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Foreign images in Mentawai

Authenticity and the exotic

What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth
John Keats

Introduction

Human cultures and groups, when defining themselves, compare themselves with others.¹ Names used to denote other groups often refer to characteristics associated with these groups, frequently in a way that expresses the superiority of the naming group or the strangeness or even danger of the named group. Derogatory terms such as 'barbarians', 'head-cutters' or simply 'edible ones'² are examples of names referring to dangerous traits. The number of groups in the world using a name for themselves that translates simply as 'human' to differentiate themselves from neighbouring groups is staggering.

In today's industrialized nations, the fear of being eaten by neighbouring groups has been replaced by a fascination with the 'other'. The 'dangerous primitives' of the past have not disappeared; instead, they have become exotic. Interest in such peoples is widely accepted and catered for through television documentaries, books, exhibitions and performances. These days it has become popular to visit such people in the flesh as a tourist. The perceived authenticity of tourist visits, as compared to observing from afar, rests on two assumptions. Firstly, people trust personal experience more than what they learn from books

¹ Data for this paper was gathered during research on and visits to Siberut in 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2004. I am grateful to Yulianus Saguluw for his assistance on Siberut, to Judith Zuidgeest for her useful comments on earlier versions of this article, as well as to Euan Taylor and Lawrence Pacewitz for their critical review of my written English. Any remaining mistakes or obscurities are, of course, my responsibility.

² 'Head-cutters' is a Crow name used for Dakota (Lowie 1983:222), while 'edible ones' is an Otjane name for their Asmat neighbours (Blair and Blair 1988:171).

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or television. Secondly, many tourists assume that seeing the sights recommended by authoritative sources such as guidebooks or documentaries is essential for experiencing the authentic culture of their destination.

The circular logic of these assumptions entails that for 'exotic peoples' to be successful tourist attractions, certain non-local expectations regarding their cultural authenticity need to be met; these expectations, or this stereotype, I have chosen to call the 'foreign image' of a culture. Dynamic interaction between local interests and the demands of international tourism is generated by the contrast between local and foreign perceptions of authenticity. This interaction may have restrictive effects on local development, or it may be creatively applied to benefit local interests.

This article starts by looking at the 'foreign image' that outsiders have of Mentawaians on Siberut, and then focuses on how Mentawaians view this image and its consequences for their daily lives. Next I discuss some Mentawaiian experiences of tourism and the foreign image this has generated. I conclude that whereas Mentawaiian influence on the image foreigners have of Siberut is negligible, local dynamism and cultural autonomy have allowed Mentawians to creatively incorporate foreigners' views into notions of their own authenticity. Linking this conclusion to the image of Japanese held by one clan in central Siberut, I suggest that a dynamic approach to authenticity and tourism appears to be a successful strategy for 'exotic peoples' to maintain their identity. Whether Mentawians' notions of their own image correspond to the image foreigners have of Mentawai is, however, a different matter.

Exoticness and tourism

A foreign image that draws tourists is not merely exotic, but attractively so. Perhaps this is inevitable, as an exotic travel destination is, as De Botton (2002:70) suggests, seen as more congenial to one's temperament than one's own country; its image intrigues and promises happiness. In a similar way, Foster (1982:21) argues that the exotic evokes a symbolic world of infinite complexity, surprise, colour, variety and richness. The exotic is what we make it, Foster says, while De Botton (2002:78) observes that what we find exotic abroad may be what we long for but fail to find at home. Curtis and Pajaczkowska (1994:199) speak of the 'trip' as a 'lapse in the regular rhythms of mundane existence' to a utopian place of unspoiled beauty, where time stands still, a place offering freedom, abundance, and a transparency that allows the traveller to combine the familiarity of his own everyday order with the pleasures that the privilege of travel brings.

An exotic travel destination is a desired place and state of being in which its inhabitant, the (exotic) other, is the ambassador. The other is viewed as culturally, socially, historically and psychologically different from the observer, yet also subject to what Augé (1998:2) calls 'opposite recognition';

the observer is situated in his subject in the sense that for him nothing that is human is unknown.

The exotic other is perceived as someone who lives in a place where time is diffused -- the image does not allow for elaborate processes of change -- where life is different and, for the visitor, full of surprises. While experiencing the place, the visitor finds that certain characteristics of the other are familiar, and uses these characteristics to form an identifying image of the other that may be inaccurate, but that allows him to recognize the other and to recount the meeting once back home.

In 1973, with the tourism industry a mere hint of what it was to become, MacCannell (1973:592) noted that the term 'tourist' was increasingly being used as a derisive label denoting someone who seemed content with obviously non-authentic experiences. Those going on a tour want to experience daily life and meet the locals. Yet they also want to experience what they consider to be the local highlights, which may well include occasional rituals or outdated traditions. While performances of such rituals benefit the local economy, they reduce the encounter to a staged representation.

It may be argued that the goal of short-term tourism, to meet one's expectations of experiencing an exotic destination in a few days or weeks, leaves no room for more realistic experiences: the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990) prevents tourists from seeing and appreciating reality at their destination (see also Crouch and Lübbren 2003). As MacCannell (1973) demonstrates, applying to tourism theory Goffman's division of social establishments into a front (public) and a back (private) region, host societies can temporarily adjust their daily lives to the desired level of authenticity. Living their real lives in the (closed) back region, they display a 'reconstructed ethnicity' in the front region, for the eyes and the cameras of tourists. Dahles (1996:71) sums up the problem of authenticity in tourism by arguing that there is on the one hand a homogenization of the international tourist culture that is referred to as globalization, while on the other hand there is an artificial preservation of local ethnic groups and attractions to be consumed as tourist experiences. In globalized tourism, the village shifts from being the centre of social relations in the local community to being an interesting detail in the international tourist's trip, making a performed event much more likely than an authentic event.

Yet, as John P. Taylor (2001) argues, communities may well attempt to go beyond staged authenticity. He suggests looking beyond the reproduction of objective truths (as authenticity) to a view of tourism as embodying communicative events involving values important both in themselves and to the social actors involved. In his view, culture 'on stage' is culture out of context; it is culture detached from its indigenous roots and driven by economic interests. This is the opposite of sincerity: tourism that shifts away from the objectification of the local culture towards interaction. Whereas a performance of staged authenticity is still given, emphasis is on communication and attempts to

produce sincere encounters with tourists, who are encouraged to change the performance into a dialogue between equals. Tourists and actors 'meet half way'; the gaze is returned, and the authenticity presented is redefined in terms of actual local values. Moscardo and Pearce (1999) report that this form of contact is appreciated by a substantial number of tourists who enthusiastically embrace all aspects of cross-cultural contact. Zeppel's research (1997) on Iban longhouse tourism shows that experiencing the marketed 'authentic' image is tourists' first concern, which makes way for an ongoing encounter with actual Iban culture only after the first concern has been met. At that point, the nature of the trip changes from watching a presented image into a personal experience that is much more open to new and unexpected discoveries. This form of unorchestrated contact approaches Urry's concept (1990:100-1) of the 'post-tourist' (originally proposed by Feifer (1985)) as a traveller whose self-awareness and eclectic tastes reflect the diversity of post-modern consumption.

The post-tourist is well aware that a truly authentic experience cannot be expected, but does not consider this a problem.³ Rather, as Voase (2002:395) argues, the tourist is not constrained by cultural differences or fettered by a search for meaning. Instead, he may realize his explorative potential and construct his own 'immersive experience'. This argument relates both to Wang's construction (1999) of 'existential authenticity' and Chhabra, Healy and Sills's analysis (2003) of authenticity in heritage tourism.⁴ Authenticity in tourism, then, becomes a fluid concept, while 'change', a topic often studied in social science research, becomes an acceptable part of tourists' expectations.⁵ Changes in cultures and the ways they are viewed (for example, Appadurai 1996; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988, 1997), changes in traditions and their meaning for the group (Hobsbawm 1983; Wolf 1982), and changes in ethnicity and identity (Baumann 1999; Hitchcock 1999, specifically on ethnicity and tourism) receive a place in the tourist experience and thus broaden the scope of social interaction from a performance to a meeting based on more realistic circumstances.

However, interaction between tourists and locals is frequently subject to government policies. In the case of Indonesia during Soeharto's New Order, national policies on tourism and ethnicity had significant influence on interaction with tourists. Acciaoli (1985:161-2) writes that 'most groups may

³ And so, successfully overcomes Culler's paradox (1981) (cited in Causey 2003:37). Culler argues that if tourists look for something which they believe to be authentic, they will feel unfulfilled if it is already in the guidebooks and hence has been spoiled and become non-authentic.

⁴ Wang (1999) argues that even if well-visited objects are totally non-authentic, tourists can find their own authenticity by appealing to their own experience. Chhabra, Healy and Sills (2003) describe how heritage tourism authenticity is a copy of the original that is modified by the needs of the modern community.

⁵ This theoretical position is supported by the work of such philosophers as Guignon (2004) and Charles Taylor (1991), who argue that authenticity of the self is defined in relating to others. As others change, so does a culture's authenticity.

dance their way to the national goals, each with its own ethnic steps, as long as the underlying ideology, the tune to which the dance is called, is what the state has ratified'. He is referring to the Indonesian national motto of 'unity in diversity' and the limitations this imposes on an individual culture's ethnic freedom. Dahles (2001:2, 216-29) shows that official tourism development in Indonesia was aimed at developing the national economy, rather than the individual Indonesian's culture or economic situation: it was *pancasila* tourism rather than *kampung* tourism.

Nonetheless, various Indonesian ethnic groups have successfully combined tourism, their own cultural interests, and state requirements in mutually supportive ways.⁶ Other groups – often smaller and more marginal ones – have defined tourists in the context of local culture without state interference. Such communities⁷ show immense cultural dynamism and creativity in dealing with tourism. Not only are tourists received in the midst of the community, they are placed within the framework of local social relations in which the concept of tourism is often non-existent. Undertaking a long and potentially dangerous 'sacred journey' without any clear purpose other than to 'get away from it all' (Graburn 1978:22) is viewed with astonishment, although this attitude appears to be changing over time.

The post-tourist and the acceptance of change have yet to reach Siberut's tourism. The image foreigners hold of Siberut is quite static and unchangeable. The Mentawaian other, as depicted in coffee-table books, television documentaries, and tourist guidebooks, closely resembles a scantily clad noble savage – a mythical personification of natural goodness based on a romantic glorification of primitive life (Ellingson 2001:1) – who is gentle, uncorrupted by modernity, and lives in harmony with (unspoiled) nature. Nonetheless, he can be dangerous as well. An early visitor, Violet Clifton (1927:107-8), describes her encounter with a Mentawaian in 1912 thus:

[...] Talbot and I walked down a track in the jungle. He suddenly felt ill, sick in fact, and asked me to go on alone for a little way. Presently I had a sensation of someone behind me, and turning round I found myself looking in the dark eyes of a Mentawi savage. He carried a knife wherewith to cut the roots of herbs he needed, and he was naked except for a loincloth. He was tattooed with blue fantastic lines that ran from his body up over his face, and in his long hair he wore flowers and black strings, with here and there some beads tied round his head. Up and down my spine I felt a curious irritation, because I had seen the knife in his hand. I walked on some way muttering to myself the historical '*tu trembles carcasse*', and then sat down by the wayside to let the Mentawaian pass. As he did so we exchanged a frank stare and a faltering smile.

⁶ See, for example, Yamashita (1997) on the Toraja, Hutajulu (1995) on the Toba Batak or Picard's extensive work on Bali (see for example, Picard, 1996, 1997, 2003).

⁷ See, for example, Erb (2000) on Menggarai and Wolff (1999) on Nias.

This description includes several components of the image of the Mentawaiian man that are as valid today as they were in 1927: he wears a loincloth, is tattooed, wears his hair long, and is adorned with flowers and strings of beads. Reference is made to another characteristic, the collecting of plant materials, one of the main components of medicines and magical substances made by Mentawaiian shamans. These striking shamans, known as *kerei*, feature prominently in nearly every present-day coffee-table book and documentary about the island.

Schefold (1990) describes how eighteenth-century travellers to Mentawai wondered whether these flower-adorned natives were perhaps remote relations of the Polynesians, at that time just 'discovered' and much admired. In Mentawai, admiration changed to pity with the arrival of missionaries, who looked down on the Mentawaiians for their superstitions and the rigid grip in which they were held by their ritual system. The account by Cannizzaro, an Italian Catholic missionary who arrived shortly after Indonesian independence, shows this change clearly. He writes of his first encounter with his flock-to-be:

I turned around, and this time there really was a group of Mentawaiians coming out of the tangle of the jungle. But what a sight they were! At night one could have dreamed of them! Tall men came first, bow and arrow ready to shoot, followed by boys carrying bamboo quivers holding spare arrows. Further behind, a few scared women clung together.⁸

Cannizzaro offered the group tobacco to show his peaceful intentions, which made the Mentawaiians shout with joy. Gratefully the group turned to him smiling:

At that moment the painful sensation of this meeting reached its climax! Their smiles showed me two rows of horribly filed teeth, and the thought of being considered from a purely gastronomical point of view came over me again.⁹

When tourism developed, from the 1970s onwards, Mentawaiians again appeared in print, now as gentle natives. The travel-writer Bos writes:

The chief is, apart from a light-coloured loincloth, naked. A reassuring calm emanates from this man. I cannot guess his age. He has beautiful, flowing hair with interesting grey stripes. A nearly toothless mouth, with a cigarette dangling from a corner. His body is tattooed beautifully, and colourful strands of braids adorn his wrinkled neck. He sits in the doorway of his bamboo house-on-stilts. I am impressed by his friendly dignity. His eyes twinkling, he looks at us welcomingly.¹⁰

The physical appearance of the Mentawaiian in Bos's passage differs little from Clifton's and Cannizzaro's descriptions, but, unlike Clifton, Bos does not

⁸ Cannizzaro 1964:33. Translation L. Bakker.

⁹ Cannizzaro 1964:34-5. Translation L. Bakker.

¹⁰ Bos 1994:33. Translation L. Bakker.

shiver with fear. During the eighty years between these visits, Mentawai's reputation changed from an inaccessible place inhabited by wild men to that of an ancient rainforest island inhabited by gentle shamans. Its present reputation is based on a 'classic' stage of Mentawaian culture that ignores modern developments and wonderfully suits Western aesthetics.¹¹

However, societies and cultures do change, and Mentawai is no exception. Tourists' expectations of Siberut therefore often diverge significantly from reality. The 'authentic' experience imbedded in Siberut's foreign image today is, at least partly, an artificial creation. It has, however, become an essential part of the life of various Mentawaian clans, who use it to legitimize their own clans as repositories of authentic Mentawaian culture. The measure of latitude they grant tourists has, in turn, facilitated members of these clans in accepting the inaccuracy of their own perceptions of the world, making them travellers with a keen sense of perspective worthy of Urry's post-tourist.

Classic Mentawai and recent history

Siberut is the largest island of the Mentawai archipelago, having a land area of 4,480 square kilometres (roughly similar to Bali). Siberut's population numbers no more than 25,000, with people living scattered over the island. Siberut is largely covered with thick primary and secondary rainforest. Cleared roads are almost non-existent; the many rivers form the main infrastructural network. The narrow footpaths connecting hamlets and houses are indiscernible to outsiders, and the swampy forest floor makes the going even harder.

The Mentawaians were long left to themselves. In the 'classic situation' of Mentawaian culture the population is divided into small patrilineal groups called *uma*, one *uma* rarely numbering over 50 members.¹² Matters concerning the group are communally discussed until consensus is reached, or until one party splits off to form a new *uma*. Each *uma* holds its own territory, where a large communal dwelling stands, also called *uma*. This dwelling is used during festivities, ceremonies and other gatherings. Except for such occasions, individual families live in smaller dwellings called *sapou* (field huts) that are scattered over the *uma*'s territory. Here they raise pigs and chickens, and grow bananas, taro and sago. Inter-*uma* rivalry is of major importance in defining relationships and status between groups. Groups compete by amassing material wealth through bride prices and trade, by outmatching other groups in

¹¹ Wagner 2003:217. By 'classic situation' I mean the traditional culture as it is said to have existed before outside influences changed life on Siberut on a major scale. Even though several groups prefer to maintain their traditional way of life as much as possible, it would be wrong to suggest that they live as their ancestors did centuries ago.

¹² As a detailed discussion of traditional Mentawaian culture is beyond the limits of this paper, the reader is referred to Persoon (1994) and Schefold (1988) for more complete ethnographies.

hunting prowess, and by celebrating ceremonies as lavishly as possible. In the past, warfare and headhunting raids were part of a group's reputation, but today it is tourists that give prestige to a group.

Clothing is minimal: a tree-bark loincloth for men and a grass skirt for women. The visible body parts of adults are covered in intricately tattooed patterns, while strings of brightly coloured beads worn around the neck and wrists, and flowers inserted in the hair, further enliven the appearance.

Mentawai society is egalitarian. Male and female tasks are differentiated, but without further specialization; each individual is capable of executing any task befitting his or her sex. Two specialized roles stand out: the *kerei*, who maintains contact with the spirit world, heals the sick, and ensures good fortune and prosperity, and the *rimata*, a senior *kerei* who leads the *uma* in ceremonies. The *kerei* are the shamans that figure so prominently in the image of Mentawai held by foreigners. Traditional Mentawai religion, *arat sabulungan*, sees the universe as a whole, consisting of different forces between which harmony must be maintained.

This worldview distinguishes between two different realms of social space intertwined in the same location. Physical creatures inhabit the first realm, which is basically the everyday world around us. The second realm is a spirit realm, not perceivable to ordinary humans. This realm is like our own realm in appearance, but populated by spirits of the forest and those of the deceased, who live there in ancestral *uma*.

The two realms overlap in time and space, and although the inhabitants are invisible to each other, their actions in one realm have consequences in the other realm. A tree cut down in the realm of the living could accidentally crush a field hut located in the spirit realm, angering its spirit inhabitant and causing him to make the living person ill. The necessary rituals must therefore precede any potentially influential undertaking to ensure that spirits are informed of the necessity of the planned work and will accept it. These rituals are performed by the *kerei* who, as mediators between the two realms, are of vital importance in Mentawai society.

The outside world made its entry comparatively late in Siberut. For centuries the only outsiders to come to the island were the crews of Chinese and Minangkabau trading vessels from Sumatra that visited the island regularly. The traders maintained a cautious attitude towards the Mentawaians, whom they considered violent and primitive.

In the early twentieth century the Dutch East Indies government decided to establish a penal colony on the island's east coast. The rough sea separating Siberut from Sumatra and the fearsome reputation of the Mentawaians in the hinterland deterred inmates from escaping. The Dutch local government forbade warfare and headhunting, but otherwise did not bother much with the Mentawaians. Chinese and Minangkabau traders soon started settling near the penal colony, and the first missionary arrived. As the government did not

actively assist the mission, the initial results were limited.

After Indonesian independence, prominent official goals were national unity and cultural adaptation. The Indonesian government started programmes throughout the archipelago to create a national awareness among the people, and to modernize groups deemed 'too primitive'. The term used to describe such groups – *masyarakat terasing* – translates as 'isolated communities', thus suggesting that these groups are isolated from modern Indonesian culture and the unity of the nation (Persoon 1994:2-5; Koentjaraningrat 1993:10-6). Modernization programmes for these groups addressed agriculture, religion and education. On Siberut, these government measures had a strong impact. Traditional Mentawaiian religion was forbidden, and *kerei* were told to turn in their ceremonial objects and abstain from further practice. All inhabitants had to convert to a monotheistic religion; many chose Christianity as it allowed them to keep their pigs. New villages of uniform houses were built at allotted locations and the *uma* were ordered to leave their territories and resettle there, several *uma* to one village. Tattooing and loincloths were forbidden, while shirts, trousers and skirts were distributed and defined as proper clothing. Exploitation of the island's forests began, as logging firms started work in coastal areas. The introduction of the cultivation of rice and other crops made it impossible to keep free-roaming pigs in the villages. Therefore, and because of the need for ready foodstuffs, people continued to spend time at their field huts. Here traditional Mentawaiian religious ceremonies were continued in secret. Lack of infrastructure and limited knowledge of the area made it impossible for government employees to effectively control people's activities outside of the villages (Persoon 1994:227-9; Sihombing 1979). Thus many villages lay deserted on weekdays, to be populated again on Sundays, when people returned from their field huts to show their modernity by attending church.

Over the years, many people accepted the reforms to a certain degree, and added a Mentawaiian flavour. However, some *uma* stubbornly refused to settle in government villages and retreated ever further inland. Frequently, male members of these groups still wear loincloths and have their bodies tattooed. These *uma* are few in number, and live mostly along the Rereiket and Sagulubbe rivers in the southern part of Siberut. They live in traditional houses in the midst of the forest, with pigs roaming freely around and under the houses. By retreating from the advancing governmental reforms, these groups brought about an unintended result: they became the focus of an outside interest that was stronger than ever before, as tourists started to find their way to Mentawai. Yet although the groups living in the forest are different in appearance from the inhabitants of the resettlement villages, their lives are not as pristine and free of outside influence as many television documentaries wish us to believe.¹³ These *uma* look at the world around them, and take from it what they find useful.

¹³ See Persoon 2003b for an interesting discussion of various documentaries.

Individual tourists started to arrive on Siberut in the 1970s. Mostly young Western budget travellers, they were attracted by stories of a unique and authentic culture. A decade later, tourism was firmly established in Siberut and tour groups were visiting the Rereiket area weekly.¹⁴ Simultaneously, widespread international attention focusing on Siberut's unique environment prompted the government in 1992 to declare half of the island a national park (*Saving Siberut* 1980). Ecotourism¹⁵ was suggested as a source of revenue to develop the park. From the government's point of view, tourism held the promise of an economic impulse. As a consequence, modernization measures were de-emphasized. Many groups constructed new *uma* and field huts in their ancestral territories, at a distance from the resettlement villages. Other individuals chose to remain in the villages. Traditional Mentawaian religion, loincloths, and tattoos remain illegal but are tolerated. These days it is quite possible to meet Clifton's root-collecting 'Mentawi' in the streets of Muara Siberut, Siberut's seat of government.¹⁶

The downfall of Soeharto's regime, and the policy of regional autonomy that followed it, brought Mentawai the status of *kabupaten* (district). The ensuing considerable latitude allowed to the local administration raised expectations of lucrative tourism. However, the consequences of the economic crisis and the various acts of terrorism caused tourist numbers to dwindle throughout Indonesia.¹⁷ The earthquakes and tsunami of December 2004 further disrupted tourism. Small numbers of intrepid travellers still visit the island, but there are fewer than ten years ago, when local police recorded over 150 tourists per month. In 2004, there were only 10 to 15 tourists per month.

Siberut's tourism

Tourism, especially ecotourism, has a prominent place in nearly all development plans drafted for Siberut's national park. Providing a link between modernization projects, international interest in nature conservation, and the

¹⁴ The number of participants in a group, the number of groups, and their frequency used to be much higher than they are at present. In the summer of 1996 up to three groups of about ten individuals each would visit the island each week. Since Indonesia's economic recession and political instability set in, the number of foreign tourists visiting the country has diminished considerably. In 1999-2002 about three groups a month left from Bukittinggi, from three to eight participants per group. In later years there were months with no groups at all.

¹⁵ Numerous definitions of ecotourism exist. Western's (1993) is basic yet clear: ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.

¹⁶ Although it is likely that he will have temporarily changed his loincloth for something more formal.

¹⁷ Surf tourism along Siberut's south coast appears to be unscathed. The surfers are a subject in themselves and beyond the scope of this paper.

regional economy, ecotourism was expected to make use of international attention to generate regional development. Frequently these plans were grounded in theory rather than being based on empirical research (Sekartjalarini 1997; *Siberut National Park* 1995a, 1995b) while, as studies by Persoon (2003a), Persoon and Heuveling van Beek (1998) and Bakker (1999) show, the main attraction of Siberut for tourists is traditional Mentawaiian culture rather than its natural environment. As a result, no governmental ecotourism project has been successfully implemented as yet, and Siberut's tourism has been developed by private, small-scale enterprises catering to the ethnic tourism market.¹⁸

Siberut's tourism is controlled and operated by Minangkabau entrepreneurs, who find their customers in the West Sumatran tourist town of Bukittinggi. Their operations are aimed at short-term profit rather than at development or investments in Siberut. As a group, these entrepreneurs have a strong, though unofficial, control over the business. Governmental development of Siberut's tourism could therefore pose a direct threat to their position.

The Sumatrans use local Mentawaiian guides on Siberut, but Mentawaiian guides are not allowed to operate in Bukittinggi. Nonetheless, Bukittinggi guides are welcome on Siberut, as they bring goods, cash and a night's entertainment to the *uma* they visit. Moreover, owing to the lack of unity among the *uma*, if one *uma* refuses the guides, another *uma* will take them in.

In Bukittinggi, many hostels and restaurants display photographs of Mentawaiians in loincloths engaged in hunting, *kerei* performing ceremonies, and tourists wading through muddy rivers. Tourists are approached by middlemen with offers to join a tour group, and guides spend the nights in tourist cafes telling tall tales about the sights of Siberut and the 'primitive' Mentawaiians who still live in 'stone age' conditions. Tour itineraries are described in vague terms of 'trekking through the jungle', 'staying with the locals', and 'participating in daily activities'. Usually this means that the group visits one or two *uma*. They may go hunting and fishing, participate in sago harvesting, or attempt to make loincloths out of tree bark, while in the evening their guide might arrange for a demonstration by local *kerei* if no real ceremony happens to be taking place.

Intense contact with *uma* members and immersion in their daily lives make many tourists consider their trip a 'once in a lifetime' experience, although the harsh conditions deter most tourists from staying longer than a week. Upon return, many express their admiration for the 'untouched' tropical for-

¹⁸ Smith (1978:2) describes ethnic tourism as tourism that is marketed to the public in terms of the 'quaint customs of indigenous and often exotic peoples'. Activities include visits to native homes and villages, observation of dances and ceremonies, and shopping for primitive wares and curios. Often these tourism targets are far removed from the 'beaten path' and attract only a limited number of visitors motivated by curiosity and elite peer approval. As long as the flow of visitors is sporadic and small, host-guest impact is minimal. See also the more recent discussion and typology by Moscardo and Pearce 1999.

est and the 'unique and authentic' culture of the island. However, the image of Mentawai that tourists are being shown is a carefully constructed one. The area tourists are taken to is nearly always Rereiket in South Siberut, the only area where *uma* prefer traditional ways to modern alternatives. In the rest of the island modern developments have made considerable inroads, making Rereiket an enclave rather than an example of contemporary Mentawai. Rereiket can be reached by speedboat in a few hours and the *uma* there are well acquainted with tourism, yet many guides attempt to present the location as remote and isolated. Some guides tell their groups that they are the only ones allowed to visit a certain *uma*.

Occasionally detours are made to 'very remote *uma*', the remoteness of which is emphasized by cutting a new path through the forest each time they are visited; the group is told that permanent footpaths to the place are not maintained. Although untrue, such stories do add flavour to the trip. What makes the forest memorable to tourists is the remoteness and wildness, along with the exotic lifestyle of the *uma*, not its fragile beauty or delicate ecosystem.

Tourism and authenticity through Mentawaiian eyes

Tourism has become an integral part of life in Rereiket, but is mostly absent in the rest of Siberut. Individuals in Rereiket deal with this attention from outsiders in various ways. Some individuals tire of the continuous photographing and the presence of strangers who lack proper social skills and who leave after a few days, only to be replaced by new strangers. The short stays and limited interests make contacts superficial and predictable, yet visitors must be patiently tolerated since they bring in money and goods.

Other Rereiket Mentawaians see a more joyful side to tourism. They appreciate the goods and money brought by tourist groups, and ignore the inconveniences or take precautions to prevent them.¹⁹ Attempts at communication succeed to varying degrees. The groups may sing songs to each other, and sit down to coffee and tobacco provided by the guide. Even if the tourists are only interesting to look at, the company of other *uma* members who come to watch and share in the coffee and tobacco make the occasion enjoyable for locals.²⁰ The turning point comes when groups arrive too often, and the visits turn from special occasions into routine events. When this point is reached, appreciation shifts to the financial benefits and the prestige it gives the hosting group among its neighbours.

¹⁹ For instance, embarrassment caused by being around fully naked tourists is prevented by avoiding the river when tourists are bathing, and by being outside of the house when they return and change clothes.

²⁰ For an interesting account of interaction between tourists and Mentawaians written by a Western tourist, see www.redtailcanyon.com/items/12392.aspx?imageId=29236.

In Mentawaiian perception, tourists come to experience authentic Mentawaiian life. Tourists are thought to be looking for unique Mentawaiian cultural traits, because they no longer have these skills themselves and wish to learn about life in the forest and the special knowledge and skills that Mentawaiians possess. Tourist interest is thought to range from tedious daily tasks such as preparation of tree-bark cloth or sago starch sieving to the preparation of vegetable poisons, hunting techniques, and the herbal medications used by *kerei*.

Yet Mentawaiian views on what comprises 'authentic Mentawaiian' differ. Members of *uma* that took part extensively in modernization programmes feel that they went through a process of reassessing their traditional culture, and allowed elements no longer meaningful to their present life to disappear while keeping elements that were still relevant. These *uma* consider themselves sensibly adapted to changing times and at the same time authentic. In their eyes, *uma* that did not participate in the modernization programmes have yet to make this transition and are stubbornly holding on to outdated aspects of tradition, a way of life these 'modern authentics' expect to become untenable in the near future, as it does not suit the demands of the present. Using expressions like *masih bodoh* and *belum maju*, they say that such *uma* are missing out on the good things of the modern world, such as education, cash crops, and participation in the broader society.²¹ The 'traditional' *uma* obviously do not agree. These 'traditionals' state that they have accepted suitable innovations and rejected what they considered unfit, rather than simply accepting imposed changes as the 'modern authentics' did. Therefore, they feel, tourists come to see authentic Mentawaiian culture as it still exists in their traditional groups, and not the imposed mixture of tradition and modernity of the modernized groups. These traditional *uma* feel they themselves are the real Mentawaiians, a view they believe is confirmed by the continuing visits by tourists and film crews. They feel that the fact that they are visited, and not others, qualifies them as authentic. Tourists have thus become physical proof of their hosts' status.

This interpretation of tourism as a confirmation of cultural authenticity has given rise to a new variety of inter-*uma* rivalry, although the matter is not without ambiguity as claims are based on the opinions of foreigners who, as modern authentics point out, have little knowledge of Mentawaiian culture and are led by guides only slightly less ignorant. An idyllically situated *uma* populated by photogenic members is of great importance in a tourist's judgement, although these are superficial criteria based on outward appearances. As one modern authentic Mentawaiian put it, to the merriment of his companions, 'By those standards, even Minangkabau can become real Mentawaiians'.²²

²¹ '*masih bodoh*' means 'still undeveloped', '*belum maju*' means 'not yet modern'. These words are in Indonesian. They have probably been adopted from government employees or Minangkabau traders.

²² Minangkabau tend to look down on traditional Mentawains (see preceding note), but are known on Siberut as shrewd business people who will take advantage of a profitable opportunity when they see one.

The *uma* involved in tourism thus face a difficult dilemma: how does one profit from tourism and modern life without losing one's claim to authenticity? Buying cows and ducks is passable, as tourists will not notice their foreign origin, but large radio sets or blue jeans clash with tourists' expectations of authentic Mentawaians. There is, however, no reason why such commodities cannot be used when no tourists are visiting.

Traditional groups define a range of foreign goods that do not clash with their own perception of authenticity that is much broader than what they feel tourists will accept. Can a young man, dressed in a loincloth and covered in traditional tattooed patterns, wear a pair of Nike sport shoes and a large survival knife? In the eyes of most traditional Mentawaians he can. In contrast to modernized Mentawaians, who are not tattooed and who wear trousers and shirts, he will look distinctively traditional. Whether tourists will consider Nike shoes appropriate to the promised 'stone-age primitive' is another matter. Most traditional *uma* approach the dilemma quite pragmatically, taking it into account only if and when it surfaces. The Sakaliou of Rereiket, a 'traditional' *uma* frequently visited by tourist groups and film crews, related the following anecdote. A few years ago, they were visited by a very demanding film director who wanted all of the men to wear loincloths in his film. Many of the youngsters were used to wearing shorts, and did not like the prospect of wearing the itchy tree-bark loincloths. Instead, they used batik cloth imported from Sumatra. Batik is used for loincloths throughout Rereiket, but it is not authentic to Mentawaiian culture, a fact that went unnoticed by the director. The Sakaliou considered this both a good joke at the expense of the unsympathetic director, and an acceptable alternative according to their own views on tradition. They feel that meeting the narrow expectations which they believe foreigners to have is the price they must pay for the material and social profit they gain from tourism, and they accept it. Therefore, they regularly make visual adaptations to their *uma* when a tourist group is on its way. Loincloths are put on and radios, chainsaws, and other modern equipment are placed out of sight for the duration of the visit.

Tourists are allowed to peer deep into the lives of their Mentawaiian hosts. Occasionally a group's visit coincides with a ceremony, at which tourists are often – but not always – welcome.²³ The tourists will be allowed to witness and photograph the event, and even take part in certain stages. The hosting family frequently invites tourists to participate in the less serious dances, and *kerei* may offer a short course in ritual singing, but often with the words changed into ludicrous or obscene verses to amuse the audience. The important parts of the ceremony always remain serious. Pigs and chickens sacrificed during the ceremonies are cooked and a ritual meal is shared by all present, while the tourist group is expected to contribute coffee, tea, sugar

²³ During a specific category of rituals – *puliaijat* – the *uma* closes itself to the outside world for an extended period of time (Schefold 1988).

and tobacco. In return they witness a spectacle of singing, dancing, exorcising evil spirits, and invoking benevolent ones that continues from early evening until well into the night.

Occasionally tourists fall ill while in the *uma*, and *kerei* are then requested to provide first aid. A *kerei's* reputation is based on his success in healing the ill, and famous *kerei* are called upon by other *uma*. The more remote the *uma* requesting assistance, the greater the *kerei's* prestige. Healing a foreign tourist is prestigious, as it means that the *kerei* is powerful enough to influence even the spirit and body of a foreigner whose ancestral *uma* and family are far away.²⁴ A *kerei's* reputation is damaged in case of failure, but one advantage of tourists is that they never stay so long as to allow for a definite conclusion regarding the outcome of the treatment. Being the patient, the tourist is expected to pay the expenses of the healing ceremony.

Film crews and authenticity

Over the years, film companies from around the globe have made a considerable number of documentaries on traditional Mentawaian culture. Broadly, these films all feature the same aspects. The daily life in a traditional *uma* is depicted, usually focusing on the exploits of a hunting party, women foraging in the forest, and preparation of sago and tree-bark cloth. The natural surroundings and landscape are shown, *kerei* performing ceremonies are included and, possibly, somebody getting tattooed. Although the interests of film crews and tourists are similar, the needs of filmmakers are quite different. The guide needs to make sure that the time schedule, which is drawn up by the director, is followed as closely as possible. He needs to look after logistics, food and other supplies, maintain a good working relationship between the film crew and the Mentawaian subjects of the film, and meet the demands for authenticity and scenic locations. This is considerably harder work than guiding a group of tourists, but as the payment is correspondingly higher, the position is much sought after.

It is the guide who often decides where the film crew will go. Many *uma* acceptable for tourist visits are considered by the guides to be too modern for filming purposes. Too much visible modern wealth such as machines, animals and clothing will require far-reaching preparations and adjustments, which makes the operation more time-consuming and hence more expensive. Preferred *uma* are less wealthy, so that they can more easily be made to look

²⁴ If a patient is seriously ill, it is possible that his soul has already departed to his ancestral *uma*. The ancestral *uma* of a European is located in Europe. To draw the attention of a soul and make it return across such a distance is considered evidence of substantial prowess. Van Beukering (1978:41), who worked as a colonial army doctor in Siberut, writes that Mentawaian magic was thought not to influence Westerners. This is certainly not so nowadays.

traditional. They need to be accessible but to look remote, such as an *uma* close to a river but not on the river bank. It is usually not possible to have a film crew and all their equipment stay in the *uma*, as they would constantly be in the picture. Hence an *uma* is needed with some other houses in the vicinity.

It is usually possible for the guide to arrange filming permission from the *uma* for nearly everything, providing a high enough price is offered. If tattooing is wanted, for instance, the guide finds an individual willing to undergo the procedure on the spot. A guide told me of his special way of filming successful hunting parties. First he buys a black pig, which looks quite a lot like a wild pig, and partially cuts its hamstrings so that it cannot run too fast and the hunt can be filmed from beginning to end in one take. In a recent film dogs chased the pig over the top of a waterfall, after which the hunters killed it in the pool. Cameras shot the scene from the top and the foot of the waterfall.

Films contribute considerably to how Mentawai is perceived by foreigners, and a film with a more realistic depiction of life on the islands could have very refreshing results. It seems unlikely, however, that such a film will be made any time soon. Film crews often need to recoup the money invested in their trip, and are unwilling to take chances with their product. On one occasion, I met a scouting party for a German film crew in a resettlement village at the border of Rereiket. They planned to make a film that would show not only traditional features of Mentawai, but also modern circumstances. Hence they would film in the village, rather than in an *uma*. When the film came out, it did indeed have shots of the school, the church and the village, but its main features were a ceremony filmed in a nearby *uma*, a monkey hunt, and a man getting tattooed. The broadcasting corporation funding the film had insisted on these, as they wanted to be reasonably sure of a commercial success.

Another case involved a Mentawaiian NGO that was contacted by a French film crew with a request for assistance in producing a realistic film on life in Mentawai. The NGO worked out a plan to film life in a resettlement village far away from Rereiket. When the crew arrived on Siberut, the leader met a Batak film guide, and soon opted for this man's assistance and a trip to Rereiket instead. The NGO was furious, but the guide believes that he has done Mentawai a service. As he explains, the outside world does not want to see a shabby collection of huts and people that look nothing out of the ordinary. What foreigners want to see are special people and exciting events.

Apart from the financial benefits, the *uma* of Rereiket appreciate film crews for raising their social standing locally. The fact that the film crew takes the trouble to travel a long way is a sign that the outside world considers that particular *uma* something special. For the film crew to have chosen their *uma* over neighbouring ones is a sign that these outsiders consider them to be the most authentic Mentawaians. Can the neighbours beat that?

Tourism's consequences and Mentawaiian tourists: the Sakaliou

A number of Mentawaians in Rereiket have gained some fame among visiting tourists based on their inclusion in books or documentaries. A well-known individual is Aman Lau Lau Manai who, with his family, is the subject of a well-known coffee-table book (Lindsay 1992). Potential celebrities are members of a Rereiket *uma* who participated in the 2005-2006 Dutch reality TV series *Groeten uit de rimboe* and *Groeten terug*. In the first series a Dutch family participated in daily Mentawaiian life for two weeks, while in the second series the Mentawaiian hosts visited the Netherlands to experience the life of their Dutch guests.²⁵

The Sakuddei are probably the *uma* most often featured in documentaries, but the Sakaliou *uma* has steadily risen to prominence as well. Whereas the Sakuddei retreated into the island's interior during the modernization campaigns, the Sakaliou stopped at a distance that, while it did not put them entirely out of reach of the government, yet made them sufficiently hard to reach so as not to be the focus of too much attention. This remote, yet accessible, location made them an ideal destination for tourist groups.

Tourism brought the Sakaliou economic riches and social status, but it also shifted the focus of inter-*uma* competition for prestige to within the *uma*. When the Sakaliou's communal dwelling, the *uma*, needed to be replaced in 1996, three brothers, senior members of the clan, each built a huge new house. They all claimed they needed such a large house in order to accommodate tourist groups, and none of them overtly called it an *uma*, so as not to start a conflict with the other brothers, but in fact each used his new house as an *uma*. The group's social structure started to suffer, as none of the three families would agree to attend *uma* gatherings in the other houses.

Individual Sakaliou profited considerably from tourism and other foreign attention, but unequal division of the profits further increased discontent within the *uma*. The eldest of the brothers, who was the Sakaliou *rimata* and had lived in the old *uma* until its collapse, removed numerous carvings from the building and sold them to a Balinese tribal art dealer. The second brother hosted a huge inauguration party for his new house that was attended by two tourist groups simultaneously. He demanded (and received) a much higher price because of the special occasion, but did not share the money with the other family members.²⁶

Another Sakaliou, a nephew of the three brothers, was the subject of a documentary on the life of a *kerei*. He received an outboard motor, the first among the Sakaliou, and hence the privilege of deciding who could travel with him, quickly and comfortably, to the market in the harbour town.

²⁵ For a critical discussion of anthropological reactions to the series, see Eindhoven, Bakker and Persoon 2007.

²⁶ 1,000,000 rupiah, compared with a normal price of 100,000 to 150,000.

One of the brothers, Salomo, together with his family, was the subject of a documentary as well. The documentary was made by a Japanese company, who gave them goods and money as payment and invited them to accompany the team back to Japan and to stay with them as their guests in Tokyo. Intrigued by stories told by tourists he has met over the years, and welcoming the idea of travelling solely for the experience, Salomo accepted the invitation. Together with his wife and three of their children, he went to Japan for two weeks.

These Sakaliou had only vague notions of Japan. They thought of it as a rich, cold place somewhere close to both America and Indonesia, as the Japanese resembled Indonesians more than Westerners. They told me lively stories about their experiences, and I will summarize what they considered to be the highlights. Salomo had been to Padang and Bukittinggi before, and knew that city life was considerably different from life in the forests of Siberut. The main difference, he notes, is that in the city one needs money for everything, and that city people, if they find out that you are an outsider, are more likely to rob you than to help you. Hence he made sure that the film crew would look after them by requesting this several times. Being a *kerei*, he also prepared powerful amulets for his family and himself to take along on the trip, as they would be very far from their clan and their ancestral spirits. Salomo's spells showed their strength on the ferry to Sumatra and on the plane to Japan, as the weather was calm and not windy. In Japan itself the weather was much colder than he had expected, but he could not influence that.

On the plane to Japan it was immediately obvious to them that Japan is much richer than Indonesia: between Padang and Jakarta they were only given a few snacks, whereas while flying to Tokyo they got two whole meals. Once arrived, they had to wear five layers of clothing to stay warm, even when they went to sleep, but the Japanese paid no attention to the weather or the time of day, as there were always thousands of people on the streets, and lamps and lights everywhere. There were machines on the streets from which one could get money, drinks, food, and lots of other items, but, easy as that appeared, not everyone could do so as there were also very poor people who were very grateful for a half-eaten sandwich or a cup of tea. There were restaurants where dishes of food rotated on small conveyor belts. You took what you wanted and paid for the number of empty plates, just as in a Padang restaurant. The food, however, was different. So was the tea, the coffee and the sugar. Japanese liked to eat many things raw, with lots of vinegar, something the Mentawaians grew rather tired of. Unfortunately, sago was unavailable.

They experienced elevators, trains, and a museum, watched dolphins playing volleyball, and attended – probably by accident – a cremation. The cremation really shocked them, as burning the corpse will utterly destroy the deceased since his soul will not survive. They were even more shocked when they found out that this was not a punishment, but a standard way of disposing of the dead. Soon afterwards, Salomo got quite a scare at a fairground. His



Salomo Sakaliou and his wife (photo: L. Bakker)



A 'modern' and a 'traditional' *Kerei* engaged in ritual singing (photo: L. Bakker)



A family at a dinner of sago (photo: L. Bakker)



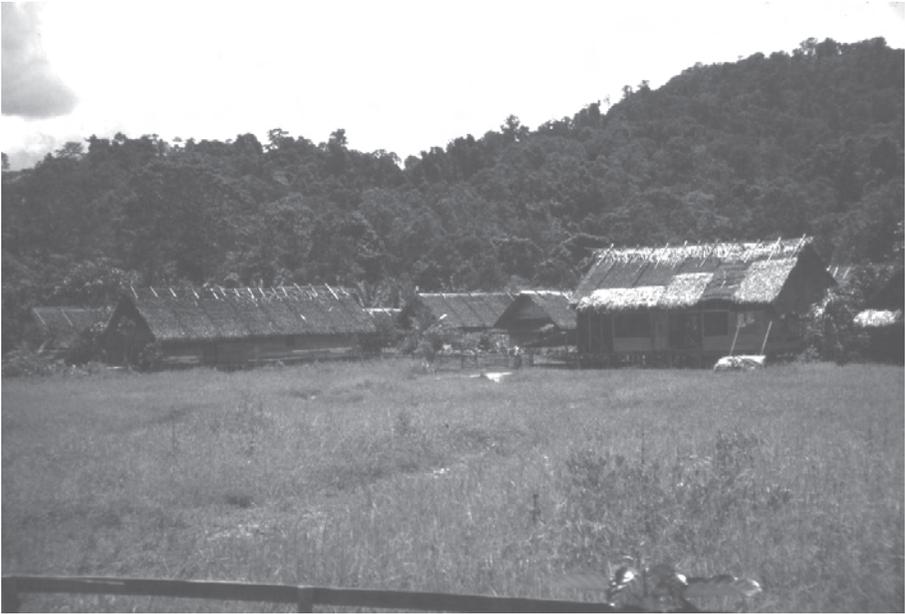
Tourists on the move in the forest (photo: L. Bakker)



Mentawaiian warrior by C.B.H. von Rosenberg, circa 1850 (KITLV 36A113)



Mentawaian woman by C.B.H. von Rosenberg, circa 1850 (KITLV 36A114)



Madobag, a resettlement village in Rereiket (photo: L. Bakker)



Tourists visiting a *sapou* (photo: Y. Saguluw)



Aman Lau Lau Manai posing with Raphael Kessler, who visited Siberut as a tourist
(photo: Raphael Kessler, www.raphaelk.co.uk)



The Dutch Rentier family and their Mentawaiian hosts in *Groeten uit de Rimboe*
(photo: SBS)



Tradition and Christian religion. A Catholic marriage in a church near Muara Siberut (photo: L. Bakker).



Enjoying taped Indonesian pop music in Rereiket (photo: L. Bakker)

children were put into a little cabin that was hoisted to the top of a pole and then dropped, to dangle on a cord narrowly avoiding the ground. With the cremation in mind, Salomo yelled at the film director that he would kill him if his children died, but luckily nothing happened. His children greatly enjoyed the ordeal, and the director found Salomo's outburst profoundly amusing.

The family enjoyed their trip immensely, but after returning home, were relieved to be back. In Japan they were unable to look after themselves and did not understand daily life. They felt that all they saw in Japan had been real; nothing was done especially for their visit, as there were always dozens of other people present. Salomo realized that it made sense for the tourists on Siberut to ask for activities and demonstrations to be carried out especially for them, as they cannot see them anywhere else. In Tokyo there were hundreds of places to go where all sorts of activities were taking place, but once tourists were at Salomo's house they could not easily move somewhere else if the family was not engaged in one of the activities they had hoped to witness. The Sakaliou felt very privileged to have experienced some of the things they had heard about: cold weather, an enormous city, aeroplanes; and to have survived it all.

A short time afterwards, Salomo took a second wife. This is very unusual in Mentawai, but Minangkabau tourist guides told him that having two wives was how successful individuals showed their wealth in Padang. Salomo liked the idea. His first wife did not, and so he had to build another house for his second wife. His first wife and her children live in the prestigious large house in Sakaliou territory, while the second one lives in a smaller house upriver. Salomo commutes between them.

During my last visit to the Sakaliou, in December 2004, internal tensions were considerable. Tourism had decreased to a trickle, and so had the wealth it brought. Among the Sakaliou only a small number of individuals had become wealthy over the years, much to the annoyance of others who had not. Various other factors contributed to these feelings, and some, notably those without tourism-derived wealth, were removing themselves from the *uma*. A number of these people had already requested permission from a neighbouring *uma*, the Saguluw, to move onto their land, and permission had been granted. Although at that point nobody had yet moved, it appeared likely that this would soon happen.

Concluding remarks

For two ethnically different groups, such as Mentawaians and (mostly Western) tourists or filmmakers, to have crude and imprecise notions of each other's culture is a common enough occurrence. In this article I suggest that such a narrow perspective on 'authentic' culture might well be out of line with

what the visited community perceives it to be. The problem with tourism, or at least with organized tours, is that it is not an objective, neutral meeting, but an economic transaction. Tourists and guides conclude an economic transaction in which the guide provides the tourists with an experience (in this case, 'authentic' Mentawai culture) whose content both parties have agreed on beforehand: the foreign image of Siberut. Agreements between film crews and guides follow essentially the same formula. Within the limits of their time frame, both tourists and film crews want to have a 'complete experience', the success of which makes the deal profitable. The businesslike character of this arrangement results in the image held by foreigners of Mentawai not being very open to revision. Tourists, after experiencing it, move on, and film crews return home to edit a movie that will encompass all the essentials of the foreign image.

To go from 'culture on stage' to sincerity, as John P. Taylor (2001) proposes, would be a step towards a more realistic situation, but it is not feasible for Mentawai at present. The unequal nature of tourist-host relations inherent in globalized tourism (Dahles 1996) and the hosts' lack of influence in the tourism business are at the root of this. The result is a static depiction of Mentawai culture that has led to a clear example of MacCannell's division (1973) into front and back regions. The front region, however, did not so much come about as a way of protecting more private, back-region matters; rather, the front region is where the 'authenticity' as defined in the foreign image is displayed. The back region, in turn, is where actual authenticity, which is less appealing to tourists, is lived for the duration of the visit.

It is in the back region that Mentawai views on 'authentic' and 'non-authentic' come to the fore. Whereas before, this was largely a theoretical matter without further consequences, foreigners' interest in the area made it relevant and economically interesting to be perceived as authentic. Mentawai views of authenticity are considerably more subtle than those that form the image held by foreigners. This shows the dilemma of many 'traditional' *uma*: how to profit from tourism and modernity without losing their reputation of authenticity among tourists and fellow Mentawaians? Visiting tourists, demanding front-region authenticity, are presented among the *uma* as evidence of back-region authenticity, but necessitate restraint in adopting foreign influences. However, among both 'traditional' and 'modern' *uma*, it is often said that the other *uma* are unable to deal with such influences properly and that their own *uma*'s well-considered choices define them as 'authentic' Mentawaians. Tourists may be used as a symbol of prestige in inter-*uma* rivalry, but the suggestion that their visits are proof of authenticity is not accepted by 'modern' *uma*.

When Salomo and his family travelled to Japan, this group of much visited Mentawaians had, for the first time, a chance to experience tourism from the other side. Unlike Western tourists, who visit Mentawai with specific expectations in mind, these Sakaliou had only a vague notion of what to expect of

Japan – seeing it as cold, rich and far away. One reason for this is their lack of access to information about Japan; a second one lies in the economic circumstances of their trip. Whereas foreign tourists choose to invest money to experience life in Mentawai based on a well-advertised stereotype of Siberut, Salomo's family did not have to spend money. At least from a financial perspective, the choice to go to Japan was thus an easy one to make. No specific goals had to be met, and every experience was a new one. The impression of Japan the family returned home with reflects the initial image they had, and is devoid of references to such cultural highlights as most Westerners would consider typically Japanese. Their narrative revolved around practical, daily matters as well as differences with life on Siberut. The suggestion by Augé (1998), that the unfamiliar form in which the familiar is experienced is the reason things are perceived as exotic, certainly holds true for the way Salomo's family spoke about their trip. Abstract concepts, and matters to which they could not directly relate, received little attention in their recollection of events.

In retrospect, Salomo feels that he had a very exciting and authentic experience. He now understands why tourists visiting Mentawai want staged experiences: daily life simply does not consistently offer the highlights that they come for. This does not, in the view of the Sakaliou, put these staged experiences 'out of context' in the way that John P. Taylor (2001) means: many Sakaliou feel that they are sincerely trying to help tourists to have a wonderful experience of authentic Mentawaiian culture. However, Taylor stresses the increased importance of economic considerations as a trait of culture out of context and, with the Sakaliou being the salespeople of their own product here, it may be justifiable to question their standpoint. Nonetheless, the Sakaliou are not unwilling to confirm their participation in insincere or unauthentic stagings. These, they feel, occur when they are requested to change into loincloths or put away possessions deemed too modern. This often happens when film crews visit, and they agree to do it because it is highly profitable.

So how does Siberut fit into the age of the post-tourist? The current lack of infrastructure and other facilities makes it next to impossible for individual tourists to explore the island independently. The strict orchestration of Siberut's tourism by Sumatran guides, and the inability of rivalling *uma* to form a united counterweight, make changes in the present situation unlikely in the near future. Moreover, there are no parties demanding change: the guides sell a successful product, the tourists enjoy the experience they desire, and the *uma* feel they provide what tourists want, and enjoy the profits and increased social standing. If tourists in the future are able to travel to Siberut and its Rereiket *uma* by themselves, however, without Sumatran guides, I believe that the *uma* will be more than obliging in making them part of their everyday life. Mentawaians often told me how much they enjoyed being visited by tourists without a Sumatran guide, as these meetings were pleasant

and more relaxed. Undeniably, Siberut would be a wonderful place to undergo Voase's 'immersive experience' (2002), but this possibility will depend on future developments in Mentawai and Indonesia in general.

Tourism has been a strong influence in the life of *uma* such as the Sakaliou. They have formed clear notions of tourists' desires and the advantageous and profitable potential these desires have for themselves. They may be marketed as 'stone age primitives', but they are also professional tourist hosts who have come to understand that the concept of tourism is travelling for the sake of a predefined experience. This does not, however, lead them to conclude that what happens on Siberut is what every tourist wants, or that their situation is how all tourist experiences must be. The experiences of Salomo and his family, as non-globalized first-time tourists, illustrate this. Rather than feeling disappointed that no performances were organized to show them authentic Japanese culture, they greatly enjoyed watching and taking part in Tokyo's daily life, which often bewildered them. Does that make the Sakaliou eclectic post-tourists? Perhaps it does. What it certainly did is put a number of Mentawaians on the other side of tourism and allow them to gain an insight into the needs and desires that inspire the exercise. The internal dissent among the Sakaliou is a typical example of authentic *uma* politics, no matter its potential negative consequences for the tourist business. Thus, even in light of Salomo's experience, the shadow of *uma* politics precludes the Sakaliou from being ideal professional 'others'.

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