A CHANCE OF SELF-REFLECTION
Searching for information among people of Mentawai

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A Thesis submitted in the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Development Studies

By Lise Johansen, March 2008

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Declaration

I, Lise Johansen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Ås, 31.03.2008

Lise Johansen
Acknowledgements

To be reaching the final stage of submission of a master thesis in Development Studies has included many late nights of hard work as well as pleased challenges, in which I owe a number of people to whom I would like to show my appreciation.

I want first to thank everyone at YCM who helped me in arranging my fieldwork in Mentawai. In particular, I thank Frans Sinan, and my two interpreters, Julianus Legeu Satokkok and Indra Gunawan Sanene for making time available for travelling with me in Mentawai. Their optimism and helpfulness was fantastic during my whole research. They made a great effort in finding relevant subjects for my interviews and made my stay in the Mentawai islands an ever memorable experience.

I also want to give my thanks to Hege Ragnhild at the Rainforest Foundation in Norway and Michelle Caghill of the SurfAid International who both provided me valuable information about the situation in Mentawai both prior to and during my fieldwork.

Most of all I need to thank my supervisors, Kjersti Larsen, who got me started and Darley Jose Kjosavik who helped me through the process of writing up my thesis. Their academic expertise and not least, kind encouragement, has been very important to me. I am also very thankful to my good friend Vivi Stenberg for her advice, grammar skills, and many questions that made me confident in my work.

To my friends and family for their patience and support, moreover a special gratitude goes to all the people in Mentawai who helped me along my travel in the archipelago. Their always-smiling faces will be with me. Masurak bagata/ thank you!
Abstract
This study examines the flow of information among the indigenous people on the Mentawai archipelago in the Republic of Indonesia after the implementation of decentralisation. The indigenous people has for years been greatly influenced by the strong Minangkabau culture from previous district Sumatra as well as the Indonesian government, due to their lack of education and information. On the background of Foucault’s theory of power-knowledge, this study sought to understand the current democratic situation on Mentawai and how decades of suppression has created an identity problem for the indigenous people. The study took a close look at the local newspaper Puailiggoubat/self-reflection that was founded by the Mentawai NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) for the purpose of providing local news to the indigenous people of Mentawai.

The fieldwork was conducted in Mentawai, Indonesia in November and December 2006. Data was collected through qualitative interviewing which included individual interviews and group interviews, key informant interviews, and several discussions among people in Indonesia. The findings of the study suggest that the indigenous people on Mentawai suffer from discrimination in Indonesia. Lack of information/knowledge is a major factor that constrains them when they try to participate in national matters, in labour force, getting educated, and for integration in general in the Indonesian society. The local newspaper Puailiggoubat/self-reflection plays a major role in trying to bridge this information gap. Their traditional practices do not fit well with the national society, because accepting the indigenous people’s rights conflict with the national norm of ‘equality’. The study shows that the indigenous people lack information about their own situation and about their rights for taking action when they are subjected to discrimination and unfairness. Even during the election, adequate information about the candidates was not provided. This clearly prevented them from exercising their democratic rights in an informed way. On the other hand, the ability of powerful transnational organisations to highlight their case in the international forums raises hopes for improvement. Several organisations currently work towards promoting the rights of the indigenous people in Mentawai. Rainforest Foundation, YCM, WWF, UNESCO, Native Planet, and SurfAid International are the most established and have managed to achieve a solid foundation for development of the indigenous people’s rights in Mentawai.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Information connections are everywhere. So how does one study information? This thesis aims to find out how the indigenous people of Mentawai get hold of information, and how having information strengthen democracy as well as people’s identity. People need information to be able to administrate and control everything ranging from their home, the local community, and to the government of a country. Firm and reliable information mechanisms in a society enable transparency and arguably support the practice of democracy.

“Information is truly, vital in people’s lives. There are even people telling that those who have information are those who rule the world,” according to a reporter in the Mentawai newspaper Puailiggoubat, first edition. Francis Bacon, on the other hand stated the concept of knowledge, more than 400 years ago, simply as, “Knowledge is power” (1597). For centuries, scholars have recognised the relation between power and information as vital. The way in which our world has developed makes his quotation highly relevant, more than ever. Yet, in order for information to carry out its functions, there needs to be practical encounters that bring information to its public.

The newspaper Puailiggoubat is an attempt to make the indigenous people on Mentawai archipelago in Indonesia more informed, knowledgeable and powerful. Puailiggoubat means “self-reflection” a word that the indigenous people in Mentawai have almost forgotten the real meaning of, and therefore seem to be now having identity problems. Human self-reflection is our ability, and not at least out motivation, to learn more about the essence of our nature in order to be able to develop an identity as a person and people. This process is something that is from the very beginning of our lives learned through family, society and the culture ones lives in. In Mentawai, through the Indonesian national politics people seem to have learned to recognise their identity and culture in negative ways, which has resulted in a considerable lack of information about their own culture. National politics has also led to marginalised access to education and general information and knowledge that are needed to function in the general society.
When democracy was implemented after Suharto’s fall in 1997 the authoritarian regime’s strict regulations were replaced by new democratic laws, which opened up for people to participate more freely in society. As a response to the policy changes, Puailiggoubat was established to provide trustworthy and critical information regarding political and economic decisions, and in addition, to speak out on behalf of the indigenous people. Puailiggoubat is published by a local NGO, Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM/Vision for Autonomy Foundation) and founded by the international organisation Rainforest Foundation Norway, and Norad. It is the only newspaper on this archipelago.

This thesis is an attempt to find out how well the newsletter is able to provide significant information to the people of Mentawai and the role of transnational and local NGOs have in this process. I will argue that the access to information is, for all people, part of the very foundation of life. For the indigenous people of Mentawai, it is essential to have the right information in order to protect their culture, as well as for keeping track of changes in time, in the process of development of their new region. Therefore, this study was conducted with the objectives that are stated below.

1.1 Objectives and Research questions

The broad objective of this study is to find out how peoples access to information and knowledge throughout the Mentawai Archipelago can strengthen the local democracy and the indigenous peoples identity. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Explore the circulation of information in the islands of the Mentawai Archipelago.
2. Explore the role of the newsletter Puailiggoubat have on the people of Mentawai level of information.
3. Examine the link between level of information and the indigenous people self-reflection.

In order to assess the indigenous people situation in Mentawai I tried to find what their main sources of information are, how they relate to information and knowledge in general. Another question was regarding how well their only newspaper Puailiggoubat/self-reflection provided information that can build a strong identity for the indigenous people. Since I was interested in the study of the local democracy in Mentawai, I found the study of the electoral processes
in line with my objective, because these processes give an example of how information flows. In addition, I attempted to study the government’s role in Mentawai particularly as decentralisation has opened up for building a stronger local democracy.

1.2 Theoretical framework

In this section, I set out the analytical framework of my study. My overall aim in this thesis is to explain how the indigenous people of Mentawai relation to information reflect the strength of a local democracy. Previously, research in Mentawai has been mostly on issues related to flora and wildlife. Data on people, communities and social interactions, are therefore not so easy to obtain. Development is a field then, which needs further research.

I intend to answer my research questions with the data collected in my fieldwork of November and December 2006. In addition, I will utilize secondary literature and discuss this in a theoretical framework. The theory by Foucault is useful in understanding the important connection between power-knowledge, and identity in a democracy. Foucault draws on some of the most recent challenging work on development according to Corbridge (2005). Corbridge says that “the work of Foucault and some post-modernists put forward an idea that the modern concept of “development” is itself weighed down by all sorts of “colonizing ambition, whether or not these are explicitly recognized, and regardless of the formal ending of empires and territorial imperialism” (2005:8). The main idea behind this statement is the notion that developing countries should learn from the countries in the west because they are already developed. The west then, form societies according to its own reflection, “colonialism can then easily survive the physical fact of decolonisation” (Corbridge 2005:8). Colonialism has then created a problem for the local people’s identity in post-colony countries because they were seen as backwards when not being developed yet. The modern thought about identity brings in Foucault’s analysis of individualism. I will in this thesis, argue how a “new form of colonialism” has appeared in the Mentawai society, which have resulted in an identity crisis for the indigenous people in Mentawai.

The term “indigenous people” has had the focus of legal and political attention for many years. However, this had significance mostly for researchers and other groups who work on development issues, and not by the governments that are responsible for the rights of these groups of people. The term regards distinct communities with the earliest historical
connection to an area, and usually regard matters where rights over territory and custom law (World Bank estimate 2007). How to determine whom the indigenous people are in Indonesia is a discussions that has been going on for quite some time. Several terms have been suggested for describing their community: native people, isolated people, rotational forest farmers, adat communities or law adat communities, and many others (Asian Development Bank 2002). I will therefore begin my research by giving a description of how the term has developed from colonisation until present time for Indonesia.

1.2.1 Indigenous people in Indonesia

In Indonesia, there are people who have identified themselves as “masyarakat adat,” people’s governed by custom, who claim that their customary institutions, rights to land, and forests to be legitimatised (WALHI, Friends of the Earth Indonesia 2003). According to Persson do “The international community labels these people as indigenous people”…nearly global phenomenon of cultural minorities within a modern nation state dominated by the people of the mainstream culture (1998:281).”

When did the Mentawaians become a minority, an indigenous people? The Mentawaians themselves can probably give the best answer. “Self-identification” policies for indigenous nations are gradually becoming more acknowledged internationally as the way of making a determination on who should count as such people. This policy has its beginning from the second assembly of the World Council of Indigenous People (WCIP) that agreed on the ruling “only indigenous peoples could define indigenous people (1977).” From that ruling both the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Population and the International Labour Organisation promoted an unrestrained right to “self-identification” for these groups of people in order to respond to potential assaults of the states who might not recognise indigenous claims as valid in their country (Corntassel 2003). Indigenous peoples are by IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) defined as

“People who have a special connection with their land and territories, people who share a feeling of common ancestors and rights to self-determination, people who have their own language, culture, religion and knowledge, people who have their own political, social and cultural institutions, people whose land and territories as well as cultural institutions have been humiliated through national states, and global institutions dominance, and action.”(1995:33-34).
In my thesis I will use this definition since it is recognised internationally. In Indonesia, the government only recently acknowledged the idea of indigenous peoples as such people. The strict government policies in Indonesia have made it difficult for making a definition for indigenous people. During President Suharto’s New Order period\(^1\) the term indigenous peoples was rejected as applying to the Mentawaians and other related groups by the Indonesian government. The Government of President Suharto used a different term “suku suku terasing,” isolated and alien tribes (Carino 2004). People in these communities were seen as ‘backward and lost from the mainstream of national progress and development’ because of their isolation (Nordholt 2007). The New Order government in order to integrate these people and make them into “proper Indonesians” then created several development programs. This could for instance be seen in the school-system, where students had the same curriculum all over the archipelago even though they lived in very diverse situations and environments according WALHI (2003). President Suharto’s idea was to break the rural cultures and assimilate them into the mainstream. In controlling and limiting information to the people, he wanted to create unison across ethnic lines. He wanted to prevent indigenous people and other Indonesians from rioting in their pursuit of independence as a reaction on his authoritarian politics. People believed then, that they were working towards common goals for a complete inclusive Indonesia. The Mentawai people involved in these programs have therefore learned to recognize themselves in negative ways since their culture and traditions was not accepted (2003).

According to the Indonesian government, the term “indigenous people” is considered as a “misnomer” for the reason that it counts every Indonesians with the exception of ethnic Chinese to be indigenous, according to ASAP (Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific 1999). However, in practise several “isolated communities” were identified as entitled of rights to take part completely in political and social life. These “isolated communities” are estimated to include about 1.5 million people in all of Indonesia. The problem is that these groups did not include the people who really live in remote area in Indonesia, like the Mentawaians. Therefore, do critics of governmental policies regarding indigenous people continue to argue that “the government’s approach is basically paternalistic and designed

\(^1\) 1966-1997
more to integrate indigenous people into society than to protect their traditional way of life (ASAP 1999).”

The term adat communities or adat law communities have been developed from a legal perspective during the 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2002). The Constitution of 1945 recognised adat communities’ rights, but there is no clarification on who can be entitled as such and in what way these rights are to be implemented. A definition on adat communities according to JAPHAMA an NGO founded to defend adat communities, is “groups of people who have origins intergenerationally in a certain geographic territory” (ADB 2002). Bureaucrats started to get familiar with the adat discourse, which led to release of a regulation, No. 3 1997 on empowerment, conservation, and development of adat traditions, social customs, and institutions by The Department of Home Affairs. When Suharto’s government lost power, it opened up possibilities for adat communities to act and become organised at local levels. In 1999, 208 adat communities held a congress of Indonesian indigenous peoples that represented 121 ethnic groups and led to the establishment of an Alliance of Indonesian Indigenous Peoples, AMAN. The organisation aims to facilitate adat communities in reinforcing their rights, existence, and autonomy (ADB 2002).

The Indonesian government now accepts that these adat communities are those referred to as indigenous peoples in international discourse. Estimates of the numbers of these peoples in Indonesia’s forests are imprecise: it seems likely that between 30 and 65 million, masyarakat adat have customary rights in Indonesia’s forest zone (WAHLI 2003).

In this thesis, I will refer to all people who live in Mentawai as “the people of Mentawai”, and use the term “indigenous people of Mentawai ” when I refer to the people who originally come from Mentawai. I will furthermore, refer the indigenous people who still live in the remote jungle following old traditions as “the indigenous people in the remote jungle.”

1.2.2 Rights and indigenous people

The declaration of human rights was ratified according to the idea of securing peoples right’s so that they could be free to make a choice about their type of life. Eleanor Roosevelt insisted upon the principle of reaching most people, she asked to “set up a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations” (Nickel 2007: 1). Having said this almost 60 years
ago, improvements since then have developed the Declaration of Human Rights into many different categories of rights in order to accomplish Roosevelt’s principle. Improvements have for the most part been based on strengthening the instrument of international law. This is important because in making these rights effective they need strong grounds. On the other hand, the mere existence of laws is not enough to give rights power and make these rights forceful. The most important argument for justifying the Declarations is the prudential argument, that people will have the prospects of a better life when they live under a political system that recognises, respects, and protects their human rights (Nickel 2007). There is an invisible bond between our self-reflection to our cultural, social, political, and economic rights, which should be made clear as being part of an included whole, which is The Declaration of Rights on Indigenous People (Nickel 2007).

In Southeast Asia, countries see the human rights norm with complications finding that the Declaration is crossing these particular countries “Way” of interference with each other (Risse 2007:143). Roosevelt’s perpetual goal “for a better life” seeks to be as universal as possible so that most people all over the world can relate to the Declaration of Human Rights. There should then not be any reason for people to decline them on the grounds of crossing their values and ethics. However, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) does not agree on the declaration terms to be universal (2008). ASEAN where founded as an economic cooperation bloc after the end of World War II had given countries in East Asia independence (ASEAN 2007). Several Asian countries have tried to get away from human rights accusations towards them by saying that the human rights discourse is not supporting Asian values, particular their argument of “non-interference” (Risse 2007:143). This means that one has to consider human rights in their social, cultural, and economic aspects. ASEAN’s fundamental principle of non-interference bases on an idea that sovereignty remained firmly placed at the national level in each country (Risse 2007). Whereas the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 3 states “Indigenous Peoples have the right of self-determination” (Nickel 2007:161). It means that this minority group of people has same rights all over the world and that a single country’s government either a group of countries cannot claim indifference. When ASEAN where founded, the five initial countries, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand were in the phase of nation building. These countries feared intervention after decades of colonisation, and wanted therefore to be free from interference by their neighbours and the west. “The Asian way” which meant non-interference and non-confrontation has since then been recognized as a logo for this region
(Risse 2007:143). It has been suggested, (Jones 1996, in Risse 2007) that part of the reason for the ASEAN bloc’s difficulties in adopting the declaration is that these countries have not had the socialising effects coming from participation in a regional organisation like the European or African Human Rights (Risse 2007).

Having in mind that Indonesia became a democracy in a fast process of coup d'état in May 1998, one must not forget how long this country was governed under regulations that neglected the human rights norm (Risse 2007). Indonesia is still in the early phase in terms of civil and political rights but I will argue that pressure from the international society as well as domestic actors have created a change forward. Indonesian people are talking about their rights and demand information regarding government regulations that have an effect on them. In Mentawai, local NGOs have been active in monitoring their cause as an “indigenous people” and been able to attract international organisations for support.

Two men, one a village-head I talked to on Sipora, south Mentawai, wanted more information on the local people’s rights according to law so they could have the frame of what they by law are entitled. By this, they mean the local law adat, “people need to know their rights. The Indonesian law says that everything belongs to the government, so the government can take your land any time. If the clan owns the land nobody can take it away from you (interview).” In Sipora, it is different from the main island Siberut, because people have only lived there for about 12 generations, coming from Siberut. This has given the island different rule of land rights as it started by the principle of “first keeper’s takes all” in contrast to the rule of Siberut, which is pater-lineal, and where clans have inherited the land through countless generations (interview). Although one cannot “purchase” property in Indonesia, the land in Mentawai is “in control” of the local clans². Disputes over government’s regulations for various state projects, like logging, mining, and palm oil-plantations have led to complicated disputes between the local people and the government. On Sipora there is a village headman who “own” and control the land in these villages, people are afraid of losing their land to the village headman as well as to the government. When there is no documentation on ownership to land, people do not have long-term security in providing for their family, since they actually risk losing “their property” at any time. Problems of land rights are a common dilemma for indigenous people in all parts of the world. Even in Norway, the Sami people have had a hard time in developing a Law that protects their rights, and particular use of land.

² Nobody can actually own land in Indonesia, it is owned by the Indonesian government (interview).
It is as recently as two years ago that the Law of Finnmark was implemented\(^3\). Indigenous people have in theory the same human rights as everybody else in the world, but because they are a minority group, they are more open to human rights violation in many countries and therefore need extra protection of their rights (Nickel 2007). The United Nations General Assembly has based The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, on years of records by the Human Rights Commission and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in addition to several other associations (UN 2007). Article 26, in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, are protecting the indigenous people’s rights (UN 2007):

“Indigenous peoples have the right to own, develop, control, and use the lands and territories, including the total environment of the lands, air, waters, coastal seas, sea-ice, flora and fauna and other resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. This includes the right to the full recognition of their laws, traditions and customs, land-tenure systems and institutions for the development and management of resources, and the right to effective measures by States to prevent any interference with, alienation of, or encroachment upon these rights.”

The Declaration has an important side that indicates new moves towards global issues, like development, decentralisation, and multicultural democracy for the many countries governments with an indigenous population. This means that countries with an indigenous population need a strong communication with their indigenous peoples that is based on cooperation between all parts so that meaningful consultations on common grounds can take place (UN 2007).

1.2.3 Democracy: Linkages between power and information

I will argue in my study that access to knowledge and information in society is important because it enables power and by that one are able to make a difference. One of the main hindrances for minority groups, like the indigenous people of Mentawai, is that when not fully recognised by the government as an indigenous group, they are not entitled to rights as an indigenous people. In Mentawai, it is mainly in regard to control over their territory and the consequent lack of control over their natural resources like the forest. Legal and illegal logging of the Indonesian rainforest, have given Indonesia the fastest destruction rate in the world, where more than two billion hectares are cleared annually (RFN 2008). In Mentawai, the logging of the forest has caused conflicts and environmental disasters that seriously affect

\(^3\) 1st of July 2006
the people living there. The indigenous people are then powerless in gaining access to and in managing their territory.

Foucault said (Foucault 1991:18, in Olssen 2007:3), “I don’t believe there can be a society without relations of power.” His theories have been used to understand the connection between power and knowledge for research in the field of democratic theory. One important part of Foucault’s power/knowledge-theory is the belief that those who are in power have “specialist knowledge” (Foucault 1991 in Olssen 2007:4). He states, “the production of knowledge and the exercise of administrative power intertwines, and each begins to enhance the other” (Foucault 1991:7, in Olssen 2007:4). This means that understandings of fields of knowledge are manufactured within their discourses. Power is unobtainable without knowledge. Foucault, who had a degree in psychology, explains the relation between power and knowledge in the way a psychologist has power to diagnose a condition, and because the person belongs to this specialist discourse, their word is considered reliable and “true” (Olssen 2007). For that reason, people have power. Modern society exercises its controlling systems of power and knowledge; that these were so fundamentally connected that he combined them in a single hyphenated concept, “power-knowledge” (O’Farrel 2008). For a democracy to be able to work after its principles, it is important that the government consist of people who have “specialist knowledge.”

Even though there is no commonly accepted definition of what democracy is, the traditional reason to justify democracy is that people should rule themselves as free and equal in their own government that demonstrate transparency of government actions. Required ideals like, participation of all members of society, goals that reach the common good and political equality, makes democracy both an ideal and a practise. Democracy is securing power to the people, although, it is not said that power is granted to the party who have the highest moral intentions. Foucault said,

“Democracy is founded on a constitution, where the people exercise power, and where everyone is equal in front of the law. Such a constitution, however, is condemned to give even the worst citizens, the overwhelming influence of bad, immoral, or ignorant speakers may lead the citizens into tyranny, or may otherwise endanger the city”(Foucault 2001a:77 in Olssen: 2007: 10).
Countries, which have recently become democratic, can suffer from leaders that are inexperienced with democratic norms and procedures, which in turn give the state inefficient regulations when it comes to civil and political rights. It is particularly important that a participatory democracy include open elections where people are freely engaged in a public discussion of its candidates and parties. In such a process, the will of the people forms the foundation for political decisions. Foucault solves the democratic dilemma in the election-process by including the importance of ethics. He explains:

"The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of perfectly transparent communication, but to give oneself the rules of law, the techniques of management, but also the ethics, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination" (Foucault 1991:18 in Olsen 2007:3).

Foucault goes to the length of calling political processes “games of power,” and by this means that it is the ethics of leaders that decide if society is to be managed well. According to Foucault ethics in democratic behaviour imply the relationship between how we relate to ourselves contributes to the self’s relationship to the self. His point is that this relationship forms our identities, as well as the way we lead our lives and govern our conduct (Foucault 1991 in Olssen 2007). His ethical argument is that “the care for the self aims at the good for others…” which would mean that ethical action takes place in a community in the way one tries to behave correctly in a relation to others, and for others (Foucault 1991:7 in Olssen 2007:4). Discipline are then shaping our identity and therefore, in a society “in which everyone would be correctly concerned for self” would be doing well and find the ethical principle of its own stability” (Olsen 2007:7). According to Olssen (2007), such a society is both “borderless and complexly differentiated” because there is a sense of balance between equality and inequality, which creates an inclusive environment (Olssen 2007:4). The theory of difference was for Foucault the essence of what is recognised as “relationality and diversity as fundamental social and political attributes” (Olssen 2007:4). Democracy can involve many different systems and practices, and by the Foucauldian “theory,” the participation of the entire people is present. This is taking place, according to Olssen because the people’s concerns of the others open up for a “continued debate, modification, rejection, or reversion of agreed decisions while enabling a maximum of freedom and autonomy, an ongoing possibility of negotiation and dialogue, and the most effective opposition possible to abuses of power” (2007:4). In addition, Mitchell Dean (1999:184) points out that government is central
for Foucault because “according to whether it allows rather than inhibits the “self-directed use and development of capacities”, there is an obvious sense in which democracy is the form of government best suited to these ends” (in Olssen 2007: 4).

1.2.4 Organisation of the Thesis

In chapter 2, I will explain in detail the methodology of my fieldwork in Mentawai, which cover information on selection of sites and informants in addition to the methods applied for the data collection. This chapter gives an explanation on how I have intended to analyze my data according to the limitations and ethical considerations as regards this particular area in addition to the strings attached for a master thesis.

The purpose of chapter 3 is to introduce the study area and present an overview of the current and historical events that have had an impact on the situation in Mentawai. This includes basic information on population, geography, and social setting to broader explanations of Indonesian political history and economy. I seek to provide a background for the situation that the indigenous people of Mentawai are in.

Chapter 4 of the thesis provides the main discussion where all of the information presented in previous chapters is placed into context. I attempt to answer my research questions outlined above based on my findings in the field and connect these to government decisions that have affected the indigenous people. The interethnic relations between indigenous people from Mentawai and the Minangkabau will explain part of the situation that has caused an identity crisis for the indigenous people and lack of information. On the other hand, implementation of new laws of decentralisation, and thereby the local newspaper Puailiggoubat is seen as an opportunity for a stronger local democracy. Part of this process is the work of NGOs who have been able to make the indigenous people’s case in Mentawai known internationally.

In chapter 5, I sum up the discussion from previous chapters and conclude that the situation for local people to participate in local politics is still limited due to lack of information about the political processes. Moreover, along with decentralisation corruption has also been decentralised. And it has and created more power to the local elite instead of the indigenous people of Mentawai.
CHAPTER 2

Methodology

The Mentawai Archipelago is the youngest district (kabupaten) in Indonesia, declared independent in 1999 from the mainland district of Padang-Pariaman (RFN 2006). Information concerning how Mentawai should integrate to Indonesia as its own kabupaten and build development is an issue that needs more attention. Especially the inexperience in dealing with public administration issues is causing a variety of problems for people on these islands. Therefore, to be able to get to the core of the problem in my study, I have to understand how people gain information in general. The perspectives of the local peoples affected by these issues are important in order to examine how information flows between the indigenous people throughout Mentawai. I therefore investigated the island’s main villages, and compared the result with how the situation is in smaller villages, by adopting a qualitative approach. My research is then, primarily based on words in the analysis of data rather than quantification. Although numbers can be a part of a qualitative research, the research is supposed to go beyond such measurements (Bryman 2004). This kind of research does not rely on objective theory, but on ideas made by social interaction between people including the researcher herself.

2.1 Fieldwork

I conducted my fieldwork in Mentawai from November to December 2006. In addition, some of my interviews took place in Padang, Jakarta, and Bali, where I arranged to meet several people with various relevant relations to Mentawai, as they happened to be in the same areas as I visited. In Bali, particularly many people had relation to Mentawai as both islands are well known for their great surfing possibilities. In Jakarta, I met one of the main persons from the NGO, Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM), who have set up my meetings in Padang. I arrived in Bali where I spent a week talking to people and prepared for the rest of the trip, before heading to Jakarta. This gave me time to familiarize myself with the country and the culture where I had spent some time during travelling in East Asia four years ago.

My previous stay in Indonesia took place as part of a trip I did in relation to a semester where I was an exchange-student in Australia for my Bachelor Degree. Although I spent only a few
weeks on vacation in Bali, I made an effort to visit several off-the-beaten track areas and thus experienced more of the particular culture of Bali. Before leaving Norway for my master thesis fieldwork, I had prepared for my research by including issues from Indonesia in most of my previous school assignments. Therefore, I knew that there are great variations between the different cultures and practices in these islands. This also helped me to learn the background to the country’s history and made me familiar with current affairs.

In Jakarta, I had a meeting with the “senior-head” of YCM one of Mentawai’s local NGOs, that helped me carry out my fieldwork. When arriving in Padang I arranged the schedule for my fieldwork in Mentawai together with YCM. One of the main challenges was to be able to reach as many villages throughout the archipelago as possible that would match the local boat-schedule during the time available in Mentawai. To meet my objective of studying how “the information flow between people throughout the Mentawai Archipelago can strengthen the local democracy” it would be necessary to meet with people living in the villages that receive the newspaper Puailiggoubat\(^4\). This newspaper is the only printed media published in the area and it is therefore an important element in my research as part of my research objective is to find out how relevant the information in this paper is and how many actually read it.

I entered the main port village Muera Siberut after 12 hours on the boat from Padang. Since it is possible to reach the northern part of the island only once a week, we had to continue the same day for another six-hour boat trip. I was however able to make a stop at the YCM headquarters and conduct several useful interviews there, and I also completed some interviews on the boat. Due to time limits, I soon concluded that the way I had to continue working was by talking to people as often as I could.

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\(^4\) See section 1.1
Figure 1: The Mentawai Archipelago outside mainland Sumatra
(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mentawai_Islands_Topography.png)

Figure 2: Indonesia
2.2.1 Selection of site
Mentawai has been an area of interest for researchers for a while, although the major focus on the island has generally been in the areas concerning flora and wildlife. The Mentawai archipelago is about 100 kilometres outside the west coast of Sumatra and has been relatively isolated from the rest of the world until the 19th century (Nordholt 2007). Social studies is therefore an area that needs more profound research. The Mentawai archipelago is a chain consisting of four larger islands (Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, and south Pagai) and several smaller islets that all together is home to approximately 70,000 people (Nordholt 2007). I limited my research area to the two islands of Siberut and Sipora because these are the main islands where the sub district offices are located and where the newspaper Puailiggoubat is possible to attain. I therefore selected these villages and a selection that lay further off track for purposes of comparison. Up north on Siberut, I went to three villages, the port village Sikabaluan, and Monganpoula, a village a couple of hours up the river in the jungle and the home village to my interpreter Malancan, which is out at sea further north. In south Siberut where I stayed the longest, I studied three villages along the main road including the sub district, Maileppet, and Muntei and then one village in the jungle six hours up the river, Rogdok. I ended my research in the island Sipora where I conducted interviews in the capital village Tuapejat and in Saureinuk, a jungle village further south reached by boat at sea and then up a river. In this way, I was able to experience first-hand how information actually has to travel in order to reach people in these remote areas.

2.1.2. Selection of informants
In the method of selecting informants, I conducted non-probability sampling in the form of convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Bryman 2004). This made it possible for me to get the type of informants that I wanted, and at the same time leaving the possibility open for meeting interesting people that I did not think of beforehand. I started my research with the intention of focusing my interviews mainly on women and men in the working age group (20-65 years), but I was also interested in talking with youth and older people. I also interviewed people from main villages and some farther off the centre. I could then get samples for comparison with each other. A convenience sample means a sample picked for the reason of accessibility although it can be difficult to generalize the findings since there is uncertainty of how representative it is of the population (Bryman 2004). I tried to get representative samples by reaching different households and by snowball sampling. Both convenience sample and snowball sample indicate that I have some information of the population I am researching.
Snowball sampling is a type of convenience sampling that gives the researcher contact with informants by approaching only a small group of people that are relevant for the research who then proceed to give information about others to be interviewed (Bryman 2004).

I travelled the island with one interpreter and usually other people from YCM who were locally familiar to the village. When we went to off-track villages, I was always introduced to the village head at first. I would then ask his permission to conduct my research in his village and whether I could start my interviews with him. In this way, I was able to get an overview as well as background information over the situation in the village. The village headman would then, together with my interpreter arrange for me to meet more people. My interviews were conducted in two ways: either by people coming over to the house where I was staying, and where I would conduct both individual interviews and group interviews, or by walking around in the village talking to people. The reason for this approach is partly that I had to make the easiest arrangements due to time limit and because people would always come over where I stayed for a discussion. People I interviewed would proceed to tell others that I was there and this resulted in more potential informants coming by the house for an interview or find me in the village. In addition, I wanted to reach the people who did not come over, so I tried to talk to them while walking in the village for observation. Sometimes we would end up having big discussions where the villagers just seemed to drop in and join the conversation. This kind of participation gave me a very good insight into how the society deals with information. It was interesting to see how quickly people seemed to know that I stayed in the village and that they already knew the reason for my presence. In walking from house to house and talking to people who happened to be at home I was sometimes able to reach female informants alone because the men were usually working outside the home. The approach gave me an opportunity to verify if there was information that they did not want to share with me when the husband was present. This could contribute to the reliability of their statement. The women seemed to be interested in discussing health issues more frequently when it was only I, and the interpreter there. I noticed that when interviewing couples the husband seemed to lead his wife’s answer. I also approached people on the bigger boats and at public places such as places to eat or at the YCM house, because here I also had a chance to meet people that was not in their familiar surroundings. In this way, I got to interview people who were coming from villages that I was not able to visit, because they were travelling.
The use of interpreters in fieldwork is essential if the researcher does not speak the local language, and has therefore been widely used by anthropologists and other researchers. Using interpreters in field research has also become a common practice in the field of development studies, as most development research is carried out in areas where people may speak a different language. I developed a very good relationship of trust and understanding with my interpreter that seemed to be noticeable to my interview subjects. This looked like to be passed on and created a more relaxed atmosphere during the interview, and in general, when I met with people.\(^5\) However, studies in using an interpreter is not so largely recognized in anthropological theory. Borchgrevink argues that the “silence regarding interpreter use is linked to the anthropologist’s need for establishing authority and to the position that fieldwork has within the discipline” (2003). He states that by neglecting the discussion around using interpreter, it leaves out valuable information in the processes of analysis. Problems that occur during research in the field, which grounds in language competence, could have been reduced by beforehand preparations. In my fieldwork, I therefore arranged for having two interpreters who were Mentawaians. They work for YCM and live in Padang, Sumatra. The fact that they both are recognized among people on the islands for their connection to YCM, and one of them also work part-time as an guide made my fieldwork a lot easier. One of them is also an English student at university level. They always had very useful information about history, people, culture of the society and could use this information to back up issues I did not fully understand during interviews or in general when talking to people. I am not able to thank them enough for giving me their valuable time away from family and school.

2.2 Data gathering

In my research on Mentawai, I was able to stay in the villages that I wanted to investigate. This gave me an opportunity to take part in people of Mentawai’s daily routines and activities and at the same time, the people got used to having me there. I wanted the setting for the interview to be based on security and trust so that there could be room for asking personal questions. When I visited a village, my interpreter and I stayed along either with a family or with the people living in the YCM house. I would take walks around the village and drop in on a conversation if possible. In this way, I was introduced to daily routines like cooking,

\(^5\) There were only the exception of a group of housewives which were asked more intense question regarding information about health, food, hygiene, and other issues that are considered female topics in Mentawai. They did not have a problem talking about these issues, as it was they who brought it up. However, my interpreter was more uneasy in the situation. In general, the type of questions I had was not on topics that were difficult to talk about.
cleaning, and common interaction between people of the villages. I would take baths in the local river or at the well behind the house as the Mentawaian people did. By learning small local phrases, it gave the conversations an informal start since my pronunciation was not always so clear. People got familiar to me and they seemed to relax when I was around. Talking about my research and doing interviews was then easier to do because they spoke more freely to me.

I wanted to conduct participant observation but unfortunately, time given for our fieldwork does not allow us to do participant observation in a satisfactory fashion. In addition, I do not speak the local languages and my interpreter could not stay longer in the field. This made my fieldwork shorter than expected. According to Bryman (2004) it is unlikely that for a master thesis one is able to do a full ethnographic research, because it require such long amount of time to understand and interpret a society. I tried to combine my research with a micro-ethnography, which means that I kept a closer focus on my specific topic, instead of trying to “portray a whole cultural system” (Wolcott 1990 in Bryman 2004:293). Participant observation is a method often used along with other methods and serves as a base for these. Data collected in this way, gives fundamental information for developing interview guides and key questions for unstructured and group interviews, which was my main data collection method in addition to secondary data from published and unpublished sources. Supplementary information, which I needed during my analysis and writing in Norway was kindly sent to me by my interpreter through e-mails.

2.2.1 Interviews

Data for this research was collected by using the method of qualitative interviewing, which included semi-structured or open-ended interviews (Bryman 2004). I collected data for the most part by doing key informant interviews, group interviews, and individual interviews. In an unstructured type of interview, the interviewer preformed the interview from a list of a set of questions that act as a guide for the interview. It is an informal approach of asking questions where each interview will be different from the other. The purpose of this type of interview is to open up for new and unexpected information by giving limited guidance to the interview. In this way the interviewer has room to follow up on responses that seem significant for the research (Bryman 2004). For group interviews, a discussion among group members takes place on a range of matters that are not fully related to the topic. However, the essence is to let people speak freely so there will be a possibility for new information to
appear. Bryman explains that in a semi-structured interview, there is a series of questions in a
genital form in an interview schedule but not all needs to be covered, these vary from
interview to interview, and one can ask additional questions.

Since I wanted to cover both what the people of Mentawai consider important, and what I
need to know about certain issues, I conducted my interviews using a set of questions that I
wanted to cover and I would in addition follow up on issues they brought up. My purpose is
to let them speak freely so that there was a possibility to discover what they think as
noteworthy topics. My list of questions would vary depending on whom I was interviewing.
Usually it included some easygoing small talk to make the interviewee more comfortable with
the situation. A less formal process made a better situation for both individual and group
interviews. Overall people showed enthusiasm when they heard the topics of my research and
wanted to provide me with information. The fact that there was usually someone listening in
on my individual interviews, did not seem to be a problem. It seemed like these societies are
rather collectivist and therefore people preferred to do the interviews together, and being in a
group made a more relaxed atmosphere for the interview. During the whole session, I took
notes, and later I did a general summing up of how the day and how the interviews went. In
this way it was easier to stay on track and discover any necessary changes. It did not seem that
people were uncomfortable with the approach. Before an interview, they were always asked
politely if they wanted to participate and were given an explanation about the topic and the
purpose of the research.

### 2.3 Data analysis

Analysing qualitative data can be a very complicated process because they draw from
interviews and observation, and constitute a large amount of unstructured textual material
(Bryman 2004). Before I commenced my fieldwork, I prepared the questions to focus on
topics that I wanted to discuss in my research. In addition, I also wanted to conduct the
interviews in ways that would allow me to access new information through the process. After
a couple of test-interviews, I was able to alter the interview-guide in a way that I found it most
useful for the research. In having this guide, I made sure that my topics of interest were
covered. I discovered that I had both gained new topics during the interviews and that there
were some questions that I could leave out. Having the results categorized based on topics
gave me an indication on how the situation in the village was.
In general, I experienced that people were engaged in the interview process and gave me the information that I sought. My topics for the interviews were not on sensitive issues. Therefore, it was not hard for people to talk to me about them although, if people made way for it, sensitive issues were discussed.

In preparing for my previous trip to Indonesia, I found out by reading the Lonely Planet that Indonesian people are in general very humble and polite, and that they do not like to give negative answers, particularly not the word “no” (2003). Declining each other is not something that Indonesians find natural; they try their best at finding a positive way out. It is in general interesting to look at people’s language in order to get an indication of their way of life. Another indigenous people, the Penan people in Malaysia have no word for “thank you” (Survival International 2002). This can easily be misinterpreted in terms of this particular people being very rude, although it is simply because sharing is taken for granted in Penan society (SI 2002). According to Lonely Planet, there are various ways of declining something in phrases that normally means yes although in Indonesia it is common knowledge that these phrases should be understood as “no.” When things are perceived as tricky, it is a common response to laugh. Since I knew about this “routine” from my previous trip, I was aware that I needed to discuss it with my interpreter. I was afraid that he too would also have problems using the word “no” during our conversations, and thus make incorrect translations. On some issues, I could notice that this was indeed a problem because the answers did not match each other. I would use triangulation to cross check that we both were talking about the same issue and had the same understanding of the answer. Triangulation is to make sure that there is consistency in the findings of data gained by using more than one way when investigating the data (Bryman 2004). Denzin (1968) explains it more broadly, as an approach that uses “multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies (in Bryman 2004:275).” It can be used when interviews do not match findings from participant observation or when you need to ask several times about the same topic, though in a different way. This does not mean that the data is less interesting or important for the research. A part of social research is to find the meaning and reason behind people’s behaviour. Bryman

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6 For example when discussing the election I noticed that since it is mandatory to vote in Indonesia it was not easy to get reliable answers on this topic. Most people said that they voted, and that they had received some information to do so, but I then asked how they got the information to know whom to vote for, they sometimes had no answer.
states: “The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world” (2004: 279). During my research, I tried to get hold of what the respondents intended to say, that even though, if I am not able to catch the complete wording as the respondents, the same meaning is there. The point with narrative analysis is that their histories are to make sense of what have taken place (Bryman: 2004). It is therefore important that it is the local people’s perspective of society that I am trying to analyse. I will make use of all data gathered through interviews and informal conversations in addition to observations done during my stay in Indonesia. This information is all part of my understanding of the way people are living in these islands.

2.4 Limitations
Successful research is to create a relationship dependant not only on how familiar the researcher is to the language and culture, but also to how familiar the people in the society of research is to the researcher, and to achieve this, takes considerable amounts of time (Bryman 2004). I was not able to obtain such relationship considering the formal constraints I had given that this is a research for a master thesis. There are many different dialects and languages on Mentawai that are very different than the main Bahasa Indonesian, and that I do not speak Indonesian and the local languages made me depend on translators that knew these dialects, as well as Indonesian and English. I was however, not left with a feeling of not having my topics covered. I just had to make the most of the time I spent in the area, which meant interviewing when travelling from village to village and at the same time make use of observation.

2.5 Ethical considerations
In order to successfully conduct social research in a foreign society, it is essential to know about and be able to manage complex issues such as culture, religion, politics, economics, law, and sometimes a variety of local customs. Ethical issues come up in the field where the researcher tries to understand an unfamiliar society. Preparations on these issues are important to be made beforehand to avoid confrontations between the people being studied and the researcher (Bryman 2004). As a researcher, one is also required to respect the subjects of the study and their rights to privacy, confidentially and anonymity. The subjects must also be given enough information about the research. Researchers who fail to consider ethical values
are not only at risk of getting questionable results, it can also damage scientific research in the area in the future. Ethics in qualitative research is therefore a concern for both the people subjected to the research and the researcher her/himself while working there (Bryman 2005).

Since the topic of my research was focused on the information flow in the area, it did not involve too many situations where people were uncomfortable answering my questions or worried that their anonymity would be violated. I was more concerned about local customs when it came to dressing and religious matters. One of the main issues for YCM’s work on Mentawai is to value and protect the indigenous people’s way of living, their culture. The indigenous people living in remote area do not wear clothes but have tattoos and some jewellery\(^7\). While the more centrally located villages have experienced influence from missionaries particularly Protestantism since 1901, protestants were the first outsiders that made it over to Mentawai from the outside. It was only later that Muslims entered the population, coming from mainland Sumatra in 1952 (Nordholt 2007). I therefore discussed with both of my interpreters how strict religious matters are in Mentawai. I asked both the Rainforest Foundation and my interpreters for advice on for instance how to dress, and if they knew of any particular behaviour, which would not be considered acceptable. Although I could not hide the fact that I was a foreigner, I was in this way trying to minimize the risk of behaving in any manner that seemed disrespectful of them and in the same time behaviour that would affect my research.

\(^7\) I was actually quite surprised when one young woman told me that she disliked the way some people dressed in Mentawai. She said that it was not proper enough, that people should not wear sleeveless shirts, and she wished that there were more information for people on such issues.
CHAPTER 3

Indonesia and Mentawai

Conducting social research involves recognising patterns of people’s behaviour in a social setting that is unfamiliar and therefore require solid knowledge on the culture and history of the study area. This kind of information was difficult for me to collect during my fieldwork as I had time restraints. Therefore, I also use other written sources of information on socio-economic, ethnic, religious, or historical political situation in Indonesia in general and specifically in Mentawai. I will combine information taken from field research by other researchers, large organisations working in the area, and from general government sources particularly in fields of law and politics. I will give an overview of Mentawai and Indonesia that can work as a background for issues addressed in this thesis. The intention of this chapter is to give the necessary information on Mentawai and Indonesia in general as to introduce it to the topic of research.

3.1 Geography and Infrastructure

The Mentawai archipelago is a chain of four larger islands Siberut, Sipora, North Pagai, and South Pagai, and many minor islets located off the west coast of Sumatra, in east Indonesia. The biggest island is Siberut, which is 4,090 km² and parted in two sub districts, north and south Siberut (Persson 1997). The capital, Tuapejat is on the smaller island Sipora in the south.

Altogether, The Republic of Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world with approximately 18,100 islands where 6,000 is inhabited, stretching for about 5150km across the equator in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It borders four countries, East Timor (228 km), Malaysia (1,782 km), and Papa New Guinea (820 km) and consists of five main islands, Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Irian Jaya (CIA 2007). Most of its size consists of water, so transportation has for centuries been on boats. Mentawai has until the 19th century experienced more isolation than a great deal of other regions in Indonesia. This is because of trouble waters between Sumatra and the archipelago, which reach about 80 kilometres (Persson 1997). A boat trip across takes about 12 hours and are usually too expensive for most Mentawaians and consequently most people I talked to, rarely make the journey.
In Mentawai, boats are not only a source for transportation between islands, it is also how people travel on the islands itself. There are less than 10 km of roads in Mentawai, so the rivers are the main transportation system. Even though there are improvements on roads around the main villages, it is still not possible to reach off track villages other than by boat. There are only a few cars in Sipora, but some people in the main ports have motorbikes. The villagers I talked to emphasized that, boats are not only a daily important necessity it is also important for development of the islands. When boats transport people around news and information is also a part of it and makes it possible for people around the archipelago to communicate with each other.

### 3.2 Population

In July 2007, the population of Indonesia was more than 234 million, which makes it the world’s fourth most populated nation, and the population is estimated to rise by 3 million per year according to growth rate 1.2%, according to the CIA, The world Factbook (2007). The main island Java, where the capital is located, alone has 128 million people, although the distribution of the population is very uneven in the country. Indonesia consists of large areas that are not well suited for living and agriculture (CIA 2007).

In Mentawai, the population is about 70 000 but it is very difficult to get reliable statistical information of the archipelago (Nordholt 2007). The majority is indigenous people, which count for about 23,000, on Siberut, and then there are the Minangkabau people who migrated from mainland Sumatra which count for about 2000. On Siberut there are about 60 village settlements, although only 20 of them are counted for administratively (Persson 1997 and interview).

### 3.3 History, Politics, and Law

In this section, I will give a short narrative of Indonesian history and some of its political matters to provide a better understanding of the country’s political institutions and structures. I want to explain how ethnic minorities in Indonesia, particularly in Mentawai come to be marginalized when independence was introduced and at the same time accomplished greater decision-making in society.
Indonesians usually separate their history into six central periods: Prehistory, Ancient period (until 1600), the Muslim states (1600-1800), 19th century, the Nationalist Movement and last the period from 1942 to today. When history is looked at this way, emphasis is on the nationalist and Islamic periods. That leaves out the importance then of Indonesia’s periods of foreign influence and colonial rule. In addition to the well developed Hindu and Buddhist states in the 7th -8th centuries ways of organising society are not counted accurately for (Reid 1996 in RFN 2006).

The Dutch laid the foundation of the Indonesian state known today through gradually occupying the archipelagos islands from its previous kingdom rule, in their times of colonisation from 1595 to 1945. The first island was occupied in 1605 by Dutch expeditions looking for exotic products like spice, coffee, and sugar. There have, until the Second World War been several inner wars between “Indonesians,” in addition to foreign occupation. Indonesia was for a short period in the hands of the British, 1811-1816, and the Japanese 1942-1945. In the early part of the 20th century, nationalism started to develop through the educated elite in Java, which formed the idea of independence and one common language. When Indonesia declared its independence after Second World War a four-year war for freedom began against the Dutch rulers who refused to give up its territory. According to The Rainforest Foundation, the Indonesian army still today, make use of the wars and the increased freedom that Indonesians experienced during occupation, as a means to justify the need for a strong and powerful army (2006). The army saw themselves as a unified force between the people and the central government (RFN 2006).

Independence was declared shortly after the Indonesian army overpowered the Japanese on 17 of August 1947 and was the first time Indonesians had defended themselves (RFN 2006). Although nationalism had created unison across ethnic lines and geographical regions, people were far from agreeing on who should run their newly freed country, nor how. Various regional differences like adat, religion, and tradition built up fear for a new political dominance. The new Indonesian leader the nationalist Sukarno made a speech on June 1, 1945 known as “The birth of Pancasila” (Worden 1993). In this speech, Sukarno proclaimed

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8 Coinciding with the period the Netherlands were occupied by Germany.
9 Adat, means custom or tradition, but has become recognised as a kind of legal term, which includes traditional laws. The government as legitimate has recognised these adat laws. Adat however do also include many different ancestral traditions like, agriculture, religious practices, marriage arrangements, political succession, or artistic expressions (Worden 1993)
the Indonesian constitution to be based on five basic principles, known as the Pancasila in order to make a foundation that all groups could accept. For later Presidents, political parties and big national organisations, it has since been important to make policy and other decisions according to the Pancasila (RFN 2006). The Indonesian government had a complicated job in making all the different ethnic groups cooperate on a common law that are inclusive and recognised by all different ethnic groups in Indonesia. Particular by the fact that Indonesia is also the largest Muslim populated country in the world, made it a complex job. Even so, in contrast to other Muslim countries, the Indonesian Law emphasised to have a cultural neutral identity instead of a Muslim one. Based on democratic and Marxist ideologies, the state philosophy Pancasila became the definition for Indonesian political culture and values. Because of this, the Indonesian legal system is extraordinarily multifaceted, put together by three forces of law: the main legal system based on Dutch colonial law, Islamic law, or sharia/syariah for Muslims and customary law or Adat, for interpersonal disputes in villages. Laws in Indonesia do not give a clear description of whom the different rules apply to, and they give a very general description of its restriction area. This problem causes confusion when handling the rules in practice, particularly for indigenous people concerning their land (RFN 2006).

“The five Pancasila principles are:

1. Belief in one god: Indonesians should believe in God but the importance of neutrality makes it clear that no particular religion is favoured. Although Indonesia is the world largest Muslim country, and therefore had many Muslim nationalists that wanted a Islamic identity, which was argued by the Indonesian farmers but probably what weight the most is the fact that the Indonesian army consist of Christians.

2. Humanitarianism: That there is acceptance between all Indonesians for each having equal value. For Sukarno this also implied internationalism, but as his successor President Suharto had a radically different foreign policy, the international aspects has been lost.

3. National unity: This means that Indonesia must be coterminous with the former Netherlands East Indies, and that local loyalties must be submerged to the state.

4. Democracy: a version of Indonesian style democracy based on idealised concepts of traditional village governance of consensus and consultation was stressed.

5. Social justice: Economic and social egalitarianism and prosperity for Indonesia. This principle has also allowed for a strong state in national economy (Ramage 1995:11-14, in RFN 2006).”
The Dutch occupation built-in weaknesses in the Indonesian state that led to political trouble before and after independence. It created an ethnic segmentation of economic roles, an uneven sharing of power, and a political system that was largely based on tyranny and violence (Touwen 2007). The leader of the Indonesian communist party, PNI Sukarno, worked towards a constitution for the country and became its first president. In 1955, The Republic of Indonesia held its first democratic election. On the other hand, it was difficult for new leaders to deal with the rising population and the need for food and education since the country was so drenched from wars and occupation. Sukarno tried to implement a liberal system of government but the politically unstable situation and the economic problems from times of war made people split up in groups. This situation gave room for several encounters between Indonesian groups around the country. There were too many political parties for making a stable political environment and Sukarno experienced a difficult power balance between PNI, the army, and Sukarno himself. The economical problems, conflicts between communists and non-communists, and the fact that the army sided up with the non-communists resulted in a coup of his government and reassignment as president in 1965 (Touwen 2007).

In the wake of the coup, the General and commander of the army Suharto gained power at the cost of life of somewhere between 500 000-1.5 million members of the communist party. The massacre lies as an open scar in Indonesian history because there has never been a public discussion in civil society, consequently nobody has then been prosecuted or held responsible (RFN 2006). Suharto was able to recover political and economical stability by western capital and his strong authoritarian New Order regime, which made him to some extent tolerable for the population. Although, his New Order regime made all levels of public administration tied up in corruption by including friends and family to govern the main economic sectors (RFN 2006). Serious crimes of human rights violations and strong military control made the times of the New Order regime a depressing part in Indonesian history. The strong military rule controlled all parts of the Indonesian archipelago, independent organisations were illegal, and freedom of the press was strictly limited. When the small country East Timor claimed its independence (1974) Suharto’s reaction was to kill one third of East Timor population. Suharto’s brutal way of governing Indonesia was not obvious to the rest of the world because the strong rule was in combination of economical growth, which

10 1949-1954
11 80% of Indonesian oil resources are now controlled by foreign investors (WALHI 2005).
12 See explanation of the ASEAN countries in part 1.2.2.
was common for East Asian countries. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 was devastating for Indonesian economy and placed the country in a serious depression. Suharto lost the Indonesian peoples last patience, who came together in mass demonstrations for new leadership. Students were able to gain power by working with the urban poor people and made the overthrow possible. The mass shouted “Reformasi”, “demokrasi”, and Suharto had to leave his position in 1998 after 33 years of dictatorship rule (RFN 2006).

3.3.1 Law No 22 of 1999 on Local Autonomy

There have been several short-term presidents trying to govern Indonesia following Suharto, according to the RFN (2006). The first one, President Habibie (1998-1999) implemented democracy in his flagship journal, Jurnal Demokrasi dan Hak-hak Asasi Manusia- HAM, Journal of Democracy and Human Rights (1999). The purpose of the journal was to strengthen the new democratic discourse for the country by informing the people of Indonesia in the human rights norms after decades of authoritarianism (Lanti 2004). According to Lanti terms like “crimes against humanity, procedural democracy, reconciliation, and civic culture,” that were previously hardly heard of, now became part of people’s daily conversation (2004).

A significant change for the indigenous people was made through Habibie’s implementation of The Law No 22 of 1999 on Local Autonomy and Law No 25 of 1999 on Balanced Finance between Central and Local Government (RFN 2006). These Laws have made a great impact on the government’s power towards its people, because local knowledge has been authorized to be a greater part of the regional government. Decentralisation has opened up for flexibility for the local people in how to manage their own specific needs, according to a report by The Community Empowerment for Rural Development Project (CERD 2006). Another important part of Indonesia’s democratisation-process has been to empower all civil society organisations (CSO) to have a say in the making of the autonomous systems (CERD 2006). There are restrictions on Law No. 32 of 2004 on Local Government as in terms of which issues local government can address, but it assures that power and authority are controlled by right instrument (CERD 2006). Law No 22 on Local Autonomy is very important for the NGO I worked with and other interest groups who try to create development in favour of local people, because it not only gives more power in managing local resources but also cover control over local expenses. In Mentawai, one can see that the pressure on the forest, since the Law was initiated have reduced and greater local authority has made it more attractive for areas to seek district status (RFN 2006). Many districts have therefore been divided since the initiation of the Law. On the other hand, there are parts of Indonesia where the opposite are
apparent. In areas where the local people hardly ever have a say in regional issues, The Rainforest Foundation has to change approach to the challenges of Law No 22 on Local Autonomy depending on the local circumstances (2006).

3.4 Ethnic diversity and religion

Indonesia is a highly populated nation, mainly made out of islands where the landscape varies from place to place. Separated by big mountains or oceans, people have also adapted to this diversity. The result is that many different ethnic groups and languages inhabit the Indonesian islands. This ethnic diversity is, by the Indonesians, understood as an asset of cultural riches supporting state unity, which is reflected in the national slogan, “Bhinneka Tunggal ika, unity in diversity”(ADB 2002).

The country is officially classified into four main ethnic groups; Melanesians, Proto-Austronesians, Polynesians, and the Micronesians. There are now registered approximately about 1,072 different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups and about 500 dialects and languages. Javanese being the single largest one including 45 percent of the population, 15.41% Sundanese, 7.3% Madurese, 6.29% costal Malays, and 26% other. Mentawai is number 80 on CERD list of ethnic groups with a percentage of 0.03 (54419), of the total population, and the Minangkabau people from Sumatra 2.7 %, as number six (CERD 2006). Today, there are as many political cultures as there are ethnic groups. Islam made its impact from 13th century and had reached most of the archipelago within the span of two centuries. Indonesia is the largest Muslim populated country in the world reaching 88.2%, Protestant 5.9%, Roman Catholic 3.05%, Hindu 1.81%, Buddhist 0.84% (2006) and other unspecified 0.20% (U.S. Department of state 2006) .

13 As part of the nationalisation of the many ethnic minorities, animist beliefs are not seen as real religions and are therefore officially counted as “people who do not yet have a religion.” according to principle 1 of Pancasila. The government has with the help of missionaries tried to make them religious in a hope for having better control on the indigenous people in Mentawai. Many ethnic minorities in addition to or instead of their traditional beliefs accept Christianity. Indonesian Islam is in general moderate and can also be found as combined with local animist belief according to the Rainforest Foundation Report (2006).

13 Usually there are four principles used to determine ones ethnic group, masyarakat adat, that is, names languages, environment and customs (CERD 2006.)
3.5 Economy, education, and environment

Indonesia initiated democracy after the fall of Suharto’s regime in 1998, which have meant a change for the conditions of the political economy in Indonesia and Mentawai. The economical situation in Southeast Asia has now improved significantly after the crisis in 1998, in a great deal because of international trade. The Indonesian stock market turned out to be the third best performers in the world in 2006 and 2007, according to CIA- the World Fact book (2008). The reason for these high scores is due to significant reforms in the financial sector. The world economy is no longer monopolised by the European and the North American countries. Asia has now displaced Europe as the major partner for America in trade, if not politics. Thinking in this vein was already suggested in the mid 1990 when it was said that the twenty first century will be the dawning of the pacific age or could be the “pacific Century” (Heron 1995). The ASEAN bloc indicates that this estimate is possible, the 10 countries in the bloc have together an average rate of growth of around 4% per annum (2005 estimate), while the EU, 15 nation zone are expected to slow down from 2.8 per cent to 2.7 per cent in 2006 (International Monetary found 2008). Indonesia, however, still struggle from corruption and poverty, as 17.6 percent of the population live under the poverty line (CIA- the World Fact book 2006 estimate).

The economy in Indonesia relies mainly on the export of oil and gas in addition to light industry like producing textiles and clothing. There is also some level of export of chemicals, fertilisers, cement, and glassware. The majority of people rely on agriculture, 43.3 percent whereas 18 percent is the industry sector, and 38.7 percent is services (CIA- The World Fact book 2004 estimate).

The market forces in Mentawai are relatively low, as most people do not have money, but rely on what they can produce themselves. People I talked to rely on agriculture, fishing, and hunting for their daily food. Those who can afford it keep chicken and pigs, while sago starch, obtained from the sago palm has been and is still their most common food source, as it grows wild in addition to being planted. Then they have root crops, bananas, and fruit trees (Persson 1997 and interview). An annual product like rice has in the last decades, become a common part of people’s diet although it is not cultivated in Mentawai. It has been imported through the Minangkabau people from Sumatra and people are dependent on getting it from mainland.
Sumatra by boat. Rice is then, for the poorest people too expansive, and I could see that people instead eat various root crops, cassava, and coconut.

Mentawai was the last area that gained independence in Indonesia, which is noticeable in the region’s economic development. I could see the differences between the living standard in the port villages and the ones off track. There is a problem on the island in getting hold of and keeping skilled bureaucracy personnel and teachers, nurses, police, and for running offices of administration. I was told in Saureinuk that 10% graduate from elementary school and only a few of them have money to continue for junior high. Although, when I was there, this village had three people pursuing a university degree. Students told me during interviews that it is normal in Mentawai and in general for Indonesia to have a break for a few years as they have to save up money for continuing their education. The students also told me that there are high motivations for getting education among the younger generation in Mentawai. Some villagers on the other hand said that “the education is a very sad issue in Mentawai,” because the graduation rate from senior high is very low (interview). People were speculating about the reason for this, whether it is the Mentawai governments that have not been serious enough about education in Mentawai, or the great absence of skilled teachers, particularly English teachers. There are a large number of teachers coming from mainland Sumatra but a problem is that they do not want to stay there for a long time. People kept telling me that people from Padang who work for the local administration on Mentawai, left the archipelago as soon as they were paid, “I can see them on the harbour with the pay-check in their hand” (interview). Educated Mentawaians end up staying in mainland Sumatra after finishing their education, which leaves the responsibility on the educated Minangkabau people from Sumatra to handle these positions. The village head pressed the importance of having people with education remain in Mentawai, in order for the community to be able to take care of themselves. As it is now people move to mainland Sumatra where there is better opportunities for education and employment and therefore settle for a life there. The village head said that students from Mentawai seemed to change their Mentawaians manners and started to forget about the local culture from Mentawai, when they have stayed in Padang for a while. What they want he said, is to find ways of creating jobs in Mentawai that not only fit the low educated population but also attract educated people to return. This is one of YCM’s main points in their work on making improvements for the indigenous people of Mentawai.
I experienced myself that there was a great interest among youth in Mentawai for learning and improving their situation. Several students would come and hang out with me at the YCM head quarter in Muarasiberut where I had my base. They wanted to practise their English skills, which they have learned partly in school and partly from private sources, which included everything from tourists, TV, and movies, to courses made for your home computer.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Figure 3: Stereo and umbrellas}

\textsuperscript{14} It was interesting for me to see the difference between people’s living standards. Although most houses in the main villages look the same, very basic, some had modern facilities like TV, stereo and computer’s.
CHAPTER 4

The situation on the information-level in Mentawai

The connection of indigenous people and lack of information, are a common dilemma for many countries, still I believe that there also exists differences within societies, which makes each case interesting to study. The connection then, ought to be placed within defined background and not generalised on the basis of what is common in other countries. The intention of chapter 3 was mainly to provide information about the political and historical background of the situation in Mentawai and I will discuss the understanding of this information in this chapter. Although all the information presented gives a look within the society where the research has been carried out, there are some points presented here that I find especially significant for the following discussion.

The fall of Suharto’s regime and the great influence by international organisations, have meant a change in Mentawai social political situation, as I see it. Even though changes were already emerging during the dictatorship, laws were still authoritarian and made work for indigenous people’s recognition, difficult and risky. The situation for the people on Mentawai was also more complex because of their remote location, which made it harder to obtain education and skills needed for dealing with administration matters. Lack of this knowledge has made the people of Mentawai rely on people outside their own culture who have different priorities. In addition, the government’s negative attitude towards groups of people that were dissimilar to the mainstream Indonesian has created a self-esteem problem among the younger generation here. Their unique culture is about to vanish, as in Mentawai it is not difficult to find people who can teach their culture to the future generations. Although, as I said, these are common problems for marginal groups of people in post-colonial countries, it does not make each case less important.

In this chapter, the flow of information on Mentawai will be considered in relation to the position indigenous people of the Mentawai archipelago are in and how they manage in taking control of their situation and lives. The newspaper Puailiggobat will be investigated as the overall source for informing people and as a source of contribution to a stronger local democracy. In addition, I will discuss how decisions made by past governments reflect on the

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15 Javanese
current situation in regard to rights and how this connects to lack of information. The influence of international non-state actors have made on the Indonesian government to change its policies will be addressed.

4.1 Government policies that have affected the indigenous people in Mentawai

According to Plato knowledge “justified true belief”, which means that believing a given proposition is true, one must not only believe the relevant true proposition, but one must also have reason for believing that it is so (Plato in Jor 1999). The value of knowledge lies in the sphere of where it is coming from, and it is the trustworthiness of this sphere that evaluates how solid that knowledge is. Plato, known for his scepticisms for democracy, claims that the democratic process is not necessarily bringing the best-suited people to govern the state (Jor 1999). The election he states will then have the ability to bring forward a candidate on rather mistrustful grounds. Along with Plato is Schumpeter adding to this idea by stating that it was rather unrealistic to think that democracy would bring the common good for people, because the democratic process was based on the will of people who were too easily manipulated by the politicians, and in addition, too self-absorbed (Rasch 1999). According to Schumpeter the “classical” definition of democracy is as follows:

“The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realises the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”(Schumpeter 1942:250).

For the common good to be realised through the democratic process people depended on “justified” knowledge about politicians, elections and not at least the society itself. A political environment where knowledge is poor cannot expect to be able to govern its people satisfactory.

In Indonesia, due to decades of severe authoritarianism and corruption I argue that people have experienced enough problems for giving them reasons for believing that decisions made by the government are not trustworthy. The poor political environment has made the Indonesian people lay their trust elsewhere. In an interview, I was informed about the role of
the NGOs in working for the indigenous people’s rights. They said that it is the NGOs that have created awareness and given information about what to do and how to go about to deal with problems in regards to the situation on Mentawai. During Suharto’s regime, people could not speak of their situation, “…but now things have changed for the better” (interview). Many problems in Indonesia occur because of the top-down perspective of laws and regulations that do not give proper room for local solutions. Local NGOs stress the importance of a flexible identification of customary law that enables more power to lower levels of administration (WALHI 2003). The local oriented approach of NGOs have created confidence among indigenous people of Mentawai, and placed them in a strong situation for informing people on the islands, which have given them a good reason for empowering NGOs.

In order to understand the reason for the indigenous people in Mentawai’s problems with identity, I will give a discussion on how the current situation is in Mentawai and what people I interviewed had to say about it. “The fundamental reference of identity is social location” (Hewitt 1989 in Calhoun 1994:14).

4.1.1 Relocation program; Transmigrasi

For the period of New Order, Suharto established the world’s biggest project in relocating people from overpopulated islands which was to “achieve a more balanced demographic development” according to a report by Down to Earth (2001). Sixty percent of the Indonesian population live on the main island Java, which stand for no more than 7 percent of the countries’ territory according to HPCR (Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research 2002). “Over a period of twenty years, 65 million of the nation’s 165 million inhabitants from the overcrowded island of Madura, Lombok and Bali were to be transferred” states the World Bank on their main page (report from 1971). The purpose was to empower poor people by relocating them to area less populated where there would be better possibilities for a higher living standard. The transmigration programs started in the 1950 but originated from projects by the Dutch during the early 20th century, including almost 1.5 million families in Indonesia (DTE 2001). With support from the World Bank, by more than half a billion USD, the Indonesian government hoped to improve regional development through expanding farming as well as reinforce the national unity (HPCR 2002). Transmigrasi, reformed in 2001 in order to prevent conflicts caused by settlers and local people, have nevertheless aroused conflicts that have become severely violent. In the last years there have been conflicts in Kalimantan, Ache, Sulawesi, and Papua. There is also a problem related to a “Javanisation” of religions
where the migrants have settled which have been particularly violent in Kalimatan (1997), where Transmigrants and local people were killed and many more displaced. Possibly the most difficult part of the transmigration process have been the impact on the indigenous people living on the islands where the migrants have moved, states the HPCR (2002). Human rights observers criticise the transmigration program for violating indigenous people’s rights. These migrants, mostly spontaneous migrants who are not part of the official program, is said to be used as a political tool in order to make people in these areas more “Indonesian”\(^\text{16}\)

Transmigration has in Mentawai, led to strains between transmigrated Javanese and indigenous population, according to a report by Action in Solidarity with Asia and the pacific (ASAP 1999). The indigenous people claim that they are given less government support and funding than the newcomers, who on the other hand criticise the area they are moved to have insufficient infrastructure to support them and less than attractive land. Sometimes that land is of disputed ownership as well. In addition, lay these programs extra pressure on the environment where the newcomers are placed. According to DTE the Indonesian outer islands where most people have moved to contain more than 10% of the worlds remaining rainforest, which are now in danger of disappearing. Transmigration made it possible for landless peasant, homeless people from urban Java, and other relatively inexperienced people to conduct farming. Their actions, believed to have led to the destruction of forest and loss of top soil, while degradation on water supplies became a major environmental hazard (ASAP 1999). The transmigration programmes have failed so far to lower the population pressure in Java, and congers poverty (DTE 2002).

4.1.2 Interethnic relations between Mentawaians and Minangkabau people

In Mentawai, the population consists mainly of the indigenous people, which count for about 23,000\(^\text{17}\) and the Minangkabau about 2000\(^\text{18}\) who migrated from mainland Sumatra, according to a research by Persson (1997). Some of the Minangkabau people moved voluntarily from Sumatra, mainly from the harbour cities Parian and Pariaman to seek new opportunities for fishing and trading and some costal agriculture. The Minangkabau stands as a strong Muslim culture on Sumatra, as being educated give them a feeling of being superior to the Mentawaians on nearly all aspects of life, including food, housing, clothing, religion,

\(^{16}\) A senior government official has confirmed this according to ASAP.

\(^{17}\) Estimate from Siberut only, 1997

\(^{18}\) Estimate from Siberut only, 1997
and material culture (Persson 1997). German missionaries of Protestantism targeted Mentawai in 1901 while Islam did not emerge until 1952 (Persson 1985 in Persson 1997). The local religion Arat Sabulungan was prohibited in 1954 and Mentawaians were forced to choose a new religion of either Islam or Protestantism (Nordholt 2007). This was decided during the so-called Rapat Tiga Agama (meeting of the three religions) where matters that the government according to its nationalistic ideas found ‘backward and primitive’ needed to be dealt with (Nordholt 2007). Living in close contact with nature and so isolated\(^\text{19}\) from the rest of the world have not only created different values for the Mentawai people but also kept them from being influenced by others until the last century (Persson 1997).

During the New order period, while Mentawai was still a part of Padang-Pariaman district, more people from Sumatra came over to handle administrational issues for the inexperienced local people (2007). Since the indigenous people lacked knowledge and education, the Minangkabau - although marginal in numbers – were in charge of both governmental issues and trade on the island. Mentawai covered almost 80% of the districts landmass and consequently accountable for nearly three quarters of the districts total revenue (Nordholt 2007). This important trade did not however benefit the island and the indigenous people. The migrant’s economical interest was on the mainland with their families, which meant that Mentawaians did not see structural investments and improvements from the export of their forest and products. The Mentawaians was not included nor where they ever encouraged to partaking in the decision-making of their island (Persson 1997). The fact that one needed to be a Muslim in order to get civil servants positions was not integrating the Christian Mentawaians into administration positions. One can then find many cases where Mentawaians have converted to Islam or changed their name to meet the requirements as a member of the government’s staff. Even so, Mentawaians participating in local governmental relations have been low and the ones there are only working in lower levels of the administration (Nordholt 2007).

Before the Mentawai archipelago detached itself from the mainland Sumatra in 1999 they had to go to the cities of Sumatra, Padang or Pariaman in order of maintain all administrative matters since this is where all government offices used to be located. A boat trip to Sumatra takes about 12 hours and is usually too expensive for most Mentawaians. For this reason did

\(^{19}\) In a western point of view
most people on the archipelago did not have important documents such as proof of citizenship, birth certificates, or marriage licenses. This created problems in various stages of life, such as when applying for higher education or attempting to marry someone outside Mentawai. Access to information from the outside world has therefore been very difficult for the Mentawai people to attain (Nordholt 2007).

Most people I talked to during my fieldwork, had rarely been outside the Mentawai archipelago. Those who did made it because they studied outside the archipelago or had children who did. I was also told that they actually felt ashamed over being from Mentawai when they came to Sumatra because of their shortcomings in education, knowledge about how to behave in a city and that they felt they where different and primitive. These are all common integration problems, which people can experience when coming to a new area, particularly a new urban area. Nevertheless, it is important to point out the relation between the indigenous people of Mentawai and the Minangkabau people from Sumatra, because it gives an indication of the situation of the indigenous people in Mentawai today.

4.1.3 Remote villages and governments resettlement plans
Out of Indonesia’s 33 provinces, four have special status that gives them stronger governmental privileges so they are not as dependent on the central government. These are further divided into regencies (kabupaten) and cities, sub districts and villages. In Mentawai, people were traditionally organized in patrilineal groups called Uma, which consist of approximately 30 to 80 people. Uma is also the name of the communal house that the clan uses for celebration, teaching, praying, and other activities traditional in Mentawai culture. The house it is the smallest unit within the imminent political system of the laggai20, and regarded as the foundation of how they manage their lives in the Mentawai society. In the last three decades, the government has tried to relocate the people living in the remote jungle who still live by the “traditional customs.” According to Native Planet the government’s plan is to provide access for logging the rainforest. They have set up government villages where the indigenous people were promised education, health care and other western style improvements, in order of giving up their traditional lifestyle in the Uma. The new houses turned out not to be properly built for life on Mentawai. Poor planning have settled them next to where the sanitation used to be which forced them to break their own taboo and use the

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20 According to Eindhoven in her article “The Return to the Laggai” laggai is a land tenure structure (2003)
river as latrine. This has caused frequent epidemics of cholera and hepatitis, and created malnutrition because they take advantage of the nearest wildlife (Native Planet 2006).

During my research, I had these facts from the Native Planet in mind. I could see how the life of Mentawaians circulated around the rivers. Not only are the rivers their main means of transportation, it is also children’s playground. It is here where women catch the daily fish in a process made out entirely under water by using a net. I could see their heads suddenly surface in the sea grass, along the river edge as we were passing by in our canoe. Nevertheless, right next to them I could also see garbage dumped and toilets going straight into the river. I realised that it is not “common knowledge” to know about bacteria, and illness caused by dirty water.

After a group meeting in Sipora consisting of only women, I asked if there were perhaps anything, they would like to ask me about in return. This was something I used to say to people after an interview if there was time available. These women started to ask me several questions regarding health issues, some that made my relative young male interpreter somewhat embarrassed. It was surprisingly to me that they did not know more about such issues. My previous idea had always been that this kind of information had been passed on through generations. It seems that in the process of relocating people, family-ties had been broken up too, causing valuable information about their culture and how to survive in the jungle to disappear. The Uma is the place for the family to interact and share experiences in Mentawai culture. These are now are declining and the knowledge and information are lost too. These failures of modernisation have caused problems for the indigenous people that are not only threatening the foundation of their culture but it has also created a risk to their health and life (Native planet 2007).

Waterborne illnesses are one of the main causes of child deaths according UNICEF (2006). Every fifteen seconds a child dies from such illnesses that are easily cured with proper knowledge (in UNESCO report). In Mentawai, up to 32 per cent of children under the age of 12 die of chest infections, diarrhoea, bad or unclean birthing and malaria, according to a UNESCO study in 2002. In addition, deaths are also caused by malnutrition and anaemia in children and pregnant women (UNESCO 2002). According to research done by NGO SurfAid International, half of all families in Mentawai are losing at least one of their children (2007). This humanitarian organisation has been working with health issues in Mentawai since 2000,
and are able to reach numerous villages on the Mentawai archipelago by their locally based approaches (SurfAid 2007). Over the next three years, they are trying to reach at 37,000 people in the Mentawai archipelago with their Community Based Health Programs. The organisation’s care group model “empower women to educate their communities on how to treat and nourish their families, which would result in preventing childhood mortality and consequently lead to a better life for the family” (SurfAid 2007). SurfAid have been able to gain such great result due to their participatory-based philosophy “hand up, not a hand out”, which focuses on including the local people to gain control over their own situation. Creating a solid foundation over knowledge in health issues for the indigenous people gives hopes for a long-lasting effect, because they can start a new epoch where knowledge is passed on through generations. SurfAid is a well-known organisation among people in Mentawai, almost all people I interviewed had heard about it. The organisation has earned good reputation largely due to their significant accumulation of volunteers among local people. The Care group model alone includes over 800 volunteers, which is one of many projects by the organisation.\(^\text{21}\)

### 4.2 Decentralisation reform and local empowerment

The Law No 22 of 1999 on Local Autonomy explained in section 3.3.1 has made a significant difference for the local people on Mentawai. This political change means empowerment of Indonesia’s civil society and the democratisation of its political structure. There is now a possibility for internal and external pressure to move towards a less authoritarian political system. This possibility have made it easier for critical parties to speak out, especially non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These organisations have taken the opportunity to voice their desire to have greater legal recognition of adat\(^\text{22}\) and adat based rights to natural resources.

“A great improvement was made when decentralisation was introduced in 1999. A desire to have autonomy at a provincial level, which could potentially have undermined the state, was cleverly

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\(^\text{21}\) SurfAid international is a non-profit humanitarian aid organisation, which aims to improve the health of people living in isolated area connected to them by surfing. Their founding is based on the surfing industry’s humanitarian charity. It is also through surfing, and this organisation that I became aware of the situation about the indigenous people of the Mentawai archipelago. This New Zealand/Australian organisation won the World Association of Non-governmental Organizations (WANGO) Global Humanitarian Award last year (2007).

\(^\text{22}\) Explained in section 3.3
circumvented when the government decided to denote lower administrative units—the kabupaten (district) and desa (village)—as key levels in the new autonomous system” (Beckman 2001).

4.2.1 Newspaper Puailiggoubat; local voice of Mentawai?

“People are very poor when it comes to information in Metawai. The tower for telephone does not work in all places, so it is not easy to communicate to other villages, this fact make some people isolated. Information then has a far way of travelling, which can create problems of making appointments because it makes it difficult for it to be there in time.” A middle age farmer in Muntei

In my study, I wanted to find out if the Puailiggoubat gave sufficient and relevant information to the people of Mentawai. The fact that this is the only local newspaper they have access to, makes it clear that the subjectivity of its information is limited because it only gives one side of the story. Competition can be an important means for improving and making sure that the information is accountable and of quality. I will here discuss the issues that people I interviewed raised as significant for the newsletter Puailiggoubat.

The ways Mentawaian receive information have changed tremendously since electricity was introduced in the 1960s for some parts of the island (interview). Previously people were dependent on getting news through other people that had been on the mainland Sumatra. Now Mentawai has radio and television access available. Although this only benefits a limited number of people directly, it is considered a major breakthrough. I could see that old technologies like radio and print are still necessary and used throughout the islands. Some of the politicians that I interviewed told me that there are plans for developing internet access to the archipelago, but these plans are still not ready to be realised by the local government. Although they do have radio, the signal is not available for all villages. A villager told me that the local station is difficult to tune in and that the one from Padang have a better signal, so they listened to that one instead.

Media sources, like internet and radio are important alternatives for the newspaper because it gives local people a wider public communication access that is important to the democratisation process. It is then possible to develop critical sources for information, and create political debates where local voices have an opportunity to be heard. Eindhoven says
that the public dialogue in Mentawai through these mass media has made it possible for people and local and international interest groups to focus their resistance to the state’s overriding ideas for a unified national culture (2002). The editor of Puailiggoubat told me that there are plans of making local organisations more powerful so they can contribute to making a stronger democracy, “The newspaper tries to build a wider public area where other ways of communication are absent” (interview).

4.2.2 Puailiggoubat/Self-reflection

The Puailiggoubat is written in Indonesia’s national language, Bahasa Indonesia, and is thus targeting the island people by presenting their articles in an understandable and accessible manner. Expressions such as “politics” and “advocacy,” common in most newspapers of today are explained in a straightforward language according to Eindhoven (2002). Villagers told me that they do not recommend translating the newsletter in Mentawai language because these differ so much between villages. The initial objective of the Puailiggoubat founders was to inform people about the government program and issues that would affect them directly, like public services, culture, education, and how to control the local budget for Mentawai. The newspaper is still the best way to reach people in far away villages according to a farmer and organisation facilitator in Rogdok; in some places it is the only information source apart from what other people tell them. Puailiggoubat is, printed in Padang Sumatera and then shipped over to Mentawai. It can then be found in the villages school library, at the teachers houses, at the village headman or it can be purchased for 2000 Rupiah in the small shops. Puailiggoubat has a total circulation of 1500 copies: whereas 200 copies are distributed in Siberut, 200 in Sikabaluan (north Siberut), 400 in Sipora and the rest are openly distributed. The newspaper employs 19 people, divided over the main islands. This also includes reporters, although villagers can also make editorial contributions, for which they will be paid 40000 Rupiah per article. The Puailiggoubat is made available to the rest of the world online internet by Down to Earth (DTE) an English organisation working on ecological justice in Indonesia. The organisations goal is to act as an international voice for civil society groups and helping them influence the national arena. On DTE web-pages one can from time to time find parts of the newsletter translated into English.

I found out during my study that peoples approval of the newspaper varied mostly form those who was reading it regularly and from those who only read it if they come across it by accident. Still most people I talked to said that they regarded the newspaper as important for
the indigenous people of Mentawai. Most criticism I found to be from people who read it regularly, in that they wanted more news, more often and even an additional competing newspaper. A competing publication could ensure that more than one side of the story would be told as well as create a broader discussion. Some people also criticised the newspaper for displaying a weak sense of objective, pointing out that a certain topic would be addressed in one issue, without any follow-up in subsequent issues. If the paper was printed in a larger format, people wanted there to be regular space for issues of the main villages and its closest area. They want to know what happens in other villages and able to bond between people in different villages. This means that reporters need to go to every village and have regular meetings so there can be a better flow of information. A regular reader from Rogdok told me that sometimes they get it so late that the news is old meaning that 2 times a month is too rare, according to him. Rogdok is a village that depending on the water level in the river is located about three to six hours by boat from the main village Muarasiberut and hold about 80 households.

For the newspaper to be able to provide significant information for the people of Mentawai, it should have editions that are more frequent. For example, I was told that, the information about an adult education program that was running free of charge came so late that there were many people who were not able to attend it. This is an example of how important it is that information reaches everybody on Mentawai and at regular times. The editor of Puailiggoubat told me that they lack reporters on the archipelago, so it is difficult to create a wider picture of life on Mentawai. Creating an informative and reliable newspaper demands a foundation on skilled people. One of their goals is to give information about Mentawai that comes directly from the villagers and not from somebody who has just been there for a limited time. He said that they would like Puailiggoubat to cover a wider range of fields, but there is simply not enough space for it in such a small newspaper. Prior to their first edition, the people behind Puailiggoubat conducted a survey on 150 people that they have largely based their content selection. They have also had meetings with other organisations that work in Mentawai in terms of providing information like SurfAid International and UNESCO. Although Puailiggoubat, through its system of distribution, potentially should reach most of the people who can read in Mentawai, only about 50% read it according to the survey. “The local people do not read so much, it is a low market when people are so poor,” the editor told me. According to my research however, did almost all the informants I spoke with as part of my research read Puailiggoubat. The ones who did not read the newspaper said it was either
because they could not read or did not get hold of it, only very few said that they were not interested. Regarding a question like this, I have to consider that about half of my interviews were with people coming to me at the house where I stayed in the village. This means that one can assume that these people are more prone or willing to seek information than the ones who did not come over.

They do however have another newspaper available, but it is a Padang paper, which writes solely about national and international issues, and is not Mentawai news. When I discussed the content in Puailiggoubat with people there was always some particular issues that most people was very concerned about, one was always corruption, and another was information regarding their family-life, particularly education. These findings correlated to the earlier Puailiggoubat survey, which led to family pages in the newspaper, and a priority to give information about education, the editor told me.

For the future, the editor of Puailiggoubat want the newspaper to be independent and able to support its own agenda. However, at current time, it is receiving support from the Rainforest Foundation in Norway, which their total distribution rely on but the funding will be discontinued in 2008. They are therefore currently trying to find other means for running the newspaper. There is unfortunately not much money gained from advertisements as people in Mentawai are in general very poor and therefore do not provide consumers’ market. The editor stressed the importance for Mentawai to educate the next generation, “there was a significant change when Mentawai became a region, there are now a number of students from Mentawai in the universities in Padang than before.” This means that the interest is rising and that they realise how important education is for them. Puailiggoubat’s role in informing people of news related to education is fundamental in order to gaining educated elite for Mentawai

4.2.3 Freedom of the press by Indonesian terms

Any discussion about media and information should start with the law guaranteeing freedom of expression. Article 19 of the Declaration on Human rights (UDHR) guarantees the right to freedom of expression in the following terms:
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Since this is a UN Assembly resolution, it is not directly binding on states although it is in general, considered as having obtained legal force as customary international law since its adoption in 1948. The Civil and Political Covenant article no 19, the terms of which are very similar, require formal legal obligations on State Parties to follow the norm.

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

Freedom of expression is also protected in all three regional human rights instruments, which are the “article 10 of the European Convention on human rights, article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and peoples Rights.” This is a right, which has a primary position in the foundation of democracy in a country (UN 2007).

During the New Order Regime, there were three issues that the Government did not allow anyone to write about, Mr. Santoso, the chairman for the Centre for Information and Development claims “one is the succession to Suharto family and its business activities and one is the role of the military in government” (Gargan 2007). Still, they do not care about the statute. If they find it to be interesting to write about, they do. “We don’t know what will happen. It’s all very unpredictable. That’s Indonesia,” (Santoso in Gargan 2007).

From the time when President Suharto was controlling the press in Indonesia, development of democratisation and the reform movement have opened up for a much greater freedom of expression than before. The legislation of the new Press Law has given the media a higher degree of protection from government interference and created a safer environment for media outlets publishing critical news. Although media in Indonesia at times suffer from poor professional standards, the Indonesian media finally have an opportunity to develop as a tool
for exposing corruption according to a Baseline study on Freedom of Expression and Media in Indonesia (2005).

In Indonesia, it was the history of the confiscation of Tempo-magazines, which led to the development of the new Law for freedom of the press. Tempo Magazine, established in 1971, is the oldest and most accepted political news magazine in Indonesia. The magazines layout is quite similar to that of Times, and it is known just as much for its courageous, and progressively reporting as for funny satire. However, the government does not quite appreciate all articles that are published. Investigation performed by the magazine’s reporters searching for information related to various articles, has been criticized by the Suharto regime many times. In 1994, the magazine’s offices was closed after twelve-days notice because they had investigated a highly questionable purchase. The deal was regarding a purchase of former East German warships on the orders of a Government minister that the Finance Ministry claimed to be a wasteful spending. Only days later, President Suharto condemned the magazine for “exposing the deep divisions in the government.” Tempo and two other magazines, which were part of the investigation were consequently banned. This caused people for the first time to organise and protest in the street for the reason of a “banning of a publication.” Tempo Magazine pressed charges against the government and made the astonishing reality of winning not only on the first attempt but also on the government’s appeal (Gargan 1996). After the Suharto regime was removed from power, the new government ratified new laws for freedom of the press. The Indonesian Press Law, No. 40 of 1999, article 19 has been launched as more strong in terms of human rights norm than the previous Law.

The 1945 Constitution have general terms for freedom of expression, but new Indonesian Press Law, No. 40 of 1999, article 19 provide for substantial security of press freedom. Still, the security apparatus often attempts to control and restrict reporting on cases that interfere with government interests. The parliament ratified the new press law that provides for freedom of the press, prohibits censorship, and prescribes penalties for anyone who violates these rights. The law requires that the press inform about events and views “with respect to religious and moral norms of the public” and to hold on to the assumption of innocence (Baseline 2005). Media that abuse these terms can be fined up to 500 million Rupiah. The

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23 In 1999
government has also kept the right to suspend publishing licenses for an unspecified period of time, which the case of Tempo is a good example on what arrangements the government still is able to manage if they find it in their interest to do so. Other means of control include instructions for the total pages of advertising allowed and of how many pages approved in the newspaper. Advertising that shame the dignity of a number of religions or build disorder among diverse religions, is contrary to public morality, or refers to addictive substances, are all prohibited. Imposed by the new law a Press Board, occupied by journalists and associates, have been launched in order to form and implement a code of journalistic ethics. In addition, the President Wahid closed down the Department of Information, formerly used as the Governments propaganda and control tool. There are still outdated provisions that unjustifiably restrict freedom of expression that in the worst case can lead to imprisonment in Indonesia.

4.2.4 The lack of transparency in “new Democracy”
In a previous authoritarian government like Indonesia, there are several problems that they face as a “new democracy” which, are often related to its earlier practices in “the dark years of military governments” (Bertoni 2002:1). Particularly for authoritarian governments it was important that all decisions were made stayed behind closed doors, “lack of transparency of decisions on public matters was standard practice, almost necessary, to maintain and exercise the power of those who illegitimately held it” according to Bertoni (2002:1). For any state, it is much more uncomplicated to govern without that observant public who actually approved of them to be in power. Political criticism is fundamental in a democracy, although all states are aware of their risk of being left out of power. This conflict, according to Bertoni is the cause of “the fundamental tensions of political life: where to draw the line between democracy and authoritarianism” (2002:1). Although how tempting it can be to leave out information to the public, it represent the very grounds of what not to do in a democracy. This fundamental question when it comes to freedom of expression and media. “The role of the media is vital in generating a democratic culture that extends beyond the political system and becomes engrained in the public consciousness over time,” states the British council on governance and information (2004). It is through a media people can have open constructive political debates, that provide meaningful and objective information. It is on these grounds,

24 President Wahid from 1999-2001
where people can communicate and learn that the government is not always making its best priorities (British council on governance and information 2004).

“The Indonesian government’s disproportionate sanction is a serious set back to the freedom of expression, reversing gains made since the fall of the Suharto regime. The decision is also an unfortunate development for the broader evolution of democratic values just as Indonesia celebrates its first direct presidential election” (Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific 2004).

The high and concentrated level of corruption at all levels in the administration, means that media groups are under control of, small but powerful elite with close ties to the former president Suharto (Baseline article 2005). The practical consequence is that foreign media coverage is restricted and the national media struggle from setbacks by Laws that do not fulfil the demands of freedom of expression completely. News is consequently coloured in these persons political views and opinions, something that work against fundamental principle of the democratisation process that require equal opportunity.

The government’s first reaction about Puailiggoubat was that they did not like it. This was mainly because the newspaper worked on cases where they discovered corruption in the official matters, according to the editor. However, after a while the government saw that Puailiggoubat work on important issues for the indigenous people, so now they welcome the newspaper, he told me. The editor also said that corruption is a severe problem in Mentawai. According to Baseline article (2005:5), there is a general problem in Indonesia that there is a “culture of secrecy,” which holds back media freedom. This problem is present between State authorities and officials. A great source of information is the development of the internet with its limitless opportunities for searching into various sources of information. It has a new potential for realising freedom of speech using processes that are not based on legal instruments. Although Mentawai does not have access to internet yet, most of the local NGO’s have a base on the mainland Sumatra where they can pass on information about their work on Mentawai and maintain their relationships with larger international organisations. This information is however, not always accepted to be officialised to the rest of the world by the government in Indonesia. The staff of YCM showed me how the government is able to regulate some of the content that is published on these organisations web pages. News articles were removed by official censors. They then showed which sites that these articles were
“safe” from confiscation. It was inspiring to see how they would not give up but continue working and uphold pressure against the government’s unjust interference. These circumstance describes one of the most common problems to media freedom in Indonesia and is an example on how interference and control will create limitations on the quality of news.

The local radio, which has large potential for spreading local news in poor areas, are also controlled by administration as well as local political figures. Radio in Mentawai sometimes is the only news source that people have and during my research I could see how people would gather around one shared radio here, as well as in various other poor areas around the world where I have been. Limited sources for receiving information and news are resulting in a poor media-environment and triggering the poor professional standards that already exist. The quality of the news will automatically suffer from reduced opportunities for a free flow of information.

4.2.5 The role of trans-national actors and local non-governmental organisations in Mentawai

Transnational organisations and Non-governmental organisations have gained importance in Indonesia as both for dealing with problems that the government fails to solve and for handling issues that might not be worked out within the state. These are issues related to Human Rights violation, and democracy in general. These organisations have been allowed to develop because of the high level of corruption in the Indonesian administration. The issues of dominating national discourses in the country then set the agenda for transnational networks. This means that pre-colony Indonesia and its later rule under highly centralised government, implemented an anti-western and collectivist rhetoric that implemented a Transnational-discourse based on economics, social, cultural rights, which was less commensurate with the dominant international human rights discourse. It was not until the early 1990s that it switched to civil and political human rights discourse, according to Risse (2007). Human rights organisations started to develop in the early 1970s after years of violations where over half a million people having become human rights violation victims. The anti-western nationalist rhetoric also gave the government excuse for not responding to the shaming strategies of transnational networks and therefore prolonged the process of democratisation extensively during the years of Suharto 25 (Risse 2007).

25 Discussed in part 1.1.2
Dealing with Human Rights issues and democratisation has been difficult for later Indonesian governments because of the country’s short experience in democratic traditions and Suharto’s previous authoritarian regime. The fact that corruption was so severe by Suharto’s friends and family governed the main economic sectors is also evident in the logging industry of Indonesia. The Indonesian rainforest functions as a sustainable resource in a bond between Japanese trading companies and Indonesian politicians (Tsing 2007). The economy was a mirror of United States privatisation, which aimed at exchanging state interest in private hands. Legal and illegal entrepreneurs created their own set of laws of exploitation, which overlooked indigenous people’s rights and meet their own interest. When the Indonesians themselves were in control over the logging industry it became an even larger problem. The escalating corruption soon incorporated district officials who arranged with private people, and obtaining off-budget financing for their projects. The head of the village was sometimes included in these activities, which traded authorization to log village forests for their private off-budgeted funding. “This systematic corruption soon developed into lower levels of government and soon to private businessmen, village leaders, ambitious youths, migrants, thieves, police, and petty gangsters all got involved in rerouting public resources as private gain” (Tsing 2007:16).

A growing number of local intellectuals in Mentawai started to question these practices that ruined their cultural identity and resources (Nordholt 2007). The ties between illegal and legal enterprises was very close and made the situation out of control. The general dissatisfaction for the corrupt government and the depressing situation with the Minangkabau turned a small set of educated Mentawai people to organise in local groups and question their situation. It started in the late 1980s with one student group and escalated as transnational organisations, WWF, UNESCO and the Asian Development Bank got news of these marginalised indigenous people. Mentawaians learned to deal with these large organisations and how to present themselves as indigenous people. Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) one of the main local NGOs, founded in 1995, has a focus on advocacy and economic development that consider and respect the will of the local people and their resources. YCM has developed a close relationship to the prestigious Rainforest Foundation, which plays a major impact in their work. This transnational partner has more than doubled the budget for YCM, which made them able to expand their offices to reach larger parts of the archipelago. The initiative of Puailiggoubat is as mentioned before, part of this process (Nordholt 2007).
According to YCM (2007), their autonomy policy is aimed to achieve the following:

- Improvement of public service and creativity development of the community and governmental apparatus in the region.
- The equality of relationship between the central government and regional government and inter-regional government in authority and finance.
- To guarantee improvement of nationality and democracy sense, as well as the community welfare in the region.
- To create a wider space for the region's autonomy.

4.2.6 Local Control and Strengthened identity for the Mentawai people

One of the Village-head that I interviewed said that the children only learn about the Minangkabau culture from Sumatra. He hoped that the special program for learning about their own culture could be running soon in his village. The program he refers to is a program aimed to strengthen the Mentawai indigenous people’s identity that have been executed by YCM in cooperation with the OD programme of The Rainforest Foundation Norway since 2003 (RFN 2005). The RFN’s overall goal in Indonesia is to secure the rights of communities that live in or near rainforest areas and halt industrial deforestation. The project is based on introducing a culturally adapted curriculum as a subject in the school of the Mentawai-islands. It includes building libraries to encourage reading and on underpinning, local indigenous organisation skills across clans and local village rule (RFN 2005). Most of the activities that have been implemented by the project aim to strengthen the cultural identity of Mentawai youth and children. These also include activities like a traditionally story contest and a traditional dance contest which encourage children to learn more about their culture.

The program, Local Control, and Strengthened identity for the Mentawai people have according to the RFN, worked well to the plan in creating awareness of their traditional culture. However, RFN found that the implementing of the curriculum had been difficult for some teachers, although being Mentawai, because they did not have a proper understanding of the programme, (RFN 2005). In some cases, the main problem is that the younger generation does not know their culture well enough in order of teaching it to the children of Mentawai. I was told that they in addition had a problem with the teachers from Sumatra since they belong to a different culture. People had tried to confront the leader of education about this problem but there is no response since he is also from Sumatra. This problem is mostly concerning
Sipora as the leader of education on Siberut has the program better installed, a villager told me. The general discussion that I had on this subject had been very positive, people were very pleased that there was a growing interest in preserving their culture. Although, another villager told me that it is important to protect local culture but new knowledge is essential, especially on how to develop Mentawai.

4.2.7 Approach by the Coral Reef Rehabilitation and management Program
During one of my many journeys by boat, I was able to interview a manager of the Coral Reef Rehabilitation and management Program (COREMAP). This organisation goal is to implement protection and sustainable management of the coral reefs on the Indonesian archipelago. It was a relevant and interesting interview because he explained to me how they find it best to approach people with lack of education and that have learned to be sceptical towards authorities, with new information. This organisation program is to inform people about how important it is to protect the coral reef, and is supported by Australia, the Asian Development Bank, the Indonesian government, and Mentawai government. It is needed not only to maintain life in the sea for research, which is affecting them directly as they are very dependent on fish for getting protein, but it can also prevent tsunamis from destroying their villages. Problem is that people are not aware how severe the damage is. They use the coral for building houses and making roads. The organisation strategy is to make an impact on people’s conscience because, he said, “it is pointless forbidding it as they will do it anyway and the police do not have enough resources to handle and control it” (interview). Their approach is based on giving information directly to people by having meetings in the village put together by the head of village and the organisation. It is an important aspect that there are no government people or police present. About 20 people that being the head of village, teachers, and leaders of local organisation usually attend their meetings, however, discussions with children are also vital in their approach. By using a cause/effect strategy people are told that the reason that they are not getting so much fish anymore is because of coral damage. The program is therefore working according to the plan, as the explanation is very simple and involving people they trust. One must not forget that because of corruption people of Mentawai are not looking at police and government as security. They have tried to use the newspaper for giving out information but it does not reach out to the villages where this problem is severe. I will argue that in terms of reaching indigenous people in Mentawai with knowledge the process must include an institution that they trust. The severe level of corruption in Indonesia has turned the people against its authorities. I find this to be part of
the reason for why NGO’s are able to fill the gap between local people and the local government with a great deal of success.

4.3 Puailiggoubat and information for the election in Mentawai

Freedom of expression is at the heart of the Human Rights because of its important role in underpinning democracy. In a democracy, it is vital that there is an open debate of political issues and candidates so voters can make informed decisions for the elections. People need to be able to participate in outlining their government’s political strategies and that is through free speech. In criticising or honouring, citizens are holding politicians accountable for their political actions. Media acts as a vessel where the people can communicate with each other and bring in important information (British Council 2004). It is then possible to control that any offence or misconduct is not committed and replace persons that are acting in terms of offence.

In Monganpoula in north Siberut, many people voted without in reality caring about which candidate they voted for. They said that because one has to make a vote, they do not have another choice than to just pick a candidate, even though there is not enough information for them to read about the candidate. One woman said she voted for the one who looked best on the picture from the campaign-poster. People in Mentawai know that they need a range of information to be able to vote, but I was told that the people who came to the village only handed out their program and left. According to most people, there was not room or time for questions and discussion. People who then do not read or write have to make a choice based on what other people tell them.

When Indonesia in 1999 held its first open and competitive election in over 40 years, both domestic and worldwide spectators considered it as a move in the direction of democratic governance from the previous authoritarian rule. The election administration was prearranged and carried out in an extraordinarily short period of four months, according to a report by the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES 2001). In this timeframe over 300,000 polling places are supposed to be equipped with sufficient electoral supplies and training of staff. In addition, the new election law was inadequate as it was far too general and administrative procedures were difficult due to inefficient organisational structures. The coordination and communication between levels of administration was complicated since the
hierarchical construction of the election administration had not been changed from the past New Order regime, which was with no clear lines of authority (IFES 2001). The report argues that training of lower level election committees was close to non-existent, something that resulted in operational difficulties, and made tabulating and reporting election results very time-consuming (2001).

4.3.1 Mentawai Bupati (district administrator) Election 2006

The National Election Commission (KPU) has the complete authority and responsibility for conducting of elections in Indonesia. KPU and the election law have been greatly improved from the 1999 election. However, election procedures are still ineffective, particularly on lower levels. When I conducted my fieldwork in Mentawai, people had just voted for their new governor, therefore information regarding the nominees and the procedure itself was part of my interview-guide. People I interviewed told me that the election committee had had one month to prepare for the election. This seems like a very short time to run a campaign for, in addition to the fact that most people need explanation on how to make their vote. The majority of villagers I talked to had seen people from KPU arrive with information about the election. Of those I talked to, there were only in a few remote villages where there had not been a campaign, and here nobody consequently voted. In Mentawai, a campaign can involve as little involvements as securing the placement of a poster of the candidate at the information wall in the village, and then delegate information to the village head. In some villages I went to, the village-head passes on information to the villagers in a group meeting. The short amount of time forced the party to leave out some villages in the campaign, the chair-man of the party told me. Therefore, this was the only information that a number of villagers had to base their opinion on, some though, found it to be more than enough. This approach, cooperation between the different parties and the village head is helpful, but gives the village head a large amount of control on the candidates. The chair-man of the party said that: “it is a bad political environment, people do not know about politics…people are influenced by other people”. If villagers had not made their choice from what the village-head had told them, they listened to other people’s opinion. Schumpeter’s argument 26 said that democracy based on the idea that the electorate identified the common good, was rather unrealistic. He claimed that citizen’s lack of knowledge and carelessness lead them into being manipulated by the politicians who were actually setting the agenda. On these grounds, the election is a

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26 Mentioned in part 1.2.3
competition between leaders where the citizen’s participation is weak which make the process reflect the true power relation in that society, like in the Mentawai society. The indigenous people need their rights to be protected and given a chance to be heard otherwise it is easy to become “carelessly” over the political situation. Schumpeter stated, “Democracy is a political method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political – legislative and administrative – decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself” (1942:242). If democracy is defined as a “method” for achieving the will of the people, no matter what that is – democratic or not - such a process must provide people with adequate information about the process itself and the candidates involved, so they have a possibility to make a rational choice. As the editor of Puailiggoubat told me, they tried to give people information about the candidates and election procedures through the newspaper. I was told by the villagers that Puailiggoubat was only by a very few villagers useful in giving information about the election, because the election campaigned for such a short amount of time. The Chairman of the party told me that there where $10^{27}$ villages in south Siberut included in their campaign. I asked him about the procedures of the campaign, whether he was aware of the poor amount information that villagers had received. He told me, not surprisingly, that they lacked skilled people to monitor an election campaign. He said that one of the biggest obstacles in Mentawai is the lack of founding, and therefore lack of educated people. There are many high priorities for their budget, but when they lack money, it makes it hard to follow up on people’s rights and promises made, he said. The political programs are sometimes not so clear to the local people because the varieties of parties are very different from each other. Religious matters, however, do not cause these differences but it is the ideology that differ greatly the chairman said.

4.3.2 Democratic Elections

Coming from a democratic country where the media play such a great role in the election and not to mention the upcoming election of president in USA, it is evident how important the campaign and people is for making a just democratic election. Although all modern democracies hold elections, it does not mean that they are democratic. The former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Kirkpatrick J. defined democratic elections as

27 Out of about 60 all together
“not merely symbolic…They are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive election in which the chief decision-makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticise government, to publish their criticism and to present alternatives.”

The essence of Kirkpatrick’s definition of democracy lies in the value she gives for the participation of people and media. Kirkpatrick claims that election is a competition for citizens votes that are just for all parties involved in it because of the possibility to criticise the candidates. Freedom of speech is the essence of such a process. It is then clear that one month, like in Mentawai for this procedure will be difficult. In Mentawai where there is a low level of information, the credibility of the election become poor. Kirkpatrick claims that, although the fact that the party in office has the advantages of incumbency, how the election is carried out must be even for all parts. They cannot limit opposition parties the possibility to compete but must instead take the risk of being voted out of office, according to Kirkpatrick J (1998). In Indonesia, it is mandatory to vote, this makes it in one way easier for the ruling candidates in having a short “campaign,” as I was told too many times by villagers, “I just voted for the one that looked best on the poster.” This kind of “campaign-procedure” can be very comfortable for the candidates who are well known -are incumbent- and camera-friendly, as they clearly do not have to go through much trouble in order to gain votes. A long campaign only makes it more difficult in keeping a “trustworthy” image. On the other hand, this situation does not open up for a competitive process for other unknown candidates but instead create an environment where information relies on gossip and rumours. Access to the race means time to give out information with reference to your political principles. Time to build trust is key in a country like Indonesia where lack of transparency is so severe.

Kirkpatrick’s definition also claims that democratic elections are “inclusive,” this means that the voters represent all levels of society (1998). In Mentawai it has, according to Nordholt become apparent that an undersized elite is in charge of the local government, which does not apply as a representative democratic government (2007). Regardless of the fact that Mentawaians were able to liberate themselves from the, dominating and selected Minangkabau people, they are still in the hands of a minority group. When the decentralisation process opened up for local authority, the Mentawaians were very eager to place one of their own in the positions as the new district head, but the governor in Padang positioned a fellow Minangkabau also from Sumatra mainland (Nordholt 2007). The local people and local NGO’s however, reacted on this choice and targeted him, and made him give
notice to leave in 2001. Still, the next person in the position did not get the local people’s approval either, although a Mentawai was also a close friend of the governor and in addition worked very close with the illegal logging. Mentawais hoped for a putra asli daerah, an indigenous person that would also represent the people that live in the remote forest. This was close by the next person elected but still it appeared to be difficult in finding skilled and educated Mentawaians that are not representing the logging industry or the Minangkabau. The new governor installed only close friends to other positions, and the very important position as head of the Department of Forestry went to a Minangkabau because he thought it would be too challenging for a Mentawai. According to Nordholt, Mentawai politicians soon forget their agenda that brought them to power when they are placed in powerful positions (2007). Nordholt’s claim is that “opportunistic behaviour” by the local elite, leads them to lose all interest in their former ideas of self-determination and protection of natural resources (Nordholt 2007). The elite running the Mentawai government is not necessarily more competent than local people and do not represent all levels of society. The people living in the remote forest areas are still unaccounted for, since most of them are illiterate and therefore not able to participate in politics. Effort to include them has not been a priority because the local government claims that for them to be integrated the indigenous people in the remote forest need to give up their traditional way of living (Nordholt 2007). This attitude, one can argue, reflect the previous New Order regime policies about “masyarakat terasing” which put the Mentawai society back again to authoritarian rule of government, and not as an opportunity for local people to run their own communities.28

The theoretical perspective on how decentralisation would have an effect on corruption in Indonesia was mostly positive because the role of the local government would be stronger when the fragmentation of government power was given to people. Although, Kuncoro argued that the low ability to the local administration in providing its services may prevent the realisation of benefits from decentralisation (2006). The new regions do not have enough funding as to maintain its services, and the money from government is not covering all expenses. All districts in Indonesia have their own tax base, but these are usually insufficient to pay even the minimal public service level, Kuncoro argue then that when the local administration is poor to begin with, this open up for bribery down to the local level. He claims that the way corruption was carried out has changed from a central point to a system

28 Masyarakat terasing is explained in 4
that include all levels of government, which at the local level have created a various of new regulations, relating to taxes and permits (Kuncoro 2006). The election campaign in Mentawai is controlled and administered by people that belong to a small dominant elite, which are connected to illegal logging and the Minangkabau (Nordholt 2007). When the nominee in an election is working in these terms then the matter of politics is limited to the issue and politics, which this elite command, then the options offered are what this elite find acceptable. A woman said that she had been given enough information about the election but she was confused about why people from Sumatra wanted to be a leader on Mentawai, they want a local person to administer Mentawai. In Mentawai, people in the party have changed all the time and made it confusing for people to identify all the different parties. Most likely, a woman told me, this is happening because people get tired of being a politician.

Foucault said that democracy is politics and “politics is the continuation of war by other means (2003:15 in Olssen 2007:8)”. He meant that democracy is the procedure of resolving conflict in “more or less peaceful transitions of power” and for that to take place the citizens need adequate knowledge and rights (Olssen 2007:8). In Mentawai, power lies out of reach for the indigenous people as long as they are not given the rights and possibility to participate adequately in the political process. I will argue then along with Nordholt that the decentralisation process has raised the level of corruption to include all parts of the local level administration, in addition to the central state. The new leader from the election in 2006 is a Mentawaian, but when I asked people about him, some said that they find it difficult to trust him since the logging of their forest seems to continue. Others said that they did not approve of him because “He does not respect us since he does not want to hire Mentawaians but people from Sumatra,” which indicates how conflicts will continue as long as there is an unjust power balance in the Mentawai society. Decentralisation has regardless of the fact that corruption has become an even greater part of their society, made people look at their future as more promising. It is now less complicated for Mentawaians to communicate with the leaders of government when Mentawai people are also part of the administration. Corruption and bribery are unfortunately part of the Indonesian society and politics therefore people have become more tolerant towards this kind of ruling.
As I have mentioned before in the thesis, looking at people’s language can be quite valuable when one is trying to understand connections in that particular people’s society. In Mentawai, the word for “politicking” is “berpolitik” which is a word of a rather negative kind, because it can also explain people’s scheme to push through their own interest (Nordholt 2007:86). “Berpolitik” is then something that politicians in Mentawai, both the Mentawaian and Minangkabau people have more or less said to be part of, according to Nordholt (2007). Without then, blaming the corruption on rhetorical phrases, it is not without reason that the indigenous people feel left out in the political process. They do not have the adequate skills for participating as most local communities; it is therefore easy to develop a distrustful attitude towards authorities (Nordholt 2007). Scott said, “they do only have the weapons of the weak” (in Nordholt 2007:86). In Mentawai I could see that even with few information channels, that news travels fast in these villages, only by person to person. Even if their “weapons are weak” did the villagers in Saureinuk know that I was there very quickly. In this village, we started interviewing the same afternoon that I arrived, and people seemed to have a lot of information already about my issues. The interview ended in a very large group meeting where people showed interested and participated in the discussion. Although, lack of information people’s highly profound arguments, kept on impressing me along my travel in Mentawai. It was clear then that there are in Mentawai there is a possibility to change “politikus” to “politis,” which is more a friendlier version of the word.

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29 In section 2.4
CHAPTER 5

5. Conclusion

“I was brought up to believe that the only thing worth doing was to add to the sum of accurate information in the world” Margaret Mead (1964).

This study was undertaken with the objective of understanding how information flows in the Mentawaian archipelago and the role of information and knowledge in the process of decentralisation of the Mentawai archipelago. When Indonesia became a democratic nation, new laws gave the regions more independence. However, the indigenous people in Mentawai lack proper knowledge in running their administration and this has made them dependent on the educated Minangkabau people from mainland Sumatra. As a result, the indigenous people of Mentawai lost control over their resources as well as their identity. A local initiative for improving Mentawai’s situation has been to develop a newspaper, Puailiggoubat, for the indigenous people, which I have used as a starting point in this study.

The way of studying information channels in a foreign society where people speak an unfamiliar language I find is to leave your heart open and your mind critical because although all impressions should be cherished facts need to be sorted out. This way one has a chance “to add to the sum of accurate information in the world” (Mead 1964). The accurate information channels in Mentawai, I will argue can be distinguished between the people who are able to read the Puailiggoubat and those who receive information from other villagers. People who read the Puailiggoubat have in most cases also access to other sources like radio and TV, then there are still the people living in the remote forest areas that hardly have access to outside information at all.

The history of Indonesia illustrates the circulation of peoples and cultures that have taken place for many centuries within the Indonesian archipelago. The result is an ethnic diversity in which each group of people requires respect for its particular way of living. The decentralisation process made it possible for ethnic groups to create their own region. Along with the rising economy in Indonesia, cooperation and development in its new regions are meeting challenges posed by lack of information and development. Widespread access to and use of knowledge by all participants in a society is important for securing a stable democracy.
It is in the exchange of knowledge and experience that many solutions to development problems can be found since it enables power to the people.

In a society where the information channels are limited, the responsibility as well as peoples expectation of the only newspaper is therefore very high. Puailiggoubat work as a channel for informing people of Mentawai, because it makes an effort in providing information that people find relevant in this particular area. Still, by having only two editions a month, the information narrows down to what is most significant. During the election, the newspaper provided information about electoral processes and about the actual candidates. However, this information was limited and lost some of its purpose since the period of the election campaign is so short. I argue that the amount of information in regard to the election gives the result of the election poor credibility, something, which reflects the strength of the local democracy. In addition, the Indonesian government’s regulations still does not meeting international standard when it comes to the terms of freedom of the press. The result is poor professional standards, which leave people in the dark about particular issues. This is an issue that is becoming very important, particularly seeing that the internet is growing at such a high-speed, a race in which everybody should be able to participate.

The villages cope with their limited information access by cooperation whenever it is possible although there is still a very poor access to remote jungle villages where most of the population is illiterate. The Puailiggoubat tries to lay a foundation of knowledge for the Mentawai culture, which is accessible for the majority of the indigenous people so that their culture reflects a proud and strong identity. The editor of the Puailiggoubat told me that the local democracy in Mentawai has seen great changes in terms of change of power since the decentralisation process, which could be seen in the rising number of Mentawai students at universities. The cultural and political domination, which the indigenous people of Mentawai have seen themselves in with the Minangkabau have also changed. Although, the indigenous people in Mentawai have the possibility to govern their own islands it cannot be said that the decentralisation process has led to a more democratic political system on the local level. The decentralisation process was supposed to strengthen the role of indigenous people but instead another type of authority rule has emerged. The fact that the local government is in control by a local elite which can be compared with the previous New Order regime standards is a set back that everybody eventually stand to loose. In addition, the indigenous people in the remote forest are still left out of reach to make decisions regards their resources.
I argue that there still seem to be strings between the Mentawai people in power and the Minangkabau, which are even today part of Mentawai’s trade and economy. It is in particular regarding maintaining the logging of the rainforest, which make the indigenous people to lose confidence in their politicians as they see that it is still going on.

Although lack of information is a common problem for developing countries, it is important to recognize the various ways in which indigenous people are able to create a foundation of knowledge differing from society to society. It is likely to assume that there are events in the Mentawai society that apply only here. From the topics given in this thesis, in addition to works by other scholars, the Mentawai society is an example over a society where justice and authoritarianism go hand in hand. Nevertheless, the commitment that find place in these forest areas have inspired foreign activists and given hopes for a change, there should then be hopes for that to happen also for the people in charge of their situation. The human rights norm is to be seen as having an actual impact on the Indonesian policies. As I see it, it is cooperation with non-governmental organisations, which have given the indigenous people identity strength and given them a better access to participate in decisions regarding their own life.

Foucault said this about human rights: “There exists an international citizenship that has its rights and its duties and obliges one to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its author, and whoever its victims. After all, we are all members of the community of the governed, and thereby obliged to show mutual solidarity (2001:474).” In Mentawai, small powerful elite, who have “specialist knowledge,” are dominating indigenous people and therefore the ability to shape and control the society out of reach of the indigenous population. “Solidarity” is then a matter of who you are friends with and not as a principle about shared aims. Mr Sylvester, from Rogdok, one of the most unswerving village’s I met said; “People need to keep on fighting, otherwise there is no hope for the future generations on Mentawai. This is our life, our home and this is where we die. Our population grows therefore we need our land”.

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Appendix

Interview guide

Interview Questions/Question guide for villagers

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Occupation
4. Education
5. Civil status
6. What village do you come from?
7. What is the village population?
8. How far is the village from the main centre?
9. How often do you go to the main centre?
10. How do you receive information about what’s going on in Mentawai?
11. Do you read the newsletter Puailiggoubat?
12. Is the newsletter important to you?
13. Is it important to Mentawai?
14. What sections are you particular interested in?
15. Why are these important to you?
16. What kind of information are you missing in the newspaper?
17. Did you vote in the election?
18. Do you know of anybody in your village that did not vote?
19. How did you get information about the election?
20. How did you get information about your candidate?
21. Was that enough information in order of making a decision?
22. Did you see people from government while the election?
23. What can you tell me about the schools in your village?
24. What do you think is the main issue/concern in your village?
(women) Is there particular concern about household and women topics that you miss reading about?

**Additional Interview Questions for Interview guide intended for key informant/organisation/politician**

- Can you elaborate about the situation for the people of Mentawai?
- What are the main goals for Mentawai?
- What do you see as Mentawai’s main problems?
- Is the newspaper important for Mentawai?
- What do you think of how the election was carried out?
- Was that enough information in order of making a decision?
- What were the main problems of carry out the election?
- What can you tell me about the schools in Mentawai?
- Do you find the NGO working in Mentawai important?
- What do you think is the main issue/concern in Mentawai?