

Stranded people

Mythical narratives about the first inhabitants of Mentawai Islands

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine the stories about the origins of the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. My aim is to understand the perspective of the local community in seeing themselves in the particular place and space where they live in the Mentawai Islands. In my opinion, a set of narrative as a story about the origin of a group of people has a significant value for the development of local communities and their culture. A collection of narratives is an important source of information to understand the ideas of local communities in perceiving their past, especially people who do not have a written tradition. Many of these stories have not been studied thoroughly and on this occasion, I explore it in more depth.

KEYWORDS: Mentawai, oral tradition, mythical narratives, stories of origins.

INTRODUCTION¹

Different scholars had wanted to find out the origins of Mentawaians but they failed to get reliable sources of information. Accounts of the inhabitants of Mentawai Islands were first documented in 1799 by John Crisp who wrote a report about the inhabitants of Poggy (Pagai) island of Mentawai. Since then, information of different events of Mentawai has been found in written accounts as listed by Suzuki (1958), Roth (1985) and Persoon, Schefold, De Roos, and Marschall (2002). However, those accounts have not provided clear information of the origins of Mentawaians.

These written accounts show that European scholars have examined the physical appearance of Mentawaians (Duyvendak 1940; Van Beukering

¹ I would like to thank Prof. B. Arps, Prof. R. Schefold, Prof. G.A. Persoon, and Prof. J.J. Fox for their valuable comments on major information presented in this article. It was mostly derived from Chapter IV of my PhD thesis.

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1947). European anthropologists, linguists and historians have focused on cultural characteristics of Mentawaians and their language features (Morris 1900; Nooy-Palm 1968; Schefold 1989a; Pampus 1989a, b). These scholars speculate that Mentawaians might have been descended from an initial family connected with a group of people in Sumatra, or else from inhabitants of the neighbouring island of Nias who had initially migrated from Sumatra. From Sumatra, the ancestors of today's Mentawaians had come thus either directly or indirectly, via Nias (see Schefold 1989a). Based on cultural characteristics and language features, scholars have assumed that Mentawaians are part of Austronesian societies whose ancestors had migrated from Formosa (Taiwan) to Sumatra, arriving in Mentawai about 2000 years ago (Schefold 1989a; see also Bellwood 1995).

Scholarly approaches and perspectives enable us to understand the context of the origins of a community. In order to understand certain particular issues – for instance how members of a small community differentiate one another while sharing similarities – we need such a scholarly perspective. The perspective that is going to be employed in this paper is by focusing on the local communities' stories. Scholars have collected stories of origins of Mentawaians; however, these stories of origins have not been thoroughly examined.

These stories will probably not solve the question of the origins of the early inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. They do not contain a history, strictly speaking, of the Mentawaians. However, stories of origins may provide historical elements that can be used to understand important aspects of the origins of Mentawaians living in different places in the Mentawai Islands. Some kin groups relate to one another genealogically and some do not have any relationship at all but they live together in the same islands. This is because the ancestors of these groups of people have migrated from different places or islands to the Mentawai Islands. This situation resembles that of the Cook Island population as described by Siikala: "The origin narratives which at the same time tell about the migration of the original ancestors from the mythical homeland to the present day islands and give their genealogies, create the qualitatively separate island populations" (Siikala 1996: 45).

In dealing with the Mentawaiian stories of origins, I do not aim to find the true origins of Mentawaians. Instead, I follow some ideas suggested by James J. Fox (1996) in identifying the origins of groups of people. A study on Austronesian societies edited by James J. Fox and Clifford Sather (1996) provides extensive comparative perspectives for understanding origin structures and systems of precedence. Fox (1996: 5) points at crucial elements in identifying the origins of persons or groups, "Conceptions of ancestry are invariably important but rarely is ancestry alone a sufficient and exclusive criterion for defining origin. Recourse to notions of place is also critical in identifying persons and groups, and thus tracing origins".

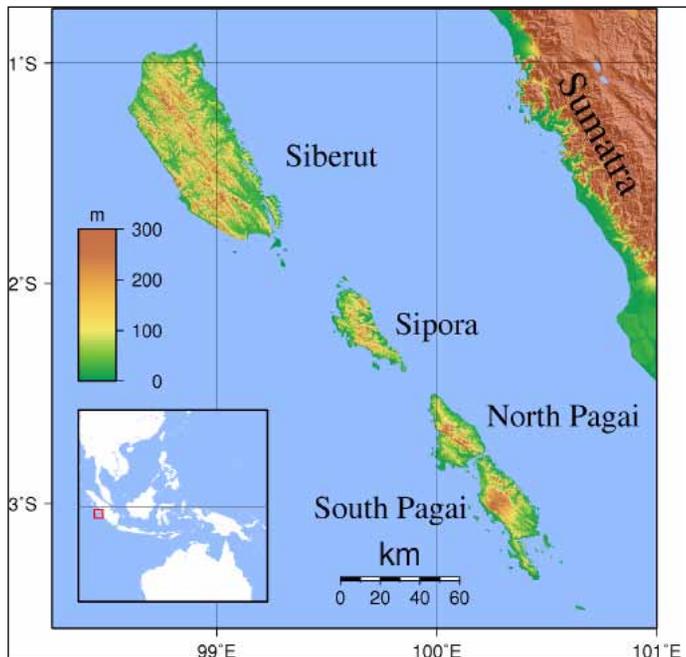
Furthermore, Fox argues that alliance, defined in the broad sense of relations of persons and groups to one another, is also an important element

in defining origins. Together, these notions imply an attitude towards the past: the past is knowable, and knowledge of the past is valuable, what happened in the past set a pattern for the present, and it is essential to have access to the past in order to make sense of the present (Fox 1996: 5).

In the case of Mentawaians, their stories of origins may contain their ideas and perspectives regarding their past. I am therefore taking the opportunity to examine their stories of origins extensively by comparing one with another in this article. Before closely looking at some of these stories, I will briefly present the Mentawai Archipelago, its inhabitants and their traditional culture with a particular focus on their oral tradition.

MENTAWAI ARCHIPELAGO

Mentawai, the official Indonesian name for the archipelago, consists of four large islands – Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, and South Pagai – along with about 40 smaller adjacent islands, is situated about 100 kilometres off the western coast of Sumatra (see Picture 1). It comprises 6,011 square kilometres. In 1945, the islands and people of Mentawai became part of Indonesia, under the jurisdiction of the West Sumatra province. On a lower administrative level, the Mentawai Islands until 1999 were part of the Padang Pariaman district, on the mainland of Sumatra.



Picture 1. Topographic map of Mentawai Islands, Indonesia.²

² Created with GMT from SRTM data: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5a/Mentawai_Islands_Topography.png.

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

MENTAWAI INHABITANTS

The total population of the Archipelago was 76,421 people in 2010.³ Mentawaians constitute about eighty percent of the total population and they are the majority ethnic group in the Archipelago. The rest are recent migrants from Sumatra and Java. A small number have come from other islands of Indonesia. A few foreign missionaries also dwell in Mentawai. Most of the migrants from Sumatra and Java live in the four sub-district capitals (*ibu kota kecamatan*) of the Mentawai Islands. Most Mentawaians prefer to live in the traditional settlements and villages far from the capital.

Mentawaians are egalitarian and patrilineal. No one is deemed higher in rank than others and one belongs to one's father's lineage. Traditional Mentawaians live in communal houses called *uma*. According to Schefold (2001: 361), the word *uma* in Mentawai refers to a building as well as to a genealogically related group of people (see also Kruyt 1923: 10). A nuclear family is called *lalep* and may consist of several individuals (father, mother, sons, daughters, and sometimes one or more widows). An *uma* as a genealogical group, or more precisely 'a local patrilineal group' (Schefold 2002), has expanded from an initial nuclear family of ancestors.

This initial nuclear family of ancestors may refer either to the first inhabitants of a particular place or to the ancestors that had formed the initial kin group when the group lived in the place of origin. Sometimes an *uma* in a particular place has a genealogical bond with a few other *uma* in other places. The genealogical bond of kin groups living in separate places is called *muntogat* and exists because the kin groups share the same initial ancestors and ancestral land from which those initial ancestors had come to spread out.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that an *uma* is the basic term for kin group commonly used in Siberut (see also Schefold 1988). However, in Sipora and Pagai the word *uma* is rarely mentioned. On these islands, *muntogat* is the most popular term used to refer to a kin group (see also Nooy-Palm 1968).

³ From www.bps.go.id/hasilSP2010/sumbar/1300.pdf, accessed on 20 August 2011.

In Siberut, on the contrary, the term *mntogat* is not really used to signify a kin group, although the term is used when people discuss relationships with other kin groups sharing the same ancestral family (Persoon 1994).

Besides *uma* and *mntogat*, most contemporary Mentawaians have started to identify their kin groups using the term *suku*, hence *suku* Samongilailai. *Suku* is an Indonesian word, short for *suku bangsa*. It can be translated into English as "ethnic group". This term is used by the Indonesian government to refer to any one of the more than three hundred ethnic groups in the country, hence *suku bangsa Jawa* (Javanese), *suku bangsa Dayak* (Dayak), *suku bangsa Mentawai* (Mentawaiian), and so on.

In Mentawai *suku* is defined slightly differently. Mentawaians use the term *suku* for a kin group instead of an ethnic group. Apparently, this tendency was initiated by the arrival of migrants, especially Minangkabaus from the Sumatra mainland. Minangkabaus traditionally use the term *suku* to refer to their kin groups, for example *suku Caniago*, *suku Tanjung suku Sikumbang*, and so on. Minangkabau kinship system is matrilineal in which descent is traced through the mother and maternal ancestors, the word *suku* is used to refer to the matrilineal descent group.

This term has similar meaning to the term *marga* used by Bataks of North Sumatra. Bataks are patrilineal and use the term *marga* to refer to their patrilineal descent groups. Mentawaians are patrilineal like Bataks; however, Mentawaians currently use the word *suku* as a synonym for the words *uma* and *mntogat*. Since the 1950s government officials of Minangkabau origin have influenced the administrative grouping of Mentawaians in Mentawai using the term *suku*. In fact, the Mentawai Islands are part of West Sumatra province.

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

What, then, does the term *suku* mean to the Mentawai people? For one thing, they use the word to refer to kin group with several families living in the nuclear family houses of a government village. They also use it to refer a genealogical network of several kin groups living in different places using the same kin group's name. They also use the term to refer to differently named but related kin groups dwelling in separate places. However, the term *suku* does not replace the essential meaning of the term *uma* as the communal house of Mentawaians (see *Uma Mentawai* in Picture 2).



Picture 2. Uma Mentawai in Siberut Island (Photograph by the author, 2004).

MENTAWAI ORAL NARRATIVES

All cultural information is preserved in narratives, and older generations used these narratives to convey such information to younger generations. These narratives in Mentawai are of different types. They will be explained one by one in this section. Most of the Mentawai oral tradition consists of stories generally called *titiboat*. However, the stories do not always fall neatly into one category.

Stories telling about the origins and workings of plants, animals, human beings, and natural phenomena are called *pumumuan*. The word *pumumuan* is formed from the root word *mumu*, which literally means 'ripe' or 'mature' and figuratively means 'old'. Stories in *pumumuan* explain how things began. These stories are narratives of things that occurred in the old time. Stories about the origins of the first human beings in Mentawai can be classified into this category; however, stories of the origins of different kin groups of the Mentawaians do not belong to this category. So, *pumumuan* can be understood as a category of mythical stories. Other examples of *pumumuan* can be found in Morris (1900), Hansen (1915), Kruyt (1923), Loeb (1929a), Sihombing (1979), Spina (1981), and Schefold (1988).

Another category is *pungungan*, formed from the root word *ngungu*, literally 'mouth' and figuratively it simply means oral narrative. These stories resemble legends, fairytales, and fables. *Pungungan* stories may be hilarious, heroic or educational. Examples of such stories can be found in Karl Simanjuntak's unpublished manuscript⁴ (1914), titled *Pungunguanda Sakalagan*⁵ (Sakalagan's stories). Most of the stories in this manuscript tell about courage,

⁴ I thank Panulis Saguntung for the copy of manuscript.

⁵ Sakalagan is a group of people, residing in Pagai islands.

and include stories about the legendary figure Pagetasabbau (see also Spina 1981: 193-194). Stories about Pagetasabbau describe the close relationship between an uncle (Pagetasabbau) and his two nephews who wanted to be handsome and accomplished. Such *pungunguan* stories convey cultural and traditional moral values, about what people are supposed to learn and how to live in society.

Mentawaians also have stories telling about apes, crocodiles, turtles, birds, snakes, pigs, deer, and lizards, describing what they are and how they live. Such stories also belong to the category *pungunguan*. Mentawaians make use of the characteristics of animals to teach people about these animals' behaviour, and to use them as examples for humans. Young people do not always positively respond to instructions given by their parents; by using stories about animal behaviour, parents give young people something to think about, and hope that their children will eventually realize the importance of behaving properly. A father who wants to encourage his son to be diligent and work fast will tell him a story about a crab on the beach or a spider spinning its web. The crab quickly runs and digs a hole for its shelter. A spider does not stop spinning before completing its web. Taking these animals as examples, the father gently encourages the son to accomplish his work as soon as he possibly can and not to stop working before finishing it.

The story of *sibatebate sabba sitoulutoulu* or 'lizard and turtle' (a short version is in Loeb (1929a), a long version in Spina (1981: 112-115)) tells about two contrasting human characteristics: cunning and guilelessness. The 'cunning' turtle smartly fools the 'guileless' lizard on a banana tree growing near the riverbank. The fruits of the banana are reflected on the river water. The cunning turtle asks the guileless lizard to dive into the river in order to get banana fruits. While the lizard is in the water, the turtle climbs the banana trunk and gets the fruits for himself. The moral of the story is that one should not be guileless if one does not want to be taken advantage of by cunning people.

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

When people work together and one person begins to lose interest in the work, wanting to stop while others are still working, and starts to leave for home, the rest of the group will address the person with a riddle like this one: *itco lee koat; lakka ienung* (if 'something' begins to look at the sea, 'something' moves faster toward it). The answer to this riddle is 'sea turtle'. If the person realizes that he has been ridiculed, he usually stays to carry on with the work until all decide to stop. Another example is: *gilik, bela ilu* (twist something off,

tears drop), which simply means a riddle. The answer is *sakoile* (papaya fruit). When you pick a papaya fruit, you twist it and drops of sap will fall off the broken stem. The message is that every action has a consequence.

Another category of Mentawai oral tradition is *sukat* or *bujai*, which is a set of sacred words or mantras used in ritual language. Some of these are used in prayers in ceremonies and others are sung. Schefold (1988: 327) in *Lia; Das grosse Ritual auf den Mentawai-Inseln*, especially in chapter four of the book, discusses a many examples of ritual language in Mentawai. On some occasions, ritual words are used in prayers and then sung. On other occasions, ritual words are only enunciated in prayers and not sung. In order to avoid confusion, Mentawaians give names to the songs. The name of a song tells what kind of song it is. These songs are distinguished into two main categories: ritual and ordinary. Ritual songs, called *urai kerei* (shamanic songs), are usually sung by shamans (*tai kerei*) (see a Mentawai shaman in Picture 3).



Picture 3. Aman Maom, a Mentawai shaman in Taileleu (Photograph by the author, 2004).

A shaman (*si kerei*, sometimes written *sikerei*) often uses songs in rituals as a way to communicate with spirits. *Urai kerei* can be further subdivided according to function. There is a group of songs for persuading spirits (*naknak simagre*) to join families in a ritual. There is a group of songs for re-harmonizing the relationship between body and spirit (*urai pameru*), and so on. Most shamanic songs are transmitted from a senior shaman to junior shamans and this transmission is called *panguli*.

Ordinary (non-ritual) songs are called *urai simata* or *leleiyo* (ordinary people's songs). Mentawaians commonly express their experiences and feelings by singing them privately. For instance, a mother whose son has just died will sing and cry at the same time to express her sorrow. According to the state of feelings, meanings, and purposes expressed, ordinary songs may be divided into several types, such as *urai soubaga* (sorrowful songs), *urai belet baga* (sad songs), *urai goat baga* (lonesome songs), *urai angkat baga* (happy songs), and *urai nuntut baga* (love songs). Some examples of Mentawai songs that have been recorded are on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings titled *Music of Indonesia 7; Music from the Forest of Riau and Mentawai* (Yampolsky 1995) and *Songs from the uma; Music from Siberut Island (Mentawai Archipelago), Indonesia* (Persoon and Schefold 2009).

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

A family story is an oral historical narrative that can be used to distinguish one kin group from another. It functions as one of a kin group's identity markers. Family stories contain information about the group. Stories in the category of *gobbui* or *tiboi* are not seen as mythical narratives by Mentawaians although they may contain mythical elements in the form of events that occurred long ago. Nonetheless, information like locations of places, names of places, personal names, and chronology of events, which are important elements of the family stories, is recognized as true by the Mentawaians. So, the content of the family story is about past occurrences when the Mentawai ancestors were still alive. Family stories, however, are not like *pumumuan* which tell about things that happened in the mythical context. The family stories are oral historical narratives. Kin groups tell their family stories (*gobbui teteu* or *tiboi tubu*) in order to explain how they exist in different kin groups and who their ancestors were (Tulius 2012).

Mentawaians tell mythical narratives (*pumumuan*) in order to explain how the first human beings came to exist in Mentawai. However, there are no stories explaining how the current kin groups relate genealogically to these first humans in Mentawai. In fact, the first human being in *pumumuan* is not necessarily the ancestor of the current kin groups. In the next sections, I evaluate stories of origins of Mentawaians, some from the collections by early scholars and some I gathered myself during my fieldwork. I divide

the stories into several periods. Some were collected between 1842 and 1930. Others were collected between 1960 and 1991, and I recorded a number of additional stories myself, after 2000. I examine the stories in order to identify their place of origin as well as to compare them to one another to see what common features they share.

STORIES OF ORIGIN GATHERED BETWEEN 1842 AND 1930

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

Neumann's report

The report⁶ that Neumann discovered was written by the assistant resident of Bengkulu on 17 November 1842. The report contains information about the origins of the Mentawaians residing on the Pagai islands. The report intrigued Neumann because it recorded a myth or legend that sheds light on the origins of the contemporary Mentawaians residing on the Pagai islands. Neumann quotes the legend in his report titled *De Mentawei-eilanden* (1909). The text originally presented in Dutch can be translated as follows:

A long time ago, it happened that two persons, a man and a woman of Kataun, were punished by the sultan of Moko Moko [spelled today Muko-muko] because they had had an unlawful sexual relationship. The sultan required them to pay a certain amount of money as a fine for their misbehaviour. They did not have enough money to pay the sultan, so the sultan and his followers condemned them to be put on a bamboo raft in the ocean. This was done, and they began to drift on the waves. After seven days on sea without food or drink, they arrived on the Poggie [Pagai] islands and became the ancestors of the following generations (Neumann 1909: 196).⁷

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

Regarding the connection between these two different groups, Mentawaians on the Pagai islands in recent times have also been telling a legend about Minuang, which is a local name for a huge tree, and Manyang,

⁶ Neumann gives the archival number 795/535 without mentioning the name of the archive it was found in.

⁷ The original text was in Dutch and translated to English by the author in 2005.

a local name for a giant eagle (see Spina 1981: 17-18). The legend in Spina's book says that the giant eagle stayed on top of a tree that was standing in Pagai and fed himself by eating people in Sumatra. The legend does not mention the exact place in Sumatra from where the people had come in order to kill the giant eagle.

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

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

Morris's collection

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

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

A group of people lived in the sky. They created this earth, trees, houses, fish, grass, and everything [on earth]. Afterwards, they created human beings: a man and a woman. Then the people [in the sky] came down to earth and brought two dogs: a male and a female. The sky people saw the two persons. 'If you remain just as you are now, both of you will not expand.' The dogs mated. 'You have to

see how dogs mate; you have to do like that in order to expand your numbers.' That was what the people of the sky said to the two persons. After that, the two people on earth began to bring life to a son, afterwards to a daughter. The children grew up and they married each other. Then the new couple had children as well. Thereafter, there were many people on this earth. Crocodiles taught people how to make a canoe. The canoe was given a sail. Many people got into the canoe and sailed. When the canoe arrived at various places, some remained there. They arrived first at Taileleu [in Siberut], afterwards they arrived at Sabirut [Muara Siberut]. Then our families expanded on this island (Morris 1900: 54-55).⁸

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

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

In Morris's collection of stories, it is not really clear where the first human beings had lived before sailing to Mentawai. Nonetheless, the stories say that the first sailors arrived at a place called Taileleu (in the southern part of Siberut Island) and settled in the valley of Sabirut. These people, after expanding their numbers in Siberut, moved to Sioban on Sipora Island.

These stories are similar to what Hansen had gathered in Pagai. In his opinion, it was the Malay people from Sumatra who had told the stories. It seems that, after occupying Siberut and Sipora, these people moved to the Pagai islands. Current descendants of these people told the same stories to Hansen

Hansen's account

Hansen was a Dutch marine commander in Pagai for ten months in 1911 and 1912. During his stay, he gained knowledge of Mentawaians and their culture and recorded his observations in a book titled *De groep Noord en Zuid Pageh van de Mentawai-Eilanden* (1915). Hansen's book presents several stories, and one of these stories is similar to that of Morris. I will not quote the entire story here, but note some points that indicate that Hansen's story is dissimilar to

⁸ This story in Morris 1900 is given in Mentawai and German. The English version is translated by the author, 2005.

that of Morris.

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

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

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

Kruyt's report

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

According to a story already well known long ago among people on the islands of Sakalagan [Pagai islands], there were two big canoes (*kinapat*), fully occupied by men; they sailed (*mulajo*) leaving Padang for elsewhere in a westward direction. Prior to departure, they prepared two things to be used as tools that would be recognizable whenever they would meet elsewhere someday. For this purpose,

they took with them giant clam⁹ shells (*pelebu*) and a whetstone (*asaan*). Each canoe had to bring one-half of the tridacna shells and one-half of an equally split whetstone. Afterwards, they left according to the initial plan, going westward from Sumatra.

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

Thus, they came closer and join together the shells and the whetstone. The two parts fitted perfectly. They then realized why they could not shoot each other: because they were members of one family. Thereafter, one canoe returned to Padang and the other attempted to move towards the island of Siberut. Before the separation between them occurred, the people who wanted to go to Siberut Island requested rice seeds and clothes from their relatives who wanted to return to Padang. But the group who wanted to go to Padang said, 'If we give you the rice seeds and clothes, we are afraid that you all will never return to us.' The people from Padang who went to Siberut indeed never returned to Padang. This is the reason why on the Mentawai Islands no rice and clothes were available. On the island of Sakalagan (Pagai islands), people still remember that rice and clothes have had to be imported from Padang for the past three generations. That [importing of rice and clothes] would thus have started in about 1850 (Kruyt 1924: 33).¹⁰

This story shares many features with the stories gathered by Morris and Hansen. The story tells that the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands departed from their initial home in Padang (the capital city of West Sumatra). They arrived at Siberut on canoes. However, the story does not describe the course of migration from Siberut to Sipora and further to Pagai, although Kruyt had gathered the story among Mentawaians residing in Pagai. This story was recorded in 1921 and the storyteller had made a little variation in the story, by mentioning guns instead of bows and arrows. It is possible that the Dutch who came with guns to Mentawai in the early 1900s had influenced this story. What is important about the story is the information about where the first Mentawaians came from and where they arrived. It is clearly mentioned that the inhabitants departed from Sumatra and arrived in Siberut. Current inhabitants in Pagai from whom the story was recorded might have an ancestral link to those Sumatran sailors.

⁹ Sometimes it is called tridacna.

¹⁰ The original text was in Dutch and translated to English by the author in 2005.

Loeb's and Wirz's descriptions

Edwin M. Loeb published *Mentawai myths* (1929b), an article containing a number of stories. Loeb collected the stories together with a German missionary known as Minister Börger. A few Batak people from North Sumatra who were sent to teach the Mentawaians on the Pagai islands helped Loeb and Börger to collect the stories. Eight of the stories in Loeb's *Mentawai myths* are similar to Karl Simanjuntak's handwritten stories collected in 1914. He was one of several Batak teachers who worked for a Protestant missionary at that time. Unfortunately, none of the stories in Loeb's publication tells about the origins of the first Mentawaians. But there are several stories narrating the transformation of animals into humans or the reverse, signifying the origins of something (see Loeb 1929b). This shows that Mentawaians also have a sort of mythical stories of origin, which, unlike what I call family stories, do not indicate links with people living today. Schefold (1989b) has extensively discussed this issue in his article on myths and the gender perspective.

The last group of early collected stories of Mentawai origins I examine is by Paul Wirz. Wirz studied the work of Maass (1898) and Kruyt (1924). He visited Siberut in 1926 and stayed there for a short time. Wirz wrote a report of his visit, *Het eiland Sabiroet en zijn bewoners* (1929-30). In the report, he wrote about the origins of the first settlers in the place called Simatalu in the northwestern part of Siberut. Based on the stories collected from Mentawaians, Wirz concluded that the first settlers had arrived at a coastal area of Siberut by means of canoes, but the stories do not indicate where those settlers had come from. The arrival of the first settlers was followed by several waves of migration. The migratory movements at that time were of people who lived on the Batu islands, situated among the southern islands of Nias (see Wirz 1929-30: 135). However, Wirz did not present stories of the origins of Mentawaians. He just described how people had arrived at Siberut and how they had expanded in number. The first settlers became the forebears of the majority of the current Mentawai population residing in the northern part of Siberut, and some of these people moved further south in the Mentawai archipelago.

STORIES OF ORIGIN GATHERED BETWEEN 1960 AND 1991

In this section, I discuss stories gathered by Herman Sihombing, Hetty Nooy-Palm, Reimar Schefold, and Stefano Coronese. They briefly talked about the origins of Mentawaians in their research.

Sihombing's collection of narratives

Herman Sihombing, a legal scholar at Andalas University in Padang, carried out a fieldwork in Sipora and Pagai in 1960. He was interested in the social life and cultural values of Mentawaians. He also gathered stories from Mentawaians, one of which tells about the origins of a man called Aman Tawe (meaning the father of Tawe, in the Mentawaiian language). Several groups of Mentawaians in Sipora and Pagai regard Aman Tawe as their forefather.

Sihombing's research findings were published in 1979 under the title *Mentawai*, from which I quote, in my own translation, the following story of Mentawai origins.

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

2. The generations of Nias migrants in Simatalu expanded. Then, two siblings (a brother and a sister) had sexual relations so that the sister got pregnant. Consequently, the father of the two siblings and other villagers decided to exile them. After years floating on a raft, the two siblings arrived at Sipora Island. Several families went after the siblings because they missed them. The families thus searched for the siblings. The families wanted to live together with the siblings. The families [that wanted to look for the siblings] split up into two groups. One group by means of a raft followed the eastern coastline, while another group followed the western coastline of the islands in a southerly direction. In order to be able to recognize one another later, these two groups were requested to bring half of a whetstone with them to Simatalu as a sign to identify each other. They thus departed [from Simatalu] going southwards. After years passed, they did not find the two siblings in Sipora. Therefore, they went beyond Sipora and finally arrived at the Pagai islands. The two groups came across each other at a place called Talu Pulai. They [the two groups] did not recognize each other anymore. They began to shoot at each other. But nobody was injured or killed. They then remembered that they had brought half of a whetstone. They joined each other's whetstones and saw that the two pieces fit together. Afterwards, they built a settlement in Talu Pulai. There they planted coconut trees as a *kelapa peringatan*, or symbol of making peace with each other (Sihombing 1979: 17-19).¹¹

The above story tells of the arrival of Aman Tawe in Simatalu on Siberut Island. He departed from Nias. The natural surroundings and natural resources in Simatalu were better than those in Nias, and for this reason Aman Tawe and his family decided to live in Simatalu. The first families were created

¹¹ The original story text was in Indonesian and translated to English by the author in 2005.

and they identified themselves as descendants of Aman Tawe. The storyteller believed that the people carrying Aman Tawe's name became the original inhabitants of Mentawai, the name of the majority of the current population in the archipelago. The next passage is about the course of migratory movements by Aman Tawe's offspring from Simatalu to the southern islands of Sipora and Pagai. This part of the story tells of the connection between the people's place of origin in Simatalu on Siberut and a current settlement called Talu Pulai on the Pagai islands.

Hetty Nooy-Palm, a Dutch anthropologist, was interested in the story of Aman Tawe and discussed it as well. She did fieldwork in Sipora and the Pagai islands in the early 1960s and collected a version of the story that is very similar to Sihombing's transcription. When Nooy-Palm asked her Mentawaiian informants where they came from, they told her the story of Aman Tawe in order to explain their origins. The same story was referred to when explaining the origin of the islands and the origin of the name Mentawai. The name belonged to a man called Aman Tawe who came from Nias (Nooy-Palm 1968: 165-166). This man was thus seen as their forefather.

Schefold encountered a similar case when visiting Sipora in 1969, where he met Jonas Samongilailai and recorded a story of Aman Tawe Samongilailai told him. Schefold and I together listened to the tape of the story in his place in Amsterdam. In general, the story is similar in content to the story (the first part) collected by Herman Sihombing. Stefano Coronese (1986: 12-13) collected a story similar to the stories studied by Sihombing, Nooy-Palm, and Schefold, when he did fieldwork in Mentawai in the 1980s. I also heard stories telling that Aman Tawe was from Nias and lived in Simatalu when I was gathering stories of origin of Mentawaiians in Siberut in 2002.

The Mentawaiians who told me the story of Aman Tawe did not claim to be descendants of Aman Tawe. But they did claim that their ancestors came from Simatalu; however, they were not descendants of Aman Tawe. They mentioned other names and another story of origin whenever they referred to their ancestors, who had come from Nias prior to inhabiting Simatalu or adjacent places on Siberut.

Another story is about a pregnant woman who drifted on a raft and later married her own son. Reimar Schefold is the first scholar to have gathered and published this story. The woman's name is unknown. Perhaps the Mentawai storyteller did not mention her name when Schefold first collected the story. The woman was just identified by her pregnant status. Nonetheless, several Mentawai kin groups believe that she is their first ancestor. I examine Schefold's story of the pregnant woman in order to figure out the location where the woman began her life in Siberut. I also note some similarities in the story to others that I gathered during my fieldwork, as some of the stories indicate other places where the woman had arrived.

Schefold's narrative collection

Reimar Schefold was the first anthropologist to have taken the story of a

pregnant woman drifting on a raft into account when he began his research in Mentawai in 1967. He also considered other stories of origin of the Mentawaiian people, like the story of Aman Tawe. Schefold examined the story of the pregnant woman drifting on a raft in order to identify where the first Mentawaiians had come from. Schefold discussed it in his books, *Speelgoed voor de zielen; Kunst en cultuur van de Mentawai-eilanden* (Schefold 1979: 19), *Lia; Das grosse Ritual auf den Mentawai-Inseln* (Schefold 1988: 79), and *Mainan bagi roh; Kebudayaan Mentawai* (Schefold 1991: 22) and an article, "The origins of the woman on the raft: on the prehistory of the Mentawaiians", (Schefold 1989a: 2). In his books, Schefold does not present the full story. Instead, he gives a synopsis of it, as follows:

The first humans on Siberut lived in Simatalu in the west part of the island. There was an unknown time [when] a girl and a dog together on a raft landed, nobody knew from where [they had come]. The girl had been expelled by her brother out of shame, because she had had sexual relations with the dog, and out of it she got pregnant. In Simatalu, she gave birth to a son. When he grew up, he wanted to search for a woman; the mother gave him a ring from her finger and ordered him to find a girl that this ring would fit. The son roved about the whole island and met nobody, until after a long time wandering he met his mother again. They did not recognize each other anymore, and the ring fitted. From this couple, the first Mentawaiian was born (Schefold 1988: 79).¹²

In order to become familiar with the full version, Schefold and I listened together to the whole story recorded in 1969 as told by Nikodemus Siritotet. Schefold allowed me to transcribe the story and use it to find out about the origins of the Mentawaiian people. Nikodemus's story is as follows:

Story 1

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

Her actual mistake was that she had sexual relation with someone. No one knew who the man was. Because of the sexual relation, she got pregnant. Therefore, the other family members felt ashamed. They thus decided to send her away. They actually wanted to send her to death at that moment. However, the mercy her brothers gave her saved her life. They [her brothers] set her adrift by means of a raft. Thus she drifted, drifted, drifted away until she arrived at

¹² Translated from German by the author in 2005 (see Schefold 1979: 17, 1989a: 2, 1991: 22 for a similar version of the story).

the area called Simatalu. The precise place where she lived was unknown, and the only place that was heard by most people was Simatalu.

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

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

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

We do not know the origins of this woman. Maybe she came from Nias, or Batak [the predominant ethnic group of North Sumatra]. Her origins remain unclear to me up to this very moment. So this story ends here. [Nikodemus Siritotet narrated this story in Mentawaiian to Schefold in Muara Siberut in 1969.]¹³

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

STORIES OF ORIGIN COLLECTED BETWEEN 2002 AND 2006

In 2002, I visited Simatalu, hoping to meet someone who could tell me the story of the pregnant woman and the story of Aman Tawe. It appeared that nobody

¹³ The story text was translated to English by the author in 2005.

was familiar with these stories. I then decided to visit a neighbouring village called Sirisura', where I met Tengtati Siribetug, a 60-year-old man who once provided Schefold with great hospitality and socio-cultural information and was Schefold's best friend during his fieldwork in Mentawai (Schefold 1988: 50). Tengtati narrated the story of the pregnant woman to me:

Story 2

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

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

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

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

He took the ring and asked her to try it on. 'Fit the ring on your finger', he said to her. When she did as he asked, the ring fitted properly. 'Because the ring fits your finger, you are my wife', he said to the woman. The woman was his mother. The mother did not remember what she had once said to him. Or perhaps she did not want to tell her son; thus they got married. Afterwards, people in Siberut began to expand. (Narrated by Tengtati Siribetug, 60 years old, in Sirisura', in 2002)¹⁴

This story is indeed slightly different from the previous versions. According to Tengtati, the woman drifted from the Tello Island near Nias and arrived at Simalegi instead of Simatalu. In this story, the place of origin of the woman is mentioned. However, the name of this place is seldom heard from other storytellers. During my fieldwork in Mentawai, I came across other storytellers who told stories similar to the one told by Nikodemus. They

¹⁴ The story text was transcribed from the tape recording in Mentawai and translated to English by the author in 2005.

referred to Simatalu as the place where the woman arrived. I do not repeat these stories here due to their similarity. I am, however, going to present another two stories in order to note some specific places where the woman may have come from.

Another storyteller said that the woman arrived elsewhere, near Simatalu. The storyteller was Eugenius Nangi Satoko, a 59-year-old man, who lived in Saibi Muara on Siberut. He had heard the story from people residing in Simalegi. In his youth in the 1970s, this man had frequently visited three areas on the west coast and northern parts of Siberut – Paipajet, Simatalu and Simalegi. He spent a few months in Paipajet, travelling around Simatalu, and eventually settled in Simalegi. The Simalegi people told him the story of a pregnant woman.

Story 3

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

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

So the son walked around the area. From the coast in Lebbekeu he took a shortcut over the hills and arrived at the river Simatalu. Then he followed the river downstream to the mouth of the river. In the meantime, his mother walked along the beach to the mouth of the river Simatalu as well. She followed the same river upstream on which her son was travelling downriver. Time passed, we do not know how many years, the son grew into a man. Later, he met his mother again in Bat Matalu [the main river basin of Simatalu]. When they met, the son remembered what his mother had told him to do if he met a woman.

The mother knew who the man was because of the ring on his finger. Shortly thereafter, they got married and lived in Simatalu. Since then, the number of people on the island had been expanding. Currently, [here Eugenius gives his own interpretation of the story] every kin group anywhere in the Mentawai islands always refers to Simatalu as their place of origin. When asked about the beginnings of their inhabitation of Mentawai, Mentawaians always mention Simatalu, because the first ancestral family inhabited a place in Simatalu. Simatalu [as the place of origin] is mentioned in a lot of stories telling about initial dispersals, such as the stories of *sipeu* (mango fruit) or *sibela siberi* (wild boars). People who have these stories always mention Simatalu as the place from where they initially came. (Narrated by Eugenius Nangi Satoko, 59 years old, in Saibi Muara, in 2002).¹⁵

¹⁵ The story text was transcribed from the tape recording in Mentawai and translated to English by the author in 2005.

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

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Detailed analysis in this article shows that the stories collected between 1960 and 1991 do not have connections with the stories collected between 1842 and 1930. During my fieldworks in 2002, 2004, and 2006, I did not meet storytellers who could tell me stories of origin similar to the stories collected in 1842–1930. Instead, the stories of origin I gathered were similar to the stories collected between 1960 and 1991. What I have tried to focus on here is where the first settlers on Mentawai had come from, how they had come, and what had been the first place in Mentawai they are said to have lived.

Most stories collected between 1842 and 1930 are about the arrival of the Sumatran people in Siberut and Pagai. However, Sipora is not mentioned in the stories as the destination of the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands. According to Kruyt's report (1924), the stories of origins of the inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands collected by scholars between 1842 and 1930 tell how groups of Malay people came to live in Mentawai. These Malay people came directly from Sumatra, more precisely from Padang. Another group also embarked from Sumatra but from another place: Muko-muko in Bengkulu. In the literature between 1930 and 1960, I did not find any stories of origin of the Mentawaians. It seems that scholars did not gather any stories of the Mentawai origins during this period.

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

A different narrative of the origins of the Mentawai people is the story of the pregnant woman. Her miserable life of getting pregnant without a husband

had forced her to leave her homeland in Nias. She was safely stranded in one of several places mentioned, Simatalu or Lebbekeu or Simalegi, where her new life began. She gave birth to a son to whom she later got married. They became the ancestors of several kin groups of current Mentawai inhabitants.

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

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

Regarding the content of those stories of origins I agree with Schefold (1988, 1989a) when he says that the first inhabitants of the Mentawai Islands came "directly or indirectly (via Nias)" from Sumatra. Nevertheless, I am aware of the probability of a situation where several groups of early settlers did not arrive at and occupy one and the same place on Siberut, because they moved to Mentawai in different waves of migration and arrived at several separate places on Siberut (and possibly the Pagai islands). If one group arrived at an unpopulated place, they might see themselves as the first inhabitants of the islands, not realizing that there were already settlements elsewhere in the islands. In fact, we do not know precisely when, where, and who came first to Mentawai.

The stories of origin of the early inhabitants of Mentawai Islands do not indicate any time of arrival of the early inhabitants. The stories are not reliable as historical sources. However, a lot of information in them can be used to understand the past of the early inhabitants of Mentawai Islands. By analysing family stories of origin, we may conclude that the current Mentawaians are descendants of diverse groups who came to live in the Mentawai Islands from various places of origin.

My main concern in this article is with the current Mentawaians' ideas about their ancestors and ancestral places in order to understand their genealogical link to ancestral land and the ties existing among related families residing in separate places in the Mentawai Islands. This may help explain the fact that not all kin groups claim the same ancestral domain and ancestral land:

it may be because the way they perceive their stories of origin leads them to believe they have not been descended from the same ancestors as other groups although they are frequently perceived as one ethnic group called Mentawai.

What I conclude after looking through all the stories of origin discussed in this article is that the roles of spoken language are very important in preserving the Mentawaiian culture. Mentawaians do not have a specific orthography or written language; they do not have any writing tradition. Mentawaians always remember important events that occurred in their past. They keep narrating the stories of their past from one generation to another because they want the current generation to also know and remember their past.

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