development, monitoring based on geographic information system (GIS), community awareness raising and mobilisation, and agricultural extension activities by local non-governmental organisations (Ministry of Forestry 1995).

While a lot of preparing activities in the fields of mapping, demarcation, training and the construction of supportive infrastructure were completed during the first years of the project (1993-1995), project activities with local communities on Siberut were to start only in 1996. Already in 1994, PHPA contracted a local NGO to this end. Local NGO, Yayasan Suku Mentawai (YASUMI) was to implement a one-year so-called Preliminary Awareness Program (PAP). It was the intention of the PAP to increase the awareness of local communities living within and adjacent to the Siberut National Park about the purpose of the park, the activities of the LIPI Survey and Mapping Team, and the ICMP planning team. Therefore YASUMI identified and hired 23 so-called field extension agents, most of them native to the villages in which they were to run the awareness program. As it was obvious that YASUMI was a young and inexperienced foundation, in February 1994, the PHPA organised and conducted a preliminary training in Padang for both YASUMI staff and the 23 identified field extension agents (Ministry of Forestry 1995).⁷² As soon as the training was completed, the PAP team started with awareness raising activities amongst local communities. Unfortunately, local communities understood the PAP team's explanation about the purpose and the rules of the national park in negative terms only. It seems that YASUMI has introduced and explained TNS mainly in terms of hunting and gathering prohibitions and land use restrictions for local communities living within and adjacent to the park. Local communities, missing out on the possible opportunities, simultaneously learned to understand YASUMI as an unreliable organisation, bartering away their lands to an incomprehensible institute called Taman Nasional Siberut (Eindhoven 2009). Until this very day TNS is not a popular institute amongst local communities. Local communities have rejected the national park and its rules and regulations, which were all together actually never seriously carried through, monitored or maintained.

The long term (25 years) integrated conservation management plans that were prepared for Siberut suffered from inadequate input from the public and other local agencies, leading to insufficient ownership and acceptance of the plans. As a direct result the output of community awareness raising, resource mobilisation and the introduction of possible livelihood alternatives were far below expectations (Persoon & Eindhoven 2006). According to the final report by the ADB the unwillingness of Sumatra-based NGOs to work on Siberut and the absence of established local NGOs working on the island made

⁷² Officially registered in October 1992 this NGO initially aimed at a more participative role of the Mentawaians in the local tourist industry.

it difficult to find experienced village motivators and community organisers. Considering the limited experience of YASUMI and the little technical support they received from the Ministry of Forestry and other agencies involved it was unrealistic to believe that this local NGO would be able to carry out all of the expected activities successfully. The later involvement of national NGO SKEPHI and the creation of a second local NGO, YASPAGET, did little to remedy what the final report by the ADB calls 'the fundamental weakness of this approach' (i.e. the use of local NGOs as intermediaries between the community and the park management staff) (ADB 2001:14).

Apart from the weak capacity of the local NGO responsible for the direct implementation of these activities, the district forest agency stopped all its activities on the island once logging concessions were closed. The project successfully trained 18 park staff members, but unfortunately only few of the trained staff returned to work on the project during implementation. It is considered a weakness that the official Siberut National Park headquarters are situated in Padang and not on the island of Siberut itself. Although 80 staff members are currently assigned to the park, none of them ever seems to be present on Siberut.⁷³ Not only leads this to a certain alienation of the area and its inhabitants, but also is it very difficult to adequately manage the park from such a considerable distance. The continued lack of incentives to ensure an adequate staff presence on Siberut Island is considered a major failure on behalf of PHPA (ADB 2001: 10).

The ADB final report further mentions that local communities proved not to be inclined to adopt strategies that would gradually lead them from a subsistence livelihood to a sustainable market economy.⁷⁴ I personally doubt whether this is as simple as it sounds. Local communities have never been involved in the initial stages of project planning. They were also never asked whether they would wish to live in a national park or rather not. Decisions were already taken before local communities were consulted. Information was transferred to local communities in a distorted way. For local communities it has never been clear how and what they would gain from their participation in the project. Local communities have been called to gatherings where they over a cup of coffee and a cigarette have been informed about activities that would be imposed upon them somewhere in the future. Local communities became confused and disappointed when activities turned out different or were not implemented at all. As the Ministry of Forestry's project was not the first one to be imposed on local communities, local communities had already developed strategies of denial and feigned cooperation to cope with project implementation in their areas.

Planned reforestation activities both within and outside the protected area were not realised under the project, but ADB surveys done during project implementation indicate that degraded areas from former logging operations are capable of regenerating naturally,

⁷³ The ADB final report states that '[o]ften the only significant periods of time that Siberut staff spent on the island were during ADB missions'.

⁷⁴ Among the livelihood alternatives we find the development of fishponds, the rearing of chickens and ducks, rattan growing, the commercial growing of durian and cinnamon, handicraft production and ecotourism.

rather than that these plots require replanting. While large scale deforestation was averted through the repeated representation by ADB and others to both MENHUT and the local government, the threat of losing biodiversity through commercial logging, mismanagement of forests, conversion to plantations and other land uses remained looming during project implementation. By the end of 1999 a little more than 235,000 hectares were under some 11 concessions; some of them located within the buffer zone for which the changes in land use proposed in the concessions were specifically rejected. The legal uncertainty over the status of the buffer zone continuously bedevilled the area. Both the PHPA and the park management were constrained in their activities in the buffer zone because they had no legal mandate in the area and the provincial and district forest agencies, apparently only interested in logging, were not supportive of the project activities. Although concessions were not operative yet by that time, the retreat of the ADB from Siberut in July 2000, made many conservationists fear for the final apocalypse of Siberut's forests. Shortly after the withdrawal of the ADB from Siberut there were rumours in the media suggesting that Siberut should 'pay its way' by generating revenues from forests to pay of the considerable debts incurred through ADB loans used for financing this project. But so far such has not materialised.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme is world wide aiming at the improved relationship between people and their environment, thereby addressing one of the most pressing contemporary issues: how to reconcile conservation of the world's natural resources and its biological diversity with their sustainable use?⁷⁵ Indonesia currently counts six biosphere reserves, one of which is Siberut Island.⁷⁶ The exceptionally high degree of endemism on the island, already indicated by WWF, forms one of the main reasons for Siberut to be declared a biosphere reserve in 1981 (Persoon & Eindhoven 2006). Factual activities to support the management of the island's natural and cultural heritage were initiated only in 1998. During the years 1998 through 2000 the Siberut Programme has primarily engaged in research, producing inventories (natural resources, birds, butterflies, rattan, insects, riverside plants, marine resources, and non-timber forest products), and case studies covering various topics (eco-tourism, land tenure and indigenous rights, behavioural and genetic study of primates, and the empowerment of local communities in the sustainable use of medicinal plants). During this first phase a community water supply system has been realised in the coastal village of Maileppet. In the initial project proposal (1999) titled: *Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Siberut Biosphere Reserve* the Mentawai communities living in the Siberut Biosphere Reserve are portrayed as one of the few remaining indigenous communities whose way of life is still primarily dependent on the traditional use of resources. The

⁷⁵ The concept of biosphere reserves derives from the first intergovernmental conference organised by UNESCO in 1968. Two years later, UNESCO launched a Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme which is one of UNESCO's cornerstone programmes until this day.

⁷⁶ The other five MAB reserves in Indonesia are: Gunung Leuser National Park, Cibodas (including Gunung Gede-Pangrango National Park), Tanjung Puting National Park, Lore Lindu National Park, and Komodo National Park (also recognised as a natural World Heritage site).

proposal further mentions that many parts of Siberut still feature a semi-subsistence economy in which the forest serves as a storehouse providing food, medicines, and other material input. Simultaneously, customary environmental management systems ensure economic continuity and at the same time contribute to the protection of the island's biological diversity. What the 2001-2005 project proposal basically suggested was the maintenance of an idealised situation, which in reality only holds true for a very small minority of the population on Siberut. The majority of Siberut's population experienced quite severe social change due to the fact that they have been subject to logging activities, resettlement projects, repressive political measurements, religious altering, mainstream education, westernisation, consumerism and the monetary economy.

Apart from having to come to terms with the seriously altered lifestyle of local communities, UNESCO simultaneously became caught in the pan-Indonesian decentralisation processes that swept through Indonesia after the fall of then president Suharto. In response to persisting – one might even say worsening – environmental threats to Siberut's ecology, continuous and rapid societal change creating altered lifestyles, and the new governmental context that ensued after regional autonomy was introduced, UNESCO initiated a new phase in the Siberut Programme in 2001, entitled: *Empowerment of Customary Environmental Management*. Where in an earlier stage only UNESCO staff, local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri, and the National Park management were involved in the team responsible for all levels of programming in the field, by 2001 the team extended partnership with the local government, one more local NGO, five local communities and Conservation International Indonesia (CII). Since 2001, UNESCO has been working on various projects using bottom-up strategies and participatory approaches all aiming at the empowerment of local communities and their guaranteed involvement in the management of their lands. In this context village management plans were produced and various training courses on alternative (other than logging) income generating activities, several workshops and village meetings and awareness raising campaigns have been held. While implementing their projects, UNESCO had to deal with local communities that were increasingly choosing the side of the logging companies that roamed around the island at the same moment in time. Local communities inspired by the fast cash offered by the logging companies became less and less interested in the conservation issues UNESCO was trying to convince them of. Logging activities were reported as uncontrolled in the surroundings of and even within the Siberut National Park. Regional autonomy has certainly constrained the work of UNESCO at the local level. As soon as the Belgium project leader pulled out, the Siberut project became supervised by the UNESCO head quarters in Jakarta; soon after which most project activities on Siberut came to an end. Working with other members of the Siberut Taskforce established in 2002, including Conservation International Indonesia (CII), Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences), Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA) of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry (MOF), various indigenous communities on Siberut, UNESCO advocated for conservation and environmentally compatible development on Siberut Island in line with Seville Strategy for Biosphere

Reserves.⁷⁷ Due to its strong advocacy efforts the Siberut Taskforce has been able to raise awareness within the Ministry of Forestry with regard to the status of Siberut as a biosphere reserve. As a result the Minister of Forestry has established a team (of which UNESCO is also a member) to investigate all logging activities on Siberut and check whether these activities were in line with the island's status as a biosphere reserve. The team presented its findings in the second half of 2005, not surprisingly expressing that the logging concessions issued for Siberut were not in line with the island's status as a biosphere reserve.

Conservation International (CI)

The Washington based conservation organisation Conservation International (CI) had its eye on Siberut for already quite some time, but their role remained insignificant for quite some time due to the fact that they were given to understand by the project manager of the PHPA/MENHUT project that there was no need for CI to expand its activities to Siberut, because the island was fully covered by the PHPA/MENHUT project. Shortly after this project was withdrawn, CI returned to Siberut once more. Their initial plan was to purchase all pending as well as active logging concessions for Siberut Island. The plan proposed to compensate the local government for the potential loss of revenues from the logging sector in return for a total log ban for Siberut.⁷⁸ Apart from the local government, local communities were also accounted for in the plan: they would become subject to various sustainable development projects implemented by a selection of local NGOs that would receive finances for these projects from CI (CII 2002). After the initial project period was evaluated it became clear that it was far more complicated than expected to unanimously gather local communities behind the conservation goal. Since regional autonomy, many local communities in Mentawai are – inspired by quick profit – handing over their lands to logging companies on a large and uncontrolled scale. Local NGOs turned out to lack sufficient capacity, reliability and authority to be able to successfully implement the planned sustainable development projects. Probably the most important

⁷⁷ The International Conference on Biosphere Reserves, organised by UNESCO in Seville (Spain) on 20-25 March 1995 resulted in the formulation of the so-called Seville Strategy; a strategy providing recommendations for developing effective biosphere reserves and for setting out the conditions for the appropriate functioning of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves effectively dealing with the conditions of the 21st century (population growth and certain trends in distribution, increasing demands for energy and natural resources, globalisation of the economy and the effects of trade patterns on rural areas, the erosion of cultural distinctiveness, centralisation and difficulty of access to relevant information, and uneven spread of technological innovations - all painting a sobering picture of environment and development prospects in the near future). Instead of repeating the general principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity or Agenda 21, the Seville Strategy identifies the specific role of biosphere reserves in developing a new vision of the relationship between conservation and development (UNESCO 2005).

⁷⁸ Larsen (2018) has labelled these kind of questionable methods by conservation agencies as 'Dirty Harry practices'. While conservationists probably mean to do good, through actions like these they might actually support corrupt and repressive regimes. Chapin (2010) has already earlier addressed the potentially problematic relationship, characterised by mutual dependency, between donors, conservation agencies and governments.

factor in CI realising that their plans were basically impossible to implement is the unwillingness of the local government to cooperate.

CI's initial ambitious plans have thus disappeared to the background. Apart from the above mentioned partnership with UNESCO which mainly manifests itself in a Jakarta-based political lobby for a log ban for Siberut there are no activities by CI on Siberut. Leaning on an article that appeared in Media Indonesia (2003) one might suggest that CI lost its faith in the possibility of successfully safeguarding the forests on Siberut.⁷⁹ The article states that it is difficult to maintain nature conservation on Siberut due to the fact that the local government – the district head is mentioned in particular – is such a strong protagonist of commercial logging in the Mentawai archipelago.

Tourists and travellers

The image of otherness that has been imposed upon the Mentawaians forms the basis of a last category of visitors to the Mentawai archipelago that are besides being interested in the unspoiled natural environment and its exotic inhabitants, simultaneously being responsible for the maintaining of this a-historic, romantic image of the Mentawaians and their islands. In search for virgin forests and intact cultural systems these 'uninvited guests' have almost solely been focussing on the island of Siberut. Similar to the foreign (donor) institutions discussed above, backpackers, cineastes, and photographers are attracted by the exotic images that Siberut is still able to offer.

The surfers visiting the islands are a somewhat different category of visitors in that sense that they seem to be primarily interested in the ultimate ride on 'world's wildest waves', while the possibility of an encounter with 'real primitive people' is regarded as a pleasant though not essential side-effect only.⁸⁰

Tracking through the muddy jungle

Attracted by the bold nature of the natural environment and the secrecy surrounding the Mentawaians, western tourists have been visiting Siberut since the early 1980s. In the early days of this tourism a visit to Siberut was no sinecure. People met with unclear regulations with regard to permits needed for travelling to the island and were often confronted with last minute governmental regulations that did not favour local cultural expressions. So it was forbidden to take pictures of people that were according to Indonesian standards not decently dressed and to engage in activities associated with *arat sabulungan*. For their own safety tourists travelling on the island were obliged to travel with a police officer who had to be paid a daily allowance (Persoon 1994: 259). Due to a lack in competition, payments for guiding and travel rose high in those days. When transportation facilities to the Mentawai Islands increased during the second half of the 1980s and governmental policies – under the influence of the precious tourist dollars – started to loosen up a little, tourism to Siberut started to grow in numbers as well as in

⁷⁹ See also <http://www.conservation.or.id/> (September 2005)

⁸⁰ See for instance: <http://www.mentawai.com> or <http://www.wavehunters.com>

level of organisation. It were mainly young Minangkabau that were among the first to recognise the business potential of organised tourism to Siberut. In hotels and coffee shops in Padang and Bukittinggi (mainland Sumatra), leaflets and brochures are distributed to promote the hiking trips to Siberut Island. With some peaks in the high season some tens of backpack tourists are travelling to Siberut every week.⁸¹

Tourism on Siberut is concentrated in the southern part of the island; the so-called Rereiket area. From the main harbour village, Muara Siberut, there goes a river navigable by outboard motored canoe straight into the hinterland. All muddy jungle trips, most of them taking no more than five to ten days thus consist of a travel upriver, thereby visiting the villages and settlements that are passed by.⁸² The mud starts to play a real role as soon as the tourists are to travel from one village to another by foot. When during the high season many groups of tourists are visiting the area at the same time, guides negotiate about who will be visiting which place on what day in order for the tourists groups not to run into each other. Tourists returning from such trips are almost always impressed by the things they have encountered with during their trip, but many simultaneously express dissatisfaction about the way in which the trip was organised. Most tourists are not properly informed about what to bring in terms of shoes, mosquito nets, spare cloths, and medicines. Bad food, or even no food at all, too little contact with the local people, local people constantly petitioning for your belongings, and the fact that there turned out to be a lot of additional costs are other annoyances.⁸³ Less frequently recognised are the unfair negotiations of the tourist guides with the local people. The guides clearly determine the prices for staying over in one's house as well as the amount of money paid for additional activities and performances by the local people. Due to ill negotiation capacities and the general disinterest of most of the guides, prices are reduced to an absolute minimum (Bakker 1999). Without doubt the biggest part of the revenues generated through tourism remains in the hands of the Minangkabau guides. Although this has lead to the affirmation among the local population of being treated unfair and being exploited, the Mentawaians themselves remain significantly absent on the organising side of the tourist industry. Apart from some Mentawaiian youngsters trying to compete with the Minangkabau guides, local communities just sit and wait for another group of tourists to visit their place. Critics suggest that this specific form of tourism only creates dependency and a sphere of meaningless performance among local communities. Other voices are more positive, defending the point of view that this so called ethno-tourism contributes to Mentawaians becoming more conscious of their traditional culture and more proud of their, finally as positive regarded, being different from many other people (Persoon & Heuveling van Beek 1998). Besides, as a result of the dollars generated through this tourism, the government

⁸¹ Some 2000-2500 tourists visit the Mentawai archipelago every year (<http://www2.unesco.org> (21 October 2005)).

⁸² These settlements are: Rokdog, Madobak, Ugai, Buttui, Attabai, Matotonan, and Rorogot.

⁸³ Payment for the travel from the harbour to the village, travel from the ferry to the shore when the ferry is due to low tide not able to enter the harbour, and food and drinks on the ferry from Padang to Siberut and in the harbour village itself are often not included in the package. Besides many local people do not want to have their picture taken if not paid for by cigarettes or other goodies they perceive as interesting.

more or less allowed - though not officially - cultural expressions, like producing traditional handicrafts, wearing loincloths and the performance of certain rituals by *kerei*, by which the tourists are attracted.

Foreign cineastes and photographers

Alongside the tourists several travellers with a somewhat extended agenda have come to the Mentawai Islands. Here again these travellers are almost solely focussing on the island of Siberut. Different from the backpack tourists discussed in the previous section these travellers ought to produce photographic and cinematographic accounts of their travels. Most of these travellers go beyond the tourist beaten tracks in the Rereiket area and exploit the in their opinion even more unspoiled areas of Simatalu and Sakuddei on Siberut's west coast.

One of the most outstanding photographic collections is made by Charles Lindsay who travelled to Buttui in the early 1990s to later produce the coffee table book titled *Mentawai Shaman, Keeper of the Rainforest*. The pictures in the book centre around the life of Aman Lau Lau Manai, a *kerei*. It is this book that has turned Aman Lau Lau Manai in a 'master of archaic Mentawai traditions', a title that has not done him any harm. Ever since Lindsay's book many others have visited Aman Lau Lau's *uma*, paying him ever increasing amounts of money in return for his performance and pictures.⁸⁴ Aman Lau Lau's stardom has turned him into a very wealthy man, enabling him to live a luxurious life. His somewhat extravagant personality and lifestyle and the fact that he divorced his wife to marry another significantly younger girl has certainly blemished his illustrious status. Latest unconfirmed news around his personality suggests that Aman Lau Lau recently converted to Islam because he wanted his children and/or grandchildren to be able to enjoy formal education.⁸⁵

Anthropologist Reimar Schefold conducted extensive field research between 1966 and 1968 with the Sakuddei, a clan living in the southwestern part of Siberut. The nearly 700 pages counting book titled: *Lia, das grosse Ritual auf den Mentawai-Inseln* (1988) forms the physical result of Schefold's research that, together with the more easily accessible museum catalogue *Spielzeug für die Seelen* (1980), has influenced so many other researchers, tourists, travellers, and even the Mentawaians themselves in their quest for knowledge about Mentawai cosmology, religion, livelihood, architecture, ritual activity,

⁸⁴ The Czech photographer, Josef Formánek who visited Buttui in 2001 is worth mentioning here. His pictures and accompanying story were published in 2002 in the Czech geographic magazine *Koktejl*. The pictures by Formánek, showing ritual activities mystified by a lot of smoke on the scenery, with flowers and glass-beads adorned children being breastfed by their mothers, idyllic scenes of young women fishing in the river, and a young hunter watching over the spectacularly displayed rainforest airing environmental wisdom and agency, are near photocopies of the pictures made by Lindsay 20 years earlier, suggesting that nothing ever changes in Buttui.

⁸⁵ If true, such a move by Aman Lau Lau would be remarkable to say the least, because he has always opposed against the introduction of formal education, stating that he himself was absolutely capable of teaching his children everything they need to learn.

social life, economics, and kinship. *Moile-moile: be good to your soul* (1973) and *The Sakuddei* (1974) are two leading ethnographic films produced by and with the assistance of Schefold that continue to inspire contemporary film and documentary makers. In the spirit of *Moile-moile* and *The Sakuddei*, contemporary film and documentary makers from all over the world are mushrooming Siberut's west coast in order to record 'fading drumbeats'⁸⁶, vanishing forests and the 'last of the medicine men'.⁸⁷ Completely bypassing current socio-economic and political developments, these cineastes and documentary makers, without exception, focus on what they call 'authentic, primitive cultures', only to be found in the interiors of Siberut. Nothing ever seems to change in Mentawai – at least not on Siberut. The local people acting in the films are so often visited by these foreign film crews that they have learned to perform precisely those things in front of the camera that are appealing to the mainly Western, urban public. Although never informed as such, the public thus learns what these Mentawaians are told to perform and not what they would usually do. An encounter with the 'wildest of tribes' can of course not exist of hanging around lazily in the house, while smoking and chatting with the neighbours. The audiences are expecting something more spectacular. Though, indeed extravagant, hunting an intentionally wounded pig in one's backyard and hunting game at brought daylight is probably something that no decent-minded Mentawaiian will ever think of; as is the intentional foundering of one's boat in the enormous breakers on Siberut's west coast.⁸⁸ Without exception all films show those activities perceived of as archaic characteristics of the Mentawaiian culture like chiselling the incisors into a point, the process of tattooing, and the search for and eating of sago larvae.⁸⁹ For most Mentawaians, their partaking in the films, though hilarious sometimes, is serious business. Just like the backpacking tourists visiting the islands, the foreign film crews are also perceived as *turi* (tourists) bringing in cash money.

Surfing with the ancients

During the last ten to fifteen years a rapidly increasing number of tourists have been visiting Mentawai in order to ride their boards. Especially after an international surfing contest was held in Mentawai in the summer of 2000, the waters surrounding the small Mentawai archipelago have become overcrowded with surfers competing over the waves. The messages on the Internet, most of them illustrated with spectacular pictures, inform us that Mentawai is the place where one can ride perfect waves and meet with 'real primitive people'; 'to surf with the ancients' so to speak. Most surfers, however, do not display particular interest in the local communities. On the contrary, they prefer to stay overnight on the luxurious yachts that are floating almost permanently on the Mentawaiian waters. For some reason there is a general and wide-spread malaria paranoia amongst surfers visiting the islands. This anxiety has certainly added to their preference for a yacht-based holiday. When surfers do go ashore they do so in several designated harbour villages. Different from the backpacking tourists and the cineastes the surfers thus not only visit Siberut.

⁸⁶ *A Fading Drumbeat, The Sakkudei* (sic), Channel News Asia.

⁸⁷ *Last of the Medicine Men*, BBC.

⁸⁸ See for instance: *Last of the Medicine Man*, Benedict Allen, BBC, *Spirits of the Mentawai*, Discovery Channel, *Les 33 Sakuddei*, *L'Odyssée de la Boudeuse*, Patrice Franceschi, France 2/Voyage.

⁸⁹ See for instance: *Body Perfect*, National Geographic, *Skin Deep*, Southern Star/National Geographic.

The surf agencies are all in the hands of foreign entrepreneurs, the majority being of Australian nationality. Though competition is growing, by putting the business on the name of an Indonesian trustee and hiring local staff these foreigners are able to make a lot of money. Acknowledging the money that is circulating in the international surf scene, Dave Jenkins, a physician and surfer from New Zealand stroke by the shortage of sound healthcare on the Mentawai Islands, established SurfAid International, a non-profit organisation dedicated to 'significantly improving the health and well-being and alleviating the human suffering of the indigenous people of the Mentawai Islands through community based health programs' financially supported by the global surfing community.⁹⁰ Taking into account the amounts of money that seemed to be donated to the organisation the factual implementation of healthcare activities on the islands remained lacking behind. Rough calculations together with the somewhat extravagant behaviour of the director has led to a general sense of distrust with regard to SurfAid International among both local communities and local NGOs.

In the meantime local government officials display an accommodating attitude towards the entrepreneurs engaged in the surfing industry. While there is – apart from some old surfboards left behind for the Mentawaian school children and the small income generated through the sale of local handicraft – no spin-off from the surfing industry to the local communities, some government officials responsible for necessary permits and taxation seem to be able to gain on a personal basis from the surfing industry.⁹¹

Conclusion

During the last century the Mentawaians have been caught in a crossfire where state instigated development and foreign conservation efforts form the two main factors. Both have tried to imprint their convictions upon Mentawaian society. The sometimes fundamentally diverting outsider opinions about Mentawaian culture and identity have caused a dilemma difficult for the Mentawaians to deal with. One either has to modernise, thereby necessarily letting go of the old ways of life, or to persist and to choose a conserved life in a protected forest. Influenced by powerful rhetoric, indoctrinated by governmental idiom and repressive measurements there seems to be little room for compromise while handling this dilemma.

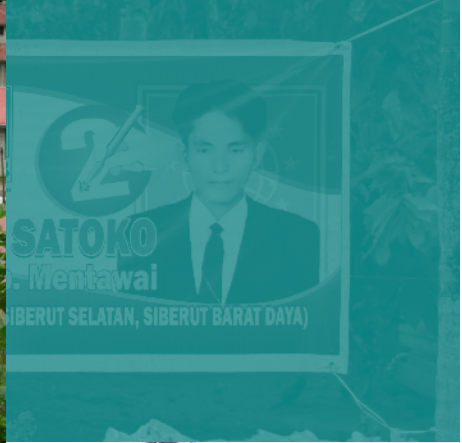
⁹⁰ Founded in Gisborn, New Zealand in 2000 as SurfAid International, SurfAid is a non-profit humanitarian organisation whose aim is to improve the health, wellbeing and self-reliance of local communities to whom the surfing community gets connected through surfing. Initially, the SurfAid activities included only the Mentawai Archipelago, but in a later stage communities living on the adjacent islands of Nias, the Banyak Islands, Telo Island and Simeule were also added to the programme. Their interventions are paid for by donations from the international surfing industry (www.surfaidinternational.org 2014).

⁹¹ In the village of Katiet in South Sipora some local craftsmen have specialised in the production of wooden masks that according to the people producing them are important artifacts in local ceremonies.



PENCINTAN KA
STAN

PROFESIONIS
NOMOR TANGGAL
PENERANGAN
LOKASI
NILAI PERAKSI
WAKTU PERAKSI
PELAKSANA
KONSULTAS PERAKSI



3 Education

16-IX-2002, Sakaliou, Siberut

Today I am travelling on foot from Ugai to Sakaliou. My travelling companion, Yohannes, is a 28 year old man from Ugai. People usually call him 'Bigen', because he has this habit of dyeing his hair with a product that goes under the brand name Bigen. Despite the fact that I found his nick name and the practise on which it was based highly amusing and everybody called him Bigen, which initially had me convinced that his real name was Bigen, I myself never dared to call him by his nick name directly.

Yohannes is a teacher in Sakaliou for the so-called Pinatoro Uma project, a forest school project instigated by UNESCO. Yohannes is walking three times a week from Ugai to Sakaliou. The walk, that normally takes a little more than an hour, mainly goes along a small trail through fields, gardens and secondary forest. Today we spent nearly two hours to reach Sakaliou. The fact that the travel takes almost twice as long as usually has everything to do with the fact that I cannot walk and talk at the same time. And I have a lot of questions to ask.

During our walk Yohannes explains me that the majority of children living in the interior of Siberut do not receive any formal education. Though, according to Yohannes, the children are eager to learn, practical objections often refrain them from actually going to school. The public school in Ugai is out of reach for many living in this region, simply because most parents do not want their children to linger around for hours in gardens and secondary forest. Though certainly not all, some parents living in the interiors told me that formal education was something superfluous, because they themselves felt perfectly capable of teaching their children everything necessary for a life in the forest. Going to school furthermore requires school uniforms, shoes, books and writing materials, for which finances are often lacking. And sometimes people feel that the limited monetary resources they do have are better spent on things considered more important than formal education. In order to tackle some of these objections, the forest school in Sakaliou is easily accessible. Participation is non-committal. Uniforms and shoes are not needed. Books and writing materials are provided and classes are only three days a week during the early morning hours.

When we arrive in Sakaliou, Yohannes is immediately surrounded by children who are obviously very fond of him. We install on the veranda of one of the large *uma*, drink coffee and Yohannes is playing guitar. As soon as I bring out one of my note books to write down some of the things discussed with Yohannes, I immediately have a friend. A five-year-old

boy nestles on my lap and wants to show me his writing skills and drink my coffee. In little time I gather more children who have brought some picture books and they start teaching me some Mentawaian. My notes will have to wait until tomorrow when these kids will all be in class with Yohannes.

Introduction

Formal education is a factor of major importance in the emergence of the self-proclaimed elite. Formal education within the Mentawai Archipelago, however, has a shallow history and has never reached a quality level comparable to that of education available on the mainland. Though already introduced by the Dutch at the beginning of the 20th century, it was only from the 1970s onwards that more comprehensive education facilities became available for a gradually increasing number of Mentawaians. Whereas the education facilities within the Mentawai Archipelago were not expanding beyond the level of junior high school until the late 1990s, school children wishing to further their education had no other option than to travel to the mainland and engage in education there. By far the majority of those Mentawaians seeking education outside the Mentawai Archipelago have ended up in the city of Padang where they had to carve out a living for themselves amidst the ethnically, culturally and religiously distinct Minangkabau dominating daily life in this city.

Those Mentawaians currently involved in politics and administration, were among the first Mentawaians who came into contact with the standardised formal education system that was gradually introduced in Mentawai from the 1970s onwards. In order to understand the emergence of the political elite, it is important to take a look into their educational background. This chapter describes their involvement in formal education in Mentawai, followed by a description of how this first generation of Mentawaian students have experienced the continuing of their education outside the Mentawai Archipelago. This is also why this chapter is limited by a time frame that roughly spans the period 1970 - 2000. After 2000 many of these formally educated Mentawaians became involved in local politics that then became accessible to them.

Apart from looking into their educational background this chapter also looks into how these young and educated Mentawaians became conscious of their ethnic and religious identity. Strengthened by various initiatives of mainly the Catholic church young Mentawaians residing in Padang started to bond, regardless their origin from what island within the Mentawai Archipelago. The church also supported them to persevere within the Islamic society of the Minangkabau and taught them to organise themselves and to be proud of their Mentawaian cultural background.

The information presented in this chapter is almost solely based on data I gathered during fieldwork. As a result I used only few references writing this chapter.

Formal education in Mentawai

Until the early 1970s there were only very basic education facilities available within Mentawai. The level of education did not expand beyond that of elementary school, basically only enabling the Mentawaians to learn to read, write and calculate. People used to call this type of education *sekolah rakyat* (grassroots school). Whereas the largest part of the education facilities within Mentawai was in the hands of the Protestant and Catholic churches, a solid portion of this early curriculum was filled with religious education. The Protestant missionaries, however, never really expanded beyond the harbour village of Nemnem Leleu (North Pagai). As a result they only served a limited number of people living in the near vicinity of this harbour village with the basic education they had on offer. The Catholic missionaries, on the other hand, had installed mission posts with educational facilities in Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Sioban and Sikakap. They furthermore had several elementary schools installed within the settlements located in the nearby hinterland of these harbour villages, which saved the locals from hour-long walks to the mission posts near the coast. Education was initially in the hands of the Italian missionaries themselves and was later taken over by the Batak and Javanese teachers the missionaries had brought along with them.



School building in Labongkurong and governmental primary school in Muara Saibi, Siberut.



From the 1970s onwards the curriculum became standardised and all educational institutions, including those of the Christian churches had to comply with the examination standards as set by the Indonesian government. This meant a serious increase in the variety of courses. Of course *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language) and *Pancasila* (philosophy of the Indonesian nation state) became part of the standardised curriculum. But other subjects like geography, biology, history and even English were also included. Six years of elementary school became obligatory as well as the use of a school uniform. In accordance with their own policy, the Indonesian government built elementary schools (*sekolah dasar* – SD) in every (official) village within the Mentawai Archipelago and the Padang-Pariaman administration sent in teachers of mainly Minangkabau origin. It was also from the 1970s onwards that the Protestant as well as the Catholic church started to build boarding houses in their respective mission posts enabling more children from the hinterland to engage in education in these harbour villages.

Although the facilities were there, actually going to school remained difficult. Stemming from a subsistence economy, people were struggling to find the financial means to pay the school fees, uniforms, shoes and learning materials. And despite the expansion in facilities, still many people remained to live quite far from the nearest school. Children sometimes needed to walk for hours along the muddy trails in the forest before arriving at school. An alternative of course was to subscribe to one of the Christian boarding houses, but additional finances were required to stay there, again adding to the already difficult financial situation. And although the churches also allowed payment in kind (e.g. sago starch, fish and coconuts), the costs involved in a subscription to one of the boarding houses remained an obstacle for many Mentawaians. As a result of the difficulties experienced, many Mentawaian children did not go to school on a regularly basis or did not even go to school at all. Classes constituted of children of mixed age and some children only entered elementary school when they were already relatively old. It was only in the late 1980s that junior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* - SMP) became available in Mentawai. The Protestant church started a SMP in Nemnem Leleu. Governmental SMP (SMP *negeri*) were built in Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalu, Sioban and Sikakap. In the early 1990s the Catholic missionaries also opened a junior high school in Muara Siberut. This SMP, named Yos Sudarso, initially operated under the auspices of the Catholic SMP, also named Yos Sudarso located in Padang. Later during the 1990s SMP Yos Sudarso in Muara Siberut became an independent school under the umbrella of the Catholic education organisation Yayasan Prayoga.⁹² Since the early 1980s several Islamic schools (*madrasah*) have been installed in several of the main harbour villages. Religious education forms the larger part of the curriculum in these *madrasah*. I have not

⁹² Initially, all education activities were directly controlled by representatives of the Catholic Church itself. Whereas the faith-based schooling industry kept on growing, Yayasan Prayoga was established in 1962, which from then on was responsible for all administrative matters with regard to education and the development and maintenance of the various Catholic schools and boarding houses in Mentawai as well as those on the Sumatran mainland. While at first the Catholic Church remained responsible for the finances needed, nowadays, Yayasan Prayoga is a more or less financially independent (Catholic) education organisation.



Catholic boarding complex in Muara Siberut (By: Juniator Tulus).

encountered with Mentawai students involved in education in one of these *madrasah*, neither was I informed by anyone who knew of Mentawaians going to the *madrasah*. The *madrasah* are mostly used by children of the Islamic migrants residing in the harbour villages.

With the faith-based schooling system within the Mentawai Archipelago never expanding beyond the level of SMP, Mentawai only knows governmental senior high schools (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* – SMA). Just before the Mentawai Archipelago detached itself from the Padang-Pariaman administration, governmental senior high schools (SMA *negeri*) were opened in Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabalan, Sioban and Sikakap.

Though some individuals in the interiors of Siberut think about formal education as a superfluous luxury, in general most Mentawaians have a positive attitude with regard to formal education. When finances are tight (which is often the case) Mentawaians, however, show a tendency to prefer to invest in their sons' education rather than in that of their daughters. This has everything to do with the fact that after marriage, Mentawai women become part of the clan of their husband and so are her children. Daughters are thus not the first to invest in, whereas in all probability the possible returns will not be shared with the members of her father's clan. Formal education as such has, however, never been perceived as something negative though in some cases it may be perceived of as something that is not part of the basic needs.

The foreign, Batak and Javanese missionary teachers have always been held in high esteem and the position of teacher has long been an outstanding and much respected position among the Mentawai communities. In earlier days the local teacher enjoyed considerable respect and revenues (e.g. lodging and food) from the local communities. The local teacher was perceived of as a knowledgeable and wise person. The teacher was the one informed, the one you could trust and turn to with your questions and problems, and maybe he would lend you some money. Over the years, however, the position of the teacher has somewhat lost of its initial prestige. Where the quality of the education offered by the religious institutions was and remains to be thorough, the governmental education has experienced a downturn during the last two decades of the previous century. The predominantly Minangkabau civil servants brought in from the mainland by the Padang-Pariaman administration were not always sufficiently motivated to fulfil the laborious task of teaching in Mentawai where conditions were harsh compared to those on the mainland. Compared to the missionary teachers working under the close supervision of the bishop and the local priests, the *pegawai negeri* (civil servant) teachers were neither controlled nor evaluated. Whereas there was nobody there to guide their activities, many civil servant teachers became indolent, showing up late or not showing up at all and sending school children back home already at eleven o'clock in the morning. During Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month, teachers returned to the mainland for several consecutive weeks. Until the administrative independence of the Mentawai Archipelago in 1999, teachers joining the civil service had to collect their salaries in Padang. In those days the return trip to Padang could take a week at least; during which school children in Mentawai enjoyed unofficial holidays. As there were little to no study books available, school children were solely dependant upon the knowledge of the teachers. While the teachers' furlough periods in Padang kept on extending, Mentawai children enrolled in the governmental schools did not work through the whole curriculum and turned out to be seriously handicapped when trying to proceed education elsewhere.

Secondary education outside Mentawai

Junior high school became available in Mentawai in the late 1980s and senior high school only in the late 1990s, so those children who wished to enrol in secondary education before that time had no other option than to transit to the mainland. While the financial means to engage in education on the mainland was lacking for most Mentawaians, the majority of the children that did go to the mainland did so with the support of either the Protestant or the Catholic church. Though not an obligation, most Mentawaians thus also enrolled in one of the church-based schools, rather than in one of the governmental facilities that are plentiful on the mainland. In addition to the schooling facilities, the churches also offered a secure place to stay in one of their boarding houses. Whereas the churches were aware of the difficult financial situation of most Mentawaians the churches quite often offered dispensation of the payment of school fees to those people that simply lacked the finances to pay for education.

The Protestant church had a fairly solid basis amongst the Batak communities in North

Sumatra and instead of expanding their facilities within Padang, the Protestant church preferred to send promising Mentawai students on an individual basis to either Pematangsiantar or Medan (North Sumatra) in order to engage in education there. In North Sumatra, these students were placed in boarding houses amongst predominantly Batak children. The only Protestant senior high school (*Sekolah Menengah Atas* – SMA) in Padang is in the hands of the independent Protestant organisation *Yayasan Kristen Kalam Kudus*. This school was opened in the early 1990s. The Protestant church furthermore ran one boarding house in Padang, but this facility was meant for boys only and was closed in the late 1990s.

Those Mentawaians involved in the Catholic schooling system, however, did not need to travel far, because the Catholic diocese had created ample educational facilities in Padang. Once arrived in Padang, Mentawai girls enrolling in Catholic education could choose from either SMP Maria (initially only accepting girls) or SMP Yos Sudarso where both boys and girls were received. Mentawai boys could choose from either SMP Yos Sudarso or SMP Frater, a junior high school connected to the seminary Maria Nirmala. This seminary was, however, closed in the late 1980s after which SMP Frater became a general Catholic SMP where nowadays both boys and girls are welcome. After the closure of the seminary in Padang, boys who had their sights set on an education in theology from then on had to enrol in the Catholic seminary Pematangsiantar in North Sumatra. Though in theory there were options to choose from, in reality only very few Mentawaians went to SMP Maria or SMP Frater. The level of education within these two junior high schools was significantly higher than that in Yos Sudarso. The majority of the Mentawai children were almost automatically subscribed to SMP Yos Sudarso. Apart from its convenient location close to the girls' boarding house, SMP Yos Sudarso was furthermore believed to be a better choice for the Mentawaians who were portrayed as less knowledgeable.⁹³ In this view Yos Sudarso offered an adapted curriculum especially meant for the Mentawai children helping them to cope with the higher standards of education in Padang.

After finalising the SMP, school children could further their education within the Catholic SMA Don Bosco or the popular teachers training college (*Sekolah Pendidikan Guru* - SPG) Xaverius, leading to a career in education. Half way the 1990s SPG Xaverius became SMA Xaverius, a general (Catholic) SMA. The majority of Mentawaians enrolled in Catholic education choose to enrol in SPG Xaverius rather than in SMA Don Bosco. SPG Xaverius would educate them to become teachers and the obligatory *ikatan dinas* attached to this type of education was by many Mentawaians perceived of as a guarantee for employment after graduation. Apart from the choice for a general SMA, girls could after SMP also enrol in specialised training to become a nurse in the *Sekolah Perawat Kesehatan* – SPK located in Palembang and Medan. Boarding houses were also conveniently available in these cities. After three years of intensive study many of these girls became nurses in one of the

⁹³ Compared to the mainly Chinese children that were also enrolled in these junior high schools, the Mentawaians were indeed less knowledgeable. While many of the Chinese children had enjoyed a solid elementary education and some four to six years of all kinds of extracurricular activities, most Mentawaians had only encountered with the absolute basics of elementary school.

Catholic health clinics in Mentawai or the Catholic hospital, Yos Sudarso in Padang. Being conscious of the fact that they were perceived of as less knowledgeable and the fact that they indeed quite often stood to lose in the competition against their better educated fellow students, many Mentawaians struggled in order to keep up with the pace. Far away from family and familiar friends, life in the boarding houses was not necessarily pleasant. Outside the boarding houses, one had to deal with the city where most of the pleasures and the entertainment the city had on offer remained, due to a lack of finances, outside the range of the young Mentawaians. Many of them were frustrated and coping with high stress levels and some even lost faith in themselves all together. As a result many dropped out of secondary school before obtaining their diploma.

Quite like the Christian initiatives, the Islamic movement has also invested in education for reasons of religious expansion. Over the last few years the Islamic movement has been quite successful amongst Mentawaian youngsters seeking education outside the Mentawai archipelago. Local organisation, *Yayasan Pembinaan Masyarakat Mentawai* – YPMM (Organisation for the Founding of the Mentawaian Society), has under the charismatic leadership of Bakri Tasirebbeb, proved to be a strong protagonist of the spread of Islam through education.⁹⁴ Although this organisation has no education facilities under its supervision, they are, in close cooperation with the earlier mentioned Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, running two boarding houses (*panti asuhan*) in Padang, solely meant for children originating from Mentawai. Mentawaian youngsters residing in one of these Islamic boarding houses are automatically members of *Yayasan Panti Asuhan Anak Mentawai*, a subsidiary of YPMM. Only in return for their conversion to Islam people can make use of these facilities. Currently, a little over 60 children are enrolled in this boarding house, the majority of them originating from Mentawai. Once administered to one of the boarding houses, one of which meant for boys and the other for girls, the young Mentawaians are thoroughly indoctrinated with the norms and values of good Islamic faith. These messages are intensified with an extremely negative stigmatising of those who drop out (*murtat*) from Islam and people of different beliefs (*khafir*). Blessed with plenty of devoted enthusiasts and backed up by a secure financial basis, the Islamic movement grew more and more influential over the last two to three decades. The ‘everything-paid-for’ education packages in return for conversion to Islam offered by YPMM, are of course tempting. While some Mentawaians have praised this opportunity and grabbed it with both hands, others speak of it as yet another Islamic conspiracy to undermine Mentawaian culture and identity.

Boarding houses

For both the Christian churches as well as the Islamic movement the boarding houses serve an important role in the enlargement and the consolidation of their carefully built faith communities. Because of the presence of the boarding houses, especially the

⁹⁴ The word ‘founding’ refers here to the educating and civilizing of the Mentawaian communities in a religious sense. Bakri Tasirebbeb, a former government official originating from Aceh, has been active in Mentawai for already over thirty years. Due to his convincing social work during these three decades, local communities have accepted him as a member of the Mentawaian community, emphasised by giving him a Mentawaian name: Tasirebbeb.

churches have been able to attach their followers to the education facilities they have on offer and simultaneously create solid faith-based communities.

For those children who went to one of the Christian boarding houses, independency started at an early age. Some Mentawai children already entered boarding school while still in elementary school in Mentawai and were released from it only after finalising SMA in Padang. Life in the boarding house thus determined several years of their early youth. Away from their parents and other family they had to comply with the rules and regulations of the missionaries. Daily routine was strict and left, except for Sunday afternoon, little time for leisure activities.

In the boarding houses the Mentawai children got in contact with children of different ethnic background (e.g. Javanese, Batak and Niassans), but also with fellow Mentawaians originating from different Mentawai islands. These increased interethnic and intra-ethnic contacts not only broadened their sense of others, but moreover so made them aware of the different manners of people that were to be considered Mentawaians like themselves. What most Mentawai children, despite the intra-ethnic differences had in common was the fact that their parents often encountered difficulties in paying for the boarding school. As a result many Mentawai children built a debt with the diocese in Padang that often had to subvene to get the boarding schools' finances in order.

While the Catholic boarding schools in Mentawai are still in full operation, both the Catholic and the Protestant boarding schools for boys in Padang were closed in the late 1990s. These closures have contributed to the phenomenon of young Mentawaians increasingly finding resort with family or friends already living in Padang. The Catholic boarding school for girls and the two above mentioned *panti asuhan* are still operational until this day.

Ikatan dinas

Those Mentawaians that enjoyed formal education from the 1970s throughout the 1980s were almost without exception relying heavily on the facilities offered by the Protestant and Catholic churches. The churches offered thorough education and with their boarding houses and frequent dispensation of tuition fees, they made the education they had on offer available for basically everyone willing to enrol. From those students that had engaged in pedagogic, health care or religious education, however, the churches asked something in return from those who had enjoyed their support. The fulfilment of the so-called *ikatan dinas*, a debt servitude was applicable to those people that enjoyed senior high school education in one of the religious institutions in one of the studies mentioned above. According to the three-plus-one agreement people had to fulfil four years of service for the church for every three years they enjoyed support from that church.⁹⁵ Whereas the *ikatan dinas* should most advantageously serve in the interest of the church (e.g. expansion and consolidation), many young school children were geared in the direction of pedagogic, healthcare and religious education and later send off as teachers,

⁹⁵ A senior high school (SMA) education, finalised without delays, takes three years in Indonesia.

nurses, pastor and reverends to those areas in the Indonesian archipelago there were still to be brought to Christianity. With only few role models to tap inspiration from, most of the early Mentawai children were indeed educated to become teachers, pastor or nurses. It was then in the capacity as pastor, teachers and nurses that these early students returned to Mentawai after the completion of their senior high school education. While the Batak and Javanese missionary teachers were not always too fond of serving their *ikatan dinas* in the Mentawai Archipelago, because of its geographic isolation and backward nature, for most of the educated Mentawaians the *ikatan dinas* was one of the only few job opportunities within the Mentawai Archipelago. Though a moral obligation, the *ikatan dinas* ensured these young graduates of a job and a small salary. With little to no job opportunities for secondary education graduates within (and outside) the Mentawai Archipelago at that time (1980s through the 1990s), the *ikatan dinas* formed an excellent opportunity for these young Mentawaians to gain some work experience after which one stood a better chance to become a civil servant, the ultimate dream of many. While they could have stayed in the service of the church, many of the early Mentawai graduates have after the fulfilling their *ikatan dinas* indeed applied for a job as a civil servant (*pegawai negeri*). Positions in the local bureaucracy (mainly as teachers) were and still are wanted because of the more attractive salaries, retirement schemes and the favourable general conditions.

Nowadays the *ikatan dinas* is no longer obligatory for people that engage in church sponsored senior high school. People simply need to pay for their education with the church. Dispensation of the schooling fees, which used to be the rule rather than the exception in earlier days, is now only granted in extraordinary cases in which people are absolutely not able to pay the school fees. Currently there are so many Mentawaians available that finished senior high school, might the church need a new teacher, they can simply hire someone qualified for the job. The *ikatan dinas* has, however, not yet fully disappeared. People that nowadays enjoy a scholarship from the church in order to enrol in higher education (either in a religious or in a governmental institute) on the mainland are still obliged to fulfil the *ikatan dinas*.

Higher education in Padang

After finalising secondary education many Mentawaians returned to Mentawai where the majority of them, in the absence of other employment, engaged in a life of farming and fishing like their parents. Not so much encouraged by the prospect of such a traditional life, a number of Mentawaians decided not to return to Mentawai. They stayed in Padang and tried to find higher education, employment or a combination of both. Those students enrolling in higher education and the subsequent choice for a (temporary) life in the city saw themselves confronted with several intellectual, mental, financial and practical challenges.

Application to one of the universities or colleges in Padang requires a certain standard of grades obtained in senior high school. Due to the earlier experienced educational

disadvantages, many Mentawaians did not meet these standards and were as a result quite often not able to enrol in the university of their choice. In such instances, one could try to subscribe to one of the private education institutions that are manifold in Padang. Some of these institutions have indeed more flexible subscription standards, but are in general also much more expensive than the governmental institutions. The majority of the Mentawaians enrolling in higher education choose for a study in the humanities, law or social sciences, avoiding the exact, engineering and bio-medical sciences. This can in all probability be traced back to the deficiencies in their secondary education where qualified teachers in physics, chemistry and mathematics were often lacking. Other popular choices were studies in education, politics and government, the travel and tourist industry, agriculture and fisheries, journalism, economics and accountancy. The choice for a certain study was pragmatic rather than based on personal qualities and often inspired by the prospect of employment in a particular area.

After one managed to be accepted to any of the higher education institutions in Padang, the problem of how to pay the college fees was the next problem to be dealt with. Scholarships covering (part of) the college fees could be obtained from the Catholic diocese, Yayasan Prayoga, the government and the Islamic YPMM. These scholarships were exclusively meant for those with outstanding secondary school results and unable to cover the college fees by themselves. The Catholic diocese and Yayasan Prayoga of course only supported Catholics, while the scholarships from Yayasan Prayoga were furthermore earmarked for those students enrolling in advanced studies in education. Scholarships from Yayasan Prayoga automatically led up to the obligatory fulfilment of the *ikatan dinas* after graduation. While this was for reasons explained above considered a plus in earlier days, nowadays the *ikatan dinas* is considered to cause a delay in obtaining real employment, which in many instances means becoming a civil servant.

In order to obtain a scholarship from YPMM, one had to converse to Islam. Apart from full scholarships, YPMM also offered welcoming Islamic host families in Padang as well as in other places on the mainland for Mentawaians engaging in higher education. In contrast to the scholarships from the churches and the government the YPMM scholarships were all inclusive. They almost always covered the full tuition fees and were furthermore inclusive of the costs involved in staying with a host family. Although both Mentawaian men and women were welcome to apply for these scholarships, YPMM seemed to have a slight preference for female students to grant the scholarships to. According to Bakri Tasirebbeb this had everything to do with the above discussed Mentawaian preference to rather invest in the (higher) education of their sons than in that of their daughters. YPMM has jumped into this gap by focussing on Mentawaian women. In order to ensure that these carefully invested-in women did not run off back to Mentawai after their graduation, YPMM went at length to actively push these young Mentawaian females to find themselves an Islamic husband from the mainland. Rumour has it that intentional early pregnancies refrained these young Mentawaian women from returning to Mentawai. True or not, fact is that marrying young Mentawaian girls is an official strategy (by *Dakwah Islamiah Indonesia*) in the expansion of the Islam within the Mentawaian area (Mas'ood Abidin 1997: 156).

For a scholarship from the government one had to go through the procedures as set by Mentawai student union, *Ikatan Pemuda Pelajar Mentawai* (IPPMEN). Procedures at IPPMEN were, however, not always that transparent. There was a general feeling that the most active and most politically engaged IPPMEN members kept the scholarships mainly for themselves and their closest friends and relatives. Several of IPPMEN's most active and politically engaged members had lobbied intensively for these finances with the government in Padang-Pariaman and apparently felt that they now had the right to allocate the governmental funds to their own discretion.

Like in secondary school, in university again, many Mentawaians experienced serious difficulties in keeping up with the pace. Their interim grades were often not sufficient to move on to the next level. As a result of which tests had to be re-examined, slowing the intermediate progress and eventually delaying graduation. Due to the slow intermediate progress, extra semesters had to be taken. This again involved an additional financial burden added to the already rather difficult financial situation most Mentawaians experienced. This has in many instances lead to Mentawaians temporarily dropping out from university in order to find the finances to pay for the extra semester first. Despite all difficulties, the number of permanent dropouts has remained low. Most of the Mentawaians that started a university study also finalised it, though in general it took them several years more than most other students.

Life in the city of Padang

A place to stay

Whereas the boarding houses in Padang are meant for children involved in secondary education only, one of the first concerns that needs to be solved if one wishes to stay in Padang in order to follow higher education is finding oneself a place to stay. The earliest group of Mentawaian youngsters certainly experienced the most severe difficulties in finding themselves a place to stay. With little to no family or friends living in the city to refer to, they had to find their way all by themselves. While few of them managed to continue to make use of facilities of the Catholic church in return for some small services for the church, the majority of them had to find host families to stay with. In Indonesia it is not uncommon to rent a room in someone's private house. This so-called *indekos* (room and board) is a popular though relatively expensive way for students to stay in the city where their university or college is located. Whereas many Mentawaians feared to be Islamised while staying with a Minangkabau family, they preferred to stay with the Christian Batak or Chinese rather than with the invariably Islamic Minangkabau. The Mentawaians often ended up *indekos* with families of lower social and economic status that offered relatively cheap accommodation. In these cheaper places sanitary and cooking facilities were often of poor quality or lacking altogether. And although *indekos* suggests that meals are included in the rent, this was quite often not the case either. *Menderita* (misery) was the word I most often heard when Mentawaians were talking about the circumstances in which they had to live in Padang. And indeed the places in

which they had to live were often not more than sheds with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling for lighting, diminishing opportunities to study to an absolute minimum. Running water was sometimes available, but more often it had to be obtained from the main building. Moreover, many of these *indekos* were located at inconvenient (with regard to accessibility and proximity of public transport) and even dangerous places. I visited many Mentawaians who lived *indekos* on the hill, notorious for its landslides, south of the Batang Arau river. Though aware of the possibly fatal danger they involved themselves in, many Mentawaians told me they simply had no other opportunities living in the city. Mentawaians *indekos* thus needed to be inventive and willing to take a chance in order to make things work. Most of them struggled continuously to make ends meet financially. Some of them, however, were lucky and found accommodation with better positioned families. Yudas Sabaggalet, the current *bupati* (head of district) of the Mentawai Islands, for instance, was more or less adopted by a wealthy Chinese family that took him in as if he were their own child.

Those Mentawaiian students that came to Padang at a later stage had almost without exception already one or more acquaintances in the city. The fact that they could connect with relatives or friends considerably eased their search for a place to stay. Instead of ending up *indekos* on an individual basis, the joint renting of whole houses became fashionable. This clustering together with family members already residing in Padang, sharing the costs for food and lodging, enabled them to help each other out on a more communal basis. But despite the mutual support these occasional households are still strongly characterised by an everlasting shortage in finances. Responsibility for the payment of the bills is taken by rotation or opportunity and almost without exception surrounded by severe financial stress, debts, arrears, last minute payments and lucky shots (e.g. paying the electricity bill with the wins from the (illegal) lottery). While several members of these households were working temporarily or on a more permanent basis they enabled others from within the household to go to school or university. The next semester or the next year positions may be conversed. The predominantly unskilled and low-paid jobs that these people engaged in vary from porter in the harbour to employee in one of Padang's many restaurants and hotels. Many Mentawaians have also found temporary jobs with one of the local Padang-based NGOs or within the organisation of the Catholic church.

Interethnic contact

Living in the city of Padang is a guarantee for an increase in interethnic contact. At schools, universities, boarding houses, within host families, at their work and even while doing the groceries at the market, everywhere the Mentawaians have to deal with people of different ethnic origin and different religious beliefs. The largest and most influential group in Padang are the Minangkabau. And they are simultaneously also the most complicated group for the Mentawaians to deal with. Although daily contact between the Minangkabau and the Mentawaians in Padang is fairly friendly on the surface, their relationship is characterised by deep running antagonisms and distrust. The Mentawaians coming to Padang tried to comply with the Minangkabau codes of conduct as much as possible. Many Mentawaians learned to speak the Minangkabau language quickly. And

in order not to be judged as poor, dirty and backwards at first instance, the Mentawaians often disavowed their Mentawaian identity within the public domain. Mentawaian clan names for instance had little to no differentiating power outside the Mentawai Archipelago other than that the people using them became classified as second-class citizens. Mentawaians in Padang thus preferred to introduce themselves by their Christian or Islamic names only. Many of the Mentawaian youngsters that came to Padang during the last three decades of the previous century almost invariably told me that they had felt bad about the fact that they had thought that renouncing their cultural and ethnic identity had been necessary in order to stand their ground amidst the patronising Minangkabau. Despite their perceived superiority many Minangkabau are a bit afraid of the Mentawaians as a result of which the Minangkabau tend to avoid the Mentawaians whenever possible.

Relations with the ethnic Chinese residing in Padang are of a different order. Generally, the Mentawaians feel comfortable in the vicinity of the Chinese. Despite the perceived stinginess of the Chinese, the Mentawaians consider the Chinese allies, at least in terms of food (pork) and religion (Christianity). The Chinese also serve as an inspiring example for the Mentawaians when it comes to cultural resilience and fellowship. Despite the strong suppression of their cultural expressions during the *Orde Baru* regime, the Chinese managed to maintain a strong pride in their cultural distinctiveness. The strong community sense of the Chinese has certainly helped them in doing so and the Mentawaians admire them for this quality.⁹⁶ The Chinese on their turn think of the Mentawaians as simple and honest people, similar to the Niassans. The business and wealth-gaining minded Chinese, however, also believe that the egalitarian Mentawaians with their incomprehensible tendency to share cause bad fortune. For the Chinese, contact with the Mentawaians on a daily basis is thus fairly acceptable, but doing business with a Mentawaian on an equal basis is considered impossible. For the same reason, marrying a Mentawaian is considered marrying down and should thus be avoided. The Chinese see themselves as superior in the relationship with the Mentawaians, but simultaneously they feel a certain connectedness and compassion with the Mentawaians that like the Chinese have endured decades of cultural and religious suppression.

Just like the Mentawaians, the Niassans form a small, but steadily growing ethnic minority in the city of Padang. Quite like the Mentawaians, the Niassans also come to Padang in search of education and paid labour. Different than on the Mentawai Islands, land is a scarce resource on the island of Nias and most natural resources (mainly timber) have been depleted. The magnitude 8.6 earthquake of March 2005 caused Nias a further setback in the already stagnating economic development. This event led to a sudden peak in the number of migrants from this island heading to Padang. Long before the Niassans and the Mentawaians came in touch with each other on the mainland they

⁹⁶ The Chinese in Padang know two larger associations and countless smaller family and interest group based organisations. HTT (Himpunan Tjinta Teman) is facilitating Chinese ritual burials. HBT (Himpunan Bersatu Teguh) is a general Chinese association organising cultural festivities like Chinese New Year and *Barongsai* (lion dance) contests.

have learned to understand each other in both congenial as well as hostile terms.⁹⁷ Due to the alleged ancestral relation both Niassans and Mentawaians often perceive of each other as somehow being related. In addition to the possible ancestral link, they also often say that they are *sama sama orang pulau* (both islanders), proudly uniting them in some sort of mutual understanding about what life entails stemming from an island. But despite the similarities and the possible ancestral connection, the Mentawaians and the Niassans do not seem to have a tendency to join forces while being in Padang. In general the Niassans are perceived of by the Mentawaians as brutal, ruthless and out of control people especially when acting in a group. The Niassans are furthermore believed to be out for Mentawai brides, a feature they are detested for by the Mentawaians. So the Mentawaians tend to stay out of sight of the Niassans whenever possible telling nasty stories about them in order to discourage the Mentawai girls from chatting up with the Niassans. And the Niassans on their turn feel no urge to link up with the suspicious Mentawaians whom they generally perceive of as being bold and uncivilised.

Student union IPPMEN

IPPMEN, short for Ikatan Pemuda Pelajar Mentawai (Union for Young Mentawai Students and School Children) was founded in 1982 by a group of young Mentawai students that were then residing in Padang. IPPMEN was the first and has long been the only Mentawai student union in Padang. Whereas many of the earliest Mentawai school children and students residing in Padang felt somewhat uneasy within the urban environment, IPPMEN was established as a formalised opportunity for these people to gather and to support each other, simultaneously creating a sense of togetherness. IPPMEN was founded for all Mentawaians residing in Padang, regardless of their origin, religion or intended length of stay in the city. Out of the more than 500 members listed in 1997, only some 20 to 30 individuals were actively involved in activities for or in cooperation with IPPMEN. Although in theory, every Mentawai heading for the mainland was automatically considered a member of the IPPMEN community, in practice many of the Islamic Mentawaians have long felt at odds with the predominantly Christian members within the organisation. Such was to change when IPPMEN became chaired by the Islamic Kornelius Muslim Sabailatti from 1995 till 2000, but by then much of the organisation's initial lustre, relevance and influence had long gone. The funding that IPPMEN had long received from the Catholic church was also stopped in the late 1990s, though this probably had more to do with the misuse of this funding by IPPMEN's

⁹⁷ There goes a myth telling that Aman Tawe, father of Tawe, at a certain moment in time migrated from Nias to Siberut. Together with his family and several others he brought from Nias, he settled in Simatalu and expanded from there over all four Mentawai Islands, forming the ancestors of the people that nowadays live on the Mentawai islands. These Niassan migrants used the name of Aman Tawe to indicate both themselves as a people and the islands they had invaded. The phonetic similarity between 'Aman Tawe' and 'Mentawai' serves as 'proof' for this mythical ancestral link between the Niassans and the Mentawaians (Sihombing 1979, Tulus 2013). Another myth, however, tells about a less harmonic encounter between the Niassans and the Mentawaians. The myth tells about how long ago a group of Niassans sailed to Siberut and came ashore in Simalegi. They went upriver where they encountered with the locals living there. They entered into a long lasting violent fight after which the Niassans were eventually driven of the island and went back to Nias (personal communication with Tulus 2013).

earlier leading figures, than that it was a result of the fact that the organisation became chaired by a Moslem.

As a student and youth union, IPPMEN focussed on the Mentawaian school children and students in Padang and the problems they encountered with. With the modest, but regular financial aid that IPPMEN received from the Catholic church and some occasional funds obtained from foreign donors, IPPMEN tried to tackle or at least diminish difficulties such as the troublesome transportation facilities between Padang and the Mentawai Archipelago, the poor student housing facilities in Padang, the lacking of governmental financial support for their studies, their fear of being Islamised while residing in the city, Mentawaian girls getting pregnant before finishing their education (sometimes even before finishing high school) and the emergence of drug abuse amongst some of the young Mentawaians in Padang. Whereas, according to IPPMEN's most active members, the origin of many of these problems needed to be sought outside the Mentawaian community, they started to seek contact with the local government in Padang-Pariaman in order to get their fears, hopes and demands across. Apart from the student related issues, IPPMEN also called the local government to account for their stance with regard to the Mentawaian community as a whole. IPPMEN stated that the fact that local government bodies still perceived the Mentawaian culture and *adat* as pagan and backwards jeopardised the position Mentawaian individuals as a citizen and simultaneously formed the basis on which less fortunate governmental policies were based. In this light the pan-Indonesian family planning programme *Keluarga Berencana*, was rejected by IPPMEN as not applicable to the Mentawaian community amongst whom population growth was (and still is) low and child mortality high. IPPMEN, together with national NGO SKEPHI and London-based NGO SOS Siberut, furthermore set face against the provincial Department of Transmigration for their condemnable plan to introduce a considerable number of bachelors to the Mentawai Archipelago to 'assimilate' with the local girls or order to rapidly and effectively upgrade the Mentawaians from their state of backwardness (Persoon 1996). Backed up by the two other NGOs, IPPMEN started a flaming letter campaign. After some politicians in the higher echelons had denied that such a transmigration plan had ever existed, the plan melted into thin air. The local government in Padang-Pariaman, somewhat impressed by the complaints filed by the vocal members of IPPMEN, as a result formalised their relationship with IPPMEN. From 1992 onwards IPPMEN was granted the responsibility over the organisation of the earlier mentioned scholarships for students enrolled in higher education. And on the basis of annual program proposals IPPMEN then also started to receive some financial aid from the Padang-Pariaman administration in order to cover their overhead costs.⁹⁸ Having experienced that vigorously filing your complaints may lead to a pay off, some members of IPPMEN started a defamation campaign against logging company PT Minas Pagai Lumber Corporation (MPLC) in 1994. The protests against this large logging company

⁹⁸ This money was part of the so-called Dana Pembinaan Pemuda dan Karang Taruna, which is money directly received from the central government allocated for sport and other creative activities among the younger generations within the district. Until IPPMEN explicitly asked for the Mentawaian share of this money, Mentawai had never received any of it.

active on the Island of South Pagai, were redeemed through an agreement according to which IPPMEN received four million rupiah (some 450 Euro) a month. In order to make sure that the promised amounts of money kept on coming in, MPLC was regularly warned for local communities on the brink of revolting against them (probably inflamed and thus only to be curbed again by IPPMEN itself) or threatened to be scandalised. In return for their low profile acting, several of the more vocal IPPMEN members were silenced by MPLC offering them scholarships on an individual basis. Several years later, during the late 1990s, then chairman of IPPMEN, Cornelius Muslim Sabailati, linked the student organisation to PT Mudam Sati, another logging company running a logging concession on the Island of Sipora. Both MPLC and Mudam Sati, competing over the concession areas that were available at that time, tried to shed a negative light over one another's activities by paying IPPMEN for ventilating negative publicity with regard to the other party. After some time IPPMEN had degraded itself to a puppet in the contest over resources between MPLC and Mudam Sati.

Protest against MPLC came to a climax in July 1998, when a crowd of students gathered by IPPMEN, after a protest session at the governor's office, headed for the MPLC headquarters also situated in Padang. Protesters denounced the plundering and deprivation of Mentawai's natural resources as well as the disruption of Mentawaian culture and society by MPLC ignoring the rights of local communities and the agreements made with them. The MPLC management reacted by stating that MPLC was working in line with the permit the company obtained from the Ministry of Forestry and that they therefore did not share the view of the protesters claiming that MPLC should be withdrawn from Mentawai on the basis of illegal activities. The MPLC management, however, declared their readiness to concretise some of the claims made by local communities on the Pagai islands. Therefore Cornelius Muslim Sabailati, and vice chairman, Levi Sirirui, were invited to meet with the MPLC management again within three days after the protest. Unwilling to wait for another three days to continue negotiations, IPPMEN further increased the pressure on MPLC by multiple protest actions in both Padang and on Pagai during the following days. By occupying the local MPLC office in Sikakap, IPPMEN even succeeded in forcing MPLC to temporarily stop their logging activities until new and satisfactory agreements between them and the Mentawaian communities were made. Later in July 1998 an agreement between IPPMEN and MPLC was signed according to which MPLC was to actively appoint Mentawaians in their work force, construct a road between the ten villages in the concession area and pay Rp 8.5 billion of overdue compensation to the various clans in the concession area. The agreement further stated that IPPMEN was to manage and hand out 54 full scholarships for Mentawaian students. MPLC simultaneously committed itself to finance the IPPMEN secretariat in Padang. Finally, the agreement stated that the Mentawaians (who exactly is not specified) would get a fair share in the shares of MPLC (Singalang 1998b). Striking is the fact that the shares-agreement became organised by Koperasi Induk Mentawai, an especially for this business newly established corporation under the administrative wings

of Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3).⁹⁹ Only a few months later Cornelius Muslim Sabailati, who was a long-term protégé of Bakri Tasirebbeb, became the new chairman of BM3. Despite the agreement with MPLC, IPPMEN's protest against the logging corporation continued way into 1999. When MPLC stopped logging activities in early 2000 – part of their concession area (unofficially) been taken over by Mudam Sati – IPPMEN as an organisation and several of its leading members suffered a considerable loss in permanent income on which they had been leaning heavily over the last years. This financial crisis together with the already questionable reputation of several of its members, eventually led to the downfall of IPPMEN. Due to a lack of leadership and funding, the organisation ceased to exist, but was never officially closed down. Ever since IPPMEN's deterioration multiple other student organisations and student focus groups have emerged. Apart from the officially registered Forum Mahasiswa Mentawai (FORMMA), the Islamic student organisation Himpunan Pelajar dan Mahasiswa Islam Mentawai (HIPMIM) and the Jakarta-based Ikatan Mahasiswa Mentawai Jakarta (IMMJ) there are nowadays dozens of occasional gatherings and Facebook-based student groups, some of which will be discussed later in this thesis.¹⁰⁰ Despite the inglorious ending of IPPMEN, this organisation has certainly been a breeding ground where self-conscious Mentawaian individuals have learned to organise themselves, to find funding needed for their organisation and activities, to put their personal experiences into words and to negotiate their collective wishes and constraints with the ones in power.

The role and influence of the Catholic church

During a symposium held in Padang in 1981 Stefano Coronese (a Catholic pastor active on Siberut) already suggested that the Christian churches in Mentawai have been extremely important in unifying the Mentawaians, granting them with a sense of ethnic consciousness and citizenship (Persoon & Schefold 1985: 105). The Catholic diocese in Padang has indeed been an influential factor in the lives of many Mentawaian youngsters that came to Padang to further their education. Apart from granting these young Mentawaians the chance to educate themselves, the Catholic church has also actively involved many Mentawaian youngsters in their activities, enabling them to earn some money while simultaneously gaining some experience in organising, building leadership skills, negotiating and communicating. In a joint fight against Islamisation, the Catholic church has simultaneously actively supported the Mentawaian youngsters in Padang to regain their cultural pride and to revive some aspects of Mentawaian culture and identity.

⁹⁹ Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) is a consultative body with an Islamic signature founded by the earlier mentioned Bakri Tasirebbeb. BM3 was established in order to strengthen democratic decision-making processes with regard to local politics and economic development.

¹⁰⁰ HIPMIM is a Mentawaian student organisation with an Islamic signature (although they explicitly claim not to exclude people with other religions) established in the initiative of Marfendi, a member of the DPRD Sumatra Barat. Besides the spread of Islam in Mentawai, HIPMIM is mainly interested in a strengthening of human resources. HIPMIM aims at as many tertiary educated Mentawaians as possible. University students can therefore count on the support of HIPMIM for their education. In return for their support HIPMIM expects their members to be active in the development of the Mentawai Archipelago.

Laggai Simaeru insert

From the early 1980s onwards the church's social commission (Komisi Sosial – KOMSOS) has been responsible for the production of the church magazine *Gema*.¹⁰¹ Until the late 1990s this magazine came with an insert called *Laggai Simaeru* (literally: beautiful place) especially meant for the Mentawaian public. The responsibility for the content, formation and production of this insert was in the hands of several Mentawaians working for KOMSOS. A Niassan has long been responsible for the illustrations within *Laggai Simaeru*. Whereas this insert was produced by and meant for the Mentawaian public, all texts within it were in the Mentawaian language. The articles and fixed columns with which *Laggai Simaeru* was filled were written around a theme that was determined in advance. Every monthly insert of *Laggai Simaeru* came with a new theme that was always somehow connected to the broad topics of Catholicism and society or, preferably a combination thereof. Insert *Laggai Simaeru* consisted of a booklet of some 15 pages in A5 format. Though *Laggai Simaeru* was meant as an insert that came with the magazine *Gema*, the public was also enabled to buy just the insert or 1000 Rp (0,10 Euro in 2004) a copy. In theory both *Gema* and *Laggai Simaeru* were distributed in Padang as well as on the Mentawai islands, but apart from in Muara Siberut and Muara Sikabalan, I have never seen it for sale elsewhere in the Mentawai Archipelago. Although people on the southern Mentawai islands knew about the existence of the insert most of them declared that they had not seen another issue for months. When talking to people at KOMSOS they admitted that KOMSOS experienced quite severe problems in maintaining the appearance and the distribution of the magazine. According to many of the people I talked to this was due to a shortage in finances. Others added that the shortage in workforce at KOMSOS as well as the indolence of some of the people responsible for the production of articles and interviews were other important factors explaining the problem. Since most of the Mentawaians working for KOMSOS moved to jobs with the Mentawaian administration after 2000 and the appearance of *Laggai Simaeru* had become superfluous due to the introduction of *Puailiggubat*, a monthly magazine by local NGO Citra Mandiri, KOMSOS decided to stop producing the insert in the early 2000s and concentrated from then onwards on the production of *Gema* only.

Siaran Mentawai

Apart from the production of the insert, the Mentawaian people working at KOMSOS were also responsible for the composing of a short radio programme broadcasted by Radio Dikara Bawana, an independent radio station operating under the supervision of the Padang diocese. This radio programme, called *Siaran Mentawai*, made by and meant for the Mentawaian public in Padang but moreover for the people on the Mentawai Islands, was broadcasted three times a week. Each *Siaran Mentawai* was announced by an openings tune consisting of the rhythmic sound of the Mentawaian *kateuba* (small drum). The programme made use of the Mentawaian language. During the 20 minutes

¹⁰¹ *Majalah Gema* is a 10-15 pages monthly magazine produced by the Catholic diocese in Padang. Written in Indonesian this magazine offers information and articles on different topics. Topics range from reports and announcements of activities organised by the diocese through religious, social, economic and environmental issues.

that the programme lasted, various subjects among which education, health and culture are most popular, were treated. The Sunday edition of the programme always handled about religion. The programme offered a mix of news and information transfer, discussion and recommendation through short talk shows, and Mentawaiian music (both popular and traditional). Apart from several Mentawaians there was only one person originating from Flores involved in the broadcasting of Siaran Mentawai. During the years that followed the independency of the Mentawai Archipelago, all Mentawaiian employees, apart from the only Mentawaiian female that worked on the production of Siaran Mentawai, left KOMSOS, transferring to employment in the civil service. Both Laggai Simaeru and Siaran Mentawai were successful productions. Especially the radio broadcast was something that I learned to understand as something that was appreciated by many Mentawaians. The fact that the radio programme was easily accessible through the use of the Mentawaiian language and presented news and information that had the interest of most Mentawaians, I have seen many Mentawaians turning up their radios when the *kateuba* was heard. Due to the earlier mentioned transfer of many of the employees and the shift in interests from 2000 onwards, KOMSOS saw itself forced to also stop with the production of Siaran Mentawai in the early 2000s.

Kaderisasi, workshops and other social gatherings

Since the late 1980s social organisation Keluarga Katolik Mentawai (KKM) organises regular meetings, social gatherings and sport activities for all Catholic Mentawaians (or anyone somehow involved with a Catholic Mentawaiian) residing in Padang. KKM is not an officially registered organisation, but rather a loose gathering of people taking the initiative to organise activities for their associates. KKM has always been headed by a Mentawaiian, but for lack of interest KKM is currently headed by a Catholic Chinese married to a Mentawaiian. One of the most conspicuous activities organised by KKN is the

Radio Dikara
Bawana



so-called *kaderisasi* (social education) gathering, almost without exception sponsored by the Catholic Komisi Kepemudaan (youth commission) of the Catholic diocese. *Kaderisasi* is especially meant for young Mentawaian students. The gathering provides them with ideas about the responsibilities they have towards the Mentawaian community whereas they are the future of the Mentawai Archipelago.

Social gatherings and support group gatherings are also organised by KKM as well as meetings requested for by the Mentawaian Catholic community on the instance of a marriage or a funeral. Sports and leisure activities are also on the agenda of KKM. In return for the payment of a small fee, the diocese makes their sport facilities available for the activities of KKM. Several times a week the Mentawaians can gather on the sport fields near Yos Sudarso hospital and St. Yusuf boarding school in order to play volleyball or soccer. The sports activities are much in demand among the young Mentawaians because it offers them an opportunity to relax and be amongst other Mentawaians. At the soccer field they could loose some of their frustrations, forget about their problems for a while and just be together casually.

Yayasan Laggai Simaeru

Being stigmatised as backwards and, despite Christianisation, still perceived as without a proper religion, many Mentawaians experienced a serious identity crisis. Especially those Mentawaians residing in Padang were downplaying their cultural and religious identity in order to fit within the urban context. It was especially during the 1980s and the 1990s that the Catholic church feared to loose its Mentawaian adherents to the powerful and convincing Islamic conversion activities. Therefore the Catholic church decided to boost the anchoring of the Catholic faith as an intrinsic part of Mentawaian culture and identity. Different from Islam, Protestantism and the Indonesian nation state, the Catholic church allowed and now even started to promote Mentawaian culture and identity to partake in Catholicism.

With this task of promoting Mentawaian culture and identity and intensifying the connection with Catholicism, Yayasan Laggai Simaeru (YLS) was founded in the early 1990s and initially operated under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese in Padang. Under the spirited leadership of Pastor Ciroi, several young Mentawaians were involved in the implementation of the YLS activities organised to highlight Mentawaian culture and identity. It was pastor Tonino Caisutti who was mainly responsible for the funding of YLS and its activities. Mentawaian song, dance and traditional clothing competitions as well as story writing and poetry contests making use of the Mentawaian language were organised. In the YLS office a collection of Mentawaian artefacts was built. Most of the objects within this collection were of little to no value whereas they contained of kitchen utensils and some hunting gear only. Some objects used by the preparation of sago starch were probably considered too large in their original form and were thus displayed in miniature versions. This looked rather odd and some of the objects were (at least to me) no longer recognisable as the tools they were supposed to represent. The objects were, however, displayed in a nice glass showcase that made the objects look more interesting than that they actually were. A small library containing information about Mentawai and

Mentawaian culture and identity, almost without exception written by outsiders, was also set up and regularly complemented. Especially the copies of *Mainan Bagi Roh* by Reimar Schefold formed a source of annoyance as they just kept on disappearing from the library. But whereas the YLS office served as a meeting point for many without much control, nobody ever found out who never returned the books. Since the early 2000s the library also holds a modest collection of CDs with Mentawaian pop music.

After an internal conflict in the late 1990s, Yudas Sabaggalet, till then working for YLS as a secretary, managed to take over from the mainly Chinese people involved in the YLS board and became the first Mentawaian director of YLS. Although changes in vision and approach were expected after this change in leadership based on internal friction, no major changes in performance could be detected. Yudas, however, did try to gather all activities related to Mentawai undertaken or financed by the Catholic diocese (including the production of *Majalah Laggai Simaeru* and *Siaran Mentawai*) under the auspices of YLS. Although YLS was welcome to contribute to *Majalah Laggai Simaeru* and *Siaran Mentawai*, neither of these responsibilities were ever fully transferred to YLS. Yudas thus decided that YLS should produce its own magazine, innovatory titled *Majalah Laggai Simaeru*. Due to shortage of input for the magazine, only few editions of *Majalah Laggai Simaeru* are produced during the early 1990s.

When Yudas Sabaggalet left YLS in order to start a new NGO with his friend Kortanius Sabeleake, Bastian Sirirui took over the leadership of YLS. During Bastian's leadership YLS started to drift. Bastian felt the need to broaden the scope of YLS' vision and mission, but was seemingly not able to make up his mind about the direction in which the organisation were to move. The initial focus and activities of YLS began to faint while Bastian's primary interest was in networking activities with the Kalimantan-based NGO *Pancur Kasih*. When Bastian eventually left YLS in order to start his own organisation, rumour has it that he took a large amount of YLS funding with him, allegedly used as investment for his newly founded organisation. While nobody seemed to know what really happened, fact is that the Catholic church withdrew its funding for YLS after Bastian had left.

It was elementary school teacher, Salvator Sakoikoi, originating from Sikakap, Pagai, who took over from Bastian Sirirui. Salvator, interested in education, managed to interest UNESCO in the partaking of YLS in their non-formal education programme that was implemented alongside UNESCO's general programme since 2000 onwards. This so-called *Pinatoro Uma* (enlightened clan/house) project was aiming at 'the empowerment of the traditional Mentawaian communities and their indigenous customs' through an increase in literacy (UNESCO 2001: 20). The main assets of this project were the production of a non-formal curriculum for elementary schools and the implementation of three so-called Community Learning Centres (CLC) in Rereiket on Siberut.¹⁰² When UNESCO withdrew its Canadian field staff responsible for the implementation of the non-formal

¹⁰² The three CLCs, located in Buttui, Attabai and Sakaliou were built by the local communities and served as school buildings where local children were provided classes in *Bahasa Indonesia*, mathematics, reading, writing, and Mentawaian culture. Three local teachers were employed by UNESCO in order to teach local children ranging from 4 to 10 years old.

education project, the responsibilities for this project were gradually handed over to YLS from July 2002 onwards. But the YLS staff performed unsatisfactorily and through their unprofessional behaviour threatened to jeopardise the position of the teachers active in the CLCs. The YLS staff was clearly not experienced enough to manage a project of this scope and complexity. Due to the disappointing results and considerable overspending on one of YLS' first field activities, UNESCO saw itself forced to prematurely withdraw the *Pinatoro Uma* project from YLS and hand it over to another local NGO (Direktorat Pendidikan Masyarakat 2002).

With the withdrawal of UNESCO, Salvator decided to accept a job as a governmental teacher on his island of origin, Sikakap; a job opportunity he had been looking forward to for a long time. Pastor Emilius Sakoikoi took over from Salvator, but due to a lack in finances and a clear programme of work there have not been many activities ever since.

The social ecology of the city

Many of the Mentawaians who came to Padang during the 1970s throughout the 1990s told me that they while residing in the city had often felt lonely, insecure, fearful, downright stupid and continuously confronted with a worrisome shortage of finances. In the midst of plenty, the Mentawaians remained spectators, not able to fully participate in the wealth and modernity of the city. Many of them indicated the Catholic church and their fellow Mentawaian also residing in Padang as their only anchors in an otherwise fairly hostile environment. Whereas the Mentawaians were invariably perceived of as an inferior ethnic group, it was especially in the city that they became subject to exclusion, discrimination and disrespect. It was in the city that these Mentawaians were most strongly confronted with their marginality. Such pressure comes with social and psychological consequences. As a result many Mentawaians start to deny their cultural background while in public and quickly adapt to the predominantly Minangkabau rules of conduct. Dependant on the context in which they had been in Padang, the Mentawaians who resided in Padang changed. Many of them reported to me that their stay in Padang had caused them to alienate from their Mentawaian identity and cultural background. When (temporarily) back in Mentawai they experienced an uncomfortable detachment from their friends and families in Mentawai who often perceived of their change as being *sombong* (presumptuous). They were often told that they didn't know their 'house' anymore, plaintively hinting at a disrespect with regard to their parents and other close family.

Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the fact that many of them report bitterness, disappointment and frustration, there is also a certain enlightenment and determination to be sensed among the Mentawaians residing in Padang. The social ecology of the city, stimulating their growing cultural self-consciousness or reflexivity stimulated by augmented interethnic contact and increased analytical power engendered by literacy, created a sense of community and simultaneously changed the perspective of the young Mentawaians residing in Padang. Their engaging in ethnic competition has made them

more aware of themselves and turned ethnicity into something salient to them. Their vision on Mentawai has simultaneously changed with it. Many of them started to reflect (some more systematically than others) on their culture and their position as a distinct ethnic group in a wider context. They increasingly questioned their exclusion from local politics and decision-making processes and their subsequent social marginalisation from larger society. They agreed that the Mentawaians were indeed less knowledgeable and their islands less developed, but they also argued that these are not intrinsic features of Mentawai culture and identity, but rather the result of ill government planning and poorly executed government projects. They began addressing their government in Padang-Pariaman to come forward with changes and real development planning for the Mentawai Archipelago.

Conclusion

Formal education has been of major importance in the emergence of the self-proclaimed political elite that nowadays rules the Mentawai Archipelago. Though formal education was already introduced by the Dutch at the beginning of the 19th century, it was only from the 1970s onwards that formal education within the Mentawai Archipelago slowly began to develop. Junior high school became available in Mentawai during the 1980s. It was only during the 1990s that senior high school became available. Anyone wishing to enrol in either junior or senior high school before its availability on the islands had to go to the Sumatran mainland. Many Mentawai youngsters went to Padang with the help of the Christian churches or the Islamic movement. Especially the Catholic church supports the Mentawaians in their struggle to carve out a living for themselves amidst the predominant and significantly different Minangkabau. The Catholic church also supports them in maintaining their cultural and ethnic singularity and helps them to organise within church supported organisations and activities. The Christian initiatives have gradually lost some of its influence. Due to tight finances the Christian churches have felt the necessity to close some of its facilities, especially in Padang. Whereas finances are not an obstacle for most of the Islamic schooling initiatives, they have gradually increased their influence amongst the Mentawaians. Though most Mentawaians do not wish to get involved in Islam, because they perceive of islamisation as a fundamental undermining of their Mentawai identity, gradually increasing numbers of young Mentawaians apply for the all-inclusive and everything-paid-for scholarships offered by the Islamic initiatives. After their graduation from high school many Mentawaians have returned to Mentawai where some found employment as teachers or nurses. Others, who were reluctant to return to Mentawai stayed in Padang and tried to find employment there or enrolled in higher education. Both turned out to be difficult amidst the little supportive Minangkabau.

Apart from the Minangkabau, the Mentawaians residing in the city of Padang also came in contact with the more friendly ethnic Chinese, increasing numbers of Niassans and Mentawaians originating from other islands within the Mentawai Archipelago. The increased inter- and intra-ethnic contact that is part and parcel of the ecology of the city has made those Mentawaians residing in the city more ethnically conscious and created a

sense of community amongst them. Their increased cultural self-consciousness sometimes lead to a denial of their cultural and ethnic background. On the other hand, however, this reflexivity combined with their increased analytical power generated by literacy, caused this group of Mentawaians to increasingly question their exclusion from local politics and decision making processes and their subsequent marginalisation from larger society. They experienced a growing dissatisfaction with the way in which the Mentawaians have been perceived and treated by outsiders. Student organisation, IPPMEN was among the first Mentawaian organisations that, apart from student affairs, also dealt with broader social issues such as the loss of cultural, religious and ethnic integrity, the discriminatory treatment of the Mentawaians as second-class citizens, the political marginalisation of the Mentawaians and the generally ill designed development schemes implemented in the Mentawai Archipelago.

4 NGOs

2-IX-2002, Maileppet, Siberut

Just arrived in Maileppet together with Nina and four staff members from Yayasan Laggai Simaeru (YLS). We have been travelling to Siberut, or *turun ke lapangan* (descending to the field) in order to implement YLS' first field activities sponsored by UNESCO.¹⁰³ In the next twenty days we will visit three settlements in the Rereiket area in the interior of Siberut, e.g. Buttui, Attabai and Sakaliou. The village of Ugai will be used as a base camp. Each of the settlements will be visited for three or four days during which sowing and cooking activities with the women from the local communities will be implemented. During evening hours workshops about tourism and preservation of local culture are on the agenda. Nina, a 20-year old Batak girl from Medan is especially hired for the organisation of these workshops. Apart from making my canoe available for transportation during this trip, I have promised the UNESCO consultant to look into the feasibility of constructing a water gravitation system, supplying the settlement of Sakaliou with potable water.

4-IX-2002, Ugai, Siberut

Today we have added two elderly women who will be responsible for the sowing and cooking activities and a missionary nurse from Muara Siberut to the team. The nurse will provide healthcare consultations twice a day in each of the settlements to be visited. Together with my field assistant, Lukman, and boat operator, Samuel, the team now counts eleven people. Quite an impressive team. Two of the YLS staff I have never met before. Taking into account the division of tasks, it seems that the four YLS staff are basically without a clearly determined task. That, however, does not affect the good mood. The team is obviously excited and our cheerful chatter is absorbed by the dense vegetation on the riverbanks while we boat upriver. Amongst other things the canoe is packed with a lot of newly purchased camping gear brought by the YLS staff. They even brought a large tent. Seeing all this equipment, I start having doubts about my own baggage consisting of one waterproof bag with clothes, a mosquito net, a notebook, a flashlight, my photo camera and twenty kilos of rice. Somebody brought the wrong equipment. Hope it is not me.

¹⁰³ Both politicians and people working for the Padang-based NGOs are 'descending to the field' when they are to run campaigns or to implement project activities on the Mentawai Island. The term *turun* (descending) indicates that both politicians and NGO personnel ascribe themselves a superordinate position with regard to the communities on the Mentawai Islands. Such stands in contrast to the phrase *pulang kampung* (going home) when travelling to Mentawai without a political or project agenda.

8-IX-2002, Buttui, Siberut

After having spent four days in Ugai during which we nearly finished all twenty kilos of rice, we have arrived in Buttui today. It has been raining during the last four days. Whereas there were no activities planned in Ugai, we have killed time by playing domino and hanging around in the village. Over the last few days this event has started to remind me of the summer camps in the 1990s when I used to take a bunch of over-excited teenagers horseback riding. While the horseback riding is off course absent here, other typical summer camp activities like hiking, canoeing, swimming, campfires, chatting up and making out are cheerfully enjoyed by all. Meals for the team have not been organised in advance and are eventually prepared with whatever food available by the two elderly ladies, the missionary nurse and myself, as always assisted by Lukman and my boat operator.

The first meeting with the locals tonight is meant for the YLS team to introduce itself and introduce the workshop programme to the community. The locals started the meeting by introducing themselves using false names, creating a playful atmosphere. But despite the cheerful mood the locals have some serious questions they like to pose. Now that YLS is made responsible for the logistics with regard to the UNESCO-initiated Pinatoro Uma project, the locals rather discuss these new arrangements instead of the workshops ahead. Neither of the YLS staff members were able to adequately answer the questions posed. Instead they have spent considerable time quarrelling with each other over leadership and budgets, leaving the locals without a clear presentation of the arrangements between YLS and UNESCO, causing distrust and suspicion. Apart from myself, nobody has been taking notes in order to recollect the topics discussed.

10-IX-2002, Ugai, Siberut

Yesterday sixteen local women and all of their children attended the sowing and cooking workshops organised by the two elderly ladies. Whereas there were not enough sowing materials it was decided to make kids cloths only. Later during the afternoon various sorts of cookies were produced. The cookies formed the starting point of irritations on behalf of the local women, as the cookies were not to be taken home but to be served during the evening workshops.

The evening workshops were attended by seven local men only. All turned out to be in a rowdy state of mind. Nina was wearing a very short pair of jeans and seemed rather nervous about her first workshop. I wonder why no one (not even Nani, the only female in the YLS staff, who is a Mentawaian herself) has taken the opportunity to inform Nina about the fact that for women to show your thighs is considered offensive in Mentawai. Because Nina does not master the Mentawaian language, her presentation was translated by one of the YLS staff. With the presentation being rather dull, the locals lost interest soon. They became noisy, walked around, prepared coffee while uttering naughty comments. A loud fart by one of the participants eventually marked the starting point of a new topic: the preservation of Mentawaian culture. Jimmy, one of the YLS staff I never met before, tried to get the attention of all present by slipping into teaching mode. But the participants were out of control and soon the meeting came to an inglorious end.

While part of the cookies produced during the afternoon were indeed served during yesterday's evening meeting, the remaining cookies were served as breakfast for the team this morning, confirming the suspicion of the local women that the team is making them bake cookies for the team to eat. Only five women attended the workshops today. The sowing activities that started yesterday were rapidly finalised and the following cooking workshop was also hastily finished. The team returned to Ugai before lunch.

12-IX-2002, Attabai, Siberut

Today we walked from Ugai to Attabai. Poor Nina has been in tears almost all day. She is exhausted and today's hike in her brand new jackboots made her feet blistering. Local communities were apparently not properly informed about the visit of the YLS team. Apart from several elderly women and children there seemed to be no one present in the settlement. One of the children was ordered to collect his parents from the field houses located in the gardens at considerable distance from the settlement. Tonight's workshops were cancelled.

15-IX-2002, Ugai, Siberut

After only one and a half days in Attabai, the team returned to Ugai yesterday. Today the YLS team convinced the local community in Ugai to sell them a piglet to be slaughtered for dinner. Mentawaians normally do not slaughter pigs just for dinner so it took the team quite some convincing power to persuade one of the locals to sell them a piglet. Once the piglet was handed over, no one in the team had a clue how to slaughter the animal. With obvious reluctance one of the locals slaughtered the piglet after which it was handed over to the kitchen team for further preparation. The locals were obviously not amused by this event and started to ask Yohannes, the Pinatoro Uma teacher, about the usefulness of the YLS team residing in their village. While locals may for the sake of cash income accept this kind of behaviour from tourists, they certainly did not seem inclined to accept it from fellow Mentawaians.

23-IX-2002, Padang

Today the YLS staff is meeting with Richard Paulsen, the UNESCO consultant. Whereas the YLS team did not have the time yet to produce a written report, reporting about the Rereiket fieldtrip is done orally. Justification for the finances used during this trip contains of one A4 paper that shows considerable overspending. Due to the negative balance, the honorary salaries of the two elderly ladies and Nina can not be paid. While both the elderly ladies and Nina are not present during this evaluation meeting, their salaries not being paid is easily accepted. Also striking is the lack of reflection on the events during the fieldtrip. Apart from Nina probably, whom I have seen in tears every day, the YLS staff did seem to have a splendid time. To my surprise the YLS staff did not at all seem to be disturbed by the deficits in their programme of work, their obvious detachment from their cultural background, and the fact that they jeopardised the position of the Pinatoro Uma teacher within the community while residing in his house. Striking was their lack of reflection on the events. They never seemed to wonder why people were farting during their meetings or why constantly diminishing numbers of people attended their workshops. Completely bypassing their own shortcomings and sometimes hilarious

performances, the YLS staff only talked about those funny, but treacherous locals and the, indeed huge, amounts of sugar they are able to consume in very little time. I am sure that the fact that they themselves caused disorder, distrust and had not been taken serious for just a single moment never came to their minds.

Introduction

During the 1980s and the 1990s the majority of Mentawaians who enjoyed higher education in Padang were not sure about what to do after their graduation. Those who had enjoyed specific or higher education from the church often returned to Mentawai in order to fulfil their *ikatan dinas*, but for those who went through more general university studies the prospect of finding employment in Mentawai was rather bleak, not to say non-existent, in those days. Whereas a return to Mentawai came with little other options than to become a farmer or a fisherman, most of the, mainly tertiary, educated Mentawaians decided to stay in Padang. They thought they stood a better chance finding employment in the city rather than on the Mentawai Islands. But despite their university degrees, finding employment in Padang turned out to be rather painstaking as well. In general sense people were not overly enthusiastic about employing a Mentawaian. Many Mentawaians told me that they had faced multiple disappointing rejections based on discriminatory ethnic and religious grounds.

With not much else to do, the restless minds of these people soon focussed again on the Mentawai Archipelago and the multiple problems it faced. The increased analytical power and the fact that they had been detached from the Mentawai Archipelago for quite some time, enabled these people to look at Mentawai and its inhabitants from a new perspective (Eindhoven 2002). In the course of time they formed new insights and developed a certain political engagement. Rather than to categorise the lack of sound development on the Mentawai Islands as an intrinsic aspect of the backwardness of the Mentawaians, they started to blame the incompetent Padang-Pariaman policies as the sole cause of the wretched state of the archipelago. They simultaneously started to classify the loss of both cultural identity and natural resources on the islands as a threat to their ethnic singularity and an ecological disaster rather than an aspired outcome of a carefully considered development plan. While the cry for change and more access to local politics became stronger over time, the Mentawaians remained to have little to no real influence on the policies engineered on the mainland. Apart from one Mentawaian, Agustinus Sabebege, holding a seat in the local parliament of the Padang-Pariaman district during the late 1990s, there were no Mentawaians involved in legislative functions. Due to the lack of direct political influence, several of the educated Mentawaians decided to address some of the problems identified by means of non-governmental interference. Inspired by both political as well as personal circumstances and most certainly fed by their experiences with organisations as IPPMEN and Yayasan Laggai Simaeru, the starting of one's own non-governmental organisation became a popular activity amongst the educated Mentawaians residing in Padang during the late 1990s. Sometimes enthused by the success of others, sometimes as an offshoot of an already existing organisation, the

number of local organisations kept on increasing at fast pace. By the turn of the century, I was able to count over 30 officially registered local organisations, all somehow focussing on the Mentawai Archipelago. Given the relatively small population of the Mentawai Archipelago, this rather overwhelming number of local organisations is in itself already a quite remarkable phenomenon. Adding to my curiosity was the fact that the composition of this collection of local organisations was not fixed. At times it was rather confusing to maintain track of the organisations. New organisations constantly popped-up while others silently disappeared, changed their names or were - as became obvious only later - just temporarily out of office to awake again from their dormancy as soon as new opportunities arose.

Apart from being a political act, many local organisations in Mentawai serve an income-generating purpose. Being without a job and an income, many Mentawaians residing in Padang started an NGO in order to get access to funds. And several local organisations have indeed been able to link themselves to influential donor organisations. The Mentawaian discontent about the way in which their archipelago and the resources therein had been managed by those in power, was easily incorporated within the conservation rhetoric of international conservation agencies. Together these, often generous, conservation agencies have invested millions of dollars in programmes and projects aiming at conservation and sustainable development implemented by local organisations.

This chapter will start with general information about non-governmental organisations in Indonesia and those established for the Mentawaian region in particular. This introduction is followed by the case studies of five local organisations active in Mentawai. Data for these case studies was collected by myself during field work in both Padang and Mentawai. In these case studies I describe the vision and mission statements of these organisations and their programmes of work. I also describe the predominantly difficult relationship of these organisations with both their constituencies and their donors. Rather than asking myself the question whether or not these NGOs succeeded in what they had planned – their lack of planning made it fairly impossible to answer this question to begin with – following Mosse (2005) I asked myself how succes is produced by the different parties involved in NGO-ing. Different from the first four organisations described in this chapter, I was personally involved in the fifth, Yayasan Kirekat Indonesia. Acting as a board member for the Dutch Kirekat Foundation, I was closely involved in the establishment as well as the financing of the healthcare project implemented by Yayasan Kirekat Indonesia, a local offspring of the Dutch Kirekat Foundation. This chapter is finalised with a rather elaborate conclusion where I present an analysis of modes of operation of local NGOs in the Mentawaian setting.

Let's start an NGO!

While accurate data on the exact number of NGOs is lacking, it is believed that the number of NGOs in Indonesia has grown significantly from 10,000 in 1996 to around 70,000 in

2000 (Hadiwinata 2003: 1). The NGO movement is, however, not a new phenomenon for Indonesia. During the 1960s throughout the early 1980s NGOs in Indonesia were foremost dedicated to community development activities, assisting the New Order government in reaching out to the poorest; providing low cost healthcare, small credits and training on micro-enterprises (Hadiwinata 2003: VII). From the mid-1980s the New Order government further neutralised NGO activities as a manifestation of President Suharto's 'de-ideologisation' and 'de-politisation' strategies. No organisations, including NGOs, were allowed to pursue any ideology other than the *Pancasila* (the five moral principles) and they were not allowed to implement any activities without the government's consent. As a result Indonesian NGOs were unable to develop a strong ideological basis (considered crucial in generating a movement) and adopted a low-profile approach with regard to political controversies. After the fall of New Order regime, the post-Suharto government allowed the formation of new political organisations and the removal of all regulations controlling their activities. The impact of these new regulations was obvious. During the era of *Reformasi* that followed the fall of New Order regime, NGOs were able to openly disclose their (sometimes radical) identity and their numbers boomed (Hadiwinata 2003: 115).

The history of local organisations in Mentawai pretty much follows the national trend. While there was only a handful of registered organisations active in Mentawai during the 1980s, their numbers swiftly increased by six times at the least during the late 1990s. Most of the local organisations in Mentawai are registered as *yayasan* (foundation). Before law 16/2001 (later further specified in law 28/2004) became operative in August 2002, it was fairly easy to register a *yayasan* in Indonesia. A simple notarised deed, containing the articles of the foundation including the names of the people taking position in the first appointed board sufficed. Due to the alleged social and non-profit character of its activities, the *yayasan* enjoyed favourable tax benefits and only little regulation with regard to accountability of the finances. These easy conditions made the *yayasan* a popular form of NGO in Indonesia, especially in the areas of education and healthcare. The firm legal status of the *yayasan* furthermore allowed these NGOs to act as an enterprise (Hadiwinata 2003). Though income-generating business activities were thus allowed for the *yayasan*, its non-profit nature required the organisation to invest all revenues obtained from its business activities in its socially oriented purpose.¹⁰⁴

Despite the easy procedure, the registering of a *yayasan* requires a small starting capital. Whereas most Mentawaians did not have such capital themselves, they had to seek financial support from more wealthy individuals (e.g. local businessmen, teachers or foreign tourists) or persons with access to possible funds (e.g. people involved in the church, local government officials or overseas donors). It goes without saying that this financial dependency affected the relationship between the *yayasan* and the donor. Donors often determined the underlying idea of the organisation and exercised significant influence on their programme of work. Donors of starting capital were sometimes

¹⁰⁴ In conjunction with the minimal regulation, however, flows of finances within these organisations are often shadowy, creating an inviting environment for people to enrich themselves at the expense of the social nature of the *yayasan*.

responsible for the establishment of the local *yayasan* and therefore claimed part in the organisation's future programme of work, blurring the organisation's vision and mission in advance.

Apart from the starting capital, the registration of a *yayasan* furthermore required a board of three people at least; a chairman, a secretary and a treasurer. Despite the fact that the formation of the founder board is actually nothing more than a formality, this proved to be an issue over which Mentawaians tend to disagree with each other. In most instances the initiator of the *yayasan* also acts as the chairman and the organisation's director, rendering all decision-making power in his hands and making the position of treasurer as well as that of the secretary less interesting. This resulted in people occupying various positions in several organisations. One can be a director of one organisation while acting as the treasurer for another organisation. Despite the fact that fellow founder board members were often sought amongst close friends and relatives, distrust and envy amongst board members are common, resulting in NGOs with uncertain bases due to frequent shifts in people constituting the board. The world of Mentawaiian NGOs is a men's world. Amongst the founders of the Mentawaiian organisations there were no women. Only few organisations have at a later stage, when additional staff became recruited, employed a small number of women.

New organisations for the Mentawaiian region focus solely on Mentawai and in most instances on the island of Siberut in particular. In order to appeal to as many donors as possible, the organisations' overarching objectives are stated in broad terms, often oriented towards the empowerment of the Mentawaiian community in general. Fields of interest that are most often mentioned are economy, agriculture, education, tourism, healthcare, finances and access to natural resources as well as the sustainable use thereof. Advocacy is often also mentioned as a field of interest rather than a method of work. Most Mentawaiian NGOs do not have a predetermined annual programme of work and simultaneously lack an annual budget. As soon as NGOs link with a donor, a programme of work, often confined to the implementation of donor designed project activities only, is eventually formulated.

Whereas for most newly established *yayasan*, operational funds were not immediately available, new organisations often lacked offices, inventory and the means to pay their staff. As a result many of the newly established NGOs operated from one of the many Internet cafes in Padang. Staff was only hired when project funds become available and until that time activities of the voluntary board were often reduced to an absolute minimum. Organisations unable to attract a donor often remained hanging in this start-up phase. These organisations were not abolished but continued to exist in a sort of hibernation. Their names and that of their directors continued to linger, popping up every now and then at public consultation meetings and/or occasional protest actions. The first major concern to be tackled after operational funds became available was the setting up of an office. By far the majority of Mentawaiian NGOs hold office in Padang. Although the absence of facilities (e.g. electricity) and means of communication (e.g. telephone and Internet) on the Mentawai Islands make office holding in Padang

defensible, it simultaneously positioned the organisations at quite some distance, both physical as well as emotional, from their constituencies. While, as addressed in the previous chapter, there was already a gap to be recognised between the communities living on the Mentawai Islands and the Mentawaians that went to Padang to further their formal education, this positioning of the local NGOs in Padang has not helped to narrow that gap. It has, on the contrary, distanced the elite group of Mentawaians even further from their fellow Mentawaians on the islands. The fact that having an office is very important in the perception of many Mentawaians can be read from the fact that an office manager is often already appointed even before an actual office is found. Both the office and the business card in the hands of the organisation's director are the only two objects that give proof of the actual existence of the organisation, adding respect and status to the one making use of it.

Having access to an office is furthermore important because an office may simultaneously serve as permanent accommodation for (some of) the people involved in the organisation as well as their relatives. More than once I heard about intimate relationships being established in the office. Whereas cohabitation and affectionate acts such as kissing and even holding hands in public are not done in Padang, the office offers a perfect place to hang out and stay the night over.

Yayasan Kondisi

Established in 1986, Yayasan Kondisi is probably the first official Mentawai organisation. It were members of the Saleleubaja clan, closely connected to the Protestant church on the Pagai Islands, that established this organisation with the aim to assist Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai (GKPM), the Protestant church in Mentawai, with the spreading of the gospel and simultaneously strengthen the local protestant communities on the Pagai Islands. Yayasan Kondisi was primarily responsible for facilitating and financing activities of the Protestant Church amidst the Protestant communities on the Mentawai Islands. Apart from the close relationship with the church, Yayasan Kondisi also maintained a close relationship with PT Minas Pagai Lumber Corporation (MPLC), a logging company active on the Pagai Islands since the late 1970s. In order to finance the corporate structure of the Yayasan as well as its church-based activities, Yayasan Kondisi obtained funds from MPLC on a fairly regular basis.

Edison Saleleubaja, a Protestant reverend who had been active for the GKPM on both Sipora and the Pagai Islands since the early 1980s, became Yayasan Kondisi's managing director in 1996. Under Edison's supervision Yayasan Kondisi actively sought for a new sponsor whereas MPLC was under severe pressure from an anti-logging campaign. Owned and financed by an acquainted Jakarta-based Chinese businessman, PT Sinula Mentawai was established in 1997. Operating as part of the corporate structure of Yayasan Kondisi, PT Sinula Mentawai got involved in the fishing industry around the southern Mentawai

Islands.¹⁰⁵ A certain percentage of the gainings of PT Sinula Mentawai was transferred to Yayasan Kondisi, which after deduction of their expenses, transferred the remaining amount to the GKPM. In search of the approval of and cooperation with the locals on the southern Mentawai Islands, Yayasan Kondisi's activities mainly consisted of the 'conditioning' of these communities; enticing them to accept, or even better, to participate in the fishing business at hand. Edison's nephew, Yonlifran Siritoitet, was officially involved in Yayasan Kondisi from 1997 to 1998. During that time he acted as a *humas* (short for *hubungan masyarakat*), responsible for the relationship with the public. At a later stage Yonlifran worked directly for PT Sinula Mentawai. Local communities on the Pagai Islands could, however, not remember the implementation of any project activities by Yayasan Kondisi at any time in history. Moreover, many local people had never heard of Yayasan Kondisi altogether before I asked them about this organisation. The daily management of PT Sinula Mentawai was in the hands of a Padang-based Chinese who earlier worked for PT Hiureksa Perkasa in the same capacity.¹⁰⁶ Whereas both the business as well as the faces involved were the same, many local people understood PT Sinula Mentawai as a restart of PT Hiureksa Perkasa, which is explicitly not the case. When Edison was elected *bupati* in 2000, he withdrew from Yayasan Kondisi. This was also the moment that Yayasan Kondisi went again in sleeping mode.

Yayasan Suku Mentawai (YASUMI)

Based on an idea and financed by an engaged German tourist who visited Siberut during the early 1990s, Yulianus Sabola' established Yayasan Suku Mentawai, otherwise known as Yasumi. Yasumi was officially registered in October 1992. Yasumi's vision and mission statement is to empower the Mentawaian communities in order to enable them to partake more actively within the small-scale but booming local tourist industry of the 1990s that until that time had been mainly in the hands of mainland Minangkabau tourist guides and Minangkabau migrants residing on Siberut. In an attempt to break through the Minangkabau hegemony over the local tourist industry and get a fairer share in the profits, Yasumi opened a *posko* (post) in Muara Siberut from which Yulianus and his two younger brothers, Robinson and Parmen (who had just suspended his study at Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI) in Jakarta), start to run their own tourist business amidst the Minangkabau. However, the little experience Yulianus had as a tourist boat operator in the Rereiket area proved to be insufficient to withstand the skilful and well-organised practices of the Minangkabau. Above all they experienced difficulties in attracting sufficient tourists to make their trips to the hinterland lucrative. Whereas they lacked both the means and

¹⁰⁵ PT Sinula Mentawai was fishing for live coral fish, mainly *ikan kerapu* (grouper). This fish, collected by local communities by means of both blast and cyanide fishing methods, severely damaging the coral reefs in particular and the marine environment in general, was exported to mainly Hong Kong and Singapore.

¹⁰⁶ PT Hiureksa Perkasa, owned by Jakarta-based Chinese Paul Junaidi, was also involved in the fishing industry around the Mentawai Islands. PT Hiureksa Perkasa, however, earlier saw its operation permit discontinued due to the fact that they instructed or allowed local communities around Bulau Bugei (Siberut's east coast) to fish on protected coral species for them.

the courage to travel to Bukittinggi to collect tourists there, they instead concentrated on those tourists that had come to Padang with the intention to travel to Mentawai without a guide. But this recruiting of free-floating tourists, who normally eventually went with one of the organised trips after all, because travelling to Mentawai on one's own initiative often turned out to be too precarious, caused Yulianus and his brothers to time and again end up in conflicts with the *preman* (villains) in the harbour in Padang, who made every tourist and/or their guide pay for their presence in the harbour and now saw their incomes decimated by these newcomers in the market.

The ADB/MOF project

As part of Indonesia's five year Biodiversity Conservation Project, the Indonesian Directorate General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation or Ditjen Perlindungan Hutan dan Pelestarian Alam (PHPA) has with the help of an international team of consultants prepared a so-called Integrated Conservation and Management Plan for Siberut in which the management of the in 1993 established Siberut National Park or Taman Nasional Siberut (TNS) is a principal issue.¹⁰⁷ For this project, that included both Siberut and the eastern Indonesian island of Flores, a multi million dollar loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was obtained in 1993.¹⁰⁸ The main objective of the project was to assist the government in their efforts to conserve tropical forest ecosystems and biodiversity within protected areas such as the national parks on Siberut and Flores. On Siberut, a lot of preparing activities (e.g. mapping, demarcation, training of park staff and the construction of supportive infrastructure) were completed during the first years of the project (1993-1995). In the mean time, however, the project management experienced difficulties in finding a suitable local NGO for the implementation of those project activities that actively included local communities. According to the ADB final report, Sumatran-based NGO were either considered unsuitable or unwilling to work on Siberut and established local NGOs working on the island were simply absent (ABD 2001: 14).

Despite the knowledge that YASUMI was an organisation with a different focus and expertise, PHPA contracted YASUMI in early 1994 in order to act as an intermediary between local communities and the Siberut National Park. Knowing that YASUMI was a young and inexperienced organisation, PHPA provided YASUMI staff with a one-month training course about general NGO practices and the so-called IPAS/ICDP approach by which the PHPA project was run.¹⁰⁹ Several YASUMI staff members and 23, already by YASUMI identified so-called field extension agents, most of them native to the villages to

¹⁰⁷ PHPA is part of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, Menteri Kehutanan (MENHUT).

¹⁰⁸ Flores and Siberut were chosen for their uniqueness, representativeness of the biographic region, economic potential, priority in the national Biodiversity Action Plan, complementarity with regional development programmes, and, quite remarkably, the apparently assumed fact that there was inadequate or no financing from other institutions.

¹⁰⁹ The project made use of the so-called Integrated Protected Area System (IPAS), later termed Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) approach aiming at the improvement of the policy, planning, implementation, and monitoring capabilities of the institutions responsible for biodiversity conservation.

which they were attached in the project design, followed this training organised by the provincial forestry department in Padang (PHPA/MENHUT 1995). During the training, however, several of the YASUMI staff got involved in a car accident with the taxi with which they travelled from the training venue back to the city centre. Yulianus Sabola' died on the spot while his friend, Stefanus Salamao, who was also working as a reporter for the social commission of the Catholic church (KOM SOS) at that time, died shortly after being hospitalised in Padang. After his tragic accident, Yulianus' younger brother, Robinson became the new chairman/director of YASUMI and Kortanius Sabeleake and Levi Sirirui were added to the staff. They continued the training and started to implement project activities soon afterwards. It was YASUMI's prime task to implement a so-called Preliminary Awareness Programme (PAP), aiming at the increased awareness of local communities living within and adjacent to Siberut National Park about the purpose of the park, the activities of the survey and mapping team of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences or Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI), and the ICDP planning team. YASUMI staff was furthermore involved in various mapping activities, where intensive negotiations with local communities were needed.

Robinson, being a less charismatic and resourceful person than Yulianus, lacked the competence and leadership capacities that were so characteristic for his elder brother. He turned out to be unable to forge a solid team out of the old and the new staff members. As a result the new team did not seem to be able to work together in a constructive manner and both Robinson and Kortanius left YASUMI as soon as the first phase of the PAP was completed. Robinson's younger brother, Parmen Sabola', only 24 years of age at the time, became the new director of YASUMI. Parmen continued the collaboration with TNS and conducted several pilots studies, based on which it was decided that the village of Sagulubbe, situated on Siberut's southwest coast, was to receive development assistance in the form of a seedling project. TNS made 37 million Rupiah available for YASUMI to distribute cocoa and nutmeg seedlings and to instruct local communities on how to go about the process of planting, nursing and harvesting. Local communities in Sagulubbe still remember that a disappointing number of seedlings (only a few dozens) were distributed, but they did not recollect any follow-up activities being implemented afterwards. Soon after the seedling project, TNS discontinued their cooperation with YASUMI. Reporting was unsatisfactory and imprecision and blank spots in YASUMI's financial reports made TNS believe that Parmen was an unreliable person. Local communities on their turn had learned to understand YASUMI as an untrustworthy organisation, bartering away their lands to an incomprehensible institute called Taman Nasional Siberut. In line with the intent and purpose of the park, YASUMI had introduced and explained TNS to local communities in terms of prohibitions and restrictions rather than in opportunities and possibilities, causing the locals to reject TNS as an infringement of their self-determination and dismiss both YASUMI and Parmen as the advocates of this nasty devil.

That YASUMI was not the only party with an ill performance with regard to the implementation of the HPHA project can be read from the ADB final report. With regard to the weak capacity of YASUMI, the report states that considering the limited experience of YASUMI and the little technical support they received from the Ministry of Forestry and

other agencies involved, it was unrealistic to believe that this new NGO would be able to carry out all of the expected activities successfully. The report furthermore states that the long term (25 years) integrated conservation management plans that were prepared for Siberut suffered from inadequate input from the public and other local agencies, leading to insufficient ownership and acceptance of the plans. As a result of which the output of community awareness raising, resource mobilisation and the introduction of possible livelihood alternatives were far below expectations. Local communities were either oblivious of the project or did not understand what the project was supposed to lead up to.¹¹⁰ With respect to the park staff, the report furthermore states that although some 80 staff members were assigned to the park during the 1990s, none of them ever seemed to be present on Siberut. Rather sarcastically the report states that '[o]ften the only significant periods of time that Siberut staff spent on the island were during ADB missions'. It is also regarded as a weakness that the official Siberut National Park headquarters are situated in Padang and not on the island of Siberut itself. Not only led this to a certain alienation from the area and its inhabitants, but it also proved difficult to adequately manage the park from such a considerable distance. The continued lack of incentives to ensure an adequate staff presence on Siberut Island is also considered a major failure on behalf of the PHPA project (ADB 2001: 10-14).

Although Parmen has remained to present himself as the managing director of YASUMI, the NGO YASUMI has been inactive ever since the ADB withdrew from the field. After the cooperation with TNS was discontinued, Parmen struggled with a persistent lack of noteworthy activities, a financial deficit and a serious image problem. In his capacity as NGO director he acted as a Janus-faced provocateur, using the legacy of YASUMI to protest the presence of Koperasi Andalas Mandani (KAM), an Universitas Andalas based logging cooperative active in a nearly 50,000 hectares concession area on Siberut. After quite a period of vigorous protest against the logging activities, Parmen was commissioned by KAM, offering him a job as a community negotiator (*hubungan masyarakat - humas*), a task he fulfilled for almost four years. During these four years Parmen established a stevedoring company responsible for the storage and loading of KAM logs on the, especially for this purpose built, quay in the bay of Subelen. Parmen also went back to university. He studied law at Universitas Eka Sakti in Padang. After his graduation he again became involved the logging sector on the Mentawai islands. His stevedoring company is currently working with PT Salaki Summa Sejahtera, a logging company operating in north Siberut. Parmen was also a candidate for the local parliament in 2004 and 2009. Both attempts were unsuccessful. For the 2014 DPRD elections he was again on the list for Partai Golkar, but again his attempt to obtain a seat in local parliament failed.

¹¹⁰ The PHPA project distributed a poster informing the public about the protected status of the shells of the giant clam. In Mentawai smaller specimen of these shells are often used as ashtrays. According to a lot of Mentawaians conservation efforts now really got out of hand because in their perception the Ministry now even started to protect and conserve their ashtrays. (Personal communication with Persoon, December 2016).

Yayasan Citra Mandiri (Mentawai)

On 17 July 1995, Kortanius Sabeleake' and Yudas Sabaggalet established Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM). Initially YCM aimed at the empowerment of the Mentawai community by strengthening their economic position and ensuring the acknowledgement of their rights to their lands and the natural resources available within the Mentawai Archipelago. The fact that the initial focus of YCM was divided into two had everything to do with the two founders of the organisation.

Originating from Siberut, Kortanius spent his childhood in Saumanganyra, a small coastal village on North Pagai's east coast where his father was a teacher in the Protestant elementary school. With a logging company active right on the doorstep of his parental home, Kortanius had witnessed at first hand how logging deprived his neighbours of their lands and how their gardens and rivers became devastated as a result of which their daily food supply came under pressure. Kortanius was especially stirred by the social and political subordination of the Mentawaians on the basis of the perceived backwardness and primitive stupidity of the ethnic group as a whole. It was Kortanius' conviction that these negative outsider stereotypes leading to both colonial and post-colonial governmental initiatives to uplift the Mentawaians from their state of backwardness have only further deprived the Mentawaians from their rights and livelihoods. Kortanius studied animal husbandry at Universitas Taman Siswa in Padang where he developed an eye for the importance of legally organised landownership and access to natural resources. Yudas, holding a degree in economics from Universitas Bung Hatta (Padang) was convinced of the fact that the standard of living of the Mentawaians could only be improved by the upgrading of their economic position. Although many Mentawaians under the influence of earlier government projects were familiar with the growing of cash crops, the marketing of these products was still weak. Due to a lack in management, facilities and contacts, Mentawaians experienced difficulties in getting their products on the market. Most cash crops (e.g. cloves, nutmeg, copra and pinang nuts) that did make it to the market, did so through the intervention of the migrant population in the harbour villages who acted as brokers in the local trade in agricultural products. The same goes for the non-timber forest products (e.g. rattan and agarwood) that many Mentawaians collected in the forest.¹¹¹ With the trade business almost solely in the hands of outsiders, the Mentawaians have always remained at the supplying end of the trade chain, making them vulnerable to arbitrariness and price negotiations elsewhere in the trade chain. It was Yudas' conviction that community-based agricultural activities supported by technical assistance, advocacy, education, training and credit facilities offered by YCM would strengthen the economic position of the Mentawaians.

In the first year after its establishment, YCM was managed by Yudas focussing on economic activities, the marketing of organic cloves especially. It was during this first year that

¹¹¹ Stocks of rattan have declined rapidly ever since the early 1990s and agarwood (a resinous hardwood valued for its fragrance used for incense and perfumes) is nowadays almost nonexistent due to overexploitation especially during the 1980s.

YCM linked with ForesTrade Indonesia (FTI), an independent subsidiary of the American product development and trading company, specialised in certified organic and sustainably harvested coffee, spices and essential oils, ForesTrade Inc. Through the intervention of Thomas Fricke, a German national affiliated with ForesTrade Indonesia, YCM obtained some 50 million Rupiah from the German embassy to run a project in the Rereiket area aiming at an increase in agricultural produce from that region. Seeds and seedlings of various cash crop species were distributed and local communities were instructed about organic agricultural techniques. Local communities were furthermore encouraged to start growing organic cloves and patchouli.¹¹² In addition, local communities were given the opportunity to get some credit in order to finance the relatively expensive distillation installations for the patchouli. With the help of ForesTrade, Yudas also managed to set up a workspace in the Jati Baru district in Padang. This building served as an office as well as a warehouse for the merchandise.

Unfortunately the cloves did prove to mature poorly in the hinterlands, as a result of which the locals focussed on the growing of patchouli instead. Due to the Asian monetary crisis, which consolidated its grip on Indonesia in the last quarter of 1997, the exchange rate of the dollar against the Rupiah increased significantly. Since the price for patchouli oil was coupled to that of the dollar, the market price for patchouli oil increased almost tenfold (from 40,000Rp to 350,000Rp per kilo) in less than 6 months time (Singgalang 1997b). People went crazy and cleared large plots of land at high speed in order to plant patchouli while using the cut vegetation from the newly opened plots as firewood for the distillation process.¹¹³ Those people that reacted to the developments in the market at the right moment were able to make a considerable amount of money in a relatively short period of time. Later in 1998, the market for patchouli seemed saturated and prices fell sharply. Many were not able to pay-off the loans they obtained from YCM enabling them to buy the distillation installations. As a consequence the project went bankrupt. With the growing of cloves unsuccessful in the hinterlands, YCM changed from instructing local communities in the interiors to grow cloves to acting as a broker in the clove trade between ForesTrade and local communities living on Siberut's and Sipora's east coast where the growing of (organic) cloves had been successful for years already. Working with communities in Muara Sikabalan, Saibi Samukop, Saliguma, Muara Siberut, Sioban and Sikakap, YCM tried to guarantee a more or less steady supply of organically produced cloves for ForesTrade. But it proved difficult to break in on the trade system the locals and the migrant brokers in these harbour villages had set for themselves. Local communities habitually bartered their cloves to the traders in the village in immediate return for food, articles or clothing from their stores. Whereas the risk of theft was high, the locals were in general inclined to monetise their cloves as soon as possible after harvesting.

¹¹² From the patchouli plant, native to Indonesia, an essential oil can be extracted through a process of steam distillation of the dried, sometimes fermented leaves. Patchouli essential oil is used in perfume, incense and food.

¹¹³ These practices were certainly no longer in line with the conservation oriented production practices of ForesTrade, which state that participating farmers should commit to no clearing of new forested land for agricultural purposes.

Although the price for dried cloves is considerably higher than that for raw, green cloves, the locals preferred to leave the process of drying the cloves to the broker. Whereas ForesTrade wished to receive dried cloves only, YCM time and again had to instruct local communities how to go through the process of drying while in the mean time avoid theft and guaranteeing the quality of the product.

Less than a year after the establishment of YCM, Yudas decided he wanted to go back to school and left for Yogyakarta. After his studies, Yudas returned to YCM in 1998. After Yudas' departure, Kortanius took over the management of the whole organisation, gradually shifting its focus to the advocacy-oriented approach aiming at empowerment of *adat* communities, legally organised landownership and access to natural resources that he had in mind for YCM all along. Kortanius' goal was not merely to empower the Mentawaian communities in an economic sense only. He was on a quest to awaken Mentawaian ethnic consciousness. YCM's initial vision and mission statement stated among other things that 'the empowerment of *adat* communities lies in the understanding of one's rights and duties, not only as a member of the local community, but also as a citizen within the context of the Indonesian nation state' (YCM 1997). Kortanius proceeded energetically. He opened a new office in Kampung Nias I (Padang) and successfully opposed plans for oil palm plantations in two locations on Siberut. At the same time YCM also campaigned against logging companies active on Sipora and the Pagai Islands. YCM furthermore successfully assisted local communities in the Rereiket area with their lawsuit against the provincial government. The provincial Department of Social Affairs had planned a resettlement project in the direct vicinity of the settlement of Rogdok for which local communities had ceded 36 hectares of their land to the provincial government. When the project was about to start it became clear that the amount of 36 hectares in the agreement had been changed to 360 hectares. With the help of YCM and Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, a Padang-based legal aid organisation, the case was taken to court and eventually the whole resettlement project was cancelled (Singgalang 1997a). Until the present day YCM still receives a lot of credit for this action amongst communities in Rogdok.

At a later stage YCM joined Wahana Lingkungan Hidup (WALHI) West Sumatra and Lembaga Riset dan Advokasi (LRA), in a campaign against the activities of the sago processing mill located on the shores of the river Siberut in South Siberut.¹¹⁴ The factory owned by a Padang-based Chinese was accused of polluting the river with effluent as well as solid waste, way beyond an acceptable level. People claimed to have difficulties navigating the river, while local women increasingly lost their desire for fishing in the river because the rotting water had seriously diminished the numbers of fish and shrimp. But despite all the resistance against the mill, people were not solely negative about it. The ambivalent attitude of the locals was that on the one hand they complained about the pollution, while on the other hand the mill could only exist by virtue of the locals willing to supply the factory with sago logs. And many locals were only too happy to supply sago logs precisely because this was one of the only few opportunities to earn a little cash income.

¹¹⁴ LRA is a Padang-based NGO aiming at the empowerment of traditional communities and farmers enabling them to gain control over their own resources as well as economic, political and cultural issues.

Apart from the fact that the locals were willing to supply they actually also desired a job within the mill, again for financial reasons. Despite the extensive media attention triggered for this case there were no measurements taken to limit the nuisances created by the factory. Due to its low profitability the factory was eventually closed in 1997.

Inspired by the Rogdok lawsuit and enriched with the knowledge Kortanius had gained during his work for the HPHA project with YASUMI, YCM started a land-mapping project in Rereiket and Saibi. Not completely surprising - landownership is probably one of the most complicated matters in Mentawai - YCM tripped severely over this project. Apparently unable to create a profound insight in the local situation, YCM came up with a severely simplified map, imaging only broadly the land claims of again only few clans present in the areas of Rereiket and Saibi. YCM furthermore made the mistake not to share the final map with the local communities involved. Obviously, local communities were angry with YCM not accurately presenting their land claims. The fact that YCM did not share the results with the locals, infuriated the inhabitants of Saibi especially. In fear of YCM selling the map to an investor without their consent, locals in Saibi dismissed the map and simultaneously expelled YCM fieldworkers from their territory. The mapping debacle marks an incident with which some residents of the Saibi area have long afterwards cherished their aversion against YCM or local NGOs in general for that matter.

Much to the aversion of the Asian Development Bank, financing the HPHA project, UNESCO started project implementation in the context of its Man and the Biosphere programme in 1998.¹¹⁵ Though Siberut and its direct marine surroundings were declared a Man and the Biosphere Reserve already in 1981, project implementation started only in 1998. In search for a decisive local NGO capable of assisting them in working with local communities, UNESCO (after a careful inventory of all local NGOs available) contracted YCM. Quite like the HPHA's choice for YASUMI, UNESCO's choice for YCM was based on the absence of other capable NGOs rather than on the competence or expertise of YCM itself. Together with some anthropology students from Universitas Andalas (UNAND), YCM staff conducted a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in the village of Maileppet in 1998.¹¹⁶ This PRA was about the traditional role of women in sustainable natural resource use. It was during this PRA that one of the students, unable to swim, drowned. This was an accident for which both the UNESCO and YCM staff were long held responsible by UNAND. At a later stage UNESCO implemented a coconut oil processing project and a seaweed-processing project in Maileppet based on the data gathered during the PRA. Throughout 1999 and 2000 YCM again conducted similar PRAs in Madobak, Rogdok, Ugai, Katurei, Tiop and again Maileppet. This time the results were disappointingly poor. As a result the cooperation between YCM and UNESCO diluted. Soon afterwards UNESCO composed its own fieldwork team and took responsibility over project implementation in its own hands. The fact that PRAs had disappointing results probably had everything to do with the fact

¹¹⁵ It is suggested that the premature withdrawal of the HPHA project from Siberut was partly due to the fact that UNESCO started implementing their MAB programme activities in 1998.

¹¹⁶ Participatory Rural Appraisal is an approach often used by NGOs and other agencies involved in development. The approach aims to incorporate knowledge and opinions of local (rural) communities in the planning and management of development projects and programmes (Chambers 1994).



Office Yayasan
Citra Mandiri in
Maileppet

that from 1998 onwards YCM staff was primarily occupied with political processes that were developing rapidly at that time. Various staff members were personally involved in the political turmoil that gathered intensity and complexity during 1998 and eventually lead to the political independence of the Mentawai Archipelago in October 1999. Both Kortanius and Yudas went into local politics in June 1999. They both became members of the political party Partai Demokrasi Kasih Bangsa (PDKB) successfully pushing for a seat in the local parliament of Kabupaten Padang-Pariaman. Yudas eventually left YCM for the second time after he obtained a seat in the local parliament of the newly established Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai in December 2000.

In January 2001 Kortanius changed the statutes of YCM, adding the promotion of democratisation and the development of information exchange and media to the initial focus on economic development and advocacy. Whereas organisations were, according to new legislation on *yayasan*, now also required to have a board of founders, a legislative board and an executive board, new people were added to the notary deed. Kortanius remained the executive director. Jan Winnen Sipayung remained secretary and Roberta Sarogdok became treasurer. At the same time Jan Winnen became responsible for the economic division, while Sandang Paruhum Simanjuntak (a Batak who has been involved in YCM ever since its establishment) for the democratisation division and Indra Gunawan Sanenek for the also newly established information and media division. In 2004, both Kortanius and Yan Winnen Sipayung enlisted themselves for the 2004 parliamentary elections in Mentawai. Sandang Paruhum Simanjuntak then took over Kortanius' position, becoming YCM's executive director. Sandang remained director until 2010 when he became the director of Radio Sura' Mentawai FM. In 2010 Roberta Sarogdog became the director of YCM. She is the first Mentawaian woman to ever take on the position of director of an official local organisation. In 2010 the statutes of YCM were modified again. This time legislation on *yayasan* required organisations to register themselves to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. When YCM registered it turned out that another organisation was already registered under that name. YCM then registered under YCMM,

Yayasan Citra Mandiri Mentawai (YCM). While Roberta became executive director, Kortanius remained attached to YCM as the chair of the executive board.

Organising indigenous communities

Shortly after the completion of the so-called Rogdok trial, YCM made a start with the creation of several local village councils consisting of experienced *adat* leaders. These so-called *dewan adat*, an idea YCM copied from Yayasan Pancur Kasih - a local organisation from Kalimantan with which YCM was sharing knowledge, information and experiences at that time - were supposed to strengthen the position of local *adat* communities vis-à-vis governmental institutions.¹¹⁷ With the use of the word *adat* (custom, tradition), YCM made a clear political statement. Instead of using the much-contested terminology *masyarakat terasing*, YCM started to use the term *masyarakat adat* (traditional, indigenous community) already in 1995. By 1997, YCM had succeeded in creating *dewan adat* in the villages of Madobak, Rogdok, Ugai, Tiop and Puro. These *dewan adat* consisted of mainly *rimata* (each of them representing their own clan) and were presided by a chairman chosen from their midst. Whereas the autonomous clans did not accept a leader from another clan, these chairmen explicitly had no decision making power attached to their position as chair. But despite this footnote, quarrels over decision-making power within the *dewan adat* were multiple, not particularly adding to its credibility as serious interlocutors in governmental negotiations.

In 2002 YCM organised a public dialogue in Tuapeijat. Some hundred people, among whom *adat* leaders, religious leaders, activists and young intellectuals from all over the Mentawai Archipelago and myself attended this meeting. During five days the democratic exploitation of natural resources in Mentawai was discussed amongst the participants themselves and with local government officials who were invited to the meeting as well. As a result of this meeting Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Peduli Mentawai (AMA-PM), or the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples caring for Mentawai was established. Whereas AMA-PM had to represent indigenous communities from all four Mentawai Islands, it was decided that all *dewan adat* became members of AMA-PM. YCM, however, never established *dewan adat* on Sipora and the Pagai Islands (Puailiggoubat 2004a). In order to avoid a hegemony of representatives from Siberut within AMA-PM, Sipora and the Pagai Islands appointed representatives for AMA-PM at village level. During the public dialogue in 2002 it was decided that AMA-PM would be responsible for the implementation of 11 recommendations with regard to the democratic exploitation of natural resources within the Mentawai Archipelago that were formulated during this meeting.

In the years that followed, AMA-PM was, under the inspired leadership of reverend Urlik Tatubeket, actively involved in actions against illegal logging, oil palm plantations and the issuing of IPK logging concessions. AMA-PM intensively, but unsuccessfully, campaigned against PT Summa Salaki Sejahtera obtaining a large logging concession for north Siberut in 2004. Apart from active campaigning and lobbying with governmental

¹¹⁷ *Dewan adat* as an advisory body were also already mentioned in the ADB/MOF project proposal. (Personal communication with Persoon, December 2016).

institutions, AMA-PM always remained in touch with local communities discussing not only environmental issues with them but also social issues like drug and alcohol abuse, gambling and undesirable sexual behaviour especially amongst youngsters. AMA-PM has also been involved in the improvement of education and education facilities all over the archipelago. AMA-PM and YCM organised three archipelago-wide congresses in 2006, 2009 and 2012 each with differing subjects and ever growing numbers of participants. It is said that AMA-PM counted over 800 members in 2012.

YCM linked itself with the national Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN), or the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago already in 1999.¹¹⁸ Whereas the financing of activities by AMA-PM remained the responsibility of YCM – a responsibility weighing heavy on the YCM budget – it was decided in 2011 to affiliate AMA-PM to AMAN, hoping that AMAN would bring in some finances. From then on AMA-PM continued its activities under a new name: AMAN Mentawai. Urlik Tatubeket was asked to lead AMAN Mentawai, but he stated that in his opinion AMAN Mentawai should be chaired by someone younger (Puailiggoubat 280: 10-11).¹¹⁹ Kortanius Sabeleake then became the new chair for AMAN Mentawai. The new name and the affiliation with AMAN did, however, not solve the financial problems AMA-PM had been struggling with earlier. AMAN Mentawai remained largely dependent on YCM for project activities and the corresponding finances. It is only in 2015 that YCM released AMAN Mentawai after they had become an official member of AMAN in February 2014.

Media, information and democratisation

Until the end of the 1990s it has been difficult for the Mentawaians to gain access to information. While many households had a small radio, the signal was often weak and people often lacked the finances to buy batteries. Newspapers that came in from the mainland only did so once a week when the ferries to and from the mainland frequented the Mentawai Islands. These newspapers, however, did not make it into the hinterlands very often. Even if people had the finances to buy a television set, electricity was confined to the four main harbour villages and even there electricity was only available during several hours in the early evening. By far the larger part of the information that became available to the Mentawaians was produced by and for people on the mainland. These people, almost without exception, perceived of the Mentawaians as being primitive and their surroundings ill developed.

While the exchange of information between the different Mentawai Islands was limited, people simultaneously had little to no access to information about developments taking place outside the Mentawai Archipelago. As a result they were not able to oversee the

¹¹⁸ AMAN was established as a result of the historic first Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (KMAN I), which was held in Jakarta in March 1999. As an independent organisation, AMAN means to act as a medium through which *masyarakat adat* (indigenous communities in Indonesia) can reinforce their rights, existence and autonomy vis-à-vis the Indonesian nation state. See also: <http://www.aman.or.id>.

¹¹⁹ Urlik Tatubeket had been ill already for a while when he made this statement. He passed away in December 2013 (Puailiggoubat 2014).

PEMILU DIMULAI 2004

PEMILIHAN LUMUT



**SAMARATUL
FUAD:**
Pemda
Manfaatkan
Kebodohan
Masyarakat



REBOISASI:
Ratusan
Hektar Manau
Ditanam
di Siberut



SIMALEGI:
Empat Guru
Honor SD
Diberhentikan
Tanpa Gaji

DUH, PENDIDIK MENTAWAI

DITANGKAP, PELAKU PEMBAKARAN KA

Puailiggoub

Untuk Kebangkitan Masyarakat

Sedang Diper
4 Kapal Rute Antarpul

Berkenalan dengan
Anggota Dewa

KELUAR DARI MASALAH

TERBIT SEKALI SEBULAN & PENGANTIANGKOS CETAK Rp2.500,-

Ombak Besar Rakyat Beruntung

Potensi ombak Mentawai untuk wisata
surfing (selancar) dicari banyak pengusaha
asing dan lokal. Bagaimana mengelolanya
agar masyarakat Mentawai juga dapat
untung?

KEMBALI KE LAGGAI

TERBIT SEKALI SEBULAN & PENGANTIANGKOS

APAT TUP 2003

KEBakaran:
Rumah Warga
Saureimu
Habis
Terbakar

OKTAVIANUS:
PP 110 Masih
Berlaku
untuk
APBD 2003

LPJ EDISON, APBD ANTONIUS

consequences of these developments for their own situation. The lack of access to information on the one hand and the coloured nature of the available information on the other, rendered the Mentawaians vulnerable to deceit and manipulation. And, even more important, made them powerless in the process of democratisation for they were not able to stand up for their civil rights and just decisions by the authorities (Syofiardi Bachyul et. al. 2015).

Through his contact with Komunitas Konservasi Indonesia (KKI) Warsi, Kortanius came in contact with a representative from the Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) already in 1999.^{120 121} With this representative Kortanius lobbied for funds with which YCM could set up their own media. In 2000 RFN funded YCM with some 5000 Euros, money that was used to produce the first edition of what would later become the first local newspaper for the Mentawaian region.

It was in April 2001 that the information and media division of YCM published the first edition of Puailiggoubat, an A4-size magazine of 12 pages filled with news and information concerning Mentawai. Six editions - the first in April 2001 and the final one in September 2001 - of 600 copies each were distributed among the public in Mentawai every month. The Puailiggoubat magazine was received well and therefore it was decided to upgrade Puailiggoubat from a magazine into a real tabloid-sized newspaper of 16 pages appearing once a month. For this purpose YCM hired several local journalists, all Mentawaians originating from different parts of the Mentawai Archipelago, and they managed to publish the first Puailiggoubat in tabloid format in December 2001. A thousand copies were printed and distributed in both Padang and the Mentawai Islands. From December 2002 onwards Puailiggoubat started to appear every fortnight and extended from 16 pages to 24 pages in the years that followed.

The name, Puailiggoubat, is taken from the Mentawaian language meaning self-reflection. Puailiggoubat's subtitle reads: *Untuk kebangkitan masyarakat Mentawai* (for the revival of Mentawaian society). The Puailiggoubat magazine was distributed for free in Padang as well as on all four Mentawai Islands. The Puailiggoubat tabloid was initially sold for 2500Rp a copy. In 2013 the price went up to 3000Rp and has remained like that ever since. Of every copy of Puailiggoubat sold, 100Rp will be set aside for an educational support fund. On the back page of every Puailiggoubat there is an overview of how much money there is in the fund as well as a list of names from people that donated to the fund on a personal basis.

Regular rubrics are local and mainland news, editorial as well as submitted public opinion

¹²⁰ KKI Warsi, initially set up as a discussion forum in 1992, uses the concept of community based conservation in order to bring about sustainable development. Their focus is mainly on forest-based communities living in Sumatra. See also: <http://www.warsi.or.id> (visited December 2016).

¹²¹ Established in 1989, RFN forms part of the international Rainforest Foundation network and has sister organisations in the United Kingdom and the USA. RFN supports indigenous peoples and traditional populations worldwide in their efforts to protect their rainforests and secure their rights to their land. RFN is active in Indonesia since 1997. See also: Rainforest Foundation Norway 2014)

pieces, local economy, education in Mentawai, local culture, tourism and environmental and conservation issues. Every Puailiggoubat furthermore contains a cartoon called *Si Bajak* (the father, mister). *Si Bajak*, personified as a friendly looking, innocent traditional Mentawaian who is otherwise making keen observations and asking sharp questions about local politics, is a highly critical and often very funny cartoon. Another regular is *Suara Daun* (literally: sound of leaves, hinting at grassroots voices), a column until 2004 written by Kortanius himself. Kortanius' *Suara Daun* are sharp, analytical writings often offering balanced insights in local economics, politics and development issues. The column *Suara Duan* was later changed into *Suara Puailiggoubat* and from then on knew constantly changing authors.

By July 2002 Puailiggoubat had grown too big for the YCM office and moved into its own accommodation in the near vicinity. This move of course put strain on the already tight budget of YCM, but fortunately RFN committed itself to further finance Puailiggoubat, at least until the end of 2016.

Puailiggoubat went online in 2003. A simplified electronic version of the tabloid then became available on www.puailiggoubat.com. This website, however, was poorly managed and the e-papers were never up to date. The Puailiggoubat website was more seriously managed from 2010 onwards. Apart from the e-version of Puailiggoubat the site now also offered a news feed that was regularly updated. Puailiggoubat went offline in 2015 and was then replaced by the news portal www.mentawaikita.com. Managed by the editorial office of Puailiggoubat, this fresh-looking website offers up to date news divided over seven sections, a blog and the e-version of the latest edition of Puailiggoubat. With a highly diverse group of dedicated and well-trained journalists originating from (and interested in) all four Mentawai Islands, YCM has created a medium exactly serving the purpose it was created for. Though Puailiggoubat may not have created the unity within the Mentawaian community that YCM had wished for at its launch, this tabloid certainly had a tremendous impact on both the quantity and the quality of information available to the public. With a circulation of 1000 copies every 2 weeks, Puailiggoubat is probably one of the most visionary and successful activities executed by YCM.

Radio Sura' Mentawai FM

In accordance with YCM's mission to make information available to all Mentawaians, they further upgraded the access to and spread of information with the establishment of a radio station. On 23 October 2010 Radio Sura' Mentawai FM started broadcasting.¹²² In doing so, YCM was the second to broadcast straight from within the Mentawai Islands. In 2005 local government had already started a radio station, also broadcasting from Tuaepeijat, called Radio Sasareina. Radio Sura' Mentawai had a limited range, reaching all of Sipora and part of the Pagai Islands. The radio station was immediately put to full use when two days after its launch the Pagai Islands were hit by an earthquake and a subsequent tsunami. People came to the radio station located in Tuaepeijat in large

¹²² Sura' Mentawai stands for *suara rakyat Mentawai*, the voice of the Mentawaian people.

numbers in order to share the latest news about the event with the general public. Because of the earthquake people working with the radio station came in contact with SurfAid International, who were assisting casualties in the field. At a later stage SurfAid International financed a new antenna which gave Radio Sura' a larger range, now reaching further into the Pagai Islands and also covering south Siberut. On ordinary days Radio Sura' Mentawai brought local (political) news, general news and information, dialogues with the public, entertainment and music in various programs throughout the day. Broadcasting started at six in the morning and ended five minutes to twelve in the evening, seven days a week. Reactions from the public were very positive. In February 2015 the radio station was hit by lightning, damaging the broadcasting equipment to such an extent that Radio Sura' went off air.

Education within reach for all

In 2003 UNESCO handed over their non-formal education programme, *Pinatoro Uma*, to YCM. Unfortunately, however, YCM did not seem to be able to remedy the negative legacy the earlier unsuccessful acquisition of the project by Yayasan Laggai Simaeru had left behind. Some of the locals as well as the three teachers involved were unwilling to cooperate with YCM and soon after YCM had taken responsibility for the project, *Pinatoro Uma* faded. As a result activities in the Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Sakaliou and Attabai expired. The CLC in Buttui became the personal project of a spirited Italian priest who had left his congregation a few years earlier. With his personal funding, this liberal priest continued the non-formal education activities in Buttui under a different name: Parurukat Togat Sikerei (PATAS). In 2002 YCM had already established a small library annex study centre in Salappak on YCM's own initiative. According to Tarinda, a local anthropologist occasionally working with YCM, children living in Bekkeiluk, located at more than an hour walking away from the library in Salappak, were so enthusiastic about the books and the prospect of learning how to read, that YCM built a small school in their settlement in 2004. One of the locals from Salappak was contracted as their only teacher. Less than two years later the responsibility for the daily affairs in this *sekolah hutan* (forest school) was handed over from YCM to the parish in Muara Siberut. In 2008 Tarinda came in contact with yet another group of children eager to learn; this time in the Sangong area. With the help of YCM, Tarinda started a class there attended by some 20 children originating from miles around. Aman Sabba Ogok agreed for the class to use his *uma* as classroom. With the help of YCM, a small school was later built by the locals. In 2009 several families from Masapsap, Gojo and Bat Sirauk relocated to a new settlement called Magosi. From 2012 onwards the forest school in Sangong was moved to Magosi where it was allowed to use the facilities of the catholic church in order to teach. In 2009 YCM started a second *sekolah hutan* in Tinambu. Both forest schools, though sometimes lacking learning materials, were successful. In June 2013 YCM signed an agreement with the headmasters of governmental elementary schools in Muntei (SDN 12 Muntei) and Saliguma (SDN 16 Saliguma). Through the agreement both forest schools became part of the official education system. From then on *sekolah hutan* was called *sekolah uma*. As a result, children that have made it successfully through the third class in the forest school may now continue to the fourth class in one of the two governmental schools.

Yayasan Krisau

Since the late 1990s the waters surrounding the Mentawai Islands have been discovered as one of the world's most spectacular surfing hotspots. Numbers of surf tourists and foreign investors coming to Mentawai have kept on increasing ever since, now exceeding the islands carrying capacity several times.¹²³ There are simply too many charters, bringing in too many surfers. While the surfers compete with each other over waves, the surf operators quarrel with the local communities and the local government over access and accommodation.

In attempt to put some regulation in place, already in 1996, the governor of West Sumatra in cooperation with Australian business man Rick Cameron established five surf zones around the Mentawai Islands. Cameron's enterprise, PT Mentawai Wisata Bahari (MWB), an Indonesian subsidiary to the Hong Kong registered enterprise Great Breaks International, would be responsible for the daily management of the five surfing zones as well as the collection of a local tourist tax that next to the issuing of permits would serve as an income for the provincial government.¹²⁴ Part of the appointments made included the collection of a five US\$ tourist tax per surfer per day, serving as an income for the provincial administration. This taxation, however, never really got of the ground. In his quest to master the surfing industry within the Mentawaian waters, Cameron made himself nearly impossible collecting the taxes he negotiated with the provincial authorities amongst his fellow business competitors. His maligned performance, which eventually earned him the title of 'Dark Lord', caused the fleet of foreign charters present in the Mentawaian waters to dig in their heels and omit all attempts to regulate with overwhelming non-compliance. Cameron's position and performance in the field as that of a dictator was increasingly questioned. Cameron was even taken to court by Paul King, founder of the Surf Travel Company, in 1999. The lack of clear legislation and the absence of compliance with and the enforcement of the existing regulations, turned the Mentawai surfing industry into a battle ground where the 'law of the jungle' seemed to rule. Local communities were critical of Cameron as well because they were disappointed by the extent to which he was willing to comply with their swiftly introduced village tax, beach use tax and fishing ground disturbance tax imposed on the surfing industry. Apart from fighting off fellow Australian investors, Cameron also had to deal with increasing numbers of dissatisfied Mentawaians visiting MWB, holding office in the prestigious Hotel Bumi Minang in Padang. Most of these local village heads and clan leaders came to Padang to claim a fee for the tourists using their resources (e.g. beaches and parts of their fishing grounds). Now that the locals heard of the provincial tax imposed on the surfers, several village heads were quick to install a so-called village tax for tourists to be paid whenever they came ashore making use of facilities on land.

¹²³ Center for Surf Research at <http://csr.sdsu.edu/> (visited June 2013).

¹²⁴ When at a later stage, Cameron experienced difficulties with the prolongation of his residence permit, government authorities in Padang denied that a business agreement between themselves and Rick Cameron had ever existed.

Whereas local communities became increasingly disinclined to cooperate and asked for compensations at random, Cameron felt the need to establish a local organisation responsible for the communication and the making of appointments with the locals guaranteeing the smooth operation of his surfing business. MWB's director, Bangun Hutagalung, gathered four Mentawaians (Ray Mondus Sababalat, Levi Sirirui, Juniator Tulus and Ferdinand Saogo) he thought of as being capable and together they established Yayasan Krisau. Although the majority of its activities were presumably located on the Mentawai Islands, Yayasan Krisau issued a budget proposal for an office in Padang to MWB. With the people involved living in pitiable circumstances elsewhere in Padang, the prospect of a more comfortable basis, to be used as office and residency simultaneously, was understandably attractive to them. But unfortunately the budget proposal did not meet with any response as a result of which Yayasan Krisau never had its own office. Instead, Yayasan Krisau made use of the computer and Internet facilities available in the MWB office. Although its general aim was clear, Yayasan Krisau never had a coordinated programme of work and factual activities in the field were never undertaken. Apart from Ferdinand, all others involved in Yayasan Krisau had obligations elsewhere. Levi and Juniator were still full time students and Ray was a secondary high school teacher at SMP Maria. Yayasan Krisau thus never had their primary attention. As a result of the lack in finances and targeted activities, both Levi and Juniator became bored and disappointed and withdrew from the organisation after being involved for some 18 months only. After that nothing was heard of Yayasan Krisau for a long time and one might have thought that the organisation had annulled itself. Apparently MWB found other ways to keep the disgruntled locals at bay, because MWB developed no new initiatives in order to fill the gap created by the withdrawal of Yayasan Krisau. In 2013, however, a small message in Puailiggoubat (2003f) mentioned Ray as the managing director of Yayasan Krisau. Apparently Yayasan Krisau remained to exist in some kind of dormant stage during all those years.

Yayasan Kirekat Indonesia

In January 2000 a Dutch foundation called Kirekat was established by Bea Bouman, who had become interested in Mentawai after a trip to Siberut, and Aurelius Yan, a Mentawaiian originating from Siberut, living in the Netherlands at that time.¹²⁵ During her trip to Siberut, Bea had developed the idea that she wanted to do something for the, what she considered, needy communities on the island. Yan, who studied medical anthropology in the Netherlands, had a longstanding wish to return to his island of origin and do something about the very poor healthcare conditions on Siberut. Together with five other people – four of them, including myself, anthropologists involved in research in the Mentawai Archipelago – Yan and Bea formed the board of the Kirekat Foundation.

¹²⁵ The Kirekat Foundation supports the socio-economic autonomy of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, with special attention for the autochthonous population of the Mentawai Archipelago. Activities and projects undertaken by this foundation are financed by donations from the Dutch public mainly (Stichting Kirekat 2001).

One of the first and main activities of the Kirekat Foundation was the submission of a project proposal to a Dutch co-funding agency, Cordaid.¹²⁶ This project proposal was aiming at the improvement of the health care system in several more remote areas on the island of Siberut. The project focussed on villages and settlements in Rereiket and Simatalu as these two areas were considered worst affected by deficient healthcare. The main objective of the proposal was to create intensive cooperation between the health department of the local government, missionary health activities, and the indigenous health care system in which the *kerei*, and local healers (*simata siagai laggek*) play a major role (Persoon 2008; Stichting Kirekat 2002). Cordaid decided to fund the proposal with 250,000 euro on a three-year basis with the possibility of extension, but requested a local NGO to actually implement and take responsibility for the project. Despite objections from the Kirekat Foundation, Cordaid pushed through on its demand for a local organisation. Whereas an existing local organisation capable to take the responsibility for implementing the project could not be found, a local organisation had to be established from scratch. Therefore, in March 2001 Aurelius Yan, Yudas Sabaggalet and Bastian Sirirui filled a submission to a notary in Padang in order to establish Yayasan Kirekat Indonesia (YKI). Considering the reason for the creation of YKI, it is quite peculiar to notice that the notarised deed does not contain any reference to the Dutch Kirekat Foundation neither to the reason for its establishment, namely the prime donor of their only project, Cordaid. This is all the more peculiar whereas the document does refer to a possible partnership with SurfAid International (SAI). Negotiations about future collaboration between SAI and YKI have indeed taken place several times, but ideas developed during these meetings never materialised.¹²⁷

Almost simultaneously with the establishment of YKI, a new law on *yayasan* passed in Indonesian parliament. Operative from August 2002 onwards and further attuned in 2005 by law 28/2004, law 16/2001 states that a *yayasan* should contain of a board of trustees (*pendiri* or *pembina*), a daily board (*pengurus*) and a controlling organ (*pengawas*). Apart from the persons involved in the daily board (the managing director, the treasurer and the secretary), no one involved in the *yayasan* as *pendiri* or *pengawas* may receive fees, payments or honoraries of any kind.¹²⁸ Due to a lack of sound understanding of the new legislation and a constant quarrelling amongst all the people involved in the establishment of YKI, the composition of the organisation kept on changing continuously, seriously frustrating the start of the implementation of the healthcare project. Although there were more than enough people willing to take a seat in the various boards of YKI, only very few were willing to operate on the required voluntary basis. Although Cordaid had made some funding available for capacity building, honorariums for the foundation board were

¹²⁶ Cordaid is a one of the biggest international development organisations merged out of three Dutch Catholic development organisations in 1999. Their main objective is to help people in distress and fight poverty worldwide. One of Cordaid's focus areas is on structural healthcare.

¹²⁷ Personal communication with Aurelius Yan in his capacity as healthcare project manager (2001).

¹²⁸ This distribution of power in the management of the *yayasan* and the restricting of financial flows was meant to prevent or at least limit the tax evasion and the personal enrichment for which many *yayasan* were used.

obviously not part of that funding. The Kirekat Foundation received multiple requests from YKI to make additional funds available in order to tackle this issue. All of these requests were of course turned down. Eventually it was decided that Yudas should become the chairman of the daily board (managing director) and Bastian would take on the role of chairman of the advisory board. Whereas Yan was to become the healthcare project manager, he – in accordance with the new legislation – had left the founder board of YKI as well as the board of the Kirekat Foundation. Protestant reverend Panulis Saguntung was found willing to take his place as the chairman of the board of trustees. The implementation of the healthcare project eventually started in August 2003. At that time YKI had a total of eight board members, a project director, a project manager, a project field assistant, two project related secretaries, and two boat operators. Unfortunately, a medical doctor, nurses and a community healthcare worker were still not hired then.

Despite the lack in executive project personnel and the seriously disturbing institutional instability, Yan managed to organise several workshops and consultative meetings during which regional and district level (healthcare) institutions as well as villagers and representatives from the Padang-based Catholic hospital discussed the prevailing health and healthcare conditions on the island and formulated possible contributions for each of the parties to make in order to relieve the multiple problems encountered in the two project areas. Cooperation with the local government turned out to be problematic and remained to be so throughout the complete project period. Though local government persistently stated that no project activities should be undertaken without their prior consultation, government officials were only incidentally present at the stakeholder meetings.

One of the first project activities amongst the local communities included the establishment of so-called *punutubut uma* (a sort of local health councils consisting of several local individuals somehow related to healthcare) in all villages and settlements included in the project (i.e. Madobak, Ugai and Rogdok in the Rereiket area, and Simatalu, Limau, Simaligbek and Paipajet located on the northwest coast of the island). It was planned that the medical staff was going to train these *punutubut uma* in various preventive healthcare techniques and instruct them about basic hygienic practices. For this purpose, public toilets and clean water facilities were installed in several of the settlements. When in October 2004 a medical doctor was finally hired, she and the two (male) nurses, both hired a little earlier, struggled with local communities that did not understand the directive character of the project activities. Instead of being trained, the locals preferred to be treated by the doctor. Those locals who attended the training sessions expected to be paid for their presence. In order not to discourage the locals, YKI started to ship various medicines and medical resources to the two project locations, increasingly bypassing the main objective of the project. Only a few months after the start of the implementation of the project activities, the nurse stationed in the Rereiket area left the healthcare project because he was offered the opportunity to become a nurse in the civil service. The nurse stationed in Simatalu was then transferred to Rereiket. Whereas the vacancy for Simatalu-based nurse was never filled again, project activities in Simatalu faded.

In early 2003, the Kirekat Foundation, acting as an official mediator between YKI and

Cordaid, had already sounded the alarm. Worried about the future of the healthcare project, the Kirekat Foundation suggested Cordaid to perform a mid-term evaluation in order to save the healthcare project that was obviously in danger of perishing amidst all the institutional turmoil. After persistent urging from the Dutch Kirekat Foundation, Cordaid eventually visited the healthcare project in June 2004. Despite the fact that the medical doctor had, due to a serious conflict with the project field assistant, resigned just a few weeks before the Cordaid visit, the findings of the Cordaid staff about the progress of the healthcare programme were fairly positive, though their report acknowledged that 'a lot still needed to be done' (Cordaid 2004). On the basis of the evaluation visit during which Cordaid staff visited the project location in Rereiket, but never met with YKI staff in Padang, Cordaid decided to prolong the project with a second term.¹²⁹

Whereas the board of the Kirekat Foundation had little faith in the events taking place in Mentawai, two members of the board of the Kirekat Foundation visited the YKI office in Padang in late 2004. By that time the implementation of the healthcare project had basically come to a halt, a shortage of qualified staff in the field and a lack of vision and leadership capacities on behalf of the project leader being the two most important factors for this stagnation. In a discussion with the board of YKI, it became clear that YKI as an organisation was not interested in harbouring a project such as the Cordaid funded healthcare project. According to YKI, the fact that the healthcare project was not a product of YKI, but rather the other way around, had caused confusion with regard to ownership and responsibility for the project. YKI thought of the multiple problems the healthcare project was facing, rather as Yan's personal responsibility than their communal responsibility. During the meeting YKI distanced itself from the healthcare project, stating that Yan was welcome to continue his healthcare project as part of YKI's healthcare division, but that YKI would move on to other fields of interest and associated activities. Despite the plea from the two board members of the Kirekat Foundation for YKI to focus solely on the healthcare project, YKI started a partnership with the Dinas Kelautan dan Perikanan Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai (local Department of Marine Affairs and Fisheries) already in early 2005. Under the banner of a programme called COREMAP (Coral Reef Rehabilitation and Management Program), financed by the Asian Development Bank, YKI was responsible for project implementation in ten villages situated along the coast of Siberut. Factual project activities were, however, only implemented in Saibi Muara and Saliguma. In Saliguma, Kristinus Andre Satoko (initially hired by YKI as one of the secretaries to the healthcare project) attempted to instruct local people about crab and fish breeding in ponds that were especially constructed for that purpose. In Saibi Muara, YKI did nothing more than handing out several so-called *kepompong* (light weight

¹²⁹ The fact that, in spite of all problems indicated, Cordaid so implicitly granted YKI a second term, had in all probability to do with the fact that Cordaid had collected nearly a million Euros for the healthcare project in a very successful media campaign using poignant images from Siberut. It would have been difficult to explain to the public if Cordaid would not have used the money for which the Dutch public had donated it.

outboard engines) in order to ease coastal fishing activities of the local villagers.¹³⁰ The partnership between YKI and the local government lasted for less than a year and was, according to YKI, terminated by the end of 2005 due to the fact that the programme knew too little “mentoring”.¹³¹

When in early 2006 the campaigning for the election of the *bupati* (district head) started, virtually all involved in YKI turned their focus to politics. Yan busied himself supporting his younger brother, Stephanus Hok, to run for *bupati*. Both Panulis and Yudas were running for *wakil bupati* (vice head of district). Others were focussed on passing the examination allowing them to apply for employment in the local civil service (*Ujian Calon Pegawai Negeri Sipil Daerah* or *Ujian CPNSD*). Right after the elections in August 2006, YKI simply ceased to exist, or so it seemed. Yudas had been elected vice *bupati* and several others managed to obtain employment in the local civil service and left YKI for that reason. Cordaid had, after they had invested nearly half a million euros, turned down the request for a third term for the healthcare project. In an attempt to restart the healthcare project, Yan also decided to leave YKI. He established a new organisation together with his nephew, Kristinus Andre Satoko. This new organisation was called Yayasan Prof. Dr. Reimar Schefold Mentawai (YRSM), after the chairman of the Kirekat Foundation. With the personal assistance of Reimar Schefold, Yan tried to obtain funding for a restart of the healthcare project with a new German donor but this donor eventually turned the request down. Subsequently the healthcare project was never continued again.

YKI's second life

After a few years of being in a state of hibernation, YKI was revived in 2011 when Kristinus Andre Satoko reactivated the organisation. Together with the Research Center for Applied Geography (PPGT) of the Jakarta-based Universitas Indonesia (UI), PT Global Green (a corporation involved in agri-business), the Siberut Conservation Programme (a Bogor-based research group mainly interested in primates), and a communication forum consisting of local people called Forum Komunikasi Kehutanan Masyarakat (FKKM), YKI had formed a local consortium. This consortium, called Konsorsium Siberut received funding from Tropical Forest Conservation Action-Sumatera (TFCA-Sumatera) in order to implement a project aiming at the conservation and rehabilitation of forests on Siberut.¹³² The project that went under the name TFCA-Sumatera Project focused on two villages in Rereiket, namely Madobak and Matotonan and two villages on Siberut's southwest coast: Taileleu and Sagulubbek. The project was expected to last three years and for its first year it was planned for the Konsorsium Siberut to seek cooperation and partnership with both the local government and the Siberut National Park. It was furthermore planned to collect

¹³⁰ The 1-1.5 meter horizontally extended shaft of the kepompong makes this light-weight engine extremely handy navigating on shallow rivers, significantly reducing travel time and physical exertion. These engines, however, lack sufficient power to be useful for travel or line fishing at sea.

¹³¹ See: <http://kirekatindonesia.blogspot.sg/2013/02/sejarah-yayasan-kirekat.html#more>

¹³² TFCA-Sumatera is a Jakarta-based organisation that is responsible for the implementation of the Dept-for-Nature Swap schemes that exist between the Indonesian government and that of the United States. See also: <http://tfcasumatera.org>

literature on conservation, to collect data on various topics among which information about medicinal plants, to conduct participatory land mapping and to investigate the organisational and economic potential of the four villages included in the project. Apart from some consultations with the local government on behalf of YKI, the other activities planned for this project were not yet implemented by the end of 2013. And in December 2013 the Siberut Conservation Programme (SCP) announced that they temporarily ceased their activities on Siberut due to the fact that their primary German counterpart and donor, the German Primate Centre, had withdrawn.¹³³ The withdrawal of this donor led to the retreat of the Siberut Conservation Programme from the consortium. Apparently Konsorsium Siberut existed by the grace of the participation of the Siberut Conservation Programme and their donor, because the consortium and all its activities disappeared after SCP's withdrawal. YKI never developed any activities since then and seems to have returned to its dormant state since its director, Kristinus Andre Satoko, went into local politics in 2013.

Conclusion

The story of local NGOs in Mentawai is complicated. Seen from a superficial outsider's perspective one might say that it is a story of many failures and only few successes. Out of more than 30 registered local organisations only a handful matured to a level where one can speak of actual project implementation. Results were often disappointing. Donor dependency is paramount. Without a generous, often overseas donor, local NGOs in Mentawai have little to no means nor reason for existence. Those NGOs that do not manage to attract a donor remain post box organisations. The only proof of the existence of such organisations is often laid in one person running around waving his business card claiming that he is the director of a particular organisation. But there is more to the Mentawaiian NGO world that at first glance is indeed rather hopeless.

Most local NGOs in the Mentawaiian context were established during the late 1990s. At that time young Mentawaians, educated on secondary and even tertiary levels, experienced serious difficulties finding a job in Padang. While job opportunities were frustratingly bleak, returning to Mentawai was not a welcoming alternative to these educated people either. While captured in this vacuum these young Mentawaians developed a cultural consciousness that led to a political awareness. Mentawaians were, however, not part of the political establishment at that time. Unable to influence local politics from within, many of them started an NGO in order to influence local politics from outside. But despite their political agenda and their being based on good intentions, local NGOs also had to serve as income generating organisations. Many people involved in local NGOs were financially dependent on that organisation. Closely related to this starting point is the fact that many organisations lack a clear vision and mission. Programmes of work are rarely written and developed into actual project activities. Local organisations

¹³³ See also: <http://www.siberut-island.org/index.html>

simply seem to wait for a donor to come along and present them with a programme of work and the corresponding budget. However, the programme of work as submitted by the donor does not necessarily coincide with the political and personal agenda of the people involved in the NGO. While the majority of the most influential international (donor) agencies aim at conservation and sustainable development, many of the local NGOs working with/for these agencies are also geared in this direction. Therefore, local NGO staff is often not completely involved in the objectives as formulated by the donor. This phenomenon often leads to the skimming of project budget allocated by the donor in order to use it for the implementation of activities that are experienced as more urgent than the programme of work as laid out by the donor. Programmes of work become blurred with activities that serve the political and personal agenda of NGO staff, resulting in disappointing results on both agendas.

In the belief that local organisations – often hiring local people – are, due to their presumed profound understanding of and intense contact with local communities, far better equipped for the implementation of projects activities amongst the project recipients than the foreign expatriate for instance, many international (donor) agencies increasingly assign local NGOs with the actual implementation of their programmes (Veltmeyer 2004). Though local NGOs might certainly stand at close distance from their constituencies, this is not necessarily the case. I would like to argue that most Mentawaiian NGOs stand at a relatively large distance from local communities. Mentawaiian youngsters involved in NGOs have often lived in Padang for years. They have been detached, both physically as well as mentally, from their Mentawaiian background. In order to survive in the city of Padang amidst the religious and culturally dominant Minangkabau, many Mentawaians needed to attenuate their Mentawaiian identity. This has not only lead to occasional identity crises on an individual level, but also to an alienation between these youngsters and their fellow Mentawaians who stayed on the islands. While these people claim to represent the entire Mentawaiian community, they in fact mainly represent themselves and are therefore not accountable.

Local communities on their turn are often suspicious with regard to NGOs and their activities in the field. Especially the older generation tends to see NGO staff as cocky youngsters who forgot about their culture and good manners that pertain of that culture. Local communities in Mentawai know a long history of non-governmental intervention within their villages and settlements. Local communities tend to be critical and suspicious of NGO activities. This probably has to do with the fact that most projects are designed *for* local communities, but not *with* local communities. Local communities have often not been involved in the process of project design. They just have to comply with the implementation of project activities. Local communities often do not fully understand the various project objectives and have diverging expectations of the activities implemented. Project activities that do not offer obvious short-term benefits are often dismissed by local communities. They simply refuse to cooperate or come into action. Locals just stay away or even obstruct the implementation of project activities. End results are often perceived of as disappointing and as not meeting the promises made during earlier stages of project implementation. At the same time local communities show high levels of project

dependency. They sometimes seem to live from project to project. As long as there is some sort of project in your village or settlement there is always something to gain from it. At the same time the presence of the project discourages local communities to think for themselves, to be creative and help themselves.

Whereas the largest part of more or less undisturbed forest is to be found on Siberut, donors – the majority of them focussing on conservation and sustainable development – have a tendency to develop programmes solely meant for Siberut. As a result, Siberut and its population have been at the centre of project attention, completely bypassing the island of Sipora and the Pagai Islands. Communities on the southern Mentawai Islands are very much aware of this donor-driven disregard of their islands. They feel like they have been denied the development opportunities that came along with these often generously financed programmes and they blame local NGOs for this denial.

Donor dependency, both financially as well as content wise, is disturbingly high. Overseas donors are generous, but often skip a critical evaluation. Analyses of success and failure are often not executed. Donor agencies display a tendency to remain optimistic about its favoured approaches and institutional solutions. In doing so donor agencies often overplay the impact of their programmes and blur the distinction between normative representations and actual outcomes. Donor ideas seem remarkably resilient in the face of contrary evidence (Mosse 2013). Many local NGOs are forced to follow the programme of work as well as the operational processes as dictated by the donor. Donors often overrate the qualifications of local NGO staff. People involved in local NGOs often do not master the English language enough. This leads to problems when writing proposals and reports. As a result proper reporting is often simply skipped. Inexperienced NGO staff is often requested to implement project activities that otherwise requires professional training; something local NGO staff often lacks. Despite the fact that many international agencies wish (at least on paper), for the sake of programme sustainability, to add to institutional capacity building at the local level, donors tend to show a blind eye for the relative distance to constituencies, the lack of qualifications, ignorance, self-interest, self-enrichment and even overt corruption that are sometimes prevalent in local NGOs. Once the programme budget is allocated to the local NGO, donors do not seem to care to conduct a thorough evaluation and take action based on the outcome of the evaluation. Interim adjustment of the programmes, factual implementation and the performance of the local NGO are rarely done. Donors seem to be unwilling to reveal and admit failure. It is painful to see how often local NGOs get the benefit of the doubt and get away with performances which are potentially harmful to both their donor and their constituencies. Local organisations that have not managed to attract a donor simply ceased to exist or remained as post-box organisation. No local organisation in Mentawai has managed (or even tried) to gain funding for their causes among the general public in Mentawai, in Padang or elsewhere in Indonesia.

The world of Mentawaian NGOs is characterised by stiff competition over financial resources. This competition has ensured that other local NGOs are perceived of as rivals as a result of which long-lasting partnerships between organisations within the local network

are absent. Generally NGOs tend to be fairly uncommunicative about their comings and goings and secrecy is paramount when it comes to finances. Distrust not only occurs between people involved in different organisations. Even within organisations individuals involved do not always trust each other. When suspicion, imputations and sometimes even open conflict between people active within the same organisation become unworkable, organisations tend to split up. One of the quarrelling parties leaves the organisation to find resort with another organisation or starts an organisation of his own. In this respect the world of Mentawaian NGOs shows a similar fluidity as the way in which Mentawaian society is organised.

Regional autonomy has, among other things marked the end of the heydays of the Mentawaian NGOs. The independency of the Mentawai Archipelago has caused many of the educated Mentawaians to shift from 'NGO-ing' to more secure and more rewarding functions in either the local government or the local bureaucracy.¹³⁴ As a result of this drain of NGO personnel, local organisations weakened and many of them disappeared all together. Renewed national legislation on *yayasan* that became operative in 2002, has furthermore discouraged the founding of new local NGOs in Mentawai.

¹³⁴ NGO-ing is a term I borrowed from Hilhorst (2003). With the term NGO-ing Hilhorst is hinting at organisational practices and discursive repertoires of development agencies in civil society.



5 The independent *kabupaten*

Introduction

In the previous chapter I have looked at how and why a multitude of politically engaged individuals became involved in various official and less official local organisations. In this chapter I will look at how these politically inspired people have made use of these organisations in order to empower their ever-stronger growing request for self-government and administrative independency from Padang-Pariaman. The heydays of their lobby took place during the last few years of the previous century and eventually led to the establishment of the independent district Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai in October 1999. The intense political turmoil that ensued soon after this liberating event forms the largest part of the descriptive elements of this chapter. The appointing of a *bupati* (head of district), the installing of the local parliament (DPRD – *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*) and the formation of the basic governmental structure were all highly politicised, laborious and time-consuming processes. Data used for this chapter are mainly based on interviews with individuals involved in the above mentioned processes and events. I have furthermore gathered data in both Padang and Mentawai, through local newspapers and frequent visits to local NGOs.

The lobby

During the last five years of the 1990s the Mentawaian request for more self-determination became more and more insistent and provocative. Various politically engaged Mentawaians openly solicited for self-government and administrative independency from Padang-Pariaman. Whereas there were basically no Mentawaians active within the local politics, they were unable to influence the system from within. Therefore the government in Pariaman, the provincial government in Padang and even the central government in Jakarta were increasingly addressed by means of letter campaigns, protest actions and personal visits by members of the Mentawaian elite. Some of them acted on their own account, but more often their organisations were used to punctuate their claims. Several of the protest letters were written and signed by individual organisations. But in the course of the 1990s, more and more of the letters were signed by a consortium of local organisations using the name of Forum Komunikasi

Masyarakat Mentawai (FKMM).¹³⁵ The protest letters invariably contained of an exposition of why development in the Mentawai Archipelago had failed and was always followed by a request for political and administrative independency from the Padang-Pariaman district. Whereas the letters never received any substantial reaction from either Pariaman or Padang, FKMM later also forwarded the letters to the authorities in Jakarta, soliciting for action from the central powers directly. When even Jakarta failed to respond to their letters, it was insinuated that a Jakarta-based Minangkabau official originating from Pariaman overdoing his loyalty to the Minangkabau homeland, had withheld the letters. Then a small Mentawaian delegation, including Kortanius Sabeleake, Levi Sirirui and Rijel Samaloisa headed for Jakarta in order to discuss matters in person with the designated authorities. The FKMM delegation managed to discuss their concerns and hopes for the Mentawai Archipelago with members of the national parliament, but the meeting never had a substantive follow-up; at least not then.

Next to the somewhat subdued letter campaigns there were various protest actions. Most of these protest actions complete with banners and loudly chanted slogans took place in Padang, in front of the governor's office. One of these larger protest actions took place on 15 July 1998. Some 200 Mentawaians had gathered in front of the governor's office. Amongst the protesters were representatives of YCM, LBH Padang, IPPMEN and FORPEM.¹³⁶ Apart from these people, on whose initiative the protest action had arisen, there were various village heads, clan and religious leaders who had travelled from Mentawai to Padang for the occasion. For many of them, their expenses for travel and accommodation had been covered by YCM. The majority of the crowd, however, was formed by Mentawaian students mobilised by IPPMEN. In a meeting with governor, Muchlis Ibrahim, it was stated that the so-called development policies of the last 30 years had victimised the Mentawaians as well as the natural resources present within the Mentawai Archipelago. Rather than lifting the Mentawaians from their state of ignorance and poverty, they argued that Suharto's Orde Baru policies had destroyed Mentawaian culture and identity and had furthermore deprived the Mentawaians of their natural resources. With the Orde Baru regime expired just two months earlier, the Mentawaians clearly grabbed this momentum to stake their claims towards change with regard to the way in which the Mentawai Archipelago had been governed so far. The protesters explained to the governor how Mentawai had become a receptacle for second-class civil servants who were either not interested in or simply not capable of contributing to the sound development of the archipelago. They therefore urged the governor to prioritise Mentawaians for the fulfilment of vacancies in the local bureaucracy and to look into possibilities to detach the Mentawai Archipelago from the Padang-Pariaman district by granting the archipelago independent district status as soon as possible. They continued their plea by requesting the governor for a review of the legality of PT MPLC operating on the Pagai Islands and two smaller logging companies (like MPLC also in the hands

¹³⁵ Forum Komunikasi Masyarakat Mentawai was fluid in composition. At some occasions FKMM consisted of twenty organisations while at other instances of only five or six organisations.

¹³⁶ Forum Pemuda Mentawai (FORPEM) is a Jakarta-based student organisation promoting the interests of Mentawaian students outside Padang.

of Suharto's daughter Titik Prabowo) active on Siberut. According to the protesters the logging corporations did not operate in accordance with lawful agreements, causing severe conflicts between and even within family clans. The very presence of these logging corporations was considered a violation of the rights of local *adat* communities that in this new political era could no longer be tolerated. The latter argument was also used to question the legality of the national park on Siberut that was established on the island without the consent of local communities, violating their control over their ancestral lands. The governor was then also asked to withdraw all plans to establish large-scale oil palm plantations in Mentawai. The negotiations over possible compensation schemes alone had already ensued conflict within the affected communities, so it was stated. Without making any real promises, the governor said that he, together with the Mentawaian community would strive for the aspirations of the Mentawaians to become reality. While at that time it remained rather vague what he actually meant, it was in early 1999 that he appointed Antonius Samonggilailai, an Islamic Mentawaian originating from Sipora, as the *camat* (head of sub-district) of South Siberut.

Also intensively lobbying for an independent Mentawai was Bakri Tasirebbeb. Allegedly speaking on behalf of the Islamic Mentawaian community, Bakri, through his organisation Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3), lobbied mainly behind the scenes and directly with the authorities in both Padang and Pariaman. Bakri frequently visited the district authorities, building personal relationships amongst others with Zainal Bakar, the then *bupati* of the Padang-Pariaman district. But apart from the minority of Islamic Mentawaians, Bakri met with little support for his lobby from the wider Mentawaian community. Many judged his interference as inappropriate and suspected him of having a hidden agenda. Although Bakri was beloved by a considerable number of Mentawaians, he remained an outsider none the less. Despite his proximity with the officials, Bakri was not successful in convincing them to change their policies with regard to the Mentawai Archipelago.

Whereas the FKMM visit to Jakarta had not led to a satisfactory result, in late 1998 the so-called *Tim Sembilan* (Team Nine) was established. In the hope to really impress the authorities in Jakarta this time, *Tim Sembilan* was composed of nine elderly Mentawaians, among whom the fathers of Parmen Sabola' and Yonlifran Siritotet. With the financial aid of Yayasan Kondisi and the practical help of FORPEM-Jakarta, *Tim Sembilan* headed for the presidential palace in order to speak to the president.¹³⁷ *Tim Sembilan* did not manage to speak with the president directly, but was received by several members of the national parliament to whom the members of the delegation once more submitted the aspirations of the Mentawaian community.

Only several weeks later both Edison Saleleubaja and Yonlifran went on a business trip to Jakarta. During this trip Edison and Yonlifran met with Sintong Panjaitan, a high-

¹³⁷ It was Rijel Samaloisa who at that time studied political science at Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI) in Jakarta and simultaneously acted as the chairman of the Jakarta-based Forum Pemuda Mentawai (FORPEM). He organised all logistics involved in the *Tim Sembilan* being in Jakarta.

ranking military in the Indonesian army. With him they once more discussed the situation at hand in the Mentawai Archipelago and the fact that their persistent call for political and administrative independence had so far not met with any reaction. For reasons not completely clear to me this meeting finally triggered a reaction from the national parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* - DPR). It was then that the DPR decided to send an investigation team to Mentawai in order to research the possibility of the Mentawai Archipelago to detach itself from the Padang-Pariaman district.

Independency at last

Decentralisation and regional autonomy triggered an intensified request from many regions in Indonesia that wished to become autonomous provinces and districts. Especially the introduction of regional autonomy formed the fertile ground that was so much needed for the Mentawaian request for political independence to germinate. During the last few months of the Suharto administration as well as in the period directly after his withdrawal, the Mentawaian lobby for independence from Padang-Pariaman had been so intensive that their request for independence had remained on top of the stack and was therefore one of the first requests for *pemekaran* to be inquired. Already in early 1999 it became obvious that Mentawai would be granted political and administrative independence from Padang-Pariaman, but this decision became official only in October 1999 due to disagreements with regard to land and the location of the new district's capital. The investigation team that was sent to Mentawai by the DPR after Edison and Yonlifran had once more presented their request to the high ranking military officer, had not been able to determine where the capital of the newly to be established *kabupaten* should be located. It was expected that the establishment of the capital would provide a huge boost to local employment and the level of development in general. Therefore representatives of the various Mentawai islands were very eager to get the capital located on 'their' island. People almost literally fell over each other in order to promote their island as the most suitable for the location for the capital and the governmental office complex. People from Siberut said that the island of Siberut had historically seen always been the centre of the archipelago and that the capital should therefore be located on Siberut. People from Pagai said that Pagai already had the best infrastructure in place and that the capital should thus be located on Pagai. And people from Sipora stated that they had attention wise always been in between the islands of Siberut and Pagai and that it now was their turn to take a place in the spotlight. The investigation team from Jakarta inspected three possible locations, Silaoinan-Saureinuk on Sipora, Nemnem Leleu-Sikakap on North Pagai and Maileppet-Muara Siberut on Siberut, but met with insurmountable problems as soon as the owners of the land in these locations were requested to make their lands available for the construction of a governmental office complex. After intense negotiations none of the approached land-owners turned out to be willing to sell their lands. After the investigation team returned empty handed to Jakarta, Melki Tatubekket, a protestant reverend active for GKPM on Sipora who is also working for PT Sinula and who is Rijel Samaloisa's father in law, negotiated with Ali Akbar, a Minangkabau migrant who owns some ten hectares of land around the harbour village of Tuapeijat on Sipora. Eventually it was this Minangkabau

migrant who made his land available for the building of the governmental office complex. As soon as these negotiations were confirmed by Jakarta, president Habibie signed law 49/1999 that officially turned Mentawai into an independent *kabupaten*. 4 October 1999 has entered the history books as *hari jadi Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai*, the day that Mentawai became an independent district. People were over the moon and absolutely confident that the newly carved out district would, within the two years set for its transition period, turn into a resounding success. The new *kabupaten* would be evaluated by the end of 2001 and in case its independency would be unsatisfactory, the archipelago would be reinserted in the Padang-Pariaman district. There was a lot of work to be done, a lot of new opportunities ensued and the Mentawaians plunged themselves en masse into this new, highly political arena. Branch offices for various political parties were opened in Mentawai, many elite members joined a political party, others opened new businesses they linked with individuals they believed to become influential within the political arena, people started a lobby for more sub-districts, others wrote a proposal for the village structure to be revised and finally many people applied for a job in the civil service.

The interim *bupati*

After president Habibie signed for the Mentawai Archipelago to become an independent district, the interim governor of West Sumatra, Duniidja was entrusted with the task to shape the new district.¹³⁸ Governor Duniidja appointed Badril Bakar, a Minangkabau with no previous experience within Mentawai, as the interim *bupati* of the Mentawai Archipelago. Already at age, Badril was a senior politician, obviously in the aftermath of his political career. Another Minangkabau, Aztarmizi, who had been acting as an adjunct to the assistant *bupati* for the Mentawai region during the 1980s, was installed as the vice *bupati*. Badril was given the task to shape and install a local parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah - DPRD) and to set up the local bureaucratic structure. Badril was furthermore responsible for the development of a governmental office complex in the village of Tuapeijat. Whereas there were basically no facilities whatsoever available in Tuapeijat at that time, all governmental offices, paved access roads and even electricity and running water had to be established and the quay in the harbour was in need of renovation. The intention was to accomplish these two major tasks within a year. The newly installed local DPRD would then elect the permanent *bupati* after which Badril's appointment would automatically end.

Badril's appointment met with disbelief and fierce opposition. Various Mentawaiian NGOs and several politically engaged individuals were especially vocal. They called for Badril to be replaced by a *putri asli daerah*, a local native to the archipelago, a Mentawaiian, preferably a Christian. The term *putra asli daerah* is to be interpreted in ethnic terms, primarily differentiating between the Mentawaians and the Minangkabau, but also the Batak and to a

¹³⁸ Duniidja was interim governor of West Sumatra from 1999 to 2000 after governor Muchlis Ibrahim had, due to political tensions in West Sumatra, resigned before the end of his term. In early 2000 vice governor Zainal Bakar was installed as the new governor of West Sumatra.

lesser extent the Niassans. Whereas the initial lobby for more local political involvement was directed against the unreliable and corrupt Minangkabau administrators, it was a common wish that local politics now also had to be taken over by sincere and trustworthy local persons, *putra asli daerah*. The important position of that of the *bupati*, now in the hands of another Minangkabau, was simply not acceptable to the Mentawai elite.

Despite his age, his poor health and the fairly extensive task at hand, Badril was confident about the fact that development in Mentawai would finally gain momentum now that the archipelago had obtained independence from the mainland. Badril saw important development potential in the forestry sector (controversially including both logging and reforestation) as well as in agriculture (large-scheme plantations of oil palm and bananas), fisheries and tourism (two sectors that had according to Badril remained underexposed during the Padang-Pariaman era). According to Badril more than 80% of the local revenues could easily be gathered from these four sectors together, but that everything would depend on how successful the local government would be in attracting and working together with investors for these sectors.

With West Sumatra having rather comprehensive political and economic interests in Mentawai, the provincial officials were not very eager to support the process of Mentawai becoming a successful independent *kabupaten*. In order to drive the Mentawai Archipelago near the evaluation date in an unsuccessful state, various provincial political elements hampered the process of installing the DPRD. The delay in the instalment of the DPRD furthermore gave the provincial authorities the time and opportunity to finalise the procedures through which two large pending logging concessions would become operational.

The infrastructural projects in Tuapeijat also met with serious delay. As if the devil played with it, one of the most important ferries when it comes to the transport of large amounts of construction materials between Padang and Mentawai, the Barau, was docked for maintenance for more than two months. The majority of the infrastructural projects, mainly in the hands of Minangkabau contractors, were subject to corruption, skimming and money politics. The absence of sufficient fresh water was also a cause for delay. As a result many projects were slowed down initially and eventually either abandoned or finished in great haste. Almost without exception projects were completed with inferior materials and transferred in such a state that substantial additional work was needed before the new facility could actually be put to use. Both electricity and running water were in almost all instances lacking. Many of the governmental offices were built amidst the remains of the vegetation that was cut in order to clear the construction area. Once finished, the offices were handed over without the surrounding area being cleared. Access roads were often still lacking, confronting those willing to enter the office with the challenge to cross at least three ditches and half a hectare of newly developed land littered with withering vegetation and construction waste. When Badril, on 14 September 2000, received the administrative records from the *bupati* of Pariaman, various offices were not in place yet. As a result some of the records remained in Padang, while others were already transferred to Tuapeijat.

Badril, working from an office complex on Jalan Nipah in Padang that was specifically hired to temporarily harbour the interim government, did little to remedy the above-mentioned problems. The fact that Badril was operating from Padang created too big a distance between him and the performing parties on the Mentawai Islands to make effective monitoring of the projects possible. It was only in November 2000 that Badril went to Tuapejat in order to personally inspect the activities of a contractor working on the construction of the main road there. The delay in this project had also been substantial and when Badril recognised that the contractor was indeed not working according to plan, he dismissed the contractor company then and there. But despite this rather bold action, many condemned the interference as being executed far too late.

Although it was Badril's responsibility to orchestrate the composing of the DPRD, the hampering of this process was caused by forces that were largely beyond his sphere of influence. Knowing that he would be fighting against the odds, Badril avoided taking an outspoken stance in this matter. It was especially his choice not to take a strong position in the political game that was played with regard to the composing of the DPRD that placed Badril under constant attack of extremely critical Mentawai voices. Various public figures (like Yudas Sabaggalet), spokes persons of various local NGOs (like Kortanious Sabeleake' and Kurnia Sakerebau) and several candidates for the DPRD (like Agustinus Sabebeben and San Andi Ikhlas) ventilated their hostility towards Badril whenever an opportunity occurred, making sure that Badril's missteps as well as their displeasure about them were extensively publicised in the local newspapers. In April 2000 a large Mentawai crowd (some 1000 people) gathered in front of governor Zainal Bakar's office in Padang requesting the replacement of Badril. Apart from the fact that they considered Badril not capable of monitoring the delicate process of Mentawai becoming a successful independent district, the protesters also stated that the Mentawai Archipelago was in need of an autochthonous leader, a *putra asli daerah*. While Zainal told the protesters that he was inclined to fulfil their requests, no changes in Badril's appointment were made on short notice.

The new financial regulations that were part of regional autonomy had underlined the importance for local governments – especially those of *kabupaten* – to carefully monitor their local revenues. Predicated and inspired by the consequences of regional autonomy but certainly not part of his job description, Badril focused on an increase of local revenues among others from the tourist sector. By the time Badril was appointed in 1999, the tourist sector in the Mentawai Archipelago was completely dominated by Australian and American entrepreneurs engaged in the booming surfing industry. In an attempt to cash in on this successful business, the governor of West Sumatra had five so-called surf zones established in the waters surrounding the Mentawai Islands already in 1996. Commercial surfing activities would only be allowed within these zones for which a permit could be obtained from the provincial Department of Culture and Tourism. The provincial government furthermore made exclusive agreements with, Rick Cameron, the earlier mentioned Australian businessman with a controversial reputation. Badril, negatively triggered by the fact that none of the revenues from the agreements between the province and the surfing industry benefitted Mentawai, discovered that several of

the foreign surfing enterprises, among which also Cameron's Mentawai Wisata Bahari, were operating in the Mentawaian waters without valid or already expired permits from the local authorities. Not inclined to renew their permits without any of the tax revenues flowing into the Mentawaian treasury, Badril did make a valid statement but simultaneously manoeuvred himself in a difficult position (that would eventually lead to his demise) with respect to the provincial authorities.

It was initially planned that the new DPRD would be installed in October 2000 and that that would also be the moment for Badril to be replaced by the permanent *bupati*. But the delay in the instalment of the DPRD was such that governor Zainal Bakar eventually decided to replace Badril prematurely. But Badril was not inclined to withdraw. So when Zainal Bakar in April 2001 appointed Antonius Samongilailai as Badril's replacement, Badril took his dismissal to court. His stance triggered contempt for his person from various sectors within society. Both in Mentawai as well as on the Sumatran mainland he was considered pathetic for his protest against his dismissal and many found it inappropriate for Badril to publicly state that he was disappointed about the fact that he was dismissed without proper reasons. Despite the fact that Badril saw his case vindicated by the court in Jakarta in June 2001, he did not return to Mentawai. Badril retired instead. Only few years after his retirement, Badril passed away.

With the choice for Antonius, recommended to the governor by Bakri Tasirebbeb, Zainal cleverly combined the Mentawaian request for a *putra asli daerah* with Sumatra's economic interests in the Mentawai Archipelago. Originating from Sipora, Antonius is an indigenous Mentawaian. Antonius' Islamic signature furthermore appealed to the expansionism of both the Minangkabau authorities in Sumatra as well as several Islamic organisations active on the Mentawai Islands, of which Bakri's Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) is one of the most influential.¹³⁹ Antonius had experience within the local bureaucracy because he had worked several years for the spatial planning department of the Padang-Pariaman district during the late 1990s. And in early 1999 governor Muchlis Ibrahim had Antonius installed as the *camat* (head of sub-district) of the South Siberut sub-district.¹⁴⁰ During the period that Antonius was *camat* for South Siberut, he had proven to be a pro-active intermediary between local communities and the government. Antonius showed a strong drive to improve the economic circumstances of local communities, not necessarily excluding the option of logging. It was exactly this attitude that made Antonius known as the governor's right hand in logging matters when during his term negotiations about the much contested pending logging concession of Koperasi Andalas Madani finally materialised. Though it never became fully clear what Antonius' role was in this matter, it was for a fact that he was installed as interim *bupati* for six months only and that his responsibilities were more limited than those of Badril had been. Antonius' main task was to reorganise the district's administration and the handling

¹³⁹ Antonius has a Christian background but switched to Islam during his education in Padang. It was also then that Antonius came into contact with Bakri.

¹⁴⁰ Muchlis had Antonius installed as *camat* in order to comply with the continuous request from Mentawaian NGOs to appoint more Mentawaians in the local bureaucracy.

of daily affairs. Zainal himself claimed the right to control the executive pending elections within the next few months. Antonius set himself as a candidate for these elections.

Installing the first DPRD

One of the main tasks for Badril was to orchestrate the process through which Mentawai was to obtain a local parliament (DPRD). For this purpose an election commission (Panitia Pemilihan Kabupaten – PPK) was installed, charged with the task of drawing up a list of DPRD candidates for governor Zainal to approve of and to swear in. Based on the size of the electorate in Mentawai it was decided that the newly to be established DPRD should consist of 20 chairs, two of which would customarily be assigned to the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (POLRI). The remaining 18 chairs were to be divided amongst the various political parties. Mentawaians interested in a position within the DPRD needed to affiliate with a political party that was to participate in the local elections on short notice. Political parties had, however, been absent from Mentawai and seemed little inclined to open branch offices in Mentawai. People seeking for party membership thus had to come to Padang to organise this. Their choice for a particular party was almost always based on the possibility to obtain an eligible position on the electoral list rather than on the ideas or ideology of that party.

The PPK had soon drafted a list of candidates based on the Mentawai votes in the DPRD election for the Padang-Pariaman district of July 1999. The chairs were divided as follows: Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) ten chairs, Partai Golongan Karya (Golkar), Partai Demokrasi Kasih Bangsa (PDKB) and TNI/Polri each two chairs. The last four chairs were for Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI) and Partai Krisna; one chair each. Zainal, however, was hesitant to approve of the list. His uncertainty was laid in the fact that several political parties started to protest against the composition of the list. Zainal did not really wish to take a stand in this matter because his own political career was based on the support of several of these parties that had voted for his governorship at an earlier stage. As many as 21 political parties, led by PPP and PAN, clustered together in what in the course of time became known as Kelompok 21 (Group 21). Having a different reading of the regional autonomy legislation, Kelompok 21 stated that the composition of the list of candidates was based on an incorrect understanding of the regional autonomy legislation by the PPK. According to Kelompok 21 the composition of the DPRD in Mentawai should be based on the composition of the DPRD in the district from which the DPRD in the new *kabupaten* was to be carved out. Their vision on the division of chairs thus significantly differed from that of the PPK. According to their idea the chairs were to be divided as follows: PAN and PPP four chairs each, Golkar and PDIP three chairs each, TNI/POLRI two chairs and Partai Bulan Bintang (PBB), Partai Keadilan (PK), Partai Persatuan (PP) and Partai Politik Islam Indonesia Masyumi (PPIIM or just Masyumi) one chair each. In either case the constitution of the DPRD in Padang-Pariaman would remain the same, though the occupation of the individual chairs would be subject to change due to the fact that some members would have to transfer to the DPRD in Mentawai. According to the list drafted by the PPK, out

of the 45 members of the DPRD in Padang-Pariaman only four were to be transferred to Mentawai. Among these four were also the only two Mentawaians that already occupied seats in the DPRD Padang-Pariaman, Edison Saleleubaja (PDIP) and Agustinus Sabelegen (PDKB). The other two, Hosrizal and Asril Piliang, both Minangkabau, were like Edison members of the popular PDIP. The other seats in Mentawai as well as the vacant seats in Padang-Pariaman were to be assigned to new members by the respective political parties. But due to the enormous confusion that had ensued after Kelompok 21 had impeached the procedure as well as the legitimacy of the PPK itself, political parties were hesitant or simply not inclined to put forward their candidates. Already at an early stage, Badril saw the onset of lengthy political wrangling. Therefore he called for the political parties not to turn the procedure into a game of interests in which mutual differences would become politicised to such an extent that composing the DPRD would become a mere impossibility. But despite Badril's appeal, Kelompok 21 did not reconsider its stance and what followed was a prolonged period of time filled with protests and intense politicking mainly taking place behind the scenes. During that period Badril did little to put the derailed process back on track.

In February 2000 the newly built DPRD office in Tuapeijat was finished, but the DPRD was not yet ready to move in. The PPK remained to be confronted with political parties, amongst which PAN, PPP and Golkar, unwilling to put forward their candidates. Edison, the intended chairman, and Agustinus, the intended vice-chairman of the DPRD, went to Jakarta to meet with the Minister of Internal Affairs. Apart from discussing the stagnation in the process of forming the DPRD, they were also to review the annual budget (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah* – APBD) for 2000 with the minister. According to Agustinus, the APBD 2000 as drafted by Badril, “*sangat tidak masuk akal*” (did not make any sense at all) because it did not accommodate all sections of Mentawai society. Unfortunately, the minister was not in a position to intervene, because according to ministerial instruction, *Instruksi Mendagri* 26/1999, all responsibility for the procedure of Mentawai becoming a *kabupaten* had been transferred to the governor.

What followed was a period in which the process of the formation of the DPRD somewhat faded into the background. The political lobby behind the scenes continued, but was not mediated at length. Finally, on 26 July 2000 the president issued a decree (Keppres 110/2000) that endorsed the accuracy of the method used by the PPK to compile the draft list of candidates for the DPRD. Encouraged by the decree it was decided that by the end of October 2000 the DPRD should be installed. But despite their obvious wrong interpretation of the regional autonomy regulations, PAN and PPP were still not inclined to put forward their candidates. Both TNI and POLRI had also not yet submitted their candidates. Despite the fact that the procedure was legitimate, Hosrizal and Asril Piliang (the two Minangkabau that were on the list for PDIP to be transferred to Mentawai), both not very eager to relocate to Mentawai, started to contest their transfer stating “*Bukan kita tidak mau ke Mentawai, tapi harus jelas prosedurnya*” (It is not that we do not want to go to Mentawai, but the procedure must be clear) (Singgalang 2000b). When it became clear that the inauguration of the DPRD would take place in Pariaman, several of the candidates, among which Maruli Saleleubaja, Yudas, Edison and Yonlifrán, as well as Kurnia

(who was not a candidate) stated that they would be inaugurated in Tuapeijat or else they would refrain from being inaugurated all together. Due to the problems with regard to the inauguration and the fact that the list of candidates was still incomplete, the ceremony was postponed till 25 November 2000. When the inauguration planned on 25 November was cancelled again, several DPRD candidates went to Jakarta in order to enforce their inauguration there. As expected, their request was not granted by Jakarta. This was followed by a wave of protests directed at Zainal, urging him to take his responsibility in the matter. Zainal received various letters urging him to give his approval of the draft list of candidates and various protest actions with the same objective were held in front of his office in Padang. It were mainly YCM, LMAPUS and IPPMEN that organised the protest actions.¹⁴¹ Especially Kurnia, Edison and Kortanius made sure that their points of view were heard and presented in the media. Kurnia stroke a threatening tone while Kortanius spoke in a more reasoned though utterly sharp manner. When it was suggested that the delay in the issuing of the recommendation letter was caused by the imminent Islamic and Christian holidays, Kortanius stated: "*Jangan nodai hari suci umat Islam dan umat Kristiani dengan kebijakan gubernur*" (don't defile the Islamic and Christian holidays with the policies of the governor). Rather than the holidays, Korta saw the undemocratic "*sikap otoriter yang sangat kental*" (severe authoritarian attitude) of the governor as the main reason for the delay in the issuing of the recommendation letter. Kortanius furthermore mocked Zainal by stating that while it seemed impossible to simply install a DPRD, it would probably take a very long time before they could start talking about more serious issues such as the details of regional autonomy (Padang Express, November 2000). Apart from ventilating their displeasure about the lack in decisive action of Zainal, they also accused the political parties of incomprehensible behaviour. At first there were only eight political parties willing to open branch offices in Mentawai and all of a sudden no less than 21 political parties felt they had to intervene in the procedure of composing the DPRD in Mentawai.

On 7 December 2000 Zainal finally approved of the list of candidates, which was however still incomplete due to the fact that the four seats reserved for PAN, PPP, TNI and POLRI were still not claimed by the respective parties. On the contrary, Zainal's approval of the draft list had triggered a reaction from Kelompok 21 stating that they would take the issue to Jakarta for reviewing by the president himself would Zainal push through inaugurating the candidates on the incomplete list. Zainal, however, did push through and on 16 December 2000 he inaugurated the 16 candidates that were on the list. Ten out of these 16 candidates were originating from Mentawai, nine of which were autochthonous Mentawaians while one was a Batak immigrant who had lived on Mentawai for a long time.

¹⁴¹ Lembaga Masyarakat Adat Pagai Utara dan Selatan (LMAPUS) is chaired by Kurnia Sakerebau. In the chaotic period after Mentawai became independent from Padang-Pariaman this organisation was suddenly there. Kurnia, a secondary school teacher in Sikakap, made his presence felt by being extremely vocal in the media. Kurnia was very critical during the installing of the DPRD and severely criticised the performance of the interim bupati. At the same time Kurnia was said to be negotiating with Badril about a banana plantation on the Pagai Islands.

Due to the fact that there were still four members missing, the DPRD was not able to appoint a chairman from their midst and to form the various commissions within the DPRD charged with specific areas of government. By not putting forward their candidates, PAN, PPP and TNI/POLRI managed to obstruct the process for another three months. When in March 2001 the four remaining chairs were still not claimed, the case was taken to court. The court was quick in deciding that the whole process had been completed in accordance with the regulations and that PAN, PPP and TNI/POLRI should put forward their candidates immediately.

Finally, on 7 April 2001, Zainal inaugurated Edison Saleleubaja (PDI-P) as chairman of the DPRD. Agustinus Sabelegen (PDKB) and Lakri Amin (Golkar) were both installed as vice-chairman. Yonli Fran Siritoitet was appointed chairman of the so-called commission A (responsible for government and administration). Maralus Sinurat became chairman of commission B (development) and Yudas Sabaggalet became chairman of commission C (finances). The PDI-P fraction was chaired by San Andi Iklas Samaloisa, the PDKB was chaired by Yudas Sabaggalet, the Nationalists parties Krisna and PDI became chaired by Hasurungan Hutagaol and Raymundus Sababalat became Golkar's chairman. Apart from making a programme of work for the year 2001 that had already entered its second quarter, one of the most pressing tasks of the DPRD was to elect the permanent *bupati*.

Electing the first *bupati*

As soon as the DPRD was finally installed, negotiations over the election of district head began. From June 2001 onwards people could enlist themselves as candidates for *bupati*. It was planned that the DPRD would vote for the *bupati* on 2 July 2001 and that the elected *bupati* would be installed on 15 July 2001. After only little time a list of twenty candidates circulated with the election commission.¹⁴² Some of the candidates were put forward by their respective political parties. Others had enlisted on their own initiative. Half of the people on the list was of non-Mentawaiian origin. This again triggered a heated discussion about the origin of the first *bupati*. Especially the Mentawaians that had been vocal during the last few years again vigorously defended their idea that the *bupati* should be one of them, a *putra asli daerah*, a Mentawaiian and preferably a Christian. The idea of being ruled again by an outsider was so repulsive to some that they simply could not accept non-Mentawaians opting for the position of *bupati*. Rumours were circulating that some of the non-Mentawaiian candidates on the list had received intimidating messages advising them to withdraw from candidacy. Mentawaiian candidates were, however, also threatened frequently. By the end of June 2001 the governmental ferry Aloy was summoned to return back to Padang shortly after it left for Tuapeijat. Edison Saleleubaja,

¹⁴² Edison Saleleubaja, Yonli Fran Siritoitet, Kurnia Sakerebau, Oreste Sakeru, Antonius Samongilailai, Kortanius Sabeleake, Parmen Sabolak, San Andi Iklas Samaloisa, Ridwan Siritubui, Asril, Suhendi, Nurdin, Alexander Lukman, Maralus, Hendri Nasraoni, Tasnimi Raza, Ade Waldemar, Yusril, Astarmizi and Maruli Saleleubaja were on the list of candidates.

on the ferry, was informed on his mobile phone that there was a bomb on the ferry that had three candidates for the position of *bupati* and their prospective vices amongst its passengers. The candidates were on their way to Tuapeijat in order to present their vision and mission statements to the DPRD in Mentawai. People took the threat serious and requested the Aloy to return to Padang. The Aloy did return to Padang where no bombs were found. The case was reported to the police, but the person who called in the bomb threat was never found.

Eventually three elect worthy candidates were distilled from the initial list. PDI-P had put Edison Saleleubaja forward. PDKB choose Alexander Lukman, an ethnic Chinese with a Catholic background. Alexander was eager to take up the position of district head. He had far-reaching ideas about opening his own logging company on the islands. He had an elaborated political and economic plan written even before he was officially listed as a candidate for the position of district head. By contrast, Edison did not seem that eager for the position. Many of his influential friends – some of them involved in the logging sector - from Jakarta, however, thought it very convenient to have a friend occupying the influential position of district head. Apart from Edison and Alexander there was a third serious candidate for the position of district head: former interim *bupati* Antonius Samongilailai. Together with his equally Muslim running mate, Ridwan Siritubui, originating from Simalegi (North Siberut), they formed the Islamic pole in the elections. They could count on the votes from Golkar and the smaller Islamic parties in the DPRD. Now members of the DPRD were frequently harassed from different directions in order to make sure that they would vote for the person perceived as the most suitable candidate. The common Mentawaians were not in any sense part of these political processes. The election of the *bupati* was a task solely in the hands of the DPRD and therefore negotiations were mainly taking place behind the scenes. The wider public was simply left out of the picture and never consulted for their opinion. When Puailiggoubat started publishing in April 2001, the public could at least read what was decided for them. In an interview with Yudas Sabaggalet, I asked him about his thoughts with regard to the political game played solely by the Mentawaiian elite. He then advocated the voice of local NGOs to be heard by the DPRD, whereas they acted as a sort of “*DPRD di luar gedung*”, a local parliament outside the (official) building. Whereas in theory it might be true that NGOs are speaking on behalf of wider society, this is not necessarily the case. In the previous chapter I have explained that local organisations stand at considerable distance from their constituencies. In addition, more than half of the members of the DPRD originated from, or still had strong ties with local NGOs.

In a close finish between Antonius Samongilailai and Edison Saleleubaja after two rounds of voting, the latter was finally elected as the first *bupati* of Kabupaten Kepulauan Mentawai. After the first round, votes for both candidates were equal. The story goes that Rp 1.3 billion (€130.000) was spent to buy the crucial vote in Edison’s advantage. It was never known who bought the vote from whom. Antonius’ supporters, convinced of an unfair procedure, opted for a third round of voting. When their request was turned down, a group of angry (and probably paid) people went for Tuapeijat where they burned down the DPRD building under construction. This action did not meet with any reprisals initially,

The burned down
DPRD office under
construction



but in July 2002, three people were convicted for their alleged involvement in the burning of the DPRD building. One was sentenced to four years imprisonment for financing transportation and food for the people that eventually started the fire. Two others were sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment for their managing of the group of arsonists (Puailiggoubat 2002h).

According to planning Edison was to be inaugurated as soon as possible after the final voting, but he was finally installed in November 2001. It was only then that the *bupati* could start with the setting up of the local government departments, appointing the various heads of these departments and start procedures to hire personnel within the civil service.

The KAM case

Regional autonomy had lifted the ban on logging on Siberut, as a result of which the island's remaining forests became an important part of the politicking that was going on. Only few months after the new *kabupaten* became official, eleven concessions for logging and oil palm plantations were proposed over an area of 274,500 ha (covering 68% of the total landmass on Siberut) (PASIH 2009). The substantive delay in the instalment of the DPRD and the election of the *bupati* provided the provincial and central authorities the

time and opportunity to finalise the procedures through which a large logging concessions located on southeast Siberut would become operational.

As part of seriously diminishing governmental expenditures, higher education institutions in Indonesia have to cope with increasing financial independency since 1999. Since 1999 Islamic schools, universities and other higher education institutions were given the opportunity to apply for a so-called Land Grant College (LGC) (*cf.* DTE 2000a).¹⁴³ Those institutions granted with a LGC are responsible for the supervision of a certain area and are able to subject the area to scientific research and other income generating activities. The majority of the areas at disposal for the LGCs are so called *lahan kritis* (critical terrain), almost always indicating that these areas have been logged over and should thus be replanted on short notice in order not to deplete further. In theory the LGC scheme thus offers a clever combination of initial rehabilitation of severely disturbed ecosystems eventually leading to ecologically sound commercial exploitation (DTE 2000a).

Not long after the introduction of the concept, the governmental university in Padang, Universitas Andalas (Unand), was offered 40,000 hectares in *kabupaten* Sawahlunto Sinjunjung on the Sumatran mainland by the Ministry of Forestry (Padang Ekspres 1999). Initially Unand was reluctant in receiving this area as their LGC, trying to make the ministry believe that they were not yet fully prepared to manage a LGC. Shortly afterwards Unand was offered a part of the former MPLC concession area on the Pagai Islands, which they also refused (Departemen Kehutanan dan Perkebunan 1999). Only in a later stadium it became fully clear why they had been lingering accepting either of the LGCs. Instead of accepting one of the proposed LGCs – both consisting of logged-over areas – Unand was much more eager to obtain an area on Siberut where large parts of the tropical lowland rain forest were still standing. An area of 49,650 hectares reaching from Siberut's south coast to halfway north Siberut immediately adjacent to the island's national park was eventually granted to Unand under the banner of a LGC. For Unand it has obviously been clear from the very beginning of the negotiations that they were going to generate fast cash through logging activities.

In the meantime Muslimin Nasution's successor, Nurmachmudi Ismail, had introduced a couple of new laws with regard to forestry. Among other things it was no longer allowed to extract timber without the intervention of a locally based intermediary – a so called *koperasi* (cooperation) – responsible for the negotiations between the timber company and the local communities living in the particular areas. Nurmachmudi Ismail also introduced the possibility to transform already issued LGCs into so-called HPHAs.¹⁴⁴ Further all applications for HPHA logging concession should be issued with an environmental impact assessment (*Analisis Dampak Lingkungan* - ANDAL).¹⁴⁵ Unand, quick in understanding this, almost instantly developed its own logging cooperative,

¹⁴³ The LGC scheme is an idea that came out of the hat of former Minister of Forestry, Muslimin Nasution.

¹⁴⁴ HPHA (*Hak Pengusahaan Hutan Alam*) is a commercial logging permit with the intention to apply selective logging and replant the area under HPHA in order to create sustainable production forests.

¹⁴⁵ ANDAL (*Analisis Dampak Lingkungan*) is an environmental impact analysis report.

Koperasi Andalas Mandani (KAM), headed by Unand's rector, Prof. Dr. Marlis Rachman. An environmental impact assessment for a HPHA logging concession for the area under Unand's LGC was submitted to the Ministry of Forestry in Jakarta almost instantly. Although the provincial ANDAL commission issued a negative environmental impact assessment (3 June 2000), on 21 August 2000 the Ministry of Forestry issued a letter in which they announced their agreement with the ANDAL sent to them by Unand in an earlier stage (DTE 2001). Without an official recommendation by the local government (Badril had refused to sign this recommendation), the Ministry of Forestry issued a permit for Unand's HPHA on 15 March 2001. By then KAM had already made an agreement with the Jakarta-based timber company PT Sinar Minang Sejahtera and in theory they were ready to operate. The last thing they had to do was to 'socialise' (*disosialisasikan*) their plans to the local communities on Siberut.

The news about the LGC being transformed into a logging concession triggered a wave of protest. Seven local organisations, among which Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM), Yayasan Suku Mentawai (YASUMI), Forum Komunikasi Masyarakat Mentawai (FKMM), Yayasan Uma Mentawai (UMANTA), Yayasan Laggai Simaeru (YLS), Himpunan Pengkajian dan Pengawasan Pembangunan Mentawai (HP3M) and Gerakan Mahasiswa Mentawai (GMM) got themselves involved in a letter campaign directed at all parties involved including the press (Puailiggoubat 2001).¹⁴⁶ Their protests concentrated around the fact that the transformation of the initial LGC into a HPHA was misleading and not according to law UUPK (41/1999) on forestry in which LGC was never mentioned as a potential means through which Indonesia's forests can be exploited. They also referred to the fact that the provincial ANDAL commission had never issued a recommendation for this concession. On the contrary, they had issued a negative environmental impact assessment, which was obviously bypassed by the Ministry of Forestry. Local government had never been properly informed and had never issued recommendations and thus could the KAM case be seen as a serious violation of the autonomy of the district (Anonymous 2001).

With the help of UNESCO and AMA-PM, YCM started to instruct local communities in Rereiket not to comply with the promises they were about to be offered by Unand. When KAM, with the help of a bribed local and a lecturer in anthropology familiar with Siberut, went to Rereiket in order to seek the approval of local communities there, local communities – with the lessons by YCM still fresh in mind – chased away the *sosialisasi* team (Puailiggoubat 2001). The initial plan was for the team to go around in the Rereiket area, but when confronted with the unexpectedly hostile locals they left the area immediately. However, the above mentioned bribed local originating from Saibi Samukop had been conducting some private investigations. He had found out that at least four clans in his home area were eager to hand over their lands to a logging company. With the help of several individual members of the four clans inclined to cooperate with the logging company and PT Sindo, a concessionaire holding a small IPK logging concession on

¹⁴⁶ GMM was established especially for this occasion.

Siberut's east coast, KAM started the building of a base camp and a log pond in Subelen.¹⁴⁷ The problem KAM faced consisted of the fact that their concession area was located land inwards. Logs thus had to be transported to the east coast over lands that were not included in the concession area. Permission for transportation of logs over these lands had to be obtained from those clans owning the lands and the vegetation growing on it. On a rainy day in May 2001 KAM decided to come to the field to settle things with the local communities in this area and so the local population in Saibi Muara was confronted with a helicopter landing in their village. After the helicopter had been investigating the surroundings it finally landed on the football-field in the middle of the village. Local communities were subjected to a round of *sosialisasi*, but matters were not discussed profoundly whereas after only fifteen minutes of heavy rain the classroom of the local school where the gathering took place became flooded. KAM left the field without a clear outcome of the negotiations (Puailiggoubat 2001).

An informant residing in Muara Siberut informed YCM about the helicopter coming to Siberut and YCM instigated a team to leave for Siberut in order to find out what was going on. The team gathered in Saibi Muara instructing local communities not to cooperate with KAM. The next day local communities were called to the base camp in Subelen located some 15 kilometres north of Saibi Muara, where KAM had just begun the unloading of some heavy machinery. When in the course of the day it became clear that their request to return the heavy machinery back to the mainland was not taken serious, the atmosphere became agitated. Residents from Saibi Muara got into a dispute with locals from Subelen and not long after that the base camp went up in flames (Kompas 2001). A couple of days later local communities were confronted with the police brought in from the mainland. The police was diligently searching for the *provokator* (provocative force) behind the burning of the base camp, but local communities had closed the ranks and pretended to know nothing. Some 45 youngsters from Saibi were subsequently brought to the police office in Muara Sikabalan for further interrogation, but they stuck to their initial story, telling the police that they burned the base camp together and on their own initiative (Mimbar Minang 2001a). They never mention anybody's name in particular and some decelerated the investigations even further by pretending not to speak Bahasa Indonesia. Some members of the team instigated by YCM went into hiding for a couple of weeks after the burning of the base camp. YCM's director Kortanius Sabeleake later told me that a special police force came to the office several times searching for evidence and one of their employees. The heated atmosphere slowly died away after the police was convinced that the person they were searching for was already for weeks on a fieldtrip to Kalimantan and no other evidence was to be found. Eventually no one was arrested. A week after the burning of the base camp, several NGOs in Padang decided to search for sympathisers amongst students of Unand through the organisation of a demonstration at the campus. Some dozens of scholars and students answered the call for a solidarity demonstration. Armed with pickets and banners calling for the immediate withdrawal of Unand from Siberut, they eventually forced deputy rector Dr. Ir. Musliar Kasim, KAM's

¹⁴⁷ IPK (*Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu*) is a small-scale logging permit allowing the concessionaire to extract timber and non-timber forest product from the area under concession.

Loading logs from the
KAM concession for
international transport



deputy chairman, out of his office. In a heated dialogue between Musliar Kasim and HP3M's spokesman, Marwin Siritubui, opinions of both parties were presented, but consensus was never reached. Musliar Kasim turned down the protest by announcing a meeting to take place on 2 June 2001 at Unand (Mimbar Minang 2001b). All parties with a maximum of 40 people were invited to further discuss matters. At this meeting where governor Zainal Bakar and Badril Bakar's replacement, Antonius Samongilailai were also present, Musliar Kasim doubted the representativeness of the mainly NGO people present. After all several local communities in the Saibi-Subelen area had come to terms with KAM (Tempo 2001). Moreover, interim *bupati* Antonius had in the meantime approved of the HPHA concession in his district. The opponents of the HPHA concession, infuriated by the *fait accompli* they were presented with, left the meeting in a dark mood.

During the following days various similar demonstrations in front of various provincial offices were organized. Local communities had also been called to Padang in order to attend the demonstrations. Among others they offered protest statements signed by local communities on Siberut to the governor of West Sumatra, the local as well as the provincial forestry department and their *bupati*. Although the crowds gathered were

rather impressive, both regional and provincial officials dismissed the claims made by the protesters suggesting that the majority of them were mobilized only because of the prospect of a free meal without actually knowing what they were protesting for or against.¹⁴⁸ With their numbers questioned, opponents of KAM became marginalised.

Despite ongoing protests and severe conflicts between and within local communities on Siberut, KAM started logging in September 2001. Although the HPHA concession had a duration of 25 years, KAM was active on Siberut for seven years only. As a result of internal problems, disappointing results, continuous opposition from conservation activists and especially the tremendously difficult relationship with local communities KAM withdrew from the field in 2007. Severe environmental damage was, however, done and conflicts between and within clans had long-term damaged relations within and between clans.

Building a bureaucracy

As soon as Mentawai became an independent district in 1999 a completely new bureaucracy had to be built. Parts of the Padang-Pariaman bureaucracy relating to Mentawai were, however, integrally transferred to the new district government of the archipelago, eventually to be located in Tuapeijat. Already in February 2000, 24 civil servants formerly active in the lower and middle echelons of the Padang-Pariaman bureaucracy resigned. These Minangkabau civil servants were transferred to the Mentawaian bureaucracy against their will. According to their own statement they were not willing to transfer to Mentawai. Various reactions appeared in the media. Provincial government stated that this was a shameful action, but did nothing to oblige these people to take their responsibilities. Kortanius Sabeleake spoke of a conspiracy that should lead to the failure of the new *kabupaten* because of crashing government machinery, after which it could easily be reincorporated within the Padang-Pariaman district. Kurnia Sakerebau saw proof of the fact that outsiders were not capable of governing Mentawai. According to Kurnia the vacant positions could only be filled with Mentawaians. Neither provincial government nor that of Padang-Pariaman took the responsibility to fill the positions. Whereas the DPRD Mentawai was not installed yet, the positions remained vacant for quite some time.

During the interim term of Badril Bakar, a start was made with the construction of the various governmental offices in Tuapeijat. As soon as office buildings were finished, the designated department was to transfer from the interim office in Padang to Tuapeijat. While some did transfer, others only partly transferred and again others remained to operate from the offices in Padang. Civil servants often had no idea about where they were supposed to go, often leading to empty offices. Until September 2000, when

¹⁴⁸ Organisers of protest gatherings indeed sometimes lured people into these gatherings by 'paying' them for their presence with a wrapped meal (*nasi bungkus*). This handing out of wrapped meals has led to *protes nasi bungkus* becoming an equivalent for gatherings attended by people paid for their presence but who might otherwise be oblivious of the nature or goal of the gathering itself.

administrative papers were finally transferred from Pariaman to Mentawai, there was an extremely chaotic situation. Nobody really knew which office was located where, whether or not it was active and whether or not it was staffed.

The formation of the lower administrative levels

Before the introduction of the village structure in 1979 Mentawai was part of the province of West Sumatra and the *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman. The archipelago was then divided in four *kecamatan* (sub-districts): North Siberut, South Siberut, Sipora, and the Pagai Islands. Since its independence, the Mentawai Archipelago has, like many other regions in Indonesia, been subject to a process of *pemekaran* (literally: blossoming, hinting at administrative fragmentation), re-dividing the archipelago from four *kecamatan* (sub-districts) into ten *kecamatan* nowadays (Pagai Selatan, Sikakap, Pagai Utara, Sipora Selatan, Sipora Utara, Siberut Selatan, Siberut Barat Daya, Siberut Tengah, Siberut Utara, Siberut Barat). Despite the fact that the plan for this *pemekaran* was already discussed for the first time in 2000 it was only in February 2013 that the ten *kecamatan* became official. Outsiders have been critical of this *pemekaran*, categorising it as unnecessary and too expensive for such a small, relatively sparsely populated archipelago. While basically everything else was contested in Mentawai, this *pemekaran* was an operation that was supported by the majority. Many Mentawaians saw the *pemekaran* as a development potential. The new sub-districts offered job opportunities in various sectors and were therefore introduced without causing a lot of fuss. Such was different for the proposal that was to change the lowest bureaucratic structure, that of the village.

Until 1985 a typical Minangkabau form of government, the so-called *nagari*, has been operative underneath the level of the *kecamatan*. Different from the situation in the rest of West Sumatra, every *kecamatan* in Mentawai had only one *nagari*, with only one *wali nagari* (head of the *nagari*) directly under the responsibility of the *camat* (head of the *kecamatan*). Underneath the *wali nagari* functioned the various *kepala kampung* (head of the settlement) (Persoon 1994: 227). In 1979, the Indonesian government – in an attempt to create uniformity in the abundant variety of local forms of government – issued a law on village government. For West Sumatra this meant that the *nagari* structure was abolished and transformed into a *desa* (village) structure. Where elsewhere in West Sumatra the *nagari* had to be divided in smaller units that became *desa*, in Mentawai the level of the *nagari* simply disappeared while a considerable number of smaller social units – regardless of their mutual social and historical relations – were united within one *desa*. For West Sumatra the introduction of the village law meant that a lot of traditional leaders lost their position and gradually also their credibility because their authority no longer fitted in the new context of legitimate leadership. For Mentawai it meant that various autonomous *uma* were clustered together underneath a new form of hierarchical leadership that never existed before in the egalitarian Mentawaian society.

With the introduction of regional autonomy, mainland West Sumatra felt that it should get rid of the *desa* structure as soon as possible for they felt that the imposition of the *desa*

structure had not worked well in West Sumatra because it was not in accordance with their socio-cultural system (Von Benda-Beckmann & Von Benda-Beckmann 2001). The province of West Sumatra decided to reintroduce the local government structure of the *nagari*. Mentawai feared that it, being part of the province of West Sumatra, would also become subject to this 'return to the *nagari*.' While West Sumatra waited for additional legislation from the provincial level, several Mentawai NGOs had in the meantime introduced the idea that Mentawai should have its own movement: *kembali ke laggai* (return to the *laggai*, in this context to be translated as settlement) (Eindhoven 2003).

From a land tenure system to a political structure

Provincial regulation No. 9/2000 effected a long process of negotiations about whether and how West Sumatra should reintroduce the *nagari*. In section 24 of this same legislation it was explained that the province of West Sumatra as a whole would be subject to the return to the *nagari*, except for the Mentawai Archipelago. Because of the significantly different *adat* and culture of the Mentawaians they were given the opportunity to construct their own regulations with regard to the restructuring of the local government (Von Benda-Beckmann & Von Benda-Beckmann 2001). This recommendation as it was put into words in this section 24 was one of the first times in which the different status of the Mentawaians was ventilated in neutral – that means not negative – terms and was understood as a public acknowledgement of the different though equal status of the Mentawaians within the province of West Sumatra.

Following the issuing of regulation 9/2000, an advisory team of 23 people consisting of civil servants, intellectuals, academics, and several Mentawaians was called to life. This team had to look into the wishes of the local communities and was also responsible for draft versions of legislations that would eventually lead to a return to the *laggai* (settlement). Local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM), known as the architect of the '*kembali ke laggai*' idea, facilitated five meetings with local communities in the first three months of 2001. These meetings were successively held in Sikakap (North Pagai), Sioban (Sipora), Madobak (south Siberut), Muara Siberut (south Siberut), and Muara Sikabalan (north Siberut) (Eindhoven 2003).

While the return to the *laggai* was initially considered the ultimate opportunity to differentiate the Mentawaians from the mainland Minangkabau, it soon became clear that a return to the *laggai* was not as simple as it had seen beforehand. As explained in chapter two of this thesis, settlements on the southern Mentawai Islands have a different history than settlements on Siberut. The first people to come to Siberut simply claimed a piece of land as being theirs by planting something. All members of one clan (*uma*) lived together in a settlement they called *puumaijat*. A *puumaijat* consisted of one big longhouse surrounded by gardens and various smaller constructions – everything located on the ancestral land (*porak punuteteu*) that was handed down from one generation to the next. When the population started to grow people started to disperse all over the archipelago settling on land still empty. There came an end to this process when all the land in the archipelago had an owner and there was no unoccupied land available anymore. This led to new a situation: that of people living on and making use of land

without owning it. With these new settlement patterns the word *pulaggaijat* came into use on Siberut.¹⁴⁹ *Pulaggaijat* was used to indicate an area where more than one *puumaijat* had its residencies, some owning the land, others loaning it. The *puumaijat* knew no explicit political leaders. Such was also the case in the *pulaggaijat* where people mutually respect the internal autonomy of the different *puumaijat* with which they had to live in the same area.

The word *laggai* has various meanings on Siberut. In the area around the river Saibi, the word *laggai* means as much as 'stone'. In the northern parts of Siberut *laggai* refers to testicles. Of course the advisory team caused some cheerful excitement when they tried to inform the public in Muara Sikabalan of their plan to return to the *laggai*. The word *laggai* as it was understood and used by the advisory team, originates from the southern Mentawai Islands where it was indeed used to indicate a settlement with a village-like structure where members of different clans may live together. Fact remains that the *laggai* and all derivatives thereof refer to a land tenure system that never had any political or bureaucratic powers attached to it.

After the first consultations with the public, the advisory team realised that a return to the *laggai* would not be as easy as they had expected it to be. The advisory team itself was not unanimous and therefore not clear about whether the *laggai* system should be composed on the basis of the initial stretches of ancestral land (*porak punuteteu*), or on the territory of the village. When based on the initial territory of the different *porak punuteteu*, the *sibakkat laggai* (initial settlers) would probably absorb all political power within that area. It was even feared that those people with no historical rights to the land they were living on could even be expelled from the area. In other instances initial settlers do no longer live on their ancestral lands, but still assert certain rights over these lands. This meant that, when based on the division of ancestral lands, the *laggai* could become governed by people not even present within the *laggai*.

Somewhere in the discussions about the return to the *laggai*, some people started to take the 'return' literally, promoting that all Mentawaians had to return to their initial *laggai* (i.e. their ancestral land). Despite the fact that this idea probably started as joke, a fuss broke out amongst less directly informed communities in the interiors of Siberut, depending on news stripped from details and context trickling down to their settlements. Almost unable to curb the tumult they had unleashed among the general public, the advisory team eventually decided that the *laggai* was to be based upon the territory of the *desa*. That decision solved their problems partially. Time and again the team found itself in heated debates about the terminology used. Apart from the discussion of the meaning of the word *laggai* itself, there was also disagreement about the terminology proposed for the various bureaucratic positions within the *laggai*. During *sosialisasi* (socialisation) of the third draft version (which was considered final) of the legislation on the *laggai*, many misunderstandings popped up with regard to the terminology used. After thorough

¹⁴⁹ On the southern Mentawai islands the word *pulaggaijat* refers to a deserted settlement.

change of the terminology, another draft was presented to the public in July 2002 (Puailiggoubat 2002a; SDKKM 2002a). But the terminology in this draft, however, caused even more confusion than that used in the previous one. It was then decided that the text drafted earlier in 2002 would be used in the final proposal for the return to the *laggai*. The final proposal suggested a simple hierarchical bureaucracy, based on the bureaucratic structure of the *desa*. The position of the *kepala desa* (village head) was replaced by the *sikebbukat laggai*.¹⁵⁰ The *sikebbukat laggai* was to be elected by the entire community living in the *laggai*.¹⁵¹ The *sikebbukat laggai* would be assisted by the secretary of the *laggai* (*sekretaris laggai*), the former *sekretaris desa*. The community would also be responsible for the election of the *pusaraat punutubut laggai*, a legislative assembly consisting of *kepala suku* (clan elders), comparable to the village parliament, *badan permusyawaratan desa* (BPD) or *dewan perwakilan desa* (DPD). The last component of the *laggai* consisted of a board responsible for security and order within the *laggai*, called *sipatalaga*.¹⁵² The *sipatalaga* was to be composed of *adat* specialists, authorities in the field of religion, clan elders and other organisations possibly present within the *laggai*.¹⁵³ The function of the *sipatalaga* is similar to that of the *lembaga ketahanan masyarakat desa* (LKMD), a village organisation that makes sure that the aspirations and initiatives of the villagers are heard and supported. The LKMD also cares for the rights and duties of all villagers to be guaranteed. The tasks and positions within the *laggai* are strikingly similar to that of the village. Therefore the return to the *laggai* was often understood as a process in which people only changed clothes (*ganti baju*).

Eventually *bupati* Edison, who actually never showed any real interest in the matter, decided that the return to the *laggai* was too complicated, basically impossible to explain to outsiders and triggering too much unrest and uncertainty within the archipelago.¹⁵⁴ As if the advisory team had not went to a painstaking and lengthy process that had taken them more than two years, Edison suddenly decided that there would be no such thing as a return to the *laggai*. The *desa* was to remain the *desa* and that was the end of it.

¹⁵⁰ *Sikebbukat* is understood as an elderly person. *Sikebbukat uma* is thus an elderly member of the clan (Tulius 2012). *Sikebbukat laggai* is a word probably invented by the advisory team. People on Siberut as well as on the southern Mentawai Islands were unable to give a clear understanding of whom should be indicated by this term (personal communication with Tulius 2010).

¹⁵¹ It was explicitly mentioned that *all* – that means also the newcomers – people living within the *laggai* are entitled to vote for the *sikebbukat laggai*.

¹⁵² In difficult disputes over land, Mentawaians often seek for an independent third party, a facilitator (*sipatalaga*). The *sipatalaga* is responsible for the transmission of claims and defences among all parties involved until a solution is found. The *sipatalaga* has no decisive power (Tulius 2012).

¹⁵³ In this context one could think of local organisations or *kelompok pemuda* (semi-organised groups of young people).

¹⁵⁴ Local NGOs more than once discredited the *bupati* as well as the DPRD for the fact that they showed little to no interest in the return to the *laggai*.

Conclusion

The lobby for a political and bureaucratic independent archipelago had already started during the late 1990s. This call for separation came from a relatively small group of educated, ethnically conscious and politically engaged Mentawaians who were furthermore displeased about the exploitation of the Mentawai Archipelago by outsiders. The lobby for more involvement in local politics and bureaucracy concentrated on officials at the national level as well as at the provincial level. The fact that Mentawai, as a result of an unexpected effect of the decentralisation processes that were introduced after the fall of the *Orde Baru* regime, was granted independency so early in the era of *Reformasi*, probably had everything to do with the intensive lobby that preceded it.

The interim period that followed was characterised by intrigues and political scheming. While the province was responsible for the transition to self-government of the newly carved out *kabupaten*, the governor himself was not particularly inclined to contribute to a smooth transitory period. The Mentawaians earlier involved in the lobby for independency were disappointed about the developments taking place. Especially the appointment of the two consecutive interim *bupati* was a thorn in their eye. Their protests and persistent demand for a *putra asli daerah* made it fairly impossible for the interim *bupati* to actually perform the tasks the governor had charged them with. Namely the establishment of the local parliament (DPRD). Political parties continuously questioned the candidate list and legislation about the process as well as the question of whom actually being responsible for what remained unclear. Party interests and the personal interests of the governor seemed to play an important role in the delay of the establishment of the DPRD.

Whereas it took so long for the DPRD to be established and inaugurated, their main task, the election of a *bupati* also suffered from delay. Apart from the delay, the election process itself was also lengthy and characterised by party politics, personal interests, bribery and ethnic as well as religious favouritism. During all this politicking a questionable HPHA logging concession was issued for Siberut. This concession in the hands of the Padang-based university Andalas became operative in September 2001 caused severe environmental and social damage.

Common people were not part of all this politicking that mainly took place in Padang. The fact that they were not part of the political process did, however, not mean that common people were not affected by it. Because it took the people responsible such a long time to establish the DPRD and to elect a *bupati*, the establishment of the public administration came to a standstill. While former bureaucrats (many of them Minangkabau) refused to physically transfer to Mentawai and their replacements were not appointed yet, the local bureaucracy was basically non-existent during the first few years of regional autonomy in Mentawai. Despite the fact that a start was made with the construction of governmental buildings and offices in Tuapeijat, these offices remained empty until Edison finally started the application procedures for jobs within the civil service. Here again, no one seemed inclined to take responsibility for the correct handling of the procedures.

While higher levels of politics and governance were not established yet, the fear of being incorporated within the mainland 'return to the *nagari*' movement triggered a local demand for a 'return to the *laggai*'. Whereas the elite mainly busied itself with the orchestration of the political realm at the level of the *kabupaten*, they showed little interest in this proposal for the organisation of the lower levels of administration (e.g. the *kecamatan* (sub-district) and the village). The possible 'return to the *laggai*' caused a lot of social unrest and simultaneously caused the elite to be suspected of disinterest for the aspirations of the people.

These developments, together with the fact that common people had never been part of the lobby for independence and the politicking that ensued after regional autonomy had been introduced, certainly widened the already existing gap between the local elite and the common Mentawaian.



PENCANTAN KASIMAE
POTRET
MUSARA KASIMAE
PENERJAN
LOKASI
MUSARA KASIMAE
WAKTU PENERJAN
PELAKSANA
KONSULTAS PENERJAN



SATOKO
Mentawai
(SIBERUT SELATAN, SIBERUT BARAT DAYA)



6 Self Government and Development

'Membangun Mentawai sudah cukup susah. Seperti memasang baju sambil berlari. Apa lagi bupati dan juga DPRD Mentawai mendahulukan memasang pakaian yang kurang penting. Ibaratnya, mendahulukan memasang jam tangan dan sepatu, sementara celana dan baju masih di gantungan pakaian!' (Puailiggoubat 25/6)

'The development of Mentawai is already difficult enough. It is like getting dressed while running around. And now the *bupati* and DPRD of Mentawai are putting on least important clothes first. Imagine, putting on your watch and shoes while your trousers and shirt are still on the hanger!' (my translation)

Introduction

As soon as Edison Saleleubaja and Aztarmizi were installed respectively as *bupati* and vice *bupati* on 14 November 2001, a new phase in the government and development of the Mentawai Archipelago started. Now that all interim government was done away with and a Christian Mentawaian had taken the position of *bupati*, a hectic period of political uncertainty came to an end. There was a general feeling that one could finally start working on the sound development of the archipelago, not disturbed by compromising outsider agendas and subsequent interventions. Despite this optimistic view on the future, people were also anxious about the course this new government would take. After 1999 a form of development based on the aspirations of the people, taking into account Mentawaian identity became aspired. Development was supposed to lead the Mentawai Archipelago out of all previously experienced difficulties and turn the archipelago and its inhabitants into a firm unity. While this rhetoric was omnipresent, no one could actually make explicit what were exactly the aspirations of the people and what Mentawaian identity actually consisted of and which parts of that identity should be preserved and promoted and how this should be done. Previous mismanagement was mainly sought in the ill development schemes of the mainland oriented government and the incomplete implementation of these development schemes. The culture of corrupt project implementation had to be broken and left behind. People agreed that a fall back into old habits (corruption) and *Orde Baru* practices had to be avoided at all costs. So far, the interim leaders had mainly focussed on the development of Tuapeijat where had been little to no facilities whatsoever when this simple fishing village was appointed

as the archipelago's new administrative and political centre. The focus on Tuapeijat concerned people about the development of the rest of the Archipelago. In general people were impatient and dissatisfied about the way the interim leaders had handled regional autonomy. Therefore expectations of the new leaders were high. All hope was on the new executive powers and the DPRD that was thought to be able to work together with the new *bupati* more constructively than with the interim predecessors who were believed to serve the personal interests of the governor of West Sumatra rather than the collective development interests of the Mentawai Archipelago. The lingering threat of being reincorporated with Padang-Pariaman in case of disappointing progress added even more pressure on the new leaders to come with sound development plans on short notice.

This chapter tells about how the new leaders installed in November 2001 have handled the government and development of the Mentawai Archipelago during their first term. In this chapter I describe how the new leaders have translated their political vision and mission into bureaucratic, physical and economic development and how they have handled their new responsibility over financial matters. The final part of this chapter tells about how the new *kabupaten* prepared for the 2004 and the 2005 elections and of how these elections have influenced the governing as well as the development of the Mentawai Archipelago.

Whereas I have been in the field throughout 2002-2003 and a large part of 2004, data for this chapter was almost solely gathered by me by means of participative observation and interviewing. Secondary sources such as newspaper articles, mainly from Puailiggoubat, are used where they add valuable information and contribute to a better understanding of the issues at hand.

Political vision and mission

During *Orde Baru*, development gained an almost sacred meaning throughout Indonesia. For the Mentawaians development simultaneously meant to let go of large parts of their identity which was perceived as unworthy to participate in the modern nation state. The trauma of the forced loss of identity was softened when the Mentawai Archipelago became an independent *kabupaten*. Almost instantly after independence the Mentawai Islands and the Mentawaians were no longer seen as primitive. The islands and their inhabitants then became appreciated for their natural, economic and cultural potential (Singgalang 2000a). The independence of the archipelago thus triggered a new dimension in the discourse about development and identity. Instead of being judged as backward and stupid, Mentawaian culture and identity became valued as a perspective from which development could also be brought about. Over 30 years of governmental development policies and investments had left Mentawaian society with basically nothing. Future investments within whatever sector in Mentawai should thus put the interest of the Mentawaian communities first, rather than fooling (*memperbodahkan*) and deceiving (*menipu*) them as has been the case during the *Orde Baru* regime. In order to prevent hollow development that would in all probability eventually lead to a relapse and popular

resurrection, the new leaders were requested to spur a kind of development that would empower society. While his rhetoric was challenging and appealing, ideas about the practical interpretation of his vision lacked.

In October 2001, Edison and Aztarmizi presented their first strategic management plan for the region for the period 2002-2006. In this draft *Peraturan Daerah Rencana Strategis (Perda Renstra)*, Edison and Aztarmizi stated that by the end of their term in 2006 the Mentawai Archipelago would be developed to such an extent that Mentawai would be a prosperous (*sejahtera*) and independent (*mandiri*) society.¹⁵⁵ In order to relieve the Mentawai people from their 'backwardness' (*keterbelakangan*) and 'isolation' (*terisoliran*), Edison and Aztarmizi wished to speed up both social and economic development, improve public services and strengthen the resilience of the people.¹⁵⁶ In a twelve-step roadmap Edison and Aztarmizi presented their plan of action: 1) improvement of human resources by education, 2) strengthening of the local economy, 3) optimisation of the use of human resources, 4) enhancement of the local public finances by enlarging local income, 5) improving primary civil services, 6) embodiment of an autonomous, democratic, competent and mandated government, 7) improvement of the governmental means, 8) establishment of legislation especially in the field of foreign investment, 9) entering into relationships with both local as well as overseas partners in order to stimulate free trade, 10) supporting economic activities, enabling people to compete on the market, 11) promote the welfare of the people in the fields of education healthcare, food and clothing, and 12) encourage the participation of the people in various sectors of society in order to speed up the development of the archipelago (Puailiggoubat 2001a). From these twelve points it was obvious that the economic development of the archipelago was of the highest priority to Edison and Aztarmizi. However, the twelve points above all explain what kind of development they wanted to accomplish, but said nothing about how they planned to go about in order to reach these goals. An accurate and detailed administrative agenda was missing and so Edison and Aztarmizi stepped aboard a ship with a potentially wonderful destination, but no compass to sail by. In an earlier interview, in which Edison was critical about the working method of the interim government, he stated that a lay-out (*tata ruang*) for development should not be based on the interests of the government, but be created in collaboration with the people in order for it to be based on the aspirations, wishes and needs of society.¹⁵⁷ He furthermore said that development should be carefully planned, thoughtfully handled and development activities should address and include society so that the people would consider themselves owners of that development. Despite these earlier expressed good intentions, the twelve-step vision and mission statement contained little opportunity for consultation

¹⁵⁵ The Perda Renstra is a five year planning in which the vision, mission, goals, strategies, programmes and activities of the local government are written down.

¹⁵⁶ The use of the words *keterbelakangan* and *terisoliran* is remarkable, because this is vocabulary used in the much detested development and civilisation schemes of the post-colonial *Orde Baru* government.

¹⁵⁷ Edison was especially critical about the physical development projects in Tuaepeijat and the, what he called 'misuse of project money' attached to these projects. According to Edison, development was much more than the implementation of infrastructural projects only.

with the people and simultaneously lacked practical steps through which society was to be incorporated within the development plans.

The 2001 *Perda Renstra* was allegedly never endorsed by the DPRD. This was, however, only noticed by the beginning of 2003 when Edison had to submit a report on the 2002 budget. A local NGO, LBH Umanta, assumed that the 2002 budget report had not been drawn up in consultation with the *Perda Renstra*. Things got a bit weird when Edison was asked for a clarification for this irregularity by a member of the DPRD, Yudas Sabaggalet. Edison claimed that he had just presented the *Perda Renstra* to the DPRD in February 2003, suggesting that there had never been an earlier version of the *Perda Renstra* and that the 2002 budget report could therefore not possibly been drawn up in consultation with whatever *Perda Renstra*.

Bureaucratic development

Regional autonomy in the Mentawai Archipelago had, apart from a take over of local government, also led to a take over of the local bureaucracy. Being a part of *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman, the Mentawaian administration had always been located on the Sumatran mainland with offices in both Padang and Pariaman. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*, people were keen on transferring the entire administration to the islands. This led to an enormous expansion of local bureaucracy. Whereas there was basically no bureaucratic infrastructure whatsoever on the Mentawai Islands, the whole system had to be built up from scratch. The next sections explain about the plans to expand from four to ten *kecamatan* (sub-districts), the establishment of the various *dinas* (departments) and the hiring of new staff in the civil service (*pegawai negeri*).

Kecamatan

Initially there were plans to redivide the four *kecamatan* (sub-districts) the Mentawai Archipelago consisted of, in eight new *kecamatan*. This redivision was believed to lead to a swift development, especially of the more remote areas of the archipelago. The status of *kecamatan* would call for the need to develop a sub-district centre where roads, harbours, governmental offices and a variety of public facilities has to be made available. Edison, however, decided that the expansion in *kecamatan* was to be elaborated upon in 2003 only. Edison was not necessarily against *pemekaran daerah* (expansion of the local bureaucracy), but he saw, certainly not unjustified, a shortage in labour potential and quite a considerable claim on the annual budget. Edison chose to focus on other issues first. But despite this decision, a governmental research team started to look into the issue. This resulted in the DPRD presenting a local regulation draft (*rancangan peraturan daerah – ranperda*) already in November 2002. This *ranperda* recommended a redivision the archipelago not in eight but in ten new *kecamatan*. Siberut was to be redivided from two into five *kecamatan*.¹⁵⁸ Sipora was recommended to be redivided

¹⁵⁸ Siberut Barat, Siberut Utara, Siberut Barat Daya, Siberut Tengah and Siberut Selatan.

Head of sub-district (camat) office in Saibi Muara, Siberut



from one into two *kecamatan*.¹⁵⁹ And the Pagai Islands were planned to be redivided from one into no less than three *kecamatan*.¹⁶⁰ The *ranperda* explained the borders of new *kecamatan* and the location of the sub district centres. The *ranperda*, however, did not give a definitive answer as to when the new *kecamatan* would become definitive. As soon as the news about the redivision came out in the open, people started questioning and even protesting the plans. For reasons explained above, basically everyone wanted their village to become the sub-district's centre. If such was not included in the plans, people rejected the redivision of the *kecamatan* altogether. Villagers in Bojakan protested their inclusion in Siberut Barat, writing protest letters to Edison, because for them the planned subdistrict centre (Simalegi/Betaet) was considered too far from the village of Bojakan. People were obviously in fear of missing out of the expected development. Moreover so for people living in villages on the borders of the *kecamatan* of Siberut Barat because the plans showed that this *kecamatan* was projected over large parts of the Siberut National Park (*Taman Nasional Siberut* – TNS). People were convinced of the fact that no income generating development was to be expected from the national park and people were thus not eager to become included in Siberut Barat. Finally there were protests against the redivision of the Pagai Islands. Especially the relatively small *kecamatan* of Sikakap was questioned. People feared that a disproportionate part of the development budget would be allocated for Sikakap, pushing development there further than in other parts of the archipelago. Edison remained reserved with regard to this *pemekaran daerah* (local bureaucratic expansion) and refused to sign the *ranperda* to be implemented. This led to friction between Edison and the DPRD and even to a personal conflict between Edison and his nephew and long term companion within Yayasan Kondisi, Yonlifran Siritoitet, then member of the DPRD and head of Commission A occupied with governmental issues. Despite the fact that Edison did not sign the *ranperda*, the DPRD decided to send a *Tim Sosialisasi Pemekaran Kecamatan* to the villages in order to instruct the people about

¹⁵⁹ Sipora Utara and Sipora Selatan.

¹⁶⁰ Pagai Utara, Sikakap and Pagai Selatan.

the new sub-districts. This stalemate between Edison and the DPRD complicated matters severely. People became disoriented because of the official information they received from the socialisation team on the one hand and the total lack of implementation of the intentions on the other hand. Matters kept on lingering until the new sub-districts were eventually officialised during the final days of Edison as *bupati* in 2010.

Dinas

Despite the fact that both Edison's predecessors had been responsible for the set up of a new bureaucratic system and the transfer of the Mentawaian administration from Padang-Pariaman to Tuapeijat, not much had been realised in this field the moment Edison became *bupati*. So one of the first things that Edison took up was the setting up of a new bureaucratic structure. In January 2002 Edison came with a draft *Struktur Organisasi dan Tata Kerja* – SOTK (Organisation Structure and Working Procedures) and the promise that all departments were supposed to have moved from Padang to Tuapeijat by March 2002. Edison deliberately chose to set up only eight departments and five offices.¹⁶¹ Edison wanted the departments and offices to be small in both number as well as in size in order not to weigh too heavy on the annual budget. Edison was furthermore of the opinion that Mentawai lacked sufficient *sumber daya manusia* (human resources) capable of efficiently staffing the departments and offices.

Despite the economical design of the local bureaucracy by Edison, negative comments were all over him. Some said the proposed structure was too heavy and inefficient. Others claimed the proposed structure too lean and ill-considered. By keeping the bureaucratic structure as lean as possible, Edison attempted to keep the number of civil servants needed to staff the various departments and offices in pace with the human resources available in Mentawai. Notwithstanding his good intentions, Edison, because of this approach, became accused of begrudging his fellow Mentawaians the job opportunities ensuing from the new bureaucratic structure. This accusation became a reality to many when Edison, forced by the lack of sufficiently educated Mentawaians and in accordance with national laws and regulations about echeloning, awarded certain key positions within the new bureaucracy to non-Mentawaian outsiders. The fact that Edison merged transportation and tourism with art and culture in one department triggered negative comments. Tourism was believed to be better off forming its own department because of the income generating potential of the surfing industry. The locally generated income (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah* – PAD) that could possibly be generated from the surfing industry was believed to be so big that a separate department for tourism only would be desirable in order to effectively organise this source of local income. It was especially local NGO, YCM claiming that the department of public works and environment should be divided in two different departments. The merging of these two topics in one department would, according to YCM, certainly lead to further unsustainable exploitation of Mentawai's natural resources, because they considered the pressure on Edison to generate PAD, too

¹⁶¹ These departments were: 1) public works and environment, 2) health, 3) education, 4) transportation, tourism, art and culture, 5) marine matters and fisheries, 6) forestry and plantations, 7) agriculture and live stock, 8) cooperations, industry and trade.

big to also reckon with the degradation of the natural environment (e.g. floodings, beach abrasion and the destruction of coral reefs) resulting from unsustainable use of that environment (Puailiggoubat 2002c). In an interview with Puailiggoubat, Edison claimed that he had not merged public works with environment, but with infrastructure. This news was considered even more worrisome because, if true, it would imply that Edison had not included the care for the environment in the draft SOTK altogether. Edison suggested that Puailiggoubat probably received a copy of an earlier draft and promised to provide Puailiggoubat with the latest draft version of the SOTK. Unfortunately Edison failed to send Puailiggoubat this copy after which YCM and Puailiggoubat decided to publish the draft version of the SOTK they claimed to have received from the DPRD and which probably suited them best. After that the public was never informed again about the proper version of the draft SOTK; at least not by Puailiggoubat.

Only in February 2003 Edison presented a rewritten SOTK to the DPRD. In this meeting only 13 of the 20 DPRD members were present. The other members were simply absent without notice. Despite the fact that only two-thirds of the DPRD members were present during this meeting and the fact that Edison missed out on new national regulations with regard to echeloning effective since the beginning of 2003, the DPRD approved of this SOTK after two changes were made. Whereas the proposed bureaucratic structure was considered too heavy by the PDI-P fraction and Yudas Sabaggalet in particular, the number of departments was reduced from ten to nine and the number of offices from nine to eight. In the final draft the Department of Public Works and Environment is replaced by that of Infrastructure. As was already feared by YCM in an earlier stage, the environment disappeared from the political agenda altogether. The Department of Transportation became an independent department apart from tourism, art and culture. Remarkable was the addition of mining to the former Department of Industry and Trade as to my knowledge there are no mining activities in Mentawai.

Together with the approved SOTK, the various departments and offices, some of which were still operating from Padang, could now finally transfer to Tuapeijat permanently.

DPRD

Right after the inauguration of Edison in late 2001, local parliament, quite like the local government, was still operating from Padang. Unwilling to move to Tuapeijat where facilities and residencies were still under construction, members of the DPRD lingered around in Padang and were thus almost never present in Mentawai. The people persistently criticised this absence of their government in Mentawai. In the beginning of 2002, youth and student organisation *Forum Pemuda* (FORPEM) suggested the DPRD to step down from power if its members would continue their aimless hanging around in Padang. Members of the DPRD were furthermore accused of staying over in expensive hotels in the company of paid women, spending too much time on the establishment of all kinds of personal businesses and unnecessary prolonged stays in their home villages under the guise of a work assignment. A member of the DPRD Sumatra Barat suggested that members of the local parliament in Mentawai had probably understood their seating within that parliament as an opportunity to improve their personal fate rather than that of

their constituencies. He furthermore stated that one should not only vote for parliament, but that both the people and local NGOs should keep the elected members accountable.

But despite the critical voices from the community and various local NGOs, local parliament remained in Padang, busying themselves mainly with *studi banding* (literally: comparative studies; field trips to other regions in Indonesia and even abroad (Malaysia, Europe, Australia) in order to exchange information and ideas with regard to business, industry and investment). The DPRD simply ignored the comments from both the community and the NGOs alike. The influence of local NGOs, whatever influential power local NGOs might have had in the past, was eroded by the drain of their staff. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*, local people including NGO staff en masse applied for a paid position within that new bureaucratic structure. Criticising your potential future employer, who by chance was also your uncle, brother or nephew, did not seem to be a clever career move. In general NGO staff was thus holding back its potentially critical comments if they had any to begin with.

However, in February 2003, right after Edison presented the revised SOTK, Bakri Tasirebbeb, chairman of Islamic Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3), came with a statement in which he accused the local government of sukuism (the designation of members of one's own clan as more important than members of other clans), the prioritising of Christian Mentawaians over Islamic Mentawaians and money politics. Signed by eleven other local organisations affiliated with BM3, the statement required the complete government to step down from power because of the immense mess they had made. Never present in Mentawai, almost never attending office and not willing to give openness about their salaries and additional payments, the members of parliament in particular were targeted by Bakri's statement (Puailigoubbat 18/11).

Whether or not Bakri's statement had any influence on the course of events, Edison inaugurated the new DPRD office (the old one being burned down while still under construction in 2001) in Tuapeijat in March 2003.

The civil service

The former authorities from the mainland, almost never physically present in Mentawai, were believed to have handled Mentawai as an income generating part of the mainland *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman only. The kind of development they had tried to implement in Mentawai was considered invasive, destructive, outsider-driven and therefore unsuccessful. The general conviction was that development in the Mentawai Archipelago would take a flight as soon as Mentawaians would form the majority within the local bureaucracy. People were thus keen on replacing everyone of non-Mentawaiian origin working within the bureaucratic system with *putra asli daerah* (literally: 'native sons of the area/region' e.g. Mentawaians). *Putri asli daerah* were considered more knowledgeable with regard to local customs and mentality and moreover more committed to the Mentawaiian *casus*. Locals were believed to be present on a more permanent basis and not linger around in Padang because they were believed not to have any pursuits there. It was therefore believed that the replacement of ill-performing outsiders with *putra asli daerah*

would empower the people and lead to a successful form of development supported and carried out by concerned Mentawaians themselves. The general conviction was that the take over and the simultaneous expansion of the bureaucratic system would bring development at fast pace and create employment opportunities for the locals.

Who is considered *putra asli daerah*, is, however, a matter of perspective. For many local communities, notions of belonging (to clan and/or to land) – rather than ethnicity – lie at the heart of their daily experienced identity. Whereas *putra asli daerah* foremost refers to the Mentawai identity relative to the identity of outsiders such as the Minangkabau and the Batak, the term *putra asli setempat* (literally: ‘native sons of the same place’) became fashionable to indicate individuals who somehow belong to a common place, usually with a reference to land. Bureaucratic positions at village or sub-district level were preferably given to *putra asli setempat*. The position of village head for instance was preferable fulfilled by someone born in and living in that village.

The general lack of paid labour in Mentawai made the paid position of civil servant a much wanted position. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten* basically everyone wanted to apply for a position within the local bureaucracy to be established. Especially young people applied for the various positions that became available within the local bureaucracy. In the first round of applications in October 2001, 7800 applications were submitted for only 137 positions available (Pualigoubat 2001c). This number of applications was quite remarkable. Moreover so because of the high percentage of young people applying. Young Mentawaians, especially those who studied on the mainland and therefore learned to understand Mentawai as *tanah tepi* (marginalised territory), were believed not to be too fond of returning to Mentawai. Edison suggested that the extreme number of applications was part of a mainland conspiracy to detonate the local bureaucracy even before it was given the opportunity to rise to full maturity. Vice governor, Faichri Ahmad, reprimanded Edison for these comments and accused Edison on his turn of not being fully aware of how urgent the search for paid labour amongst young Mentawaians was (Pualigoubat 2001c).

Weeks of testing and interviewing were needed to select suitable applicants. Out of the 7800 applications, 450 applicants passed the tests and out of these 450 candidates, 246 passed the job interview. Whereas 137 positions were available, 109 people who passed both the tests and the interview could not be hired. At a later stage in March 2001, another 150 people were hired, but this round of applications was never communicated to the public and was not preceded by tests and interviews. So even if the 109 candidates successful in the first of applications were hired, 41 persons hired in the second round were never tested nor interviewed. On the list of candidates hired in the first round were 8 names of people who were interviewed despite the fact that they had not passed the previous tests. Something which was supposedly impossible if the correct procedures would have been followed. Furthermore, both Badril Bakar and Antonius Samongilailai had at an earlier stage promised that 60 people above the age of 40 would, due to their earlier work performance, be given priority when applying for a position within the civil service. But Edison never considered these promises.



Office of the bupati in Tuapeijat over the years

Despite the overwhelming number of people applying for a job in the civil service, it was difficult to fill the positions at the higher echelons. Most Mentawaians missed the proper education and experience for these positions as a result of which these positions were given to more suitable candidates of non-Mentawaiian origin. Many disapproved of this development for reasons explained above.

Complaints about the procedures addressed to the local government were handled with the claim that all procedures had been completed in accordance with the legislations at hand. Various members of the DPRD distanced themselves from responsibility, stating that they held office for only a very short period of time and that they were therefore not yet familiar with the procedures and the corresponding legislation. Edison, responsible for the application procedures, became discredited because of the intransparent course of events and was accused of working in collusion with influential friends in both Padang and Jakarta. A thought that became as good as a reality when two anonymous letters of complaint sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Jakarta were never answered.¹⁶²

Physical development and public facilities

Development was one of the biggest expectancies of regional autonomy. The development of public facilities and services formed the most visible, most tangible form of development. The Mentawai Archipelago had been lacking public facilities and services of quality for such a long time, that people were more than ready to welcome these facilities and services in their villages. In order to meet the public, a headstart was made with the development of infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges, harbours, government buildings, offices, school buildings, healthcare facilities, police stations and indoor marketplaces. Whereas both public facilities and facilities to shelter the local government and the bureaucratic system had been basically absent within Mentawai, the construction of all these facilities had to be set up from scratch. New *kabupaten* received an annual budget (*dana alokasi umum* – DAU) from Jakarta in order to carry out activities needed for their physical development. Local governments were thus given the time and the means to develop the local infrastructure needed for their government and bureaucratic system. With over 32 billion Rupiah, nearly half of the 2001 annual budget, allocated for the physical development of the archipelago, one could have expected swift results (Puailiggoubat 2002e).

In the wake of the annual development budget countless local contractor companies and cooperatives ensued in the hope to get a share of these allocated finances. Unhindered by any knowledge about constructing, but blinded by the chance to grab a piece of the governmental budget for physical development, many founded their own contractor company or cooperative. Quite like the establishment of post box NGOs, booming during the late 1980s and the 1990s, the founding of paper companies and partnerships became

¹⁶² One of these letters in the hands of Puailiggoubat and the other in the hands of BM3, suggesting that these two parties were also the authors of these letters.

fashionable very quickly after 2000. Thereafter most of the construction projects were assigned directly to construction contractors through intransparent procedures. Despite the fact that tender procedures were obligatory for projects with a budget exceeding one billion Rupiah, public procurements were often awarded to befriended individuals regardless of whether or not these people had any knowledge about constructing (Pualiggoubat 2001b).

In many instances land had to be cleared first and therefore construction sites were often under logging concessions before actual construction could begin. These relatively small timber utilisation permits, *Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu* – IPK, were issued by the *bupati* himself.¹⁶³ Therefore anyone on good terms with the *bupati* could obtain himself an IPK logging concession. In December 2003, Pualiggoubat reported a whopping 86 cooperatives registered for all four Mentawai districts.¹⁶⁴ No less than 81 of these cooperatives were in the market for the IPK logging concessions. The remaining five were established with other goals (mainly agricultural in nature) in mind. After a construction site was cleared from timber it often remained barren for quite some time. This had everything to do with the fact that construction projects were often assigned to companies with nominal or even zero assets with regard to construction and were thus resold to other companies. In this manner projects were sometimes resold several times before they finally ended up with a company that actually started constructing something. During all these transactions project budgets were skimmed to such an extent that the company finally executing the project was left with only a fraction of the initial budget. This led to the use of inferior and insufficient materials and apparently finalised projects of shockingly poor quality. The road constructed in Sioban for instance, was handed over in such a miserable state that the whole project had to be redone. Instead of purchasing construction materials from the mainland, the contractor bought beach sand and coral stone from the locals. Apart from the fact that these materials are less suitable as construction materials, their extraction caused considerable damage to the coastal environment. When asked for accountability, actually nobody really knew who was to be held responsible for which project. Construction sites gave no information whatsoever about the parties responsible for the project at hand. Government officials responsible for the assigning of the projects were either untraceable themselves or unable to account for the projects they had signed for. After his inauguration, Edison was not only expected to further and expand the physical development of the archipelago, but also to upgrade the quality of the already existing projects and to restrain the corrupt and collusive practices surrounding the projects. The *asal jadi* (as long as it happens) mentality with which many projects were finalised annoyed the public and triggered a call for more strict regulations and monitoring. Edison, inclined to put all public procurements under tender procedures, established a set of new rules and regulations. Starting in 2002, all project budgets exceeding 50 million Rupiah could only be obtained through a tender procedure. Poorly performing companies were blacklisted and excluded from future tender procedures. But despite

¹⁶³ IPK concessions were issued by the *bupati* until 2005 when the central government withdrew that power from the district heads because of misconduct.

¹⁶⁴ 47 cooperatives were registered for North and South Pagai (PUS), 27 for Siberut and 17 for Sipora.

Edison's measures and new regulations improvements were only nominal and the general public remained dissatisfied about the level and quality of the physical development of their archipelago. After the new DPRD was installed in August 2004, its members again made an inventarisation of the projects still in progress. The results of their inquiry were striking. Neither of the projects visited met the requirements, quality, budget nor the time span allocated beforehand. The majority of the projects was delivered too late, delivered partially and generally of poor quality. Basically all projects had problems with the payment of compensation for the land on which the project was executed, the payment of salaries or per diems and locals obstructing the implementation of the project because they somehow felt not sufficiently accounted for.

In the next sections I discuss the development of Tuapeijat, village development in general and the development of infrastructure, transportation, education and the healthcare system. With Tuapeijat being the new bureaucratic and governmental center of the archipelago, development efforts were most comprehensive in this village. Such was different in other villages where different work methods and different money sources were used to establish development. I have chosen to also elaborate on the development of infrastructure, transportation, education and healthcare, because these sectors of society have historically been sectors that proved difficult to develop. Expectancies were also highest for these sectors, because people believed that their perceived backwardness had everything to do with the lacking behind of the development of these sectors.

The development of Tuapeijat

Edison's predecessors had focussed mainly on the development of Tuapeijat, building offices, residencies and infrastructure meant for the local government that actually should have moved to Tuapeijat already. But despite the excessive focus on Tuapeijat – something people were displeased about because they saw development in their own villages lacking behind – constructions were far from finished by the end of 2001. While the focus was foremost on the development of infrastructure and transportation, the development of public facilities in the form of running water, electricity and telecommunications was forgotten. This approach had led to newly built government buildings, offices and residencies with no running water and no electricity, located in the middle of recently cleared land with no proper roads to reach these facilities.

In Tuapeijat, the nearest water source was at a distance of twelve kilometres from the center of the village. The newly built government buildings and residencies have remained without running water and sanitation facilities until 2003. A heavily subsidised company then managed to extract water from the source at twelve kilometres and transport it to the village. Until that time residents had to buy water at 1500 Rupiah for a 20 liters jerrycan.

Only in July 2002, Tuapeijat had 24/7 electricity supply, generated by the Indonesian national electricity company, Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN). PLN had long been reluctant in coming to Mentawai, because they feared never to be able to work cost-effective in Mentawai.

In January 2003 the telecommunication company Telkom Indonesia, made a start with the construction of a telephone network in Tuapeijat. Telkom used wooden instead of steel poles to hang up the wiring. Even before the final pole was placed, the first already began to rot, endangering the whole network. Locals went furious and demanded Telkom to replace all wooden poles with steel ones. This of course caused considerable delay in the delivery of the network. In August 2004, a subsidiary of Telkom, Telkomsel made a start with the introduction of a mobile telephone network. An internetconnection came later and only for Tuapeijat. Only in the course of 2018 Telkom came with a plan to install a fiber optic cable to improve the quality of the internetconnection in Tuapeijat and to eventually also connect the other islands to the internet.

All this certainly discouraged people within the local government, DPRD and civil service to actually move to Tuapeijat. Because of the fact that both staff and government officials were still not present in Mentawai, but still operating from Padang and Pariaman, public procurements were barely supervised. In this manner a vicious circle had ensued: offices not yet finished meant staff and officials could not move, absent officials meant no supervision as a result of which offices were not finished, finished with considerable delay and/or handed over in uninhabitable state. Probably one of the most disappointing projects was probably the construction of the main road in Tuapeijat. Even by the end of 2004, this road was still not finished.

Village development

Apart from the development of the bureaucratic and governmental centre of Tuapeijat, people expected public facilities and services in their villages also. But village development went slow. Village heads had to send in project applications and then had to wait for the approval and the finances to trickle down from Tuapeijat. Whereas affairs in Tuapeijat were far from in order, villages had to wait for the approval of their applications quite long. As soon as funds became available, many villages made a head start with the paving of roads within the village. Already existing paths and trails were paved with a cement top layer. Whereas most of the paving came to a halt just outside the village, a curious situation ensued where people were able to ride their bike or motorcycle to the local store or the church within the village, but not to their gardens or to the neighbouring villages because connecting roads were still non-existent.

In the main harbour villages and those villages indicated as future sub-district centres expectations with regard to development were high. In many cases, however, the construction of government buildings, offices, school buildings and healthcare facilities met with serious obstructions and delay due to the fact that local communities proved reluctant in the negotiations over construction sites and related finances. In general people were reluctant to make land available for the construction of governmental projects. Conflicts between different clans living in the same area and conflicts between members of the same clan with different ideas became everyday's business. There were situations in which one clan, claiming to be the owner of the land under discussion, had come to an appointment with the local government over terms and payments, soon after which another clan claimed the land to be theirs. All these uncertainties again put serious delay on the projects at hand.

The lack of ownership and the absence of monitoring of these projects led, as explained above, to infrastructure of poor quality and fairly uninhabitable buildings.

The Rural Infrastructure Development Project (*Proyek Pengembangan Prasarana Pedesaan* – P2D) financed many smaller projects on village level. P2D started only in 2001 and was funded by a loan from the Japanese government. P2D consisted of three categories of projects eligible for financing: 1) construction of roads and bridges, 2) projects supportive of the local economy such as irrigation, 3) clean water, sanitation and projects supporting a healthy environment such as organised garbage disposal. Local Community Organisations (*Organisasi Masyarakat Setempat* – OMS) could prescribe for funds from P2D in order to finance their local projects. Projects were mainly implemented by local contractors or by the OMS themselves. This last option, attached to the fact that the quality of the projects delivered by OMS was often very poor, is also the reason why the OMS were jokingly referred to as *organisasi main sendiri* (play by yourself organisations). When Edison made up the balance in early 2002, many of the P2D projects appeared abandoned or had not entered the fase of implementation altogether. A local contractor in Matotonan was reported to the police for the misappropriation of 102 million Rupiah meant for a P2D project in that village. He had boldly transferred the total budget for the project to his private bank account, while project activities had never started (Puailigoubat 2002f). The DPRD then forced contractors to finish the projects they had signed for and obliged them to report to the *camat* (head of the subdistrict) and the head of the village in which they were working. Later in 2002, all unfinished P2D projects were discontinued.

Early during regional autonomy, village development focussed mainly on the construction of infrastructure, government buildings, offices, school buildings and healthcare facilities. Only later attention was also paid to the development of services such as running water, sanitation, electricity and communication. Apart from Tuapeijat, PLN also supplied the village of Muara Siberut with 24/7 electricity from January 2003 onwards. The village of Muara Saibi (district centre for Siberut Tengah), for instance, only received electricity in early 2017. The fact that villages like Muara Saibi received electricity at such a late stage had its repercussions. Not only did people feel disappointed and forgotten by their government, it also affected their chances to develop and move forward. Change did not come as fast as they had hoped for and many, especially the younger people, therefore left the villages in the hinterlands to seek their fortune elsewhere.

Infrastructure and transportation

One of the most notable developments was the construction of roads throughout the islands. In many cases local materials like sand, coral stone and corralite were extracted from local beaches and coral reefs located near the construction sides. These materials were collected by locals who were paid in accordance with the amount of materials they collected and delivered to the project sides. The fact that these materials were less suitable for construction and the fact that their extraction caused considerable damage to the environment appeared not to disturb the people involved. The fact that people were able to contribute to and partake in development while simultaneously making some money, rendered them indifferent to the negative effects on the environment.

Despite the fact that people were aware of the negative effects of their actions, again and again explained to them in awareness campaigns by local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri and concerned outsiders, people continued their destructive actions.¹⁶⁵

Paved roads were constructed within villages and at a later stage also between villages. The construction of the latter almost always also involved the partaking of a concession holder and a logging company involved in the clearing of the trail along which the road was to be constructed. Instead of following existing trails over the shortest distance possible, the new trails often meandered through the landscape in order to extract as much wood as possible. Whereas most contractors were only interested in the profits of the logging activities, they often quickly lost interest in the project soon after the logging activities were finalised. The project was then resold to another contractor or simply abandoned, resulting in many roads left unfinished or finalised in an abominable state.

Finalised roads were immediately put to use, regardless of the state in which they were delivered. Shoes, wheelbarrows, bicycles, motorcycles and even cars and trucks were introduced at fast pace. Making use of the road required materials and means of transportation considered appropriate with the image of modernity intrinsically attached to the road. Those not able to afford themselves these consumer goods were looked upon as outside this realm of modernity. People from the hinterlands, accustomed to walking the trails to the harbour villages barefooted, now ended up on the cemented roads that became burning hot under the tropical sun. Those already used to the road and the materials needed to navigate it, almost immediately attached an image of misery and pity to the people apparently unable to comply with the requirements of the road. So, the purchase of a motorcycle, or at least a bicycle, became one of the most important events in the lives of many Mentawaians. Many went at great lengths to acquire this ultimate image of modernity. People put themselves in debt in order to buy themselves or their beloved ones these consumer goods. While I personally had my doubts about the speeding cars and motorcycles and the loud back and forth shouting of friendly greetings – one after all needed to be seen on his or her motorcycle – the Mentawaians themselves had no negative feelings towards the road and the way in which it was used.

What, however, did disturb them was the fact that many roads did take such a long time to construct and after delivery deteriorated at fast pace. In March 2004, for instance, the main road in Tuapeijat was still not finished. It was said that, by then, more than 30 billion Rupiah had already been spent on the construction of that road alone.

Transportation in between the Mentawai Islands had been laborious and apart from a passenger ferry between Padang and Mentawai, frequenting the islands on an average of twice a week, public transportation between Mentawai and the Sumatran mainland had been minimal too. The ferries, in the hands of a private entrepreneur, were frequently out of service and some of the vessels were less suitable for the transportation of people. So haste was made with the improvement and expansion of public transport services from

¹⁶⁵ The Earth Observatory from the Nanyang Technical University of Singapore launched a poster campaign in Mentawai in 2003, informing the public about the importance of the coral reefs.

and to the mainland as well as between the Mentawai Islands. Almost immediately after independence two extra fast ferries were put into operation. Tickets for these fast ferries, which travelled in less than six hours from Padang to Mentawai, were rather expensive and therefore only obtainable for those able to afford it. In December 2001 another four new vessels were announced, but the delivery of two of these vessels was delayed due to the fact that part of the payment was not forthcoming (Pualiggoubat 1/11). Only in December 2002, several members of the DPRD went to Sibolga in order to check on the progress of the construction of the ship. When they returned from Sibolga they claimed that the construction of the ship had met with serious delay due to the fact that the motor of the ship, ordered in Malaysia, had not been delivered on time.

In April 2003, PT Rusco – the company responsible for the ticket sales and the maintenance of the governmental vessels – kept three governmental vessels out of service. PT Rusco claimed that the Mentawaian government had an overdue payment of nearly 70 million Rupiah. After heavy protest of the public, Edison came to the harbour in person to make sure that the ferries would leave for Mentawai as scheduled, but he encountered with firm resistance from the director of PT Rusco, who demanded the bills to be paid before putting the ferries back into service. Edison was surprised to hear about the bills to be paid and asked the DPRD to sort things out. In accordance with the head of the department of transportation, PT Rusco claimed responsibility for the ticket sales as well as the operating costs and the maintenance costs. Edison claimed not to know about these appointments. After a payment of 40 million Rupiah had been made, PT Rusco took two out of the three vessels chained back into service. The vessel named Nade remained in the harbour for repairs.

Despite the fact that the Mentawaian government had eight vessels in service in June 2003, the ships were constantly in dock, out of service and eventually two of the ferries just disappeared. Control over the vessels and the appointments and finances accompanying this public transport remained problematic.

In July 2003 it was planned to reopen the airport Rokot on Sipora. The already existing runway, built by loggers in the 1980s, was lengthened with an additional 250 meters and a new reception hall was built. But after the Sumatran Department of Transportation had inspected the new facilities, it was decided that the old part of the runway was not safe enough to land an airplane on it. A new contractor was hired and the reopening was scheduled for December 2005. But at the beginning of 2006 the airport turned out to be abandoned by the contractor. The renovation of the airport came to a standstill and was resumed again only in 2012. Susi Air started to fly from Padang to Mentawai two or three times a week from 2014 onwards. Due to the short runway only small planes with a maximum of 18 passengers were able to land on Rokot. As planes were chartered, schedules were irregular and unreliable due to weather conditions and last minute cancellations. Whereas tickets were too expensive for most Mentawaians, the flights were mostly filled with tourists and government officials.

Education

Educational facilities in the Mentawai Archipelago have, despite the efforts of both

Protestant and Catholic missionaries to upgrade the educational system, always been lacking behind compared to the mainland. As a result the Mentawaians are poorly educated and lack a sufficiently educated workforce. Local government, much aware of this shortcoming, tried to catch up by assigning major investments in the education sector. Apart from the construction of various new school buildings and the assigning of numerous new teachers, a revised curriculum was also high on the agenda. Schools in Mentawai were obliged to teach their students *Budaya dan Adat Minangkabau* – BAM (Minangkabau Culture and Customs). Whereas many teachers in Mentawai were actually Minangkabau themselves, the teaching of Minangkabau culture and customs went unquestioned. This changed after Mentawai became an independent district. The call for local, Mentawai teachers teaching Mentawai culture and customs increased. Especially Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) was actively involved in changing the local curriculum. Based on a book written by one of the catholic missionaries, YCM had already developed a module about Mentawai culture and customs for their forest school projects. YCM time after time tried to involve the local Department for Education in their plans and activities, but Kurnia Sakerebau, head of the Department of Education, turned out to be unwilling to cooperate with any stakeholder. Both YCM and the UNESCO, with their *pinatoro uma* project, tried to connect and work together with the Department of Education, but time and again found the door of the department closed. In his own words, Kurnia said that he was far too busy with political matters and therefore unable to find the time for negotiations and cooperation with outsiders such as YCM and UNESCO. One time, the Canadian UNESCO consultant was even told by Kurnia that if local communities in the hinterlands would really like to send their children to school, they had to come out of the forest and relocate in proper villages where education facilities were made available by the government.

According to many the poor quality of education in Mentawai had everything to do with a shortage of teachers and the fact that many teachers were of non-Mentawai origin. In early 2002, Kurnia thus made a start with the appointment of various extra teachers and the replacement of Minangkabau teachers with *putra asli daerah*, even if these Mentawai replacements lacked proper levels of education themselves (Puailiggoubat 2002d). But these new teachers, quite like the old ones, were also frequently absent. Many of the new teachers did not get an official appointment and received payment in the form of a honorarium. In 2002 the *guru honor* (teachers without an official appointment, receiving a honorarium) had not received any payment for six months. Their complaints with the Department of Education were not handled satisfactorily. Most teachers did not originate from the villages in which they were stationed. Many teachers experienced difficulties in their search for housing. As they also lacked a garden to extract food from, they were completely relying on their salaries for their daily expenses.

Many were deeply disappointed with the efforts of their local government to upgrade the education system. People continuously wrote protest letters to the Department of Education, complaining about the lack of facilities and teachers. People felt they had to wait too long for school buildings, teachers, furniture, libraries, proper learning materials and they complain about leaking school buildings, windows and doors that could not

be closed, school buildings being flooded for months and teachers who stay away for weeks and even months without anyone asking questions. The public was also furious about the fact that Ridwan Siritubui, the district's secretary, had apparently spent 200 million Rupiahs for the purchase of musical instruments to be used for music lessons their children had never enjoyed, while the education system was still in an abominable state.

Commissioned by the Department of Education, later in 2002 a team was compiled to map out the problems within the education system. Kurnia Sakerebau, head of the Department of Education, could have saved both precious time and money had he cooperated with parties like the YCM, UNESCO and the Catholic Church, that had already made an inventory of problems encountered within the education system. One result of this investigation was the abolishment of the *guru honor* in February 2003. This was quite a remarkable discussion, because this left many places without a teacher altogether. This made the local community in Paipajet Hulu decide to keep the much needed teacher and pay him from the *Anggaran Bantuan Khusus Murid* (a small poverty alleviating budget from the district government meant for poor people to enable them to send their children to school).

Later in 2003, YCM concluded that, despite measures by the Department of Education, nothing had really changed so far. In Puailiggoubat they question Kurnia's expertise and request Edison to intervene. In conformity with YCM, Maralus Sinurat (Head of Commission C of the DPRD) then called upon Kurnia to resign, stating that Kurnia appeared not to be capable of leading an important department such as that of education. Under pressure from the public and several members in the DPRD, Kurnia and Polin Saleleubaja exchanged their positions in April 2004. Kurnia moved to the much smaller (in terms of budget) Department of Tourism and Polin took over Kurnia's position at the Department of Education. But problems with the education system remained to hunt the public. In May 2004 students in the village of Taikako (Sikakap) were still without furniture. And the primary school in Saumanganya (Sikakap) still lacked a principal, who strikingly enough had been on the payroll during all these years.

Healthcare

In many instances the problems within the healthcare sector are more or less the same as those in the field of education. Sufficiently educated people are lacking as a result of which newly built hospitals and clinics were abandoned soon after the new buildings were delivered. In a newly built hospital in Sarereiket, weeds were growing through the poorly cemented floor and windows could not be closed at the moment the building was delivered. While malaria, typhus, cholera and measles continued to make casualties, doctors and medical staff felt little to no enthusiasm to transfer to Mentawai, especially to the more remote areas where healthcare was actually needed the most. In December 2002 over thirty people died of an outbreak of cholera in Simatalu. The newly built polyclinic was unmanned and people affected had literally nowhere to go. When Ildil Gusti, head of the Department of Healthcare, was asked for an explanation he stated that he could not get in touch with the staff of the polyclinic, because they were all participating in the civil servant test in Tuapeijat. In June 2003, the *camat* of

Siberut Selatan wrote a lengthy letter of complaint in which, among other things, he again asked for medical staff for the two polyclinics built in two villages in his *kecamatan*. The polyclinics, however, remained unmanned and eventually deteriorated. A newly built polyclinic in Bulaubuggei became rapidly overgrown with weeds since it was never taken into use. The small polyclinic, consisting of one room and a separate bathroom, costed 24 million Rupiah. The village head of Saumanganya claimed that he could not do anything about the inactivity of the polyclinic. He said that he had never received the official transfer of the polyclinic, therefore rendering the clinic as non-existent. The village head was also not inclined to take action in whatever direction. If people in Bulaubuggei became ill, he would send someone or some medicine, so he stated.

Economic development

Economic development was always connected to *potensi daerah* (regional potential). Four sectors were indicated as prime sources for the obtaining of *pendapatan asli daerah* (locally generated income): tourism, forestry, fisheries and plantations. Plans for the development of these sectors were all focussed on the exploitation of natural resources and left little to no space for small-scale sustainable development or conservation of natural resources. Common Mentawaians were barely included in the plans and the drafting thereof (Puailiggoubat 2002b). Government action to spur economic development and to generate local income consisted mainly of negotiations with overseas investors from Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Hong Kong. These talks were mainly about the issuances of permits and licenses for fishing, surfing tourism and the creation of large-scale oil palm and banana plantations. The exploitation of natural resources by outsiders was not new to Mentawai. Foreign fishing vessels have long been active in the Mentawai waters. Their catch was exported mainly to Hong Kong and Singapore. Most of these fishing activities had been illegal and revenues almost never returned to Mentawai.¹⁶⁶ The same was true for the revenues from the surfing industry, which were considerable, but remained in the hands of foreign entrepreneurs. Through the issuing of permits, licences, concessions and the collection of taxes, the local government hoped to regulate these businesses and obtain local income.

In order to gain ideas and negotiate with potential investors, *studi banding* (comparative studies), *kunjungan kerja ke luar negeri* (work visits abroad) and *perjalanan dinas* (official travels) were frequently planned. These trips often involved intercontinental flights and many DPRD members brought their spouses along on these trips. Therefore the annual budget of five million Rupiah for each DPRD member allocated for these trips was certainly exceeded. Critical questions from the public about these practices were countered with promises about the inevitable increase in employment opportunities as soon as the through *kunjungan kerja ke luar negeri* acquired ideas and investments would have been introduced to Mentawai.

¹⁶⁶ Local fishermen had been able to gain a small income from the selling of fish to the foreign fishers.



Emblem Kabupaten
Kepulauan Mentawai

There was a lot of talking, mainly about problems and inhibiting factors, but only little real action. New legislations took too long to pass through parliament and when they were finally passed, the local government experienced difficulties in implementing the new laws. In many cases they lack the workforce to maintain and control the new legislations. Despite twelve new laws on taxes and other forms of retribution adopted in December 2002, revenues from both the fishing and the surfing industry continued to disappoint throughout 2003 and 2004.

Preserving Mentawaian culture and identity

On the Sumatran mainland many government buildings have curved roofs like the traditional Minangkabau *rumah gadang* (big house) adding to their grotesque appearance. New government buildings constructed on the Mentawai islands of course lacked this reference to Minangkabau culture, but simultaneously failed to highlight Mentawaian culture. Government buildings were all constructed as identity-free concrete constructions with plain sinc roofs and no reference to traditional buildingstyles. Apparently traditional architecture was not an item to be preserved or highlighted. This idea, however, had to be adjusted when an emblem for the new *kabupaten* had to be designed. The local government started a public contest in which everybody was invited to come up with a design for the emblem. After several weeks a design by a Mentawaian youngster was chosen but immediately dismissed by many due to its reference to the Minangkabau traditional buildingstyle. The contours of a Minangkabau traditional house adding to the contours of a Mentawai *uma* were meant to indicate the fact that Mentawai is part of the province of West Sumatra. But many found the image of the Minangkabau building too dominant, marginalising the meaning of the *uma* as a symbol for deliberation and consensus. After intense discussion it was decided that the characteristic contours of the Minangkabau building were to remain but coloured white as if not part of the Mentawaian

stylistic canon. While this holds true in rhetoric it remains difficult not to recognise the Minangkabau influence in the emblem, especially now the contours of the traditional Minangkabau building are white.

Self-government and development were supposed to go hand in hand with the preservation and revival of Mentawaian culture and identity. Mentawaian culture and identity were, however, closely related to a forest-based lifestyle, in which kinship and origin were key factors in the identification of groups and individuals as well as insiders and outsiders. It was precisely this forest-based lifestyle that was highly disapproved of by the post-colonial government in particular. In line with that conviction, the icons of Mentawaian culture – mainly defined by supportive outsiders – such as the presence of the *kerei* (medicine men), *arat sabulungan*, the traditional houses reflecting the *suku*-oriented structure of Mentawaian society and the full body tattoos, were precisely those cultural expressions repressed the most by both colonial and post-colonial governments.

Especially Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) constantly emphasised that action was needed in order to save and revive what they called crucial aspects of Mentawaian culture and identity. In Puailiggoubat appeared a regular section by their hand treating various topics related to what one could call traditional Mentawaian culture. Full page articles about hunting, traditional medicines, tattooing, the process of producing sago and stories of origin of various Mentawaian clans appeared in Puailiggoubat every other two weeks.

The local government tried to contribute to the regaining of cultural pride by organising cultural contests and workshops in traditional clothing, singing, dancing and even tattooing. Whereas only few people were still inclined to go through the time-consuming and above all rather painful process of traditional tattooing, the contest invited people to draw up traditional tattoo designs to be printed on t-shirts. The traditional clothing contest was also characterised by compromise. Traditional Mentawaian clothing consisting of a loincloth for men and a skirt for women was considered to be too exposing. Additions needed to be made to make the traditional clothing suitable for contemporary use.¹⁶⁷ While there was considerable attention for the contests and workshops in the media, people felt little to no enthusiasm to partake. Local government was questioned about the costs involved in these contests and workshops while proper development activities were still lacking behind.

In November 2004 a government financed traditional handicraft centre was opened in Tuapeijat.¹⁶⁸ The articles produced and sold there were in the first place meant for the

¹⁶⁷ This problem was also experienced by government leaders and civil servants who wished to emphasise their Mentawaian identity by appearing at official meetings and inaugurations in traditional clothing (Puailiggoubat 2002g). In order not to be offensive they had to wear modern clothes in addition to the traditional ones, which in my opinion almost always resulted in a rather clumsy mixture of clothes and accessories that obviously did not fit together within the context at hand.

¹⁶⁸ This centre was financed by the Department of Education and that of Industry Trade Cooperatives and Mining.

surfing tourists visiting the island. This resulted in the mass production of miniature versions of traditional drums, bows and arrows, tobacco containers, peddles, birds and *kerei* caskets, but also of small statues of *kerei*, monkeys, fish and pentrays and ashtrays with surfboards or palmtrees. I guess that it remains questionable in how far this handicraft centre contributed to the preservation or the revival of Mentawai culture and identity. Products sold in the centre were often of very poor quality and had very little to do with the produce of traditionally handcrafted articles.

In December 2004 a government delegation and twelve *kerei* went to Jakarta. They were to partake in a dance performance during the Festival Art Suku Kencana Budaya Nusantara. This large-scale festival taking place from 17-19 December in the Graha Bakti Budaya building of Taman Ismail Marzuki even made it to the frontpage of Kompas. The staging of cultures that had been marginalised within Indonesian society for decades was indeed a remarkable event. Apart from the *kerei* from Mentawai there were also dance delegations invited from Papua and Kalimantan (Dayak). The very fact that Mentawai had been invited on a national stage made many indeed proud of their Mentawai identity.

Fact was, however, that many were convinced that genuine Mentawai identity had to be sought in traditional stuff. People and matter *yang masih asli* (still original, genuine) were considered authentic, but also as *kuno* (ancient, outdated). It turned out to be difficult to



Mentawai on the frontpage of Kompas. By Gerard Persoon.

combine these two in daily life. While many wished to eat sago and even prefer it over rice, they lost the knowledge of and the interest in preparing it. Especially young people showed a renewed interest in tattooing, but feel little enthusiasm for the traditional full body tattoo that might obstruct their job opportunities. And ofcourse, basically everyone preferred to ride a motorcycle wearing dark sunglasses instead of peddling a canoe along the river wearing a traditional head made out of palm leaves.

Quite like the general public, the local government was also inconclusive about these matters. While at the one hand they claimed to seek development supportive of Mentawaian culture and identity, they failed to assist local communities in setting up sustainable marketable fisheries or agriculture, two activities defensibly close to the core of Mentawaian identity. Instead the government was seeking foreign investors for sectors that the locals traditionally had not been part of. The government also claimed major investments in education, but when UNESCO seeked its cooperation in the setting up of forest schools, the head of the Department of Education simply said that people had to come out of the forest in order to send their children to school. A renewed curriculum replacing the teaching about Minangkabau culture and customs only became official in 2014.

Budgetary issues

In April 2002 Edison had to hand in his *Laporan Pertanggungjawaban* (LPj), a financial accountability report over the *Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah* (APBD), the financial budget over 2001. While Edison became *bupati* in November 2001, he thus had to account for the APBD largely under the supervision of Antonius Samongilailai. Edison, however, claimed that he did not get any transfer of information from Antonius and that therefore he was simply unable to write a LPj over 2001. Nobody seemed to know who was actually responsible and despite pressure from the province Edison stood firm in his refusal to draft this financial report. Eventually Edison provided the DPRD with a minimalistic LPj 2001 in November 2002. The DPRD approved of this report, but did have a lot of questions that Edison was unable to answer. Among other things they questioned the limited returns from the government ferries and the absence of revenues from the logging concession in north Siberut. The fact that in late 2002 there were still no laws on taxation and retribution passed by the DPRD made it understandable that locally generated income (PAD) lacked behind in the LPj 2001.

The APBD 2002, with a total of 142,4 billion Rupiah, thus had to be drafted before the LPj 2001 was handed in and approved of (Puailiggoubat 2002o). Only in December 2002, Edison received order from governor Zainal Bakar to revise the APBD 2002. Why Zainal ordered this and what actually had to be revised remained unclear, but did result in omnipresent speculations about foul play. Thereafter the LPj 2002 was silently presented to the DPRD in May 2003. It was said that Edison had been told by a member of the DPRD not to show his draft LPj to anyone but the members of the DPRD. Members of the press were deliberately not given a copy of the draft LPj when they asked for it. Earlier in 2003, the media had been refused at a meeting

where the draft APBD 2003 with a total budget of 157.3 billion Rupiah was discussed (Puailiggoubat 2003g). Nobody thus really knew what was actually discussed during this meeting. All this secrecy led to various speculations and allegations of corruption and nepotism. Soon afterwards Puailiggoubat came with a complaint suggesting that the local government was apparently not inclined to observe the rights of the public and accused them of intransparent and bad governance. The DPRD initially rejected the LPj 2002, because several members of the DPRD were displeased about the countless ill performing contractor companies active in Mentawai. Their questions were mainly about the fact that what Edison reported in the draft LPj 2002 did not correspond with the actual situation in the field. Projects only partly finalised and several projects of which implementation had not even started were nevertheless reported finished and budgeted in the LPj 2002. Some of the projects had been unrealistically expensive and again other projects were never communicated to the communities involved nor implemented, while suspicious investments were made in activities of private enterprises that were only slightly attached to the initial objectives of the projects at hand. All villages were to receive 25 million Rupiah for development in 2002, but only received 22 million each. The remaining three million for every village was supposed to benefit the *kecamatan* of which the villages were part. The total of over 120 million Rupiah village money to be spent on the development of the subdistricts could not be traced back in LPj 2002. Some 350 million Rupiah was budgeted for a new governmental news bulletin. Only in January 2003 a thousand copies of Sasareina were distributed. A second edition was planned to appear in March 2003, but was never printed. The 350 million allocated for the bulletin was never really accounted for. Finally there were questions about some strange budget items awarding unlawful payments to both Edison and Aztarmizi. Edison was given thirty days to revise the LPj 2002 with the knowledge that both he himself and his vice *bupati* Aztarmizi would be suspended would the revised version also be rejected (Puailiggoubat 2003h).

Soon afterwards, the media and several local NGOs laid their hands on the draft LPj 2002 causing a storm of critique and protests. Different from the DPRD, Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) had many questions about the budget allocated for the DPRD.¹⁶⁹ Especially the healthcare insurance for each member of the DPRD had their attention. According to the LPj 2002 each member of the DPRD had received 1.250.000 Rupiah per month meant for health insurance. AMM, however, calculated that even the most expensive health insurance should cost no more than 200.000 Rupiah per month. Puailiggoubat wished to know why the health insurance was paid in cash instead of in the form of a premium paid for by the *kabupaten*. They also wished to know why a

¹⁶⁹ Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) was an occasional partnership of 12 local NGOs (BM3, YPMM, HIPMIM, Yaysan Sehati, Forum Peduli Pembangunan Mentawai, Siaran Mentawai Membangun, Forum Masyarakat Mentawai, LBH Umanta, Hipmas, YLKBH, Yayasan Kirsau eand Badan Penelitian dan Pengawasan Otonomi Daerah), chaired by Raymondus Sababalat (then chair of the local department of the Golkar party). AMM was called to life because the organisations gathered within this alliance felt that together they would stand a better chance to held their government accountable for their actions (Puailiggoubat 2003e).

member of the DPRD who unfortunately passed away during 2002 was still receiving his health insurance after his funeral. LBH Umanta stated that the LPJ 2002 was not drafted in accordance with the 2002-2006 strategic management plan (Perda Renstra). Edison agreed to this, stating that he had handed in a new Perda Renstra to the DPRD only in February 2003. The DPRD had not approved of this Perda Renstra yet. While 3.6 billion Rupiah locally generated income PAD was budgeted in the APBD 2002, the PAD in the LPj over 2002 was almost nil. While the DPRD said that there were still no laws on taxation and retribution drafted, Edison said that laws were drafted, but that the DPRD was holding back in passing the laws through parliament.¹⁷⁰ Fact was, however, that Mentawai had received retribution from Jakarta for the logging concessions active on all three islands, but this PAD never appeared in the LPj 2002 and the DPRD seemed unwilling to sort out where Edison had left the money. Earlier in 2002 a message had appeared in the media that 2.26 billion Rupiah of so-called *dana retribusi pengelolaan sumber daya hutan*, retribution for the active logging concessions had erroneously been transferred to the private bank account of an acquaintance of Edison instead of the bank account of the Mentawaian Department of Forestry.

Both AMM and LBH Umanta went to court with their suspicions of corruption, collusion and nepotism (Puailiggoubat 2003e). After more allegations of bad government by the Padang-based university Universitas Eka Sakti, the court in Padang decided that they would start an investigation of the Mentawaian government. Despite the fact that some of the questions posed by the DPRD remained unanswered, the DPRD approved of the revised version of the LPj 2002 in July 2003.¹⁷¹

Corruption, Collusion en Nepotism

In May 2003 Ridwan Siritubui and Edison Saleleubaja were indicted at the court by Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) on corruption with regard to the APBD 2002 and on collusion and nepotism with regard to the civil servant procedures in that same year. With Bakri Tasirebbeb in the lead again, AMM took the accusation of large-scale corruption of government funds (nearly 30 billion Rupiah) to court (Puailiggoubat 2003c). According to BM3 there were at least seven uncertain posts on the APBD 2002. All posts for which there were no corresponding activities to be found in the field.

Besides this large-scale corruption case, BAWASDA Sumbar was also asked to look again into the procedures used in the process of hiring new civil servants as well as into the functioning of the DPRD itself. The DPRD, supposed to represent the people, seemed little inclined to actually control the executive part of government. It was on the contrary believed that the DPRD colluded with Edison and his partners within the various departments for their personal benefit. Among other things such could be read from the fact that the DPRD wished to discuss the APBD 2003 behind closed doors and that they had advised Edison not to share his LPj 2002 with the media and local NGOs. Furthermore,

¹⁷⁰ In a document circulated by the district's secretariat several intended regulations with regard to taxation and retribution were made public (SDKKM 2002b).

¹⁷¹ This approval was not anonymous. Political party Golkar did not approve of the revised version.

members of the DPRD were never held accountable for their disproportionately raised salaries and additional payments compared to previous years.

Edison's legal counsel, Ade Waldemar, denied all allegations of AMM. In an effort to divert the attention from the allegations, Ade stated that AMM was just a group of disappointed people, who saw their job applications or project proposals rejected by Edison and were therefore seeking for some sort of revenge. Ridwan stated that he felt betrayed by his '*adik-adik*' (younger brothers), especially the ones who also adhered to Islam (*yang sama-sama islam*), who took him to court. He questioned their support for Mentawai autonomy and stated that AMM would be responsible for the reintegration of Mentawai into Padang-Pariaman. In his opinion these organisations and the fuss they made about only minor issues in the governing of the Mentawai Archipelago, made it impossible for the local government to concentrate on their responsibilities.

In July 2003 the court called upon Ridwan as a suspect in the corruption case. However, Ridwan as well as five other witnesses never showed up for questioning. Few days later, Ridwan was arrested in Bukittinggi and pending the results of the ongoing investigation, detained for 20 days. Investigations indicated that 8.1 billion Rupiah from the APBD 2002 disappeared. Several people investigated said that money that was 'left over' from the budget had been lent (*dipinjamkan*) to several members of the DPRD and various officials, some of them even originating from Padang. Edison as well as Ridwan supposedly agreed orally with some of the transfers involving these 'loans' ranging from 30 to 100 million Rupiah. Edison stated that he knew about these transfers, but that he had been under the impression that the various departments had been in need of money because the APBD 2003 budget had not yet been released in early 2003.¹⁷² By the end of July 31 people were heard. Six people, among whom Ridwan, were indicated as suspects in the corruption case. After 50 days of detention, two of these suspects were released. Ridwan was hospitalised in August 2003 and provisionally released from detention in September 2003. In October 2003 Ridwan, together with four others, was officially sued for the obscuring of 7.6 billion of public money. Bakri Tasirebbeb then again insisted on the hearing of Edison, because he was convinced of the fact that if Ridwan was found guilty, Edison had to be guilty too. After four court hearings, where Edison was also heard as a witness, it became clear that Ridwan had signed for various false receipts and that his secretary had frequently transferred money to both his private bankaccount as well as that of Edison. During the hearing of 14 January 2004, Ridwan admitted that he used 140 million Rupiah to pilot the LPj 2002 through parliament. Both Edison and Aztarmizi denied this and stayed faithful to their initial claim to know nothing. In May 2004 the court demanded Ridwan to be imprisoned for five years and to pay back 3.2 billion Rupiah of public money that disappeared under his supervision (Puailiggoubat 2004b). Various local NGO's went to Padang in order to protest in front of the court house again. With the impending conviction of Ridwan they feared that other corrupt government leaders, among whom Edison, would walk away unpunished. Despite permission of president Megawati

¹⁷² The budget for 2003 was only released in Juli 2003.

Sukarnoputri, Edison was never qualified as a suspect. In August 2004 the conviction of Ridwan (and four other suspects) was delayed once more and one month later the whole case was all of a sudden withdrawn. It was decided that the bulk of the 8.1 billion Rupiah that initially disappeared was eventually accounted for. The court decided that the remaining amount not accounted for could be judged as administrative errors. A young and unexperienced *kabupaten* such as the Mentawai Archipelago had to be allowed such defaults. Basically everybody was flabbergasted by this decision of the court, but for some it was also a relief that their fellow Mentawaians had been dismissed from further legal proceedings. The general public had an ambivalent vision on corruption. No one wanted corruption, but at the same time people were inclined to defend corruptors and downplay their actions as soon as these people were part of their kin group. Puailiggoubat frequently called upon the public not to remain hanging in the initial euphoria of regional autonomy that blinded basically everyone for the mistakes made by their *putra asli daerah*. Puailiggoubat promoted to develop and maintain an independent and critical attitude towards the local government and to morally reject those people involved in corrupt practices, even if those people were brothers and sisters.

External evaluation and self-reflection

Everybody within the Mentawai Archipelago seemed to be conscious of the fact that the performance of the archipelago was to be evaluated after some time. Some said that Mentawai was given two years in order to prove itself capable of selfgovernment. Whereas Mentawai became a *kabupaten* in October 1999, it should be evaluated in October 2001. But such a regulation was not to be found in the official document UU49/1999 by which Mentawai became a *kabupaten*. In addition, October 2001 already passed and no evaluation had taken place. Others claimed that law 22/1999, that apparently mentioned evaluation of some sort, became operable only in May 2001 as a result of which no evaluation was to be expected before May 2003. No one seemed to know for sure. Not even Edison himself, and he did not seem eager to find out when, where and by whom the archipelago might be evaluated. As a result of no one really knowing, several parties used the threat of being reincorporated with Padang-Pariaman in support of their own arguments questioning government performance (Puailiggoubat 2002i). Among others, Parmenson, director of Yasumi, incited the public opinion against the local government stating that both the local DPRD and the executive powers had failed the Mentawai community. According to Parmenson their ill performance and bad government had turned reincorporation with the mainland district of Padang-Pariaman into a near inevitability. With this statement Parmenson called upon people to oppose against the government and advocate their resignation (Puailiggoubat 23/2)

Without prior notice (or so it was said), BAWASDA Sumbar (*Badan Pengawas Daerah Sumatra Barat*), a supervisory body that controls the functioning of local authorities including their finances, came to Mentawai in August 2002 in order to investigate all governmental and administrative affairs of the *kabupaten*. Bakri Tasirebbeb of Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) had called upon BAWASDA to check on the

threefold promotion of Ridwan Siritubui, who became the district secretary in 2002. BAWASDA retained Ridwan's third promotion because of the lack of sufficient education to qualify for yet another promotion (Puailiggoubat 2003a). BAWASDA furthermore asked Edison about the procedure by which he had hired civil servants. Several local NGOs had claimed the procedure had been intransparent and that Edison had favoured friends and relatives over other, more eligible candidates. In reply, Edison stated that the procedure by which civil servants were hired had been approved by the governor himself and that he therefore considered the case not open for discussion. BAWASDA also spoke to Edison about why he had not yet provided a SOTK (*Susunan Organisasi dan Tata Kerja*), a document explaining local government structure and their programme of work, and no LPj 2001 (*Laporan Pertanggungjawaban*), a financial report over 2001 that especially the governor was interested in. Edison explained that the local bureaucratic structure had not yet fully crystallised and that it was therefore premature to produce a SOTK. With regard to the finances, Edison said that he was solely accountable to the local DPRD and not to the governor as suggested by the investigators of the BAWASDA. Edison stated that if the governor wished to know what was going on in Mentawai, he would be happy to receive him in person and show him around. Upon request, the local DPRD claimed to have never seen a SOTK or the LPj 2001. They immediately returned the responsibility for these matters back to Edison. The unwilling attitude of the DPRD to discuss matters with the BAWASDA made the latter conclude that Edison and the local DPRD were not working together constructively. The DPRD was reprimanded for their constant absence from Tuapeijat. Whereas the majority of DPRD members were by that time still residing in Padang, convening a meeting alone proved to be a lengthy process. BAWASDA therefore proposed to build houses for the DPRD members in Tuapeijat. Apart from this suggestion, that was immediately rejected by the local DPRD, and the recommendation for the *bupati* and the DPRD to work together more effectively, the BAWASDA made no mention of a possible reincorporation of the archipelago within the Padang-Pariaman district.

By the end of 2002 the independent archipelago existed for three years and several parties drew up the balance. Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) came with a critical reflection on three years of self-government published in Puailiggoubat (2002n). The state of affairs within the archipelago after three years of independency was not what they had hoped and expected. Despite the governmental focus on economic development, the local economy was still underdeveloped and real plans to boost local economic activity had not yet been implemented. Another thorn in the eye of YCM was the local education system. Local government had promised to make great efforts with regard to education. Especially so because human resources were limited and sufficiently educated and trained professionals were scarce. YCM stated that in their opinion local government had done little to nothing in order to improve local education. People within the interior of Siberut still had no access to formal education and local government was accused of unwillingness to cooperate with initiatives by others (YCM and UNESCO) to offer basic education to children within the interior of Siberut. Archipelago-wide people were still dealing with absent teachers, dilapidated schoolbuildings, insufficient furniture, and outdated learning materials. YCM furthermore stated that local government had done nothing in order to prevent large logging companies from stealing land from the local communities. According

to YCM, local government had failed to inform local communities about their position and rights in negotiations with these logging companies. Procedures to be followed had never been explained to local communities. It was therefore that YCM held the local government responsible for the multiple conflicts that ensued in between and within clans over the last few years. Local government had not developed any serious alternatives for seeking local income by logging. YCM recognized that transportation facilities had significantly improved but also remarked that immediately resulting from this development there should be no reason for the DPRD and the various governmental departments not to reside in Tuapeijat. YCM noted that the government was divided and the DPRD seemed unable to control and monitor the executive part of the government. The DPRD, supposedly representing the people, was actually never present in Mentawai. Members of the DPRD preferred to reside in Padang, so how could they possibly know about the aspirations of the people? The people on their turn became disappointed and disoriented and were blamed for their lack of entrepreneurial spirit. In order for development to grow from below, people were asked time and again for their participation in development. But frameworks and conditions for this participation were never suggested. The Mentawai community is internally divided and divisions along the lines of religion and *suku* (clan) cristallised and hardened.

Puailiggoubat (2002m) furthermore published an interview with Edison in which Edison was asked to critically reflect on three years of self-government. Edison acknowledged that the development of the archipelago went very slowly. In his opinion, the fact that development made slow progress was mainly due to the fact that the Mentawaians, *khusus yang masih bersifat berhubungan dengan budaya* (specifically those people who were still closely related to culture), lacked progressive thinking. According to Edison the majority of the Mentawaians still lacked a modern, future-oriented way of thinking. They remained hanging in short term thoughts and actions focussed on today's issues. According to Edison, the various local NGOs have neglected the important task of mobilising the Mentawai community towards modernisation. With their absense from the field and their focus on the performance of the local government, local NGOs have missed out on the opportunity to assist the people with the modernisation of agriculture and fisheries and leading them into more progressive thinking. Edison thus circumvented all criticism and on his turn pointed the accusing finger in the direction of the communities and the local NGOs, bypassing the controlling function of local NGOs over the political elite.

Preparations for 2004 elections

The elections of 2004 were extraordinary elections for Indonesia. For the first time in Indonesian history, the Indonesian people were to choose their president. For the Mentawaians it was the first time that they were to elect their local parliament. They also had to vote for the provincial parliament. In the build-up to these elections basically everybody in the local government was busy securing their (future) positions and had little time and commitment left for the actual management of the archipelago. Everything became glaring from politics from early 2003 onwards.

Because of outdated and incomplete statistics it was decided that everybody residing within the archipelago had to be registered once more. The registration of those allowed to vote was in the hands of *Tim Pendaftaran Pemilih dan Pendataan Penduduk Berkelanjutan* (P4B), a team simultaneously responsible for the collection of population data and the registration of voters. In order to avoid misunderstandings about and obstruction of the census, vice *bupati* Aztarmizi had instructed the 120 P4B team members and the 20 supervisors to meticulously explain to the public why this census was necessary and how it connected to the forthcoming elections. Apparently Aztarmizi had little faith in the registration event, as he also urgently called on all Mentawaians to work with the team and answer their questions as truthfully and accurately as possible. Based on his experiences with the registration of voters for the 1999 elections, Kortanius Sabeleake, still director of YCM at that moment, also called for more complete and precise registration of voters. A lot of things went wrong in 1999. People without a birth certificate were rigorously excluded from voting, while people already deceased did appear on the voting lists then. The population of smaller villages and difficult to reach settlements were basically left oblivious of the elections in 1999. On his turn turn, *bupati* Edison was fully confident that the P4B team would succeed in registering and informing everybody living in the archipelago, including communities within the more remote areas. The census and registration was supposed to be due by the end of April 2003. Indeed quite a task. By the end of May 2003 the P4B team had a little over 80% of the archipelago covered. As expected large parts of Siberut's west coast were not yet accounted for. The difficult terrain and challenging weather conditions were suggested as excuses for the delay in the registering process.

In the mean time, a KPU (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*), a general elections commission, was installed for Mentawai. The KPU, consisting of 19 politically independent (which means people outside the civil service and without an affiliation to a political party) was installed by the end of April 2003. The KPU was responsible for the organisation of the elections and the introduction of the election process to the public. Despite the census and registration not yet fully completed the KPU started their socialising activities amongst the Mentawai public from May 2003 onwards. However, the transmission of information seemed to concentrate once more on the more easily accessible harbour villages. The KPU barely went up-river and was basically never seen on Siberut's west coast. Again YCM in the person of Kortanius pleaded for timely information about the when and where of the voting. Especially for the more remote regions within the archipelago such information was of the highest importance in order for the communities residing there to be in the right place at the right time. Voting in an area such as Simatalu, where a boat trip of at least half a day is necessary to get to the nearest polling station, is indeed fairly different from voting in a coastal village such as Maileppet, where a ten minute motorbike ride suffices to cast a vote successfully. Already in June 2003 the KPU requested more funds in order to execute their tasks successfully. When their request was turned down, the secretary of the KPU withdrew from the commission in August 2003. He stated that the commission's budget was so minimal that he feared the commission to be incapable of preparing for the 2004 elections successfully.

People could apply as a candidate for the DPRD elections between 8 July 2003 and 8 September 2003. Only in December 2003 a preliminary list with 303 candidates divided over 22 political parties registered with the KPU was published. As soon as the list was published both campaigning and protest actions started. Especially Yudas Sabaggabet went ahead energetically, starting his campaign with a Christmas greeting in Pualiggoubat. With a picture of himself adjacent to the logo of the PDI-P party he wished all fellow Mentawaians, but pastors and reverends residing in Mentawai in particular a merry Christmas and a happy new year. In doing so, Yudas clearly profiled himself as a Mentawaiian and a Christian, hoping to appeal to a majority of voters.

Early in January 2004 student organisation FORMMA (*Forum Mahasiswa Mentawai*) called upon all students and reverends to withdraw as candidates for the upcoming DPRD elections. FORMMA argued that students were not suitable as political leaders and reverends were, according to FORMMA, required to solve the internal problems within Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai – GKPM (the protestant church in Mentawai) first before they were to think about a career switch into local politics. Neither of the parties addressed did respond to the call from FORMMA. At a later stage, in March 2004, FORMMA organised a large student protest in front of the governor's office in Padang. They resisted against the alleged interference of governor Zainal in the local Mentawaiian politics. Zainal supposedly sent several unofficial informants to Mentawai in order to map and evaluate the political and bureaucratic progress within the independent archipelago. FORMMA considered these actions unacceptable and rejected in advance whatever outcome of these, what they called, spying actions commissioned by Zainal. Formma was furthermore suspicious of the fact that both Edison and Ridwan were suspects in the corruption case, but that vice-bupati Aztarmizi was not. Governor Zainal was accused of shielding Aztarmizi from prosecution. Zainal never reacted to the student protest at his front door.

In January 2004 the KPU removed 55 candidates from the preliminary list, the majority of which did not hand in the required paperwork. Out of the remaining candidates 90% handed in incomplete paperwork. These cases were sent back to the various political parties in order to be completed and resubmitted before the end of the month. At a later stage the KPU once more removed 47 candidates from the list, leaving 201 candidates divided over 19 political parties on the final list. Both Kortanius Sabeleake and Yan Winnen Sipayung, active with YCM, were on the final list.

In February 2004 the KPU again asked for additional funding. The KPU asked for four billion Rupiah on top of the existing budget in order to complete further preparations successfully. The KPU claimed they needed the additional funds specifically for the transportation of voting materials and the furnishing of the polling stations in the various villages on Siberut's west coast. Again their request was turned down.

In March 2004 time was running out and various kinds of actors left en masse for Mentawai (*turun ke lapangan*) in order to carry out some final *sosialisasi* (socialisation). Various individual candidates tried to influence the public by handing out free

merchandise and making promises about future developments would they be chosen by the public. Puailiggoubat came with the advise to vote for especially those candidates willing to move to, or already residing in Tuapeijat.

KPU was in a state of panic by the end of March 2004, because a lot of the materials needed to finalise the polling stations were still in stored in Tuapeijat. The threat of bad weather conditions and a shortage in budget had refrained them from earlier distribution of these materials to the regions.

During the first few days after 5 April, the day of the voting, a storm of critique and protest came to the fore. Over 16,000 votes were counted, while only 14,000 voters had been registered by the P4B.¹⁷³ Some ballot boxes had not been sealed properly, people complained about a lack of proper information and in some places supervision of the voting process would have been lacking. In the mean time people were waiting for the KPU to announce the official results of the elections. Unofficial rumors said that the PPD would become the largest party, followed by the PDI-P and Golkar. While the official results were awaited, some of the candidates were fined (*didenda*) by the locals, because they were claiming the freely distributed merchandise and materials back from the public. Some locals even went as far as withdrawing their casted vote; something that was of course impossible, but formed a telling indicator for all the turmoil going on.

On the 21st of May 2004 the KPU came with the official results and the new composition of the DPRD. At first the PDI-P did not want to agree with the composition of the DPRD, delaying in the inauguration of the new DPRD until the end of August 2004. With the PPD being the largest party in DPRD they choose to put Kortanius Sabeleake forward as the chairman of the DPRD. Striking was the fact that nearly half of the members of the previous DPRD were chosen again. All protests and disagreements in between the day of the election and the inauguration had no influence on the outcome. Those candidates voted for were also the candidates inaugurated in Tuapeijat in August 2004. In his inaugural speech, Korta asked the public for their input, steering and controle. AMA-PM was quick in picking up this request and immediately sought contact with the DPRD. Korta on his turn guaranteed AMA-PM that the DPRD would cooperate with them and take their recommendations in consideration. Despite the minimal changes in the composition of the DPRD, the public seemed more confident that this new DPRD under the leadership of Korta would do much better than the previous one. A nasty surprise was awaiting the new DPRD as soon as they wanted to move in the office and residencies in Tuapeijat. Residencies were ruined by neglect and the DPRD office was left in a pitiful state. The office was completely drained from furniture and other inventory such as cars, motorcycles, computers and printers. Even the fans, lamps and the printing paper were taken by the previous users. So again the DPRD had to reside in Padang until the residencies and the office were rehabilitated.

¹⁷³ This probably had to do with the fact that by the end of March 2004 some regions in mainly west Siberut were still not covered by the P4B.

This chapter ends with my final observations in the field in late 2004. Unfortunately the first direct elections for regional administrators (*pemilihan kepala daerah – pilkada*) in Mentawai took place in late August 2006 and is therefore not part of the descriptive elements of this thesis. In the epilogue at the end of this book I will say something about the *pilkada* of 2006, 2011 and 2017.

Conclusion

In retrospect one could say that the transition to bureaucratic and political independency of the Mentawai Archipelago was poorly prepared. All of a sudden in 1999, way before proper decentralisation laws were in place, Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*. There never was a gradual transition under responsible authority, enabling the new leaders to learn and to grow into their new positions. Apart from a handful progressive individuals who had been active in bureaucratic and political positions outside Mentawai, Mentawaians in general had no administrative, bureaucratic and political experience whatsoever. Despite this gap in experience, they were blinded by the wish to govern themselves. Regardless of whether or not these individuals were adequately skilled and sufficiently trained, *putra asli daerah* preferably Christians, were chosen or elected over others (non-Mentawaian outsiders) who might have been more eligible for the positions at hand. Motivated by the trauma of failing development under the repressive government of these outsiders, self-government and development while maintaining Mentawaian identity became the starting point of the political vision of the new leaders.

This vision, however, met with difficulties in its practical implementation. The new leaders found it difficult to think beyond the *Orde Baru* approach that had focussed mainly on the exploitation of Mentawai's natural resources and project driven development. In the *Orde Baru* approach cultural, religious and social particularities were seen as obstructions to development rather than a basis from which progression could develop from inside the community itself. Being without experience and the *Orde Baru* approach as their only frame of reference, the new leaders had no idea how to combine identity and development in order to spark some form of intrinsic development. While organising some rather weird cultural contests and competitions, which in theory should have led to a revival of Mentawaian identity, the government solely focussed on the physical and economic development of the archipelago. Exactly like the *Orde Baru* regime, the Mentawaian government understood this physical and economic development as a series of projects and outsider investments. With the means, and the distribution thereof, involved in these projects and investments being the most important aspect of development, the actual results of these projects and investments become of minor importance. Projects and investments were seen as a way to make money. Not the predetermined project goal, but the number of people sharing in the means of the project determined whether or not the project was satisfactory. This project thinking was an important factor in the way the political agenda was drawn up and can also be seen as one of the major factors in the stagnant development of the archipelago.

The fact that there was so much money available for the development of the archipelago in combination with inexperienced leaders and little to no control and monitoring was another combination of factors that allowed the stagnation of the development of the archipelago. The lack of proper monitoring and evaluation ensured the unpunished mismanagement of human, natural and monetary resources available. While local NGOs with influence like Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) and Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) were committed to hold their leaders accountable for their actions, these organisations met with little to no support from the legal institutions (e.g. the provincial government, BAWASDA and the court of justice) responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the new *kabupaten* and its leaders.

In an overall sense the general public was fairly dissatisfied with the progress made by their new leaders. In contrast with the era in which the Mentawai Archipelago was governed by outsiders, the new leaders were simultaneously fellow Mentawaians, relatives even. This made it difficult to criticise the government. The government apologised beforehand with the argument that they lacked sufficiently educated people, that they had to deal with multi interpretable legislation and that they met with opposition from both Jakarta and Padang. When society did criticise the government they almost immediately got the ball thrown back at them. The local government was quick in outdoing the public by stating that they themselves had to *mandiri sendiri* (selfdevelop) instead of passively waiting for the government to bring them development. This stance created a deadlock in which the local government kept the local communities in an unproductive grip.

7 Conclusions

My thesis evolves around the wish to understand the dynamics of local politics in the Mentawai Archipelago during the era of *Reformasi*. In seeking to address this research question, I have investigated both the political and the cultural dimensions of regional autonomy and decentralisation by focussing on the actions of a particular group of Mentawaians, whom I have called the Mentawaian elite. In order to understand how the elite exploited the opportunities created by encroaching global discourses and profound changes in the national political context, I have researched the background, composition and nature of this elite stemming from a strictly egalitarian but otherwise highly diverse and fragmented society. I have investigated how this elite localised the global discourses and political changes by giving them their own cultural stamp. I have furthermore researched how they coped with the challenges and dilemmas attached to their new, self-acquired political position and based on what considerations they made which decisions. The longer view has allowed me to realise that what I have observed is not exclusively the result of the decentralisation agenda. Regional autonomy certainly was a catalyst for accelerated, fairly chaotic political and administrative changes. But, as my thesis shows, profound social change was already taking place before decentralisation was at the horizon. The establishment of the Mentawaian elite itself was not solely a product of regional autonomy. The elite was already in the making long before regional autonomy was introduced and should therefore be understood as a product as well as a producer of social change.

The Mentawaian elite

In the preceding chapters I have described the Mentawaian elite as a group of young, formally educated, politically engaged Mentawaians. While this broadly holds true for the majority of the people on whom the main part of this thesis is based, we need to realise that the Mentawaian elite is in no way a static, homogeneous group of youngsters, all heading for the same goals. What has become obvious from the preceding chapters is the fact that the nature of this elite as well as the alliances formed by this group are subject to constant change. Quite similar to Mentawaian society itself, the Mentawaian elite is of a heterogeneous composition in which mutually independent individuals occupy

substantially different stances and positions. The Mentawaian elite as I have described it consists of men only, the majority of them being Mentawaian and several of mixed descent. Although there are some women involved in the activism and politicking as I have described in the previous chapters, the positions they occupy and their actions undertaken are fairly uninfluential. The majority of this elite considers itself Christian. While a small, but rather vocal part of this group adheres Islam. After regional autonomy was introduced, the majority of the Mentawaian elite individuals became politicians and civil servants. Others, however, refrained or distanced themselves from participation in local politics and the bureaucracy. They became involved in local businesses while others remained active within one of the local NGOs.

What all these people, despite their differences, do have in common is the fact that they are all of the opinion that the Mentawai Archipelago is in need of speedy development. They also share the opinion that this development should not be brought by outsiders, but should be based on the aspirations of Mentawaian society itself. Mentawai should be developed on its own pace while Mentawaian identity should be preserved or even revitalised. Paradoxically, the main impediment to the development issue lies in this accordance. What exactly enhances development is a question that different people have a fairly different answer to. The same goes for Mentawaian identity.

The making of a self-conscious elite

The colonial powers as well as the Indonesian nation state have portrayed the Mentawaians as 'modernity's other', 'a-political savages' lost from the mainstream of progress and development. With their culture and lifestyle branded as inferior, the Mentawaians have been subject to various civilisation and development policies especially radical during the *Orde Baru* regime of the 1970s and 1980s (Persoon 1994). Various projects and programmes have altered almost every aspect of Mentawaian daily life during those years. Ranging from food to religion and from clothing to social structure, basically everything has been subject to forced change and even suppression (Persoon 1994). Large-scale commercial logging has decimated the forests - of major importance in the traditional livelihood system of the Mentawaians - especially on the southern Mentawai Islands of Sipora and the Pagai Islands and to a lesser extent on the island of Siberut. Both the logging and the governmental development schemes, often implemented by their Minangkabau neighbours, have deprived the Mentawaians of large parts of their environment and eroded their cultural and ethnic identity. As a result they learned to understand themselves as third-rate citizens while building a fairly antagonistic relationship with their Minangkabau neighbours. The Mentawaians, however, have found multiple ways to deal with these (sometimes forced) changes. While some have chosen to retreat in order to continue their forest-based lifestyle, others have embraced modernisation or parts thereof. Some choose to become Christians, others have chosen Islam as their new faith. All these changes and transitions and the multiple ways in which the Mentawaians have dealt with it, have created large intra-cultural variation.

From the 1970s onwards, gradually increasing numbers of Mentawaians started to head for the Sumatran mainland in search of secondary and at a later stage even tertiary education (Schefold 1988). On the mainland they came in contact with other ethnic groups present in the city more intensively than ever before. In order to survive in the city of Padang, these young Mentawaians had to adapt themselves to the cultural codes of the majority population of that city, the Minangkabau (Eindhoven 2007). During my field research I have seen these young Mentawaians struggling with their forward position in otherwise fairly hostile surroundings. I have frequently heard them denying their Mentawaian identity while in search for jobs, favours or friends. Many of them told me that renouncing their identity felt like treachery, but that they saw no alternative. On many occasions I have found their situation quite sad. Many of the young Mentawaian students faced severe financial problems as a result of which their standard of living was quite miserable compared to that on the Mentawai Islands where food is plentiful and housing generally rather spacious.

Their stay in Padang, on the other hand, also triggered increased intra-ethnic contact with other Mentawaians, originating from different Mentawai islands and clans they sometimes never heard of before. Despite the fact that old prejudices proved hard to do away with, these contacts certainly broadened their view on their fellow Mentawaians and even created a certain group sense. In chapter two I have described how intra-ethnic animosities make it fairly impossible to construct the Mentawaians as a homogeneous ethnic group. While residing in Padang, however, fellow Mentawaians were regarded as allies. The Catholic church, prominently present in Padang with its schools and boarding houses, frequently visited and inhabited by Mentawaians, has certainly helped to build and nurture this Mentawaian group sense (Coronese 1986). While turning the Mentawaians into devote Christians, the Catholic church has also supported and encouraged the Mentawaians to hold on to their Mentawaian identity. Extracurricular activities and sport events organised by the church, as well as the establishment of local NGO Yayasan Laggai Simaeru, were all initiatives by the Catholic church adding to the cultural consciousness and the strengthening of the Mentawaian community in Padang.

Their increased levels of education combined with increased inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic contact formed the start of a process the literature has described as ethno-genesis, an increased ethnic self-consciousness or cultural reflexivity (Eriksen 2010 [1993], 2014 [2007]). Different from their parents, these young Mentawaians, both physically as well as psychologically distanced from their background, now became able to analyse that background more profoundly and eventually turned them into self-appointed spokesmen for their elders and siblings on the Mentawai Islands. When I came to Padang for the first time in 1997, I was able to witness a group of Mentawaians that rose against the marginalised position of the Mentawaians within larger Indonesian society. They disapproved of their exclusion from local politics and bureaucracy. They increasingly vocalised their resentment against ill designed and poorly implemented development programmes within the Mentawai Archipelago. They questioned the establishment of the Siberut National Park (especially the inclusion of their settlements within the park was perceived as an unjust impediment to their pursuit of livelihood and development) as

well as the large scale logging concessions active on their islands from which little to no returns were ever enjoyed in Mentawai. Consequently they demanded more Mentawaian involvement in decision-making processes and more participation in local politics. Eventually their claims evolved in a lobby for political and bureaucratic independency of the Mentawai Archipelago from the Minangkabau dominated district of Padang-Pariaman.

Being involved in local NGOs

In the face of rather poor job opportunities in both Padang as well as back home on the Mentawai islands, many of the formally educated Mentawaian youngsters got themselves involved in local NGOs. Whereas in many cases the establishing of their own NGOs was foremost meant as an income generating activity, their own political agenda became marginalised. Instead of formulating their own objectives and gather the funds needed to implement their own programme of work, leaders of local NGOs busied themselves networking, trying to get themselves involved in programmes designed by others and most important: financed by others.

This stance rendered these local NGOs vulnerable to the programmes of work of larger, mainly overseas donors, the majority of them involved in nature conservation. These international conservation agencies, among which we find influential organisations such as the Asian Development Bank, the Rainforest Foundation Norway, the UNESCO and Conservation International, have a tendency to render the responsibility for the implementation of their programmes in the hands of local NGOs. In their belief that local partners, due to their supposed vicinity to local communities, are far better equipped to successfully implement their programmes, donors tend to bypass the agendas (if present) of local NGOs and to overrate the competencies of local NGO staff. In chapter four I have described how the vicinity of local NGO staff to local communities in Mentawai is questionable and sometimes even non-existent. I have also described how the co-optation of local NGOs by overseas donors created a comprehensive collection of local NGOs of which the majority actually serve no other purpose than to deliver a local workforce responsible for the actual implementation of the donor programme. This has led to dissatisfaction on behalf of basically all involved. Unwilling to let go of their assumption that local NGOs are basically doing good, donors become increasingly disappointed by the way in which their programmes are implemented. At the same time donors do not seem to be interested in capacity building and/or proper monitoring and evaluation of their programmes. In doing so they create little opportunity for adjustment and improvement. Local NGO staff on their turn often find themselves in situations where they are expected to deliver performances they do not master and on many occasions the issues at hand are not of their interests. This leads to situations where uninspired, unskilled staff is working on the implementation of projects of which the results are not important to them. The projects and programmes of the overseas donor are merely perceived as an income for those involved in the local NGOs. Last, but not least, are dissatisfied local communities. Local communities often feel as toys in the hands of both donors and NGO staff. Local communities are often poorly instructed. They have to do things and leave others without proper explanation why. They, however, know all too well that there are considerable amounts of donor money involved in the projects and programmes implemented within

their communities. They also know that they are the last in line to benefit from these funds. Local communities tend to distrust NGO staff, accusing them of skimming project funds and blaming them for the ill implementation of projects. In order to get at least something out of the projects implemented in their villages, local communities display counterproductive behaviour and often simply refuse to come into action unless they are paid for their activities. Now that local communities expect payment for their participation in project activities, they – quite like the NGO staff itself – suffer from high project dependency. The incentive to improve their lives and to come into action on their own initiative has almost completely disappeared. They simply sit and wait for the next project to come their way.

The involvement of the educated Mentawaiian youngsters in local NGOs has connected these Mentawaians to the international discourses of environmentalism and indigenous peoples. Quite in contrast with the Indonesian government, the majority of the international donors involved in Mentawai, perceive the Mentawaians as an indigenous people and as crucial partners in nature conservation. Like many indigenous peoples, Mentawaians hold a strong entitlement to their land/territory, based on a history of continuous occupation and active transformation of the landscape. It is furthermore a fact that the majority of Mentawaians is heavily dependent upon their environment for subsistence as well as income generating activities. But despite the intense connection to their land and their extensive knowledge of the environment, Mentawaians are not to be understood as intrinsically motivated conservationists. Despite the fact that many scholars have already long time ago warned against indigenous communities constructed as homogeneous ‘green noble savages’, environmentalists still seem to find it difficult to let go of this ‘ecological myth’ (Kuper 2003; Milton 1996; Persoon 1991). The beliefs and practices of indigenous peoples, which environmentalists interpret as ecologically harmonious, do not work in the way that environmentalists expect. Rather than providing a blueprint for ecological conservation, contemporary practices of tradition in the context of livelihood are practiced as a means through which actions in the environment, destructive actions included, can be negotiated (Perez 2010). Throughout this thesis I have illustrated that Mentawaians cannot be considered as time-less, homogeneous people. They are people subject to change, influenced by globalisation, modernisation and Indonesianisation. In enforcing the perceived partnership between indigenous peoples and environmentalists, the latter are confronted with conflicts of interest between their own goals and locally defined ideas of progress and development (Perez 2010). This stance has certainly placed environmentalists active in Mentawai at odds with the Mentawaiian community in general and the local NGOs in particular and has in the end led to their retreat from Mentawai altogether.

The politics of identity

One of the first priorities after the district of *Kepulauan* Mentawai became a fact, was to exclude outsiders, the Minangkabau in particular, from positions within the local government as well as the local bureaucracy. These people were no matter what to be

replaced by fellow Mentawaians, *putra asli daerah* (sons of the region). The question of whether or not these Mentawaians were actually available and equally capable of successfully accomplishing the tasks attached to these positions, was completely bypassed by the omnipresent wish to 'Mentawaiianise' the local political and bureaucratic order (Puailiggoubat 2002j). The fact that the governor of West Sumatra installed a Minangkabau interim *bupati* (head of district) provided him with accusations that he was not really a protagonist of development in Mentawai and that he only wanted to continue to use the archipelago for the development of the Sumatran mainland. The interim *bupati*, Badril Bakar, became captured in a vacuum in which he was unable to actually govern the Mentawai archipelago. The governor did not allow him to act and the Mentawaiian people were not inclined to accept him as their new leader as he was not of Mentawaiian descent. After persistent protests, the governor gave in to the Mentawaiian call for a *putra asli daerah* as their *bupati*. In April 2001, governor Zainal Bakar installed Antonius Samongilailai, a Moslem Mentawaiian originating from Sipora.

Being Christianised ever since the beginning of the 20th century, the majority of Mentawaians experiences Christianity as an integral part of their identity. In chapter two I have described how the Mentawaiian belief system, *arat sabulungan*, has been repressed and replaced by Christianity and, at a later stage, Islam. Due to the fact that by far the majority of Mentawaians choose to become Christians, Christianity became their new collective identity that made the Mentawaians imagine their community as homogeneously Christian. This new consciousness was an assertion of their unity and difference directed at the power of Islamic outsiders, focussed primarily on the Minangkabau. It is therefore that in political negotiations, the Mentawaians use their Christian identity to differentiate between themselves and Islamic outsiders. However, as I have shown in chapter five and six, reality is more complex than this imagined us against them. Antonius was a fellow Mentawaiian, but he also adhered Islam. His appointment as interim *bupati* caused disagreement within Mentawaiian society about the question whether or not he should be supported as their new leader. While the Islamic part of Mentawaiian society was inclined to support Antonius, the majority of Christian Mentawaians remained negative.

Besides religion, origin and kinship have proven to be very important aspects in ethno-political negotiations in the Mentawaiian context. In chapter two I have described how and why Mentawaians hold various persistent prejudices against fellow Mentawaians originating from different islands or regions within the archipelago. One's origin almost automatically determines one's character and eventual political or bureaucratic performance. Generally people are more inclined to include people originating from the same island or area as they themselves originate from within their circles. Kinship and institutionalised social ties are probably the most important identity aspects with which Mentawaians differentiate amongst themselves. Mentawaiian society consists of a multitude of clans that hold a historically embedded aversion and distrust against each another. As a result people, women in particular, enjoyed little mobility, rarely visited people in other villages and watersheds, let alone other islands within the archipelago. With the clan furthermore perceived as a closed, self-governing entity, Mentawaians tend

to have an antipathy against basically everyone originating from a different clan trying to exert power over them. These sentiments obstruct cooperation and certainly influence the choices people make when voting or forming political and/or economic alliances. As a result, local politics and bureaucracy in Mentawai are highly fragmented and lack a long term vision and clear goals. People do not trust each other and experience difficulties when in search for cooperation. Constituencies on their turn display a tendency not to trust their leaders as long as they are not members of their own clan. The installation of Edison Saleleubaja dumbered the call for *putri asli daerah*, but simultaneously started the discussion on the island of Siberut whether or not this Protestant reverend originating from Sipora would actually be inclined to involve the primarily Catholic population of Siberut in his development plans for the new *kabupaten*.

The identity of politics

After Edison Saleleubaja and his vice *bupati*, Aztarmizi, had taken office in late 2001, the economic, political and bureaucratic development of the archipelago became their first priority. Despite their elaborate vision and mission statement, their plans lacked a practical implementation scheme. So without tangible objectives they made a head start with the setting up of a bureaucratic structure. Whereas the Mentawai Archipelago had had long been part of the district of Padang-Pariaman where governmental and bureaucratic facilities had almost exclusively been located on the mainland, the new *kabupaten* lacked these facilities in every way. In order to establish a sound political and bureaucratic structure, the Mentawai Archipelago received a generous budget, *anggaran belanja*, from Jakarta. The small and somewhat insignificant harbour village of Tuapeijat was chosen as the new political and bureaucratic centre of the archipelago. Whereas clean water, electricity, basic infrastructural facilities and the necessary government buildings and offices had to be developed from scratch, the development of Tuapeijat formed a priority on the development agenda as a result of which the development of other regions in the archipelago somewhat fell into oblivion.

The set up of the bureaucratic structure itself turned out to be rather problematic. Despite the fact that so many people wished to become a civil servant, Mentawai lacked sufficiently educated people to fill all the available positions. As had been the case with the choice for the *bupati*, the appointing of bureaucratic staff was also subject to ethnic sentiments. Rather than being elected for substantive reasons, people were selected or rejected from the civil service on the basis of religion, *asal-usul* (origin) and kinship. Whether or not one actually passed the examination to qualify for the application as a civil servant was sometimes rather a formality than a real part of the selection procedure. This caused unrest within society and various people started to distrust their government. Despite the problems staffing the offices, the bureaucracy continued to expand. The continuous focus on the expansion of bureaucracy should not be mistaken as governing. Politicians were eager to fulfil their promise to make development available to all Mentawaians by creating jobs and material benefits. This, however, had little to do with sound governing, but hinted more in the direction of buying off constituency support and

granting claims made by friends and relatives (see also Simandjuntak 2013). Moreover, the continuous expansion of the bureaucracy led to a top-heavy structure characterised by hidden unemployment. Whereas there were so little paid job opportunities within the Mentawai Archipelago, the state became perceived of as the prime employer (Choi 2011). Due to the delayed finalisation of new government buildings and offices, many government officials as well as administrative staff remained in Padang. As a result government was almost never present in Mentawai and offices were either empty or staffed with people who actually had no idea what was expected of them.

The messy and delayed establishment of the archipelago's governmental structure went hand in hand with its ill government. Plans of work were never really produced and budgets and financial reports were always late, incomplete and often missed a link with reality. Every now and then new regulations were passed through parliament, but as soon as the new legislation became operable, more than once the government lacked the means and the manpower to actually implement them properly. The significant lack of governmental strength became painfully obvious when the local government, in their search for *pendapatan asli daerah* (locally generated revenues), tried to tax the local tourist industry. The mainly Australian businessmen active in surf tourism in the Mentawai Archipelago cleverly evaded local taxation schemes with the support of the provincial government. Acting as petty kings, the foreign businessmen were simply not taking the local government nor their new regulations seriously. Local government officials, often interested in the job rather than the tasks it encompassed, had no clue how to stand their ground against the aggressive attitude of the foreigners and the provincial government. Instead of entering a confrontation, local bureaucrats and politicians strategically choose to collaborate in order to get at least something for themselves out of the negotiations. So, if local revenues in the form of taxes, retribution and the results of local assets management, were generated they often disappeared in the pockets of bureaucrats and politicians instead of in the archipelago's treasury. Corrupt practices like these are by politicians, civil servants and even many people outside the bureaucracy, understood as an asset to the job and have, together with political power and decision-making processes, decentralised as well (see also Simandjuntak 2013). It were especially the members of the DPRD who proved to be prone to corruption while holding a strong position vis-à-vis the executive part of government. Until direct elections were introduced in 2005, *bupati* were elected by the DPRD rendering them vulnerable to extortion and bribery. Edison became *bupati* through a bought off vote, probably paid for by the logging industry and thereafter he experienced regular clashes with the DPRD about his budget proposals and annual financial accountability reports. Threats and bribery were part of these clashes. Together with the above mentioned lucrative private-public arrangements individual members of the DPRD served their own interests especially. They enjoyed self-granted privileges like motorcycles, computers, mobile telephones, cars, houses and holidays disguised as *studi banding* or *perjalanan dinas*. When asked, people certainly reject this short-term opportunism of their leaders, but at the same time they will not fail to participate in similar practices may the occasion arise. Corruption did not thus remain limited to the local government, but affected basically everyone. Lucrative public procurements in mainly infrastructure resulted in an increase in contractor companies, but simultaneously in very

little infrastructure of good quality. The skimming of infrastructure projects by contractors has enriched many at the expense of the public interest.

While the shortage of *pendapatan asli daerah* remained poignant on every annual budget, the Mentawai Archipelago remained heavily dependent on the annual allowance from Jakarta. Bureaucratic sabotage, corrupt power politics, short term opportunism and the absence of a shared vision of the future have most certainly contributed to the uncertain political as well as economic development of the archipelago (see also Kingsbury & Aveling 2003; 2008).

The establishment of electoral democracy is considered one of the greatest achievements of the political reforms in Indonesia since 1998 (Schulte-Nordholt 2008). In theory, local elections fit with the logic of good governance and democratisation. After all it is up to the people to determine their leaders. However, when taking a closer look at the electoral processes within the Mentawai Archipelago it becomes painstakingly clear that its democratic component is weakened by party politics, corruption, collusion and nepotism. Co-opted within political parties, the Mentawaian elite busied itself with the distribution of power and the access to state resources amongst themselves. The choice for a particular political party was almost never based on that party's political ideology, but almost always on the availability of eligible positions on the electoral lists. These party politics and the fact that only few considered the relationship with their constituencies and the actual governing of the archipelago their prime tasks, raised questions about whom the Mentawaian elite is actually representing. They were so occupied trying to secure their own positions, that considering the possible interests of others – even that of their constituencies – was considered a nuisance. The fact that the local government in Tuapeijat turned down the plan to 'return to the *laggai*' gave proof of their unwillingness to accept, or at least look into new forms of bottom up government. Rather than giving local government, as West Sumatra did, its own cultural stamp, it was rather bluntly decided that Mentawai was to stick to the village structure as imposed upon them during the first decade of post-colonial government. Electoral democracy has certainly given the Mentawaians the chance to eliminate ill-performing and/or corrupt administrators from their government, but simultaneously the nature of the relationship with their leaders is holding them back in being all too critical. Their leaders are after all also their kin with whom they wish to maintain friendly and equal relationships.

Decentralisation was believed to empower local communities and strengthen citizenship. While regional autonomy has certainly brought politics to the local level, common people in Mentawai have always been and remained distant from the state. Common people are not part of the politicking processes taking place behind the scenes and remain to perceive government and politics as realms of which they are not part. Government and politics are seen as distant spheres where the privileged make a living (see also Simandjuntak 2013). In the rare event of local communities acting against decisions made by their kinsmen active in local government, it becomes painstakingly clear that the egalitarian and fragmented nature of Mentawaian society is restraining critical individuals within local communities to speak out against their leaders. The independent

clan structure of society and the lack of leadership within clans hinder local communities in making their voices heard. This, however, does not mean that local communities are without an opinion. Dissatisfaction with the functioning of the local government often lingers in foal gossiping and slandering.

At the base of the empowerment of local communities and strengthened citizenship are local NGOs. NGOs in general were assigned the important role to facilitate democracy and good governance. Their alleged proximity to local communities and their commitment to empower the marginalised generated optimism that NGOs would contribute to strengthening of Indonesian civil society (Antlöv 2003; Aspinall & Fealy 2003). Local NGOs in Mentawai, however, have experienced a drain of their activists who gravitated towards the new political and bureaucratic positions that became available after decentralisation. NGO activities thus declined and some NGOs even ceased to exist altogether (see also Hadiwinata 2003). The NGO sector in Mentawai has weakened beyond the point where these organisations could have been able to check on the accountability of their government. Their inability to formulate and establish political alternatives has everything to do with the way in which Mentawaian NGOs functioned before decentralisation. Being largely dependent on external funding and occupied with issues of a more global character, Mentawaian NGOs lacked autonomy to set and pursue their own local (political) agenda and long-term objectives.

The independent clan structure of Mentawaian society itself is another important aspect in the explanation why the strengthening of a sense of citizenship is lagging behind in Mentawai. Bureaucrats and politicians in particular agonise over the question what unites Mentawai and the Mentawaians. In earlier days the common denominator was quite easily determined. It was all about the Mentawaians against the aggressive outsiders. Regional autonomy, preceded by profound social changes, has tremendously complicated this rather clear and convenient arrangement. The processes of decentralisation, which emphasise difference rather than solidarity, have sharpened not only inter-ethnic, but intra-ethnic and religious boundaries as well. Decentralisation has reinforced the independent nature of the various clans in Mentawai and has certainly sparked their mutual hostility. Motivated by the intrinsic nature of the clan structure of Mentawaian society, ingredients for a strong and relative autonomous civil society are lacking in Mentawai. In Mentawai, decentralisation has politicised the clan rather than that it has brought about a strengthening of civil society.

Mentawai became a *kabupaten* early during *Reformasi*. Even before the laws on regional autonomy and decentralisation became operable, the Mentawai Archipelago detached itself from the mainland-oriented district of Padang-Pariaman. The early independency of the archipelago was met with great enthusiasm on behalf of basically all involved. But its actual implementation dealt with a number of problems. Problems that were initially thought to be childhood diseases, but later proved to be rather persistent. Regional autonomy in Mentawai came early and it came quick. The interim government triggered a multitude of protests and political turmoil rather than an opportunity for a gradual takeover of the power by the Mentawaians. With the provincial and Padang-Pariaman

governments unwilling to let go of the Mentawai Archipelago, the Mentawaian elite, fed by the trauma of their earlier ethnic and political marginalisation, went to the limit in eliminating all outsider influences from their local government. But the Mentawaians lacked manpower, sufficient education and political as well as bureaucratic experience. With no other example than the authoritarian *Orde Baru* regime during which they had matured, the new leaders easily lapsed into old patterns. Top-down governing and project orientation were the rule rather than the exception. The lack of clear plans of work in combination with loads of money and very little monitoring and evaluation led to an easy decline into corrupt practices that were basically left without reprisals. Stemming from an egalitarian society organised around kinship and origin (*asal usul*) in which one clan never exerted power over another, the new self-appointed political elite experienced difficulties in binding constituencies outside their personal circles. This fragmentation of the local political realm was especially problematic in the event of local elections. In order to get elected, local politicians not only needed to mobilise various ethnic and religious sentiments but also a lot of money in order to support their campaigns. The need for funds rendered politicians vulnerable to generous investors who were not always supporting the most ideal development schemes for the Mentawai Archipelago.

The development of identity

In the run-up to regional autonomy and decentralisation, local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) tried to get Mentawai connected to the pan-Indonesian discourse of *masyarakat adat* and the connected global discourse of indigenous peoples by building a relationship with and becoming a member of the Jakarta-based NGO Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN). In an effort to accommodate the indigenous discourse in the local context, YCM created Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Peduli Mentawai (AMA-PM), a representative body of ambassadors from the various local communities on all four Mentawai islands. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*, the new leaders failed to see the benefits of the equation between *adat* (local customs) and indigeneity. For reasons explained in chapter one, playing the indigeneity card is of little effect in Indonesia whereas indigenous issues are considered not applicable to the nation. While *masyarakat adat* on the other hand was a growing and increasingly influential identity marker in political negotiations within other regions in Indonesia, the new Mentawaian leaders felt little enthusiasm in coming to the fore with their *adat* identity. After all the Mentawaian *adat* had been stigmatised as backwards and unworthy for decades. And the need for ethnic distinction in order to justify the archipelago's independency from the mainland district of Padang-Pariaman was annulled as soon as Mentawai became a *kabupaten*. The local government did not accept AMA-PM as an unofficial advisor to the government. Instead of benefitting from the information they were provided with by AMA-PM, the local government perceived AMA-PM as an unrecognised group of people trying to be difficult and obstructing solutions to the 'real problems' the archipelago faced.

Decentralisation led almost everywhere in Indonesia to an increase in exclusive religious and ethnic identity politics at regional level, sometimes expressed in terms of *adat* (local customs) (Acciaioli 2001). Avonius (2004) has explained how the use of *adat* has helped communities in North Lombok to demarcate the social and political landscape in that region. The use of *adat* rhetoric proved to be helpful in determining one's own group and certainly formed an opportunity to exclude perceived outsiders from that group. The Mentawaians have certainly used ethnic sentiments to carve out a new *kabupaten* and subsequently exclude the Minangkabau from the governing of the new district. For reasons explained in chapter six, the equation of *adat* with indigeneity discouraged the use of *adat* in further political negotiations in Mentawai as well as in West Sumatra. Both societies did not want to become associated with notions of indigeneity. The Minangkabau felt that their culture would be downplayed if associated with indigeneity. For the Mentawaians the use of *adat* came too close to the idea long imposed on them that their *adat* was worthless. Furthermore, in societies where *adat* forms part of the explanation why certain individuals exert power over other individuals within that society, *adat* forms a handy tool in the hands of ambitious elites. The Mentawaian elite, however, stems from an egalitarian society consisting of a heterogeneous collection of independent clans. The Mentawaian *adat* system, *arat sabulungan* offers no legitimisation for one person or clan for that matter exerting power over another person or clan.

The moment the Mentawai Archipelago became independent the call for development while retaining Mentawaian identity ensued. There was a problem laid in this intention that had everything to do with the core of Mentawaian identity itself and its perceived incompatibility with development. The local custom and belief system, *arat sabulungan*, is what is generally perceived of as the core of genuine Mentawaian identity. However, *arat sabulungan* and basically all that it encompasses, its physical manifestations first, have been marginalised and even forbidden as backwards and savage. In chapter 2, I have described how the Mentawaians have learned to understand themselves as people caught in a backward tradition, lacking the proper incentives to progress and develop. With the very core of their identity eroded only very few Mentawaians nowadays still seem to know and understand what exactly contains *arat sabulungan*. Perceived as backwards and unworthy, Mentawaians are in general not very eager to demonstrate their identity openly.

Modern Mentawaians rather ride a motorcycle than to peddle along the river in a dugout canoe and they rather buy and eat rice than to go over the laborious processing of the sago palm in order to eat sago. Traditional communities living in the interiors of Siberut, still involved in these kinds of activities, are on the one hand perceived as the living bearers of genuine Mentawaian identity, on the other they are seen as odd relics from ancient times. These people are often looked at with a mixture of affection and compassion. Whereas traditional Mentawaian culture and identity are, even by the majority of Mentawaians themselves, perceived as backwards, most tangible aspects of Mentawaian culture and identity are banned from the political sphere. One simply does not come to the office wearing a loincloth or a full-body tattoo. Some, more innocent symbols of Mentawaian culture and identity, however, are still appealing to the modern Mentawaian. The wearing of glass beads and flowers behind one's ears during public

performances is an accepted means for politicians to express and emphasise their Mentawaian identity and their connection with their constituencies. Some Mentawaian politicians appreciate and use traditional communities for their symbolic value. The pretended close proximity to traditional communities is often used by politicians to convince the public of their stance (development while maintaining Mentawaian identity) and their respect for what is at the core of Mentawaian identity. That their involvement in traditional communities is mainly symbolic became painfully clear when an UNESCO consultant tried to negotiate with the new local government about a forest school programme meant for children living in the interior of Siberut. An education project, ran parallel to the larger conservation programme, would facilitate the need of children living within traditional communities to enjoy formal education that would otherwise remain out of their range. After the consultant had rudely been ignored by the head of the education department several times, he was eventually told that it was not the responsibility of the UNESCO to provide these communities with formal education. It was said that if traditional communities living in the remote interiors of Siberut wished to enjoy formal education, it was up to them to come out of the forest and resettle there where their children could enjoy formal education.

When asked the new leaders always claimed that they were protagonists of development while retaining the Mentawaian identity, but they never came with innovative plans or policies supporting these ideas. The cultural gatherings, workshops and contests that were organised every now and then can hardly be understood as serious attempts to solidify Mentawaian identity. However, what these seemingly a-political gatherings, often sponsored by the government do, is creating a sense of community that might come handy with the next elections. The identity aspect of these gatherings is reduced to mere folklore.

The identity of development

In their vision and mission statement, *bupati* Edison and his vice-*bupati* Aztarmizi claimed to relief the Mentawaian people from their 'backwardness' (*keterbelakangan*) and 'isolation' (*terisoliran*) through both social and economic development. By the end of their term in 2006 Mentawai would be a prosperous (*sejahtera*), independent and self-sufficient (*mandiri*) society. But what exactly these visions would consist of and how they would be brought about remained vague. In practice the ideology of development was mainly understood as modernisation that on its turn was translated into the more obvious metaphors of progress. Development remained lingering in the physical development of the archipelago. And this physical development on its turn was mainly focussed on infrastructural development and the development of Tuapeijat, the district's new political and bureaucratic centre. This focus on physical development triggered many to establish their own contractor company in order to get their share in the generous development budget of the new *kabupaten*. Often unhindered by relevant knowledge, the people involved in these businesses were primarily interested in getting the governmental development projects assigned (*dapat proyek*) to their companies. This project orientation in which the budget assigned to the project is of more relevance than the content and the

result of the project itself, turned the awarding of projects in an income generating activity and often led to project results of abominable quality.

One could say that development is considered successful when the individual rather than the collective has gained from it. Project budgets were often skimmed to such an extent that there was very little money left for the actual implementation of the project. Individuals involved in the projects, however, often saw their personal needs (mobile phones, expensive sunglasses, motorcycles, etc) satisfied by the project. This approach led to people wearing expensive sunglasses while riding motorcycles along roads that were in such a bad shape they could barely be called roads. The poor quality of the infrastructural projects and the continuous absence of the development of public services of course led to protests and society blaming the local government for their ill development plans and projects. While people accused their government of self-enrichment and nepotism, local communities became accused of laziness and lack of self-reliance. Instead of waiting for their government to implement the next project, local communities were called upon to (*mandiri*) and spur their own development. Due to their learned project dependency the post-colonial government had brought about, this call was something local communities were completely oblivious to and only strengthened them in their conviction that local government only acted for their own good.

The fact that development is considered a government project, a sense of ownership is lacking. This viewpoint, added to the culturally inspired lack of interest in maintenance of whatever kind is rather counterproductive for development and especially not cost-effective. Traditionally the Mentawaians carry out very little maintenance. They simply lacked the products to carry out maintenance on their premises. While building materials have always been available in abundance, that what was broken was simply replaced. Garbage has always been 100% biodegradable, so there was never a need for a proper garbage disposal system. Garbage simply decayed there where it was left. Now that the composition of garbage and construction waste has changed, construction sites and gardens fill with plastics, cement, glass and household waste. The environment is polluted while so far no one really thought about the introduction of a garbage disposal system. Various new government buildings in Tuapeijat were never used or degraded at fast pace because they were never cared for. The renovation or upgrading of these buildings was never an option. Once deserted buildings remained empty and new facilities were built in a different location.

International conservation agencies saw in regional autonomy and decentralisation a chance for a more sustainable development of natural resources all over Indonesia. It was believed that people would feel more responsible for their natural environment as soon as they would have ownership of the resources within that environment (see Eindhoven 2009). But in many cases regional autonomy and decentralisation led to a rush for the regions natural resources (DTE 2000a, 2000b). The often unsustainable exploitation of natural resources was considered one of the easiest ways to generate locally generated income (*pendapatan asli daerah*). In Mentawai the economic development scheme was almost solely based on the exploitation of the archipelago's natural resources. These

economic development plans including forestry, fisheries, mono-culture plantations and the surfing industry, all heavily dependent upon foreign investments, left little opportunity for sustainable development. Let alone nature conservation. Until new legislation was adopted in 2005, *bupati* were allowed to issue small so-called IPK logging concessions. In Mentawai multiple of these concessions were issued by Edison in the period 2001-2005. These logging concessions up to 100 hectares were often connected to government construction projects and despite the fact that they were only small, these concessions caused considerable damage to Mentawai's forests. On top of this damage, concessions more often than not worked illegally outside their concession area. Despite occasional protests by local communities living in the vicinity of the concession areas, these illegal practices were condoned by the authorities as they were often involved in the logging sector themselves.

This was different with the large-scale logging concession in the hands of the Padang-based university, Andalas. Issued by Jakarta, this concession bypassed all regulations with regard to regional control over natural resources as laid down in the regional autonomy laws. This, of course triggered protest from the public as well as the local government who saw their authority undermined by Jakarta. But despite the case against Jakarta being plausible, logging activities started in late 2001 soon after interim *bupati*, Antonius had, under pressure of the governor, signed the agreement with the concessionaire.

The large international conservation agencies active in Mentawai during *Reformasi* were chasing the facts. They failed to see and/or acknowledge that local communities were changing at fast pace and the local NGOs with which they had been working together during the last decade became – due to the transfer of activists and staff to the *kabupaten's* civil service – empty shells in only a few months time. Unable to anticipate on the social change that was taking place, they failed to timely rethink their assumptions and re-design their plans of action. Instead they held on to the method of co-optation, now trying to buy-off the local government. The new local government, however, turned out not be interested in a partnership with the conservation agencies. Eventually the conservation agencies, deeply distracted, withdrew from Mentawai.

Mentawai in contemporary academic debate

The processes of democratisation and decentralisation that were introduced in Indonesia after Suharto had to step down from power in 1998 have increased scholarly interests in political developments in the regions. Indonesia observers have put regional autonomy to the test of democratisation, good governance, the strengthening of civil society and sustainable natural resource management in a variety of regions in Indonesia (e.g. Bakker 2009; Hadiz 2007; Haug 2010; Van der Muur 2019; Vel 2008). Due to the localised flavour of regional autonomy, their observations highlight a variety of aspects resulting in a divers body of literature. All this literature brings several general tendencies of regional autonomy to the fore and allows me to position Mentawai within the broader context of decentralised Indonesia.

Two decades have passed since Indonesia turned from an authoritarian, highly centralised state into one of the world's largest democracies. The processes of democratisation and decentralisation have promoted and established an increase in civil liberties which led to a much more vivid public sphere characterised by increased public debate. The introduction of direct elections has furthermore brought politics to the local levels of administration, altering the relation between the centre (Java, Jakarta) and the outer regions, and has intensified political participation in general (Berenschot et.al. 2017; Haug et.al. 2017).

Unfortunately, however, in many regions local politics have been hijacked by local elites displaying predatory government practices that were common under the *Orde Baru* regime (Bakker 2009; Eindhoven 2007; Hadiz 2007; Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007). Direct elections have done little to curb the dominance of the elites and their patronage politics (Van Klinken 2009; Schulte Nordholt & Van Klinken 2007; Simanjuntak 2010). What Hadiz (2010) has called 'predatory elites' are winning elections by dirty politicking characterised by money politics and sometimes even forceful persuasion of their constituencies (Aspinall & Van Klinken 2010). The general public and voters in particular are lured but simultaneously kept at bay by policy poor rhetoric that does, however, appeal to certain ethnic sentiments (Schulte Nordholt 2008, 2012) and implies promises of preferential access to state resources. Political activity is often geared towards the facilitation of clientelistic exchanges between politicians and their constituencies rather than facilitating substantive public debate or developing programmatic policy agendas. As a result popular representation comes across as invalid and genuine democratisation itself is often questioned (Berenschot et. al. 2017).

The current state of affairs and the conclusions drawn from it raise questions about the form of and the way in which people in Indonesia experience citizenship. Why is it that, despite decentralisation and democratic reform, citizens in Indonesia do not seem to be able to resist, let alone end, the predatory and clientelistic practices of their political elites? According to Mietzner (2011) the persistence of these practices cannot solely be attributed to weak or non-existent civil society institutions or the shameless self-enrichment of the elites alone. After all, constituencies now have the power to vote all too corrupt politicians away (Schulte Nordholt 2012). Citizenship is generally studied and put to the test along Western parameters with little attention for the form of citizenship in a predominantly clientelistic political context such as in Indonesia (Berenschot et.al. 2017). What is needed is a reconceptualisation of citizenship and research that studies every-day interactions between citizens and the state rather than deviations from abstract Western notions of citizenship.

For Mentawai the introduction of regional autonomy foremost meant liberation from the Minangkabau hegemony, islamisation and state enforced development and civilisation programmes. From being excluded from the process of nation building, regional autonomy was believed to turn the Mentawaians into full-fledged citizens. As soon as the Mentawaians took over the management over the archipelago a powerful triad of politicians, bureaucrats and business elites ensued. Characterised by collusion, nepotism and corruption this triad excluded ordinary citizens from its midst and simultaneously

ensured the already weak judiciary not to mingle with their practices (Aspinall & Van Klinken 2010). With the law being a random and unpredictable institute, ordinary citizens rather avoid the abstract legal system. In the face of rather weak state institutions, citizens enter into clientelistic relations with known individuals in order to realise or protect one's rights. Politicians may or may not be elected based on their capacity to solve daily problems and provide personalised access to state resources. (Berenschot et.al. 2017). The egalitarian clan structure of Mentawaian society seems to have narrowed this form of citizenship down to kinship. The absence of society-wide uniting identity markers has probably also contributed to the seemingly weak Mentawaian civil society. As the epilogue to this thesis will show, contemporary developments in the Mentawai Archipelago are urgently requesting further research in this field.



Epilogue

Today we are able to look back at nearly twenty years of political and bureaucratic independency of the Mentawai Archipelago. This thesis has handled the first, most hectic years of regional autonomy and decentralisation and the conclusions I have drawn in the last chapter are based on observations I made during intensive field research during those years. The larger part of the past twenty years is, however, not part of the descriptive parts and analysis of this thesis. While many believe that the first years of *Reformasi* are by far the most interesting, I believe that the politicking as it is taking place in the Mentawai Archipelago today is as intriguing as it was two decades ago. In this epilogue I wish to take a look at the current state of politics and governance and the developments that ensue from it. This epilogue simultaneously serves as a check whether or not the conclusions I have drawn earlier are eligible for refinement.

Currently, Yudas Sabaggalet acts as *bupati* for the Mentawai district. In the elections of 2017, Yudas Sabaggalet was elected as *bupati* for a second term. This time he coupled up with Kortanius Sabeleake as his vice, while during his first term (2011-2016) Yudas was coupled with Rijel Samaloisa. Rijel, however, did not want to couple up with Yudas for a second term, because he was displeased about the extent to which Yudas allowed himself to be influenced by personal and outsider interests. Unlike Edison who was keen to minimize the interference of the Minangkabau and Islam, Judas is much more focused on economic development in which everyone can participate, also as Minangkabau or Muslim. Unlike Edison who was keen to minimize the interference of the Minangkabau and Islam, Judas is much more focused on large-scale economic development in which everyone regardless of their background and religion is welcome to participate. In view of the developments in the archipelago so far, Mentawai has changed from a backward region into a region that is full of opportunities. Yudas' more inclusive approach has led to a considerable increase in the numbers of migrants to Mentawai. Many Niassans, but even more Minangkabau have taken the leap to the islands, bringing their own culture and religion with them. When I visited Mentawai in 2014 it became clear to me that these migrants, with their predominantly Islamic signature, put a clear stamp on daily life in the archipelago. Mosques are sprouting and the call for prayer five times a day is now common rather than exceptional in almost every village. Yudas, being receptive to political interference from the mainland, gave the provincial government permission to build an extensive Islamic centre in the village of Malleppet, immediately after his inauguration

in 2011. Yudas then also appointed Ildil Gusti, a Moslem Minangkabau and known vassal of the governor, as the district's new secretary. Both requests were earlier submitted to Edison Saleleubaja during his second term (2006-2010) as *bupati*, but Edison never gave in to these requests from the mainland leading to a further deterioration of the relationship with the mainland that was already not too good at that time.

Different from the two previous direct local elections (*pemilihan kepala daerah – pilkada*) in 2006 and 2011, the *pilkada* of 2017 was entrenched with party politics from Jakarta. In view of the upcoming presidential elections (*pilihan presiden – pilpres*) in 2019, political parties in Jakarta interfered with the nomination of candidates for the *pilkada* 2017. Political parties wanted to make sure that they could count on the support from the regions for their presidential candidate and therefore interfered with the local elections. Party chairmen at the regional level had to come to an agreement with their headquarters in order to get their candidates for the *pilkada* approved of. At the time of the local elections in 2017 the PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan) as well as Partai Golkar had four seats within local parliament. They were therefore able to put a candidate for *bupati* forward without forming any coalition with another party within the DPRD. PDI-P put Yudas forward as their candidate and Partai Golkar choose to put Kortanius, who acted as vice chair of the DPRD at that time, forward for the position of vice *bupati*. Being without a candidate of their own, Partai Nasional Demokrat (Nasdem), Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), Parti Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra) and Partai Persatuan Indonesia (Perindo) joined the PDI-P – Golkar coalition in their support for Kortanius and Yudas. Kortanius and Yudas had to stand up against Rijel Samaloisa who coupled up with Binsar Saleleubaja, the two of them being supported by Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat (Hanura) and Partai Demokrat. The PDI-P, Partai Golkar and Hanura are part of the governing coalition under Indonesia's current president Joko Widodo and are therefore inclined to make sure that their candidate for the upcoming *pilpres* will be supported at the local level. Yudas and Kortanius enjoyed the support of precisely those parties. While it is denied that political parties have transferred money to their regional offices in order to support their candidates in the *pilkada*, it is a fact that political headquarters have deposited considerable amounts of money labelled as *ongkos logistik* (logistic expenses) to their provincial and regional branches (personal communication with Juniator Tulus 2018). These funds enabled Yudas and Kortanius to also campaign in the more remote areas of Simatalu and Simalegi on the island of Siberut. Having less funds to spend, Rijel and Binsar never went campaigning in these areas. Votes from these two areas were eventually decisive for the final victory of Yudas and Kortanius. As with every election, the 2017 *pilkada* also triggered rumours that the counting of votes would not have been fair. Whether or not this was actually true will always remain an unanswered question whereas there were no supervisors present in the areas of Simatalu and Simalegi the moment the votes were counted (personal communication with Juniator Tulus 2018).

The introduction of direct elections at the local level was believed to restrict the apparent decentralisation of corruption and strengthen democracy. Direct elections indeed made it more difficult for local parliaments to harass local administrators with their corruptive practices. The party politics that increased after the introduction of direct

elections, however, seriously hindered the development of democracy at the local level. Whereas government support for political parties was reduced in 2005, party bosses in Jakarta tried to make money from the regional elections by making local candidates pay considerable amounts of money in order to be allowed to run for office (Mietzner 2010a, 2010b; Schulte Nordholt 2008, 2012). For those willing to run for office in Mentawai this almost always meant that an external sponsor had to be found, automatically rendering the candidate vulnerable to the agenda of that sponsor. Despite the introduction of direct elections and the several adjustments that were made to the voting system in the course of time, the Mentawai public has become more and more cynical towards politicians and their promises. Common Mentawaians believe that politicians make a lot of promises, but actually do very little to further the development of the archipelago. Politicians are often classified as liars and thieves busy to serve their personal interests only. Mentawaians in general also believe that it eventually does not matter who is chosen as *bupati* or as a member of the DPRD, because in the end it comes down to replacing one corrupt politician with another corrupt politician (see also Eindhoven 2007). Despite their cynical standpoint, common Mentawaians in general are not shying away from accepting or even openly soliciting for goods and services during the campaigning. Asking for votes while bringing nothing in return is even classified as improper behaviour. Although goods and services are generally happily accepted, voters often do not feel honour-bound to actually vote for the donor. Candidates, however, felt betrayed and asked for their *oleh-oleh* (presents) to be returned after they had failed to obtain the position they had ran for, leading of course to uncomfortable quarrels with the public. Despite the fact that the public is involved in the campaigning, it is for a fact that common people are increasingly excluded from the political processes taking place. In the literature this process is often equated with a marginalisation of the public sphere and stands in rather sharp contrast with the earlier expectation that regional autonomy would lead to more democracy at the local level and a rise of civil society (Buehler 2010).

In November 2011, only few days after Edison was replaced by Yudas as *bupati*, Edison was detained on suspicion of alleged misappropriation of government funds. He was suspected of the misappropriation of 1.5 billion Rupiah (10% of the total budget) of the return on forest revenues (Provisi Sumber Daya Hutan – PSDH) during his first term. The fact that Edison was only taken to court in 2011 had everything to do with the fact that the former governor of West Sumatera, Gamawan Fauzi had become the Minister of Internal Affairs by that time. Fauzi, decorated for his efforts to battle corruption, had been bound with his hands on his back during his term as governor of West Sumatra. As the Minister of Internal Affairs, Fauzi started an investigation into the alleged corrupt practices of Edison during the time the latter acted as *bupati* for the Mentawai region. In July 2012 Edison was sentenced to 4 years in prison. Edison has always insisted that he had nothing to do with this corruption case. Edison remained convinced of the fact that the unpleasant relations between Mentawai and the Sumatran mainland were the main reason for Fauzi's hostile stance towards him personally.

Four years before Edison was sentenced to prison, Kurnia Sakerebau, former head of the Department of Education, also served 2 years in prison. He was sentenced for the

misappropriation of 1.2 billion Rupiah allocated for the development of education in Mentawai. While the general public always remained divided about the question whether or not Edison was involved in corruptive practices, Kurnia was declared guilty even before he was officially sentenced. Kurnia was personally held responsible for the fact that education in Mentawai remained lacking behind for such a long time.

And even Yudas Sabaggalet was interrogated at the police headquarters Padang in late February 2013 for alleged corruption of a fund meant for the rehabilitation of victims of the October 2010 earthquake and tsunami. Half of this fund (1.3 billion Rupiah) made available by Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (BNPB), Indonesia's national board for disaster management, was already used while there had been no relief or rehabilitation activities in the field (Padang Ekspres 27/2/13). It seems that Yudas would have said that the money was indeed used for rehabilitation and reconstruction activities and that he welcomed anyone who wanted to check this for themselves. This was basically the end of this corruption case while local communities in north Siberut, that were hit hardest by the 2010 earthquake and subsequent tsunami, insisted that they had not received any help from the local government.

By the end of his first term Edison eventually agreed the archipelago to be redivided from four to ten *kecamatan* (sub-districts) (Puailiggoubat 2002k). This triggered a new round of applications for the civil service as well as a second boom in construction activities. Transportation facilities between the islands were also further upgraded and by the end of his second term (2006-2011) Edison launched the idea of constructing a road network called *Jalan Trans Mentawai*. When Yudas became *bupati* in 2011 he quickly transferred this idea to his own agenda and started constructing in 2012 on the island of Sipora. Local contractor companies as well as the Indonesian national armed forces (TNI) are involved in the construction of the *Jalan Trans Mentawai*. Nearly one third of the total costs for this prestigious road network is charged from the national budget, while the remaining two third is accounted for by the local budget (APBD) on which it is weighing heavily. While Yudas had planned the project to be finished by the end of 2017, the road is still under construction at the time of this writing. In a playful protest in North Siberut, people started to plant banana trees on the unfinished part of the road between Sikabalan and Monganpoula and sent pictures of their plantings to the *bupati* hoping to draw his attention to their daily struggle to travel along this road. Yudas reacted through social media suggesting that this part of the *Jalan Trans Mentawai* had so far not been finished due to the fact that local communities had obstructed construction by planting banana trees on the cleared spaces. At the beginning of 2018, Yudas has said that he would do everything he could in order for the *Jalan Trans Mentawai* to be finished by the end of the year. He also suggested that the next item on his development agenda would be the construction and upgrading of several harbours on all four Mentawai Islands (Kabar24 2018).

At the beginning of 2018 the Mentawaians were suddenly confronted with a megalomaniac development project called Mentawai Bay. Under the banner of *Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus* (KEK), the central government wishes to upgrade the economy in nineteen regions Indonesia-wide. Two of these KEK are planned for West Sumatra, one in

Mandeh on the Sumatran mainland and the other in Mentawai. Mentawai Bay consists of an integrated tourist area enhancing the development of a harbour, an international airport, various hotels, resorts and apartments, restaurants, a shopping centre, a zoo, schools, a hospital, a water garden and various museums and an art centre. Mentawai Bay is located in the south of Siberut. In the master plan produced by the main investor of this project, PT Putra Mahakarya Sentosa, Mentawai Bay is projected over the village of Pasakiat Taillelu covering 2639 ha of land that is officially classified as *areal penggunaan lain* – APL (area for alternative use), but is actually in use by local communities for their gardens.¹⁷⁴ A total of eleven trillion Rupiah is budgeted for this project paid for by private investors. An actual start of the constructions is planned for 2019 (Mentawaikita 2018).

Preparations for this project already started in 2016, but local communities were confronted with requests to hand over their lands to the main investor only last January. Without giving much publicity to the project, last April it was suddenly announced that local communities had agreed to hand over their lands and that the environmental impact assessment was awaiting approval of the governor (Metro Andalas 2018).

¹⁷⁴ PT Putra Mahakarya Sentosa is a part of the Sentosa Group, a Surabaya-based hospitality management corporation, which owns, operates and develops apartments, hotels and properties in Indonesia. They are mainly active in Bali and Surabaya (Sentosa Group 2018).



Mentawai Bay poster by Sentosa Group (Obtained from gendovara.com)

Local communities are, however, not that unanimous about the handing over of their lands. Local communities have been offered 750.000 Rupiah per month for every hundred coconut trees that will disappear as a result of the development of Mentawai Bay. Communities in south Siberut produce a significant amount of copra and have calculated that they can make almost three times as much money by producing copra than by receiving the compensation for trees lost to the Mentawai Bay project. They are furthermore promised two million Rupiah every month for a duration of five years for the use of their land. The exact status of their land after these five years is not included in the appointments made with the local communities. As a result people can only speculate about whom will be seen as the owner of the land after these five years.

While the first signs of disagreements at the local level already start to unfold, various Mentawaians active on social media start questioning this mass tourism project. The project aims at economic development, but the project master plan fails to explain how local communities in Mentawai will be included in the project. Apart from the compensation paid to local communities who will lose their livelihoods to the project, the master plan mentions a significant increase in local income whereas local communities will be enabled to sell their agricultural products on the local market. Whereas local communities will lose their land and garden to the project the question is what agricultural products will actually be marketed by local communities. Messages on social media are questioning the general absence of the Mentawaians from the master plan as well as the environmental impact assessment and fear the marginalisation of local communities within their own territory. Especially the separation from their (ancestral) lands is seen as a major threat to their identity (Harian Haluan 2018a, 2018b).

Questionable also is the stance and position of the local government in the Mentawai Bay negotiations. Whereas Mentawai Bay is projected on so-called APL lands, it is local communities and local government that should make decisions about the way in which this land is put to use. It is, however, mainly the Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Tourism together with PT Putra Mahakarya Sentosa that have been dealing with the land issues attached to KEK Mentawai. So far the local government has been seemingly absent from the negotiations and have according to parties concerned only facilitated the smooth passage of procedures (personal communication with Juniator Tulus September 2018). While busy campaigning for the 2019 parliamentary elections (*pemilu legislatif - pileg*) candidates for the DPRD have, probably in an attempt to avoid the undermining of their position, chosen not to mention KEK while visiting local communities.

People active on social media believe that the local communities in south Siberut are left on their own and call for public uprising. The social media activists believe that local communities in Taleleu are unilaterally informed and can therefore be deceived and misled by all too pretty promises. People on social media feel that there is need for action and call upon their NGOs to take action. However, Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM), basically the only NGO left in the field, does not seem to be inclined to take action. The current director of YCM, Qbar Rivai Lubis, does indeed seem to have doubts about the Mentawai Bay project, but makes the impression to be little inclined to take action. This

in all probability has everything to do with the fact that vice *bupati* Kortanius is also still a member of the board of YCM.

While Edison mainly focussed on the development of the bureaucracy and the physical development of the archipelago, Yudas is now shifting his focus in the direction of economic development. This economic development is mainly outsider driven and based on the interests of the investors rather than that of local communities.

The development of the local bureaucracy and the physical development of the archipelago have sooner or later served the majority of the Mentawaians to a greater or a lesser extent. Some people had to wait for a long time to finally be hired as a civil servant. Some villages only received electricity three years ago, but eventually everybody gained something from Edison's efforts. This is probably questionable when big economic development project like KEK Mentawai are going ahead in next few years. It is likely that local communities stand to lose from projects like these. It will deprive them from their lands and their livelihoods. With potentially powerful international conservation agencies leaving the scene and civil society organisations hollowed, local communities in Mentawai seem to be on their own.

It will be interesting to see how local communities are going to deal with these recent developments. The option of retreat will become increasingly limited as land will become a scarce commodity as far as that is not the case already. This means that local communities will once more have to adapt to outsider influences, becoming marginalised within their own territory this time.

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Summary

Products and Producers of Social and Political Change. Activism and Politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago is about a generation of young, formally educated and politically engaged Mentawaians. My interest for this group of people was awakened when I first visited Padang, the provincial capital of West Sumatra, in 1997. It was then that I recognised that these people were involved in a, yet ill-defined, strive for more access to the resources of the local state. Divided over seven chapters, this thesis describes and discusses their intensifying quest for their increased partaking in the local political and bureaucratic machinery and their aspirations and attempts to develop the Mentawai Archipelago without the loss of their Mentawai identity.

The Mentawaians, living on the four Mentawai Islands that constitute the Mentawai Archipelago located some 100 kilometres off the west coast of West Sumatra, form a heterogeneous ethnic group consisting of some 170 politically autonomous clans. Traditionally the egalitarian Mentawai society is unfamiliar with any authority above the level of the clan (*suku*). The inclusion of the Mentawaians within the Indonesian nation state has introduced new administrative and authoritative units (e.g. the village (*desa*), the district (*kabupaten*), the province and the state) that exist alongside the clan structure. Mentawaians have long been excluded from local bureaucracy and politics on the basis of their alleged insufficient notion of what proper Indonesian citizenship encompasses.

Colonial as well as postcolonial rulers have constantly portrayed the Mentawaians as primitives in need of civilisation and a proper religion, as backward, isolated communities (*masyarakat terasing*) in urgent need of an upgrade towards full Indonesian citizenship. On the contrary, international discourses common in circles of the global indigenous peoples rights movement and the environmental movement tend to categorise the Mentawaians as a-political noble green savages, intrinsically sustainable environmentalists trying to carve out a living in a forested environment otherwise considered to be under serious threat. As a result of these contradictory views of who the Mentawaians are and who they should be, the Mentawaians have seen themselves confronted with Christianisation, Islamisation, the introduction of formal education, forced resettlement, levelling cultural policies of the postcolonial state, large-scale commercial logging, conservation efforts by international conservation agencies, the installation of a national park on the island of Siberut and increasing (ethno)tourism. Especially the invasive development and civilisation

programmes of the postcolonial state, altering and/or eliminating almost every aspect of their traditional lifestyle, were introduced without the consent of the Mentawaians and have caused the Mentawaians to perceive themselves as second-class citizens not worthy of partaking within the modern Indonesian nation state.

From the 1980s onwards a growing group of formally educated Mentawaians started to question their exclusion from local politics and decision-making processes and their subsequent social marginalisation from larger society. Their critical voices, misinterpreted by influential overseas donor agencies, were bended towards the goals of these agencies mainly aiming at the conservation of Mentawai's natural resources, the forests standing on the island of Siberut in particular. The international attention for nature conservation has led to a multitude of otherwise aimless local NGOs, all trying to obtain a share of the conservation pie. This relationship between local NGOs and generous overseas donors has certainly delayed the large-scale commercial exploitation of Siberut's forests, but has simultaneously created a gap of distrust between local communities and their fellow Mentawaians involved in the local NGOs. Based on incorrect assumptions, donor agencies have overestimated the competencies of NGO staff and the capacity of NGOs in general to implement their projects. Donor agencies started to withdraw from Mentawai during the early years of regional autonomy when the local NGO sector started to fall apart as NGO staff transferred to positions within the local government and bureaucracy.

The Southeast Asian economic and financial crisis of the late 1990s that hit Indonesia hard brought an end to the authoritarian *Orde Baru* regime of president Suharto in may 1998. A wave of democratisation and decentralisation then swept through Indonesia, transforming Indonesia in one of the world's largest democracies. The introduction of regional autonomy (*otonomi daerah*), transferring much of the former central government's authority to the regions, was probably the most influential reform policy during the first years of *reformasi* (reformation). *Kabupaten* (districts), being the main recipients of the new authority, became important regional centres of power.

The newly acquired importance of the *kabupaten* not only triggered an increase in their numbers Indonesia-wide, but also caused an upsurge of both old and new local elites, formerly excluded from power by the highly centralistic system, (re)turning into ruling elites. These shifts in power constellations have turned the *kabupaten* into important sites of regional power struggles in which the elites tend to play a role of major importance, mobilising ethnic and religious sentiments to achieve their goals.

In some of the new *kabupaten* formerly marginalised ethnic minorities have become local majorities within the new district's borders. This development was especially within international circles of indigenous peoples rights protectionists and conservationists received with optimism. Self-government and increased property rights were believed to improve the stance of marginalised ethnic minorities vis-à-vis the Indonesian unitary nation state and simultaneously discourage unsustainable natural resource exploitation. Local elites, however, display a tendency to act in their own interest and in that of their protégées, excluding others on the basis of kinship and ethno-religious sentiments, creating new forms of marginalisation.

For the young, formally educated and politically engaged Mentawaians the introduction of regional autonomy formed an important window of opportunity. After intense lobbying on behalf of a small group of politically engaged Mentawaians, the Mentawai Archipelago became a politically and bureaucratically independent *kabupaten* in October 1999, seeing itself freed from decades of cultural, political and economic hegemony of the mainland oriented Minangkabau. After the initial euphoria had died down, Mentawai saw itself confronted with the laborious task to build a *kabupaten* from scratch.

During what should have been a sort interim period, a local parliament (DPRD) was to be installed that on its turn would be responsible for the election of a new *bupati* (head of district). The governor of West Sumatra choose to install a Minangkabau interim *bupati* responsible for this job. This decision met with intense resistance from the Mentawaians. Still traumatised by the Minangkabau interference within their territory the Mentawaians feared that a Minangkabau *bupati* would install a Minangkabau dominated DPRD rendering the independence of the archipelago futile. Frequent public protests directed at the governor as well as at the interim *bupati*, demanding a *putra asli daerah* (literally: 'native sons of the area/region' e.g. Mentawaians) for a *bupati*, made it impossible for the latter to fulfil the tasks he was appointed for. The composing of the DPRD as well as the development of the governmental complex in the new district capital Tuapeijat met with serious delay due to the turmoil around the interim *bupati*. As a result the administration could not be moved to Tuapeijat and thus remained in temporary offices in Padang. In April 2001 the governor gave in to the protests and installed a new interim *bupati*. Despite being a Mentawaiian, the Islamic signature of this second interim as well as his alleged advocacy of the logging sector again triggered public resistance against the appointment of this second interim. Together with the new interim *bupati*, a new DPRD was installed in April 2001. In a controversial election this DPRD voted for a new *bupati*, a Protestant reverend originating from the island of Sipora, who was installed in November 2001, two years after the Mentawai Archipelago became an independent *kabupaten*.

Expectations were high and the public was confident that the development of the Mentawai Archipelago would take a flight now that local government had largely been taken over by Mentawaians. But the task at hand was overwhelming and the new politicians and administrators were lacking experience and monitoring, resulting in a messy, uncontrolled situation in which people were mainly acting in their own interests.

The establishment of a bureaucratic structure along with the proper facilities was one of the first priorities of the new government. A generous annual budget from Jakarta was received in order to finance the new bureaucracy. Whereas the Mentawai Archipelago lacked basic infrastructure and suffered from poor or even absent education, healthcare and transportation facilities, the local government's initial focus was on the physical development of these sectors, changing the entire archipelago in an enormous construction site. The development of government and housing facilities in Tuapeijat as well as the expansion of transportation facilities between the mainland and the Mentawai Archipelago and between the Mentawai Islands themselves were prioritised. At a later stage a network of roads in and between villages was developed, triggering

a overwhelming increase in motorcycle ownership. Still later education and healthcare facilities were constructed and finally some attention was paid to the development of public facilities such as electricity, running water and telecommunications. Without proper monitoring and control, occasional contractor companies – often unhindered by any knowledge about constructing – skimmed many of the infrastructural projects to such an extent that only a fraction of the initial budgets were left for actual construction. Projects were often delivered in questionable condition as a result of which people were not eager or even simply unable to start living or working within the new facilities. With little to no maintenance many of the newly constructed facilities deteriorated without ever being used officially.

Due to the fact that there were so little paid job opportunities within the Mentawai Archipelago, people were eager to become a civil servant. Despite the fact that becoming a civil servant was high on the priority list of many Mentawaians, the *bupati* experienced difficulties filling the available positions. Mentawai lacked sufficiently educated people to fill all vacancies and simultaneously the appointing of bureaucratic staff was subject to ethnic sentiments. Rather than being elected for substantive reasons, people were selected or rejected from the civil service on the basis of religion, *asal-usul* (origin) and kinship. Whether or not one actually passed the examination to qualify for the application as a civil servant was sometimes rather a formality than a real part of the selection procedure. This caused unrest and the first signs of distrust amongst the public with regard to their government became visible. Apparently unhindered by the shortage of capable candidates for the civil service, the local government continued to expand the local bureaucracy, as a result of which the state became the prime employer within the Mentawai Archipelago. The continuous focus on the expansion of bureaucracy should not be mistaken as governing. Politicians were eager to fulfil their promise to make development available to all Mentawaians by creating jobs and material benefits. This, however, had little to do with sound governing, but hinted more in the direction of buying off constituency support and granting claims made by friends and relatives. The continuous expansion of the bureaucracy led to a top-heavy structure characterised by hidden unemployment and offices staffed with people who actually had no idea what was expected of them.

The messy and delayed establishment of the archipelago's political structure and bureaucratic system went hand in hand with its ill government. A general vision and mission statement issued in October 2001 indicated a strong focus on the socio-political and economic development of the Mentawai Archipelago. Detailed plans of work were, however, never really produced and budgets and financial reports were always late, incomplete and often missed a link with reality and therefore suggested corrupt practices. Every now and then new regulations were passed through parliament, but as soon as the new legislation became operable, more than once the bureaucratic machinery lacked the means and the manpower to actually implement them properly. The significant lack of both governmental and administrative strength deepened the mutual distrust between the executive and the legislative part of the local government as a result of which governing became nearly impossible. Local government officials, often more interested

in the job rather than the tasks it encompassed, continued to linger around in Padang and were thus frequently absent from Mentawai while engaged in paid-for holidays disguised as *studi banding* (comparative studies) or *perjalanan dinas* (official travels). It were especially the members of the DPRD, holding a strong position vis-à-vis the executive part of government, who proved to be prone to corruption. As a result of overt corrupt practices and more concealed lucrative private-public arrangements, individual members of the DPRD enjoyed self-granted privileges such as motorcycles, computers, mobile phones, cars and even houses.

Self-government was believed to lead to the development of the archipelago without the loss of Mentawaian identity. In practice it turned out to be rather complicated to find a solution for the paradox raised by the postcolonial government especially. Half a decade of aggressive development policies had learned the Mentawaians that in order to modernise they had to let go of their traditional forest-based lifestyle and all socio-religious aspects attached to it. With the core of their identity eroded, Mentawaians experience difficulties combining development and modernity with their identity as Mentawaians. Eager to let go of everything that possibly connected them to the *masyarakat terasing* (isolated community) discourse current during the *Orde Baru* period, the new local government has consciously chosen not to link itself with AMAN, a national organisation committed to reinforce the rights, existence and autonomy of *masyarakat adat* (*adat* communities) nation wide.

Instead, local leaders have organised various cultural gatherings, workshops, and song and dance contests. But these government-sponsored activities can hardly be understood as serious attempts to reinforce Mentawaian identity. The sense of community that is certainly created through these seemingly a-political activities should rather be understood as an investment to be put to use during the next elections. The identity aspect of these gatherings and activities is reduced to mere folklore, sometimes displaying invented aspects of tradition rather than aspects of identity that were once part of the Mentawaian *adat* (customs, tradition).

The prospect of the extraordinary elections of 2004 added yet another sentiment to the politicking that had taken place so far. Mentawai had to be physically as well as mentally prepared for these elections. Campaigning and protest actions against the state of affairs with regard to the preparations occurred simultaneously showing tremendous division within Mentawaian society and new forms of marginalisation in the sense that local communities were barely granted the opportunity to partake in the political negotiation taking place.

Decentralisation and regional autonomy were believed to empower local communities and strengthen citizenship. While regional autonomy has certainly brought politics to the local level, common people in Mentawai have always been and remained distant from the state. The independent clan structure of Mentawaian society itself is important aspect in the explanation why the strengthening of a sense of citizenship is lagging behind in Mentawai. The processes of decentralisation, which emphasise difference rather than solidarity,

have sharpened not only inter-ethnic, but intra-ethnic and religious boundaries as well. Decentralisation has reinforced the independent nature of the various clans in Mentawai and has certainly sparked their mutual hostility. Motivated by the intrinsic nature of the clan structure of Mentawaian society, ingredients for a strong and relative autonomous civil society are lacking in Mentawai. In Mentawai, decentralisation has politicised the clan rather than that it has brought about a strengthening of civil society.

Samenvatting

Products and Producers of Social and Political Change. Activism and Politicking in the Mentawai Archipelago handelt over een generatie jonge, formeel opgeleide en politiek geëngageerde Mentawaiers. Mijn interesse voor deze groep mensen werd reeds gewekt toen ik Padang, de provinciale hoofdstad van West Sumatra voor het eerst bezocht in 1997. Toen werd ik mij ervan bewust dat deze mensen betrokken waren bij een, toen nog slecht schetsmatig omlijnd, streven naar meer participatie in de lokale politiek en bestuur. Verdeeld over zeven hoofdstukken beschrijft en bespreekt dit proefschrift de zoektocht van deze groep mensen naar meer deelname aan de lokale politiek en bureaucratie. Tevens beschrijft dit proefschrift hun ambities en pogingen om de Mentawai-archipel tot ontwikkeling te brengen zonder het verlies van hun Mentawaise identiteit.

De Mentawai-archipel bestaat uit vier eilanden die ongeveer 100 kilometer voor de westkust van West Sumatra in de Indische oceaan zijn gesitueerd. De Mentawaiers zijn een heterogene ethnische groep die bestaat uit zo'n 170 politiek autonome clans. De traditionele Mentawaise samenleving kent geen formeel gezag boven het niveau van de clan (*suku*). De opname van de Mentawaiers in de Indonesische natiestaat heeft nieuwe bestuurlijke en gezaghebbende eenheden geïntroduceerd (bijvoorbeeld het dorp (*desa*), het district (*kabupaten*), de provincie en de staat) die naast de clanstructuur bestaan. Op basis van hun vermeende ongeschiktheid voor het Indonesische burgerschap, zijn de Mentawaiers lang uitgesloten geweest van deelname aan de lokale politiek en bureaucratie.

Zowel koloniale als postkoloniale gezaghebbers hebben de Mentawaiers voortdurend afgeschilderd als primitieven die beschaving en een juiste religie nodig hadden, als achterlijke (*terbelakang*), geïsoleerde gemeenschappen (*masyarakat terasing*) die dringend behoefte hadden aan hulp die hen naar een volledig Indonesisch staatsburgerschap zou leiden. Het discours gangbaar in internationale kringen van natuurbescherming en binnen dat van het mondiale netwerk voor inheemse volken categoriseert de Mentawaiers veelal als a-politieke nobele wilden, intrinsiek duurzame milieuactivisten die trachten te overleven in een ernstig bedreigde bosrijke leefomgeving. Als gevolg van deze tegenstrijdige visies op wie de Mentawaiers en wie zij zouden moeten zijn, zijn de Mentawaiers gedurende de afgelopen eeuw geconfronteerd met kerstening, islamisering, de introductie van formeel onderwijs, gedwongen hervestiging,

nivellerend cultureel beleid van de postkoloniale staat, grootschalige commerciële houtkap, verschillende natuurbeschermingsprogramma's van internationale organisaties, het oprichten van een nationale park op het eiland Siberut en toenemend (ethno) toerisme. Met name de ingrijpende ontwikkelings- en civilisatieprogramma's van de postkoloniale overheid, die bijna elk aspect van hun traditionele levensstijl veranderen dan wel elimineren, werden zonder de toestemming van de Mentawaiers geïntroduceerd en hebben ertoe geleid dat de Mentawaiers zichzelf als tweederangs burgers zijn gaan beschouwen die niet voldoende waardig zijn om deel te nemen aan de moderne Indonesische natiestaat.

Vanaf de jaren tachtig begon een groeiende groep formeel opgeleide Mentawaiers hun uitsluiting van de lokale politiek en besluitvormingsprocessen en hun daaruit voortvloeiende sociale marginalisering te betwijfelen. Hun kritisch geluid, verkeerd geïnterpreteerd door invloedrijke overzeese donor organisaties, werden omgebogen naar de doelen van deze organisaties die voornamelijk gericht waren op natuurbescherming, de bescherming van het oerwoud op Siberut in het bijzonder. De internationale aandacht voor natuurbescherming heeft geleid tot een veelheid aan lokale NGO's, die allemaal probeerden een deel van de budgetten van de donors te bemachtigen. Deze relatie tussen lokale NGO's en de veelal gulle overzeese organisaties heeft de grootschalige commerciële exploitatie van de bossen op Siberut zeker vertraagd, maar heeft tegelijkertijd het wantrouwen tussen lokale gemeenschappen en de Mentawaiers die betrokken waren bij de lokale NGO's aangewakkerd. Op basis van onjuiste aannames hebben donorinstanties de kennis en kunde van NGO personeel en de capaciteit van lokale NGO's in het algemeen om uitvoering te geven aan de natuurbeschermingsprojecten overschat. De internationale natuurbeschermingsorganisaties begonnen zich terug te trekken uit Mentawai tijdens de eerste jaren van regionale autonomie toen de lokale NGO sector uiteen begon te vallen voornamelijk omdat NGO personeel een overstap maakte naar aantrekkelijker posities binnen de lokale overheid en de bureaucratie.

De economische en financiële crisis in Zuidoost-Azië van eind jaren negentig die Indonesië hard trof, maakte in mei 1998 een einde aan het autoritaire *Orde Baru* regime van president Suharto. Als gevolg van democratisering en decentralisatie transformeerde Indonesië in vrij korte tijd in een van de grootste democratieën ter wereld. De invoering van regionale autonomie (*otonomi daerah*), waarbij een groot deel van het gezag van de voormalige centrale overheid werd overgedragen naar de regio's, was waarschijnlijk de meest invloedrijke hervormingsmaatregel die tijdens de eerste jaren van *reformasi* (reformatie) werd ingevoerd. *Kabupaten* (districten), de belangrijkste spelers in de herverdeling van de nieuwe autoriteit, werden belangrijke regionale machtscentra. De nieuwe machtspositie van de *kabupaten* leidde niet alleen tot een toename van hun aantal in heel Indonesië, maar veroorzaakte ook een opleving van zowel oude als nieuwe lokale elites, voorheen uitgesloten van de macht door de zeer centralistische overheid, die de macht (opnieuw) naar zich toetrokken. Door deze verschuivingen in machtsverhoudingen zijn de *kabupaten* veranderd in belangrijke centra van regionale machtsstrijd. De lokale elites spelen een prominente rol in deze machtsstrijd waarin zij etnische en religieuze sentimenten mobiliseren om hun doelen te bereiken.

In sommige van de nieuwe *kabupaten* behoorden voorheen gemarginaliseerde etnische minderheden wegens de nieuwe grenzen ineens tot de dominantie groep binnen het district. Deze ontwikkeling werd vooral onder natuurbeschermers en in kringen van inheemse volken rechtenorganisaties met optimisme ontvangen. Zelfbestuur en toegenomen eigendomsrechten werden verondersteld de positie van gemarginaliseerde etnische minderheden ten opzichte van de Indonesische staat te verbeteren en tegelijkertijd de duurzame exploitatie van natuurlijke hulpbronnen aan te moedigen. Lokale elites hebben echter de neiging om te handelen in hun eigen belang en in dat van hun protégés, anderen uitsluitend op basis van verwantschap en ethno-religieuze sentimenten, waardoor nieuwe vormen van marginalisatie worden gecreëerd.

Voor de jonge, formeel opgeleide en politiek geëngageerde Mentawaiers vormde de introductie van regionale autonomie een belangrijke kans. Na intense lobby van een kleine groep politiek geëngageerde Mentawaiers, werd de Mentawai-archipel in oktober 1999 een politiek en bureaucratisch onafhankelijke *kabupaten*. Mentawai zag zichzelf bevrijd van tientallen jaren van culturele, politieke en economische hegemonie van de op het vasteland georiënteerde Minangkabau. Nadat de aanvankelijke euforie was weggeëbd, zag Mentawai zich geconfronteerd met de moeizame taak om vanuit het niets een *kabupaten* op te bouwen.

Tijdens, wat een korte interim periode had moeten zijn, moest een lokaal parlement (DPRD) worden geïnstalleerd dat op zijn beurt verantwoordelijk zou zijn voor de verkiezing van een nieuwe *bupati* (districtshoofd). De gouverneur van West Sumatra koos er voor om een Minangkabau interim *bupati* te installeren die verantwoordelijk was voor deze taak. Deze beslissing stuitte op weerstand van de Mentawaiers. Nog altijd getraumatiseerd door de jarenlange bemoeienis van de Minangkabau op hun grondgebied vreesden de Mentawaiers dat een Minangkabau *bupati* een door de Minangkabau gedomineerde DPRD zou installeren waardoor de onafhankelijkheid van de archipel ter discussie zou komen te staan. Middels veelvuldige publieke protesten gericht tegen de gouverneur en de interim *bupati*, eisten de Mentawaiers een *putra asli daerah* (letterlijk: 'inheemse zonen van het gebied / gebied' bijv. Mentawaiers) als een *bupati*. Door alle protesten werd de interim *bupati* het werken vrijwel onmogelijk gemaakt waardoor het samenstellen van de nieuwe DPRD alsmede de ontwikkeling van het overheidscomplex in de nieuwe districtshoofdstad Tuapeijat ernstige vertraging opliep.

Als gevolg hiervan kon de administratie niet naar Tuapeijat worden verplaatst en bleef deze dus in tijdelijke kantoren in Padang. In april 2001 gaf de gouverneur toe aan de protesten en installeerde een nieuwe interim *bupati*. Ondanks het feit dat deze tweede interim een Mentawaiër was, leidde zijn islamitische signatuur en vermeende betrokkenheid in de houtkapsector opnieuw tot weerstand van het publiek. Desondanks werd samen met de nieuwe interim *bupati* ook een nieuwe DPRD geïnstalleerd in april 2001. In een controversiële verkiezing stemde deze DPRD voor een nieuwe *bupati*, een protestantse dominee afkomstig van het eiland Sipora die in november 2001, twee jaar nadat de Mentawai Archipel een onafhankelijke *kabupaten* werd, werd geïnstalleerd.

De verwachtingen waren hoog gespannen en het publiek was ervan overtuigd dat de ontwikkeling van de Mentawai-archipel een vlucht zou nemen nu de lokale overheid grotendeels door Mentawaiers was overgenomen. Maar de taak was overweldigend en de nieuwe politici en bestuurders hadden geen ervaring en kregen geen ondersteuning, wat resulteerde in een rommelige, ongecontroleerde situatie waarin mensen voornamelijk in hun eigen belang handelden.

Het opzetten van een bureaucratische structuur samen met de juiste faciliteiten was een van de eerste prioriteiten van de nieuwe regering. Voor de financiering van de opzet van de nieuwe politieke en bureaucratische structuur ontving de nieuwe *kabupaten* een jaarlijks budget vanuit Jakarta. Omdat de Mentawai-archipel niet of nauwelijks beschikte over basisinfrastructuur en voorzieningen op het gebied van onderwijs, gezondheidszorg en transport nihil waren, richtte de lokale overheid zich in eerste instantie op de fysieke ontwikkeling van deze sectoren en veranderde de hele archipel in een enorme bouwplaats. De ontwikkeling van de overheids- en de huisvestingsfaciliteiten in Tuapeijat evenals de uitbreiding van transportfaciliteiten tussen het vasteland en de Mentawai-archipel en tussen de Mentawai-eilanden zelf hadden de prioriteit. In een later stadium werd een netwerk van wegen in en tussen de verschillende dorpen ontwikkeld, wat een overweldigende toename in het bezit van motorfietsen teweegbracht. Nog later werden onderwijs- en gezondheidszorgfaciliteiten gebouwd en uiteindelijk werd ook nog enige aandacht besteed aan de ontwikkeling van openbare voorzieningen zoals elektriciteit, stromend water en telecommunicatie. Zonder goed toezicht en tijdige controle roomden de veelal voor de gelegenheid in het leven geroepen aannemersbedrijven - vaak zonder enige kennis van constructie - veel van de infrastructurele projecten zo sterk af dat slechts een fractie van de oorspronkelijke budgetten overbleef voor daadwerkelijke constructie. Projecten werden vaak in een dubieuze staat afgeleverd, waardoor mensen niet enthousiast of zelfs niet in staat waren om in de nieuwe gebouwen te gaan wonen of werken. Met weinig tot geen onderhoud raakten veel van de nieuw gebouwde faciliteiten in verval zonder ooit officieel in gebruik genomen te zijn.

Vanwege het feit dat er zo weinig betaalde banen binnen de Mentawai-archipel te vinden waren, wilden mensen graag ambtenaar worden. Ondanks het feit dat ambtenaar worden hoog op de prioriteitenlijst stond van veel Mentawaiers, ondervond de *bupati* moeilijkheden bij het invullen van de beschikbare posities. Mentawai miste voldoende opgeleide mensen om alle vacatures te vervullen en tegelijkertijd werd het aanstellen van bureaucratisch personeel bemoeilijkt door tal van etnisch-religieuze sentimenten. In plaats van om substantiële redenen gekozen te worden, werden mensen geselecteerd of afgewezen op basis van religie, *asal-usul* (herkomst) en verwantschap. Of iemand daadwerkelijk geslaagd was voor het verplicht toelatingsexamen, was soms eerder een formaliteit dan een echt onderdeel van de selectieprocedure. Dit veroorzaakte onrust en de eerste tekenen van wantrouwen bij het publiek met betrekking tot hun regering werden zichtbaar. Ogenscheinlijk ongehinderd door het gebrek aan bekwame kandidaten voor het ambtenarenapparaat, bleef de lokale overheid de lokale bureaucratie uitbreiden, waardoor de staat de belangrijkste werkgever werd binnen de Mentawai-archipel. De voortdurende aandacht voor de uitbreiding van de bureaucratie moet echter niet worden

verward met regeren. Politici stonden te popelen om hun belofte na te komen om ontwikkeling en vooruitgang beschikbaar te maken voor alle Mentawaiers door banen en materiële voordelen te creëren. Dit had echter weinig te maken met regeren, maar eerder met het paaieren van de achterban en het inlossen van beloften aan vrienden en familieleden. De voortdurende uitbreiding van de bureaucratie leidde tot een topzware structuur gekenmerkt door verborgen werkloosheid en kantoren gevuld met mensen die eigenlijk geen idee hadden wat er van hen werd verwacht.

De rommelige en vertraagde opzet van de politieke structuur en het bureaucratische systeem ging hand in hand met het slechte bestuur van de archipel. Een algemeen visie en missie statement, uitgegeven in oktober 2001, wees op een sterke focus op de sociaal-politieke en economische ontwikkeling van de Mentawai-archipel. Gedetailleerde werkplannen werden echter nooit echt geproduceerd en begrotingen en financiële rapporten waren altijd laat, onvolledig en misten vaak een link met de realiteit en suggereerden daarom corrupte praktijken. Zo nu en dan werden er nieuwe lokale wetten aangenomen door het parlement, maar zodra de nieuwe wetgeving operationeel werd, miste meer dan eens de middelen en de mankracht om ze op de juiste manier te implementeren. Het aanzienlijke gebrek aan zowel bestuurlijke als bestuurlijke kracht verdiepte het wederzijdse wantrouwen tussen het uitvoerende en het wetgevende deel van de lokale overheid waardoor het besturen van de archipel bijna onmogelijk werd. Lokale overheidsfunctionarissen, vaak meer geïnteresseerd in de baan dan in de taken behorend bij de baan, bleven rondhangen in Padang en waren dus vaak niet aanwezig in Mentawai. Zij vulden hun dagen met betaalde vakanties onder het mom van *studi-banding* (studiereizen) of *perjalanan dinas* (officiële, werkgerelateerde reizen). Het waren met name de leden van de DPRD, die een machtspositie hadden ten opzichte van het uitvoerende deel van de regering, die vatbaar bleken te zijn voor corruptie. Als gevolg van openlijke corrupte praktijken en meer verborgen lucratieve publiek-private arrangementen genoten individuele leden van de DPRD van zelfverleende privileges zoals motorfietsen, computers, mobiele telefoons, auto's en zelfs huizen.

Zelfbestuur werd verondersteld te leiden tot de ontwikkeling van de archipel zonder verlies van de Mentawai-identiteit. In de praktijk bleek het nogal ingewikkeld om een oplossing te vinden voor de paradox die vooral de postkoloniale overheid had teweeggebracht. De ruim vijftig jaar van agressief ontwikkelingsbeleid had de Mentawaiers geleerd dat ze, om te moderniseren, hun traditionele op het bos gebaseerde levensstijl en alle socio-religieuze aspecten die eraan verbonden waren, moesten loslaten. Met de kern van hun identiteit uitgehold, ervaren Mentawaiers moeilijkheden bij het combineren van ontwikkeling en moderniteit met hun identiteit als Mentawaiers. Omdat ze zo graag alles los willen laten dat hen mogelijk heeft verbonden met het discours over *masyarakat terasing* (geïsoleerde gemeenschap) gangbaar tijdens de *Orde Baru*-periode, heeft de nieuwe lokale overheid er bewust voor gekozen zich niet te verbinden aan AMAN, een nationale organisatie die zich inzet voor versterking van het bestaan, de rechten en de autonomie van *masyarakat adat* (adat gemeenschappen) in het hele land. In plaats daarvan hebben lokale leiders verschillende culturele bijeenkomsten, workshops en zing- en danswedstrijden georganiseerd. Maar deze door de overheid gesponsorde

activiteiten kunnen nauwelijks worden begrepen als serieuze pogingen om de Mentawaise identiteit te versterken. Het gemeenschapsgevoel dat zeker wordt gecreëerd door deze ogenschijnlijk a-politieke activiteiten moet eerder worden gezien als het creëren van goodwill die tijdens de volgende verkiezingen kan worden ingezet. Het identiteitsaspect van deze bijeenkomsten en activiteiten wordt gereduceerd tot louter folklore, waarbij veelal verzonnen aspecten van de traditie worden getoond in plaats van aspecten van identiteit die ooit deel uitmaakten van de Mentawaise *adat* (gewoonten, tradities).

Het vooruitzicht van de buitengewone verkiezingen van 2004 voegde nog een ander sentiment toe aan de *politicking* die tot nu toe had plaatsgevonden. Mentawai moest zowel fysiek als mentaal voorbereid worden op deze verkiezingen. Gelijktijdige campagne en protestacties tegen de gang van zaken met betrekking tot de voorbereidingen op de verkiezingen legden een enorme verdeeldheid binnen de Mentawaise samenleving bloot. Tevens werden contouren van nieuwe vormen van marginalisering zichtbaar in die zin dat lokale gemeenschappen nauwelijks de kans kregen om deel te nemen aan de politieke onderhandelingen die plaatsvonden.

Decentralisatie en regionale autonomie werden verondersteld het burgerschap van lokale gemeenschappen te versterken. Hoewel regionale autonomie de politiek zeker naar het lokale niveau heeft gebracht, zijn gewone mensen in Mentawai altijd ver van de staat verwijderd geweest. De onafhankelijke clanstructuur van de Mentawaise samenleving zelf is een belangrijk aspect in de verklaring waarom de versterking van een gevoel van burgerschap in Mentawai achterblijft. De processen van decentralisatie die de nadruk leggen op verschil in plaats van solidariteit hebben niet alleen de inter-etnische, maar ook de intra-etnische en religieuze grenzen aangescherpt. Decentralisatie heeft het onafhankelijke karakter van de verschillende clans in Mentawai versterkt en heeft geleid tot een aanwakking van hun wederzijdse vijandigheid. Gemotiveerd door de intrinsieke aard van de clanstructuur van de Mentawaise samenleving, ontbreken ingrediënten voor een sterke en relatieve autonome burgermaatschappij in Mentawai. In Mentawai heeft decentralisatie vooral geleid tot een politisering van de clan en eigenlijk nauwelijks tot een versterking van het maatschappelijk middenveld.

Glossary

Bahasa Indonesia

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Adat | Custom, tradition |
| Autonomi daerah | Regional autonomy |
| Badan Permusyawaratan Desa | Village parliament |
| Bahasa Indonesia | Indonesian language |
| Belum beragama | Not yet having a religion |
| Belum maju | Not yet progressed |
| Bodoh | Stupid |
| Bupati | Head of district |
| Camat | Head of sub-district |
| Da'i (arab) | Islamic missionary |
| Desa | Village |
| Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah | Local parliament |
| Dusun | Hamlet |
| Gotong royong | Collaboration, communal work, mutual aid |
| Guna guna | Harm inflicting black magic |
| Haram (arab) | Prohibited by Islam |
| Indekos | Room and board |
| Kepala desa | Head of village |
| Komisi sosial | Social Commission |
| Kuno | Old, outdated |
| Lugu | Ignorant |
| Kecamata | Sub-district |
| Kehutanan | Forestry |
| Kepala suku | Head of the clan |
| Khafir (arab) | Of different belief |
| Kotor | Dirty |
| Maju | Progress, progressed |
| Miskin | Poor |
| Murtat (arab) | Those who renounced Islam |
| Orde Baru | New Order |
| Pancasila | Philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state |
| Pembangunan | Development |
| Pemekaran | Blossoming, administrative fragmentation |
| Peraturan desa | Village regulations |
| Perikanan | Fishery |
| Perkebunan | Plantation |
| Pertanian | Agriculture |
| Ranah | Realm |
| Reformasi | Reformation |
| Suku | Clan |
| Suku bangsa | Ethnic group |
| Terbelakang | Underdeveloped |
| Toko | Store |

| <i>Bahasa Mentawai</i> | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Ala'toga | Bride price |
| Arat | Custom, tradition |
| Arat islam | Islamic tradition/religion |
| Arat katolik | Catholic tradition/religion |
| Arat laggai | Settlement regulations |
| Arat protestan | Protestant tradition/religion |
| Arat puaranan | Outsider tradition/religion |
| Arat sabulungan | Mentawaian tradition, cosmological system |
| Babalat | Dagger |
| Bilou | Primate species, endemic to Mentawai |
| Bokkoi | Primate species, endemic to Mentawai |
| Gette | Root vegetable, taro |
| Iba pangurei | Dowry |
| Joja | Primate specie, endemic to Mentawai |
| Kamaman | Mother's brother |
| Kerei | Medicine man |
| Laggai | Settlement, village, stone, testicle |
| Lalep | Nuclear family |
| Moile-moile | Slowly |
| Muntogat | Kin group with common ancestor |
| Parurukat uma | Cluster of kin groups living in communal house |
| Pasaggangan | Violent conflict |
| Porak | Land |
| Porak punuteteu | Ancestral land |
| Punubuak | Sister's children |
| Puumaijat | Settlement of one clan |
| Rakrak | Social alliance |
| Ratei | Graveyard |
| Rimata | Ritual leader |
| Sabirut | Inhabitants of Siberut |
| Sakalagat | Stereotypical indication for people who left Siberut |
| Sakalelegat | Stereotypical indication for people who stayed on Sipora |
| Sakobou | Of our kind |
| Sapou | Small field house |
| Sasareu | Strangers, outsiders, tourists |
| Sibakkat laggai | Initial settlers |
| Sikameinan | Water sprit |
| Sikaoinan | Crocodile |
| Simakobu | Primate specie, endemic to Mentawai |
| Simattaui | Mentawaian |
| Simateggele | Cutting with a machete |
| Siripo | Close friend of same sex |
| Taek | Black magic |
| Tulou | Fine |
| Uma | House, clan |

Curriculum vitae

Myrna Eindhoven was born on 25 September 1971 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Myrna completed her secondary education (HAVO) in 1989 after which she was enrolled in the propaedeutic programme 'Vormgeving & Communicatie' of the Ichthus Hogeschool in Rotterdam. In the spring of 1993 Myrna completed her pre-university education (VWO). Later in 1993 she started to study Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Non Western Societies at Leiden University. During her studies she specialised in Indonesia as an ethnographic field of study and simultaneously focussed on more sociological issues concerning environment and development in both Asia and Africa. After her graduation in 1999 she did partake in the nine month during Advanced Master's Programme, organised by the Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), Leiden University. From late 2000 through 2004 she has been enrolled as a PhD student at the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR), University of Amsterdam. Starting early 2005 she has been working at the Institute of Environmental Sciences, Leiden University, where she, during four years, has been working on the implementation of an international network for indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her PhD thesis is the result of the research that started at the ASSR and was finalised at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Leiden University.
