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The expansion of Mentawai ancestors

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the genealogical growth and geographical expansion of ancestors of a few current Mentawai kin groups. The discussion of geographical expansion is focused on the departure of particular kin groups from the place of origin located in Simatalu to other places in the Mentawai archipelago. To illustrate origins and destinations of the migrating kin groups, I present maps sketched according to information told in family stories.

Notions of topogeny and genealogy discussed by James J. Fox (1997) are relevant in the discussion of the geographical and genealogical expansion of early Mentawai kin groups. Applying the notions of topogeny and genealogy in the Mentawai cases, I look at the family stories presented in part two of this book. These stories describe the process of expansion of several kin groups. The main aim of this chapter is to examine the social logic of the geographical dispersion of Mentawai kin groups in order to gain an understanding of why Mentawaians moved to particular places and why they currently belong to different kin groups.

9.2 Places of origin

My initial understanding was influenced by stories telling that the earliest Mentawai ancestors formerly inhabited a place located in the valley of Simatalu, in the western part of Siberut. Similar stories about Simatalu as the earliest place of settlement in the Mentawai Islands are discussed by early scholars like Nooy-Palm (1968), Sihombing (1979), Schefold (1988), and Coronese (1985). Before starting my research, I thus assumed that Simatalu was seen as the only place of origin of Mentawaians. I was led by what local people told me and by literature written by scholars like Schefold, who researched the prehistory of the Mentawaians (Schefold, 1989).
According to the stories discussed by the above scholars, the first Mentawaians departed from Sumatra (directly, or indirectly via Nias) and arrived on one of the Mentawai Islands and settled in Simatalu. The first Mentawaians thereafter commenced to move out from their place of origin in Simatalu. They moved in a southern direction. After the valley of Siberut was occupied, early Mentawaians moved to other valleys. They kept doing that until all of Siberut island was claimed by one or another family, although the land was not fully occupied. Thereafter, the migrating families spread out over the other islands of the Mentawai archipelago. These migratory movements happened over a long period of time.

Although this accounts for the origins of the majority of the current population of the Mentawai Islands, it does not explain the origins of other groups of residents who regard themselves as Mentawaians. These other groups believe they originated from places other than Simatalu. After exploring ethnographic accounts of the Mentawaians and after separately interviewing Mentawaians residing in villages in the archipelago during fieldwork, I discovered several other places of origin, namely Simalegi, Berisigep, a valley in the southern part of Siberut island, and an unknown place on South Pagai island. Talukpulai is sometimes mentioned as the place on South Pagai where people from Muko-muko (on the Sumatran mainland) first came to settle.

By exploring villages in the Mentawai Islands and talking to elders of various kin groups, I became aware of the existence of these other places of origin. Several kin groups share the same opinion, seeing Simatalu as the place where their ancestors first commenced to live in the Mentawai Islands. Other kin groups believe that Simalegi is the place where their ancestors first arrived and lived. Other kin groups regard Berisigep as the initial place. A few groups believe their ancestors first settled in a valley in the southern part of Siberut. What all of the stories of these groups have in common is that after some time, the earliest ancestors started moving southwards.

According to a few other ancestral stories, in the southern islands of the Mentawai archipelago, some families had no connection to those who had migrated from Simatalu or other places on Siberut. These families migrated northwards. A few groups stayed on Sipora island, for instance in Sioban and Tuappeijat, while others continued moving further north, to the southern part of Siberut island. Although they moved northwards, the families apparently did not move as far as the northern part of Siberut.

I will not discuss further the migration of the population of southern Pagai, as I focus on the migratory movements of Mentawai families from the valley of Simatalu to elsewhere in the Mentawai Islands. The selection of Simatalu as the starting point in looking at the process of migration is motivated by the following reasons. First, it is because the family stories presented in part two of this book – the mango story in Chapter 5, the wild boar story in Chapter 6, and the pig story in Chapter 7 – talk about Simatalu. Second, it is because
ancestors of the current Mentawaians had departed from Simatalu. Third, it is because I was influenced by my initial familiarity with Simatalu as the first and only place of Mentawai origin. This affected the process of data collection during fieldwork. Consequently, my research looks mostly at one starting point of migratory movements, which is the valley of Simatalu.

The three selected stories told by different kin groups in different places in the Mentawai Islands are discussed in the three following sections. The kin groups that tell the mango story are not related to each other. Several kin groups tell the pig story, which actually belongs to the Samongilailai kin group, and the wild boar story, which belongs to the Siriratei kin group. I provide sketched maps to help the reader follow the migratory movements described in the family stories. The sketches of migratory lines are not meant to indicate the exact locations where the migrating families passed through or the exact route taken by the migrating families. The maps, however, show destinations as well as a few of the places the migrating families passed through.

On the maps, numbers are given to reflect the places the migrating families once occupied. Sometimes a place-name has one number and sometimes more than one number, signifying that the migrating family returned to the place it once occupied. Each map is accompanied by a legend. The middle column gives the place of settlement indicated by the number in the first column. The last column gives the name of the kin group at the time they lived in that place, since some families during their migratory movements changed their kin-name.

9.3 Migration on account of a conflict over mangos

I chose three different kin groups that had migrated ‘because of mangos’, namely Siribetug, Salakkau and Satairarak. These three kin groups all claim to have been affected by the mango incident. Map 9.1 illustrates the migration of the Siribetug kin group from Simatalu to Sirisura. The information used for drawing Map 9.1 is drawn from Story 7, in Chapter 5.

According to this version of the mango story, members of the Siribetug kin group were relatives of the Samongilailai kin group. The group first dwelled in (1) Bat Mongilailai, therefore they were called Samongilailai. From Bat Mongilailai, they moved to (2) Bat Polime where they came to be called the Saepunu kin group. A few of the families moved to (3) Bat Bajak, while some families remained in Bat Polime. The families residing in Bat Bajak later returned to Bat Mongilailai. They did so in order to fulfil what their father wished and requested them to do. The father wanted his former family reconciled.
However, the families that lived in Bat Polime refused the reconciliation, and they moved even further away. One group moved away to (4) Paipajet and acquired the name of Satobbou. This Satobbou kin group did not end their journey in Paipajet. They departed again for (5) Sagulubbe, where they acquired the name Sabaggalet. Meanwhile, the Saeppunu kin group in Bat Polime went away to inhabit the valley of Saibi Samukop. In this valley, they dwelled on the riverbanks called (6) Sakreake, where they changed their kin-name to Siribetug. This name was derived from the fact that the
families built their communal house at a place surrounded by a kind of bamboo clusters called *betug*. Afterwards, the families moved to the place called (7) Sirisura. Most recently they came to live in the place called (8) Bat Simoilaklak.

Looking at Map 9.1, it may be clear to us that the ancestral family of Siribetug split into three groups. One group remained in the place of origin, one group migrated to Paipajet and further to Sagulubbe, and the third group migrated to the eastern part of Siberut island. Due to being separated from each other, these kin groups each began to create their own identity by naming their kin group differently. Although the families have been separated for several generations and currently live in separate places, the storyteller of Story 7 surprisingly remembers not only the places where his relatives had migrated to, but also which kin-names those relatives are using currently.

Another mango incident is described in Story 8. This is about the migration of the Salakkau kin group. Nevertheless, Story 8 also tells us about the Sakerebau kin group. This is because before the Salakkau kin group came into existence, it had been part of the Sakerebau kin group. That occurred when the group was still occupying the place of origin in Simatalu. Due to its being collected from the Salakkau, Story 8 tells more about the Salakkau than about the Sakerebau. To follow the migratory movements of the Salakkau kin group, see Map 9.2.

The Salakkau kin group was originally known as Sakerebau, when they were dwelling in the upriver place of (1) Lubaga in Simatalu. Due to the mango incident, the kin group dispersed in different directions, following several rivers. Two families moved away to the southern islands of Mentawai by means of raft, and occupied two places there: Matobe on Sipora island and Matobe on Pagai island. Other families moved to the northeastern part of Siberut. They arrived at a place called (2) Sikatirik and then went on to a downriver place called (3) Sikabaluan before settling in a place called (4) Tatubeket. There, they were still called the Sakerebau kin group. Because of the new conflict over mango fruit, which was locally called *bailoi* or *lakkau*, the families in Tatubeket split up into two groups.

One family moved away to a place called (5) Berisigep. As two other families kept following the migrating family, the migrating family kept going to find another place. They arrived at (6) Simalegi. From Simalegi, they moved on to (7) Simatalu, where the family acquired a new name: Salakkau. Because of the warfare occurring in Simatalu, the Salakkau kin group then moved again to the valley of Saibi Samukop. In the valley of Saibi Samukop, they settled in a place called (8) Sirilabat. They claimed two plots of land called Teitei Tabot and Bat Kurejet. While dwelling in Sirilabat, the group received two plots of land from Satoutou because Satoutou assassinated some ancestors of Salakkau. The two
plots of land were given the names Sikuret and Simatet. They are also known as *porak segseg logau*, or land for stopping bloodshed. From Sirilabat, they moved to (9) Saibi Muara and (10) Totoet, where the group currently live.

According to Story 8, the Salakkau kin group chose the northeastern side of Siberut island, that is the opposite direction of the two brothers who had left for the southern islands of Mentawai. That happened when the group was still known as Sakerebau. In the new place called Terekan, a new conflict occurred, which compelled some members of the group to wander round on the north side of the island until they returned to the valley where they initially came
The expansion of Mentawai ancestors from. In Simatalu, the group was called Salakkau, and this group later migrated to the valley of Saibi Samukop. With reference to the migration of the Salakkau kin group to the valley of Saibi Samukop, we are told that the group had plots of land there and received some other plots of land from other kin groups. We are not informed about the land that the Salakkau owned when they were still called Sakerebau.

The third version of the mango story is Story 9. It is about a kin group called Satairarak, which had departed from Simatalu. This group currently lives in Maileppet and is therefore called the Samaileppet kin group. Map 9.3 shows the journey of the Satairarak kin group after being affected by the mango incident. This incident split the group in two; therefore the migratory movements pursue two different directions. As the groups wandered around the same island, they met again with each other in a particular place. However, they were never again reunited as one kin group.

The Satairarak kin group had been called by that name since living in Simatalu at a place called (1) Lubaga. Because of the mango incident, the families split up into two groups. One group departed for (2) Paipajet and the other went to (3) Rereiket. From Paipajet, one family moved to a place called (4) Sikabaluan, and later to (5) Saibi Muara. Meanwhile, the families that went to (3) Rereiket moved to a downriver place called (6) Muara Siberut, but they did not stay there permanently. The families decided to live in (7) Maileppet. While in Maileppet, the families had the idea of looking for a place in (8) Katurei Bay. But because people in Katurei rejected the family, they eventually returned to (9) Maileppet. However, only some of the families returned to Maileppet and a few others remained in Katurei. In further migratory movements to the south, the families living in (5) Saibi Muara met the other families in (10) Maileppet. They stayed there temporarily because the group decided to return to (11) Saibi Muara after their houses were burned in Maileppet.

In the course of time, the Satairarak and other kin groups such as Sagulu, Samongan Abbangan, Sakaelagat, Sataiuma, and Samongilailai that were also living in Maileppet came together in order to create a new kin group called Samaileppet. As a result of merging, the Satairarak kin group was not commonly known as Satairarak anymore for several generations. Instead, the group was known as Samaileppet. The merger of the groups could not be maintained, however. A conflict over land in Maileppet split up the group. The Satairarak then resumed using the old kin group name. The other groups also reclaimed their former kin-names.

The Satairarak kin group did not move out from their place of origin all at once. One family commenced to leave the place of origin, and after a while another family left for a new place. Both groups tried to avoid meeting each other; therefore every family chose a direction different from the direction the other family had gone. Another thing the story tells us is that every time
the Satairarak occupied a place, one family remained in that place while other families departed to find a new place to live. Besides, the Satairarak descendants of two brothers did not reunite, although they met once in Maileppet. Descendants of the younger brother returned to the last place, which was Saibi Muara, before they met descendants of the older brother in Maileppet. Nevertheless, they continued to regard each other as relatives descended from the same ancestors, the same initial kin group, and the same place of origin.
9.4 Migration due to the pig incident

Three stories represent the pig incident, discussed in Chapter 6. They were collected from three different kin groups. According to these family stories, these groups are descended from the same initial kin group. In order to differentiate the stories of these groups, I present three maps. This is to show variant accounts of the same historical event. I begin with Story 10, with Map 9.4 as illustration.

Map 9.4 Migration of the Salamao kin group to Taileleu (10) on Siberut island
Story 10 tells how the Samongilailai family arrived at the village of Taileleu and became the Salamao kin group. According to the story, the family departed from (1) Simatalu and moved to a place called (2) Sigarena in order to avoid a kin group called Sapokka, with which the ancestor of Samongilailai had been involved in an assault. Before leaving the place of Sigarena, the migrating ancestor of Samongilailai returned to Simatalu for the last time. Thereafter, the migratory movements began. A few families moved to (3) Cempungan and (4) Berisigep. The families in Cempungan moved to (5) Malamit by passing through Saibi Muara. From Malamit, they went to (6) Maileppet and later migrated to Sipora island. A few other families in Sigarena moved to the valley of Silaoinan. They settled in a place called (7) Bat Koddobat. They became a new kin group called Sakoddobat. A few plots of land had been claimed by the group. Besides, while living there, they received a few other plots of land as payment of fines.

Two families of Sakoddobat decided to move away from Bat Koddobat in order to inhabit (8) Bat Lamao and (9) Bat Palakkokoai. At those places, they changed their kin-names to Salamao and Sapalakkokoi, respectively. Afterwards, the Salamao kin group departed from Bat Lamao, and together with their relatives from Sapalakkokoi and Samongilailai they went to populate a village called (10) Taileleu. In Taileleu, they occupied several riverbanks. As this happened several times, one family of the Salamao kin group decided to separate from the Salamao. This family created a new kin group with the new name Salimu, after the place they lived, (11) Bat Limu.

Map 9.4 shows the dispersion of the Samongilailai kin group, which began to separate from each other after the pig incident. The family separated again after one of the leading figures of the group left the place of origin and went to a place called Sigarena. After that, the group split into two groups. One group moved north and the other moved south. After the separation the two groups did not come together anymore. Each group eventually grew independently. The next set of migratory movements is sketched on Map 9.5 and Map 9.6. Information for these maps is taken from Story 11. As the story covers the expansion of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut as well as on Sipora island, I present two maps. The expansion of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut is shown on Map 9.5 and it continues with the expansion of the group to Sipora island, which is sketched on Map 9.6.

In Story 11, we are informed about a past event when the Samongilailai kin group was still known as Saurei (see Map 9.5). The group initially lived in (1) Paipajet. The families moved to Simatalu in (2) Lubaga, precisely in Siatsemi at the river mouth of Lubaga. The kin group had a plot of land in a place called Baibai. Afterwards, the pig incident occurred.

Sapokka, a neighbouring kin group of Samongilailai, shot a pig belonging to the Samongilailai kin group. In revenge, a Samongilailai man killed a few
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members of the Sapokka kin group. Thereafter, he and his family began to move to other places. Before leaving for new places, the Samongilailai all made a clear agreement among themselves about the plots of land that ancestrally belonged to the group. The migrating Samongilailai ancestor and his family moved away to a place called (3) Teitei Sigarena. From that place, the migrat-

Map 9.5 Migration of the Samongilailai kin group on Siberut island
ing ancestor visited the valley of Saibi Samukop and stayed with his nephew in a place called (4) Sirilabat. The ancestor afterward moved on to the valley of (5) Silaoinan. In this valley, he received a plot of land as payment for threats. He got the land from his best friend.

Another plot of land was received from another kin group as payment for humiliating his female relatives while fishing in the river. All these plots of land were located in (8) Bat Koddobat. The migrating family in (5) Silaoinan returned to (6) Sirilabat. After the death of the ancestor, the Samongilailai families split up into several kin groups. One group remained in (5) Silaoinan. One group moved to the valley of (8) Bat Koddobat. A few families emigrated to (9) Taileleu, and the rest of the families migrated to Sipora island.

According to Story 11, the migratory movements of other Samongilailai families to Sipora island started from Silaoinan (on Siberut) (see Map 9.5). In this case, one particular Samongilailai family, after separating from other families that had migrated to other places on Siberut, began their migration from (6) Sirilabat and continued to the coastal area, passing through places called (9) Beat Torongai, (10) Tiniti and (11) Toinong Onai. On their journey, the family found (that is, claimed) several plots of land at these places, which are in the same valley, and in order to take care of this land, they settled in Beat Torongai. In further migratory movements, the family expanded into several families and some of them moved away to a place called (13) Rogdok in the Rereiket valley. From this place, the families went to Sipora island. Their further journey to Sipora is sketched in Map 9.6.

On Sipora island, the group stayed at a place called (14) Goisòoinan for a short time. Thereafter, they went to dwell in a place called (15) Bagat Ureinu (currently called Saureinu), before eventually settling in a place named (16) Simatoraimonga (currently known as Sioban). A few families of the Samongilailai kin group residing in Simatoraimonga returned to (13) Rogdok, leaving their grandfather in Simatoraimonga. But they visited their grandfather regularly. Because they visited their white-haired (ubat) grandfather again and again, Simatoraimonga became known as Siubat (place of the white-haired man). After the Samongilailai kin group pioneered to inhabit Sioban, a few other families came to live there as well. The next migratory movement after Sioban is to a place called (16) Sibagau. From Sibagau, the Samongilailai kin group migrated to the Pagai islands.

What we see on Map 9.5 and Map 9.6 is that the Samongilailai kin group migrating to Sipora island kept contact with their families residing in Rogdok on Siberut island. However, they did not have any contact with the families that had migrated to other places on Siberut. Moreover, the group did not immediately occupy a place on Sipora permanently where they first arrived. The group occupied several other places before eventually deciding to live in Sioban, which was formerly known as Simatoraimonga. The Samongilailai kin
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group did not seem to remain in the place either. Map 9.6 shows that one or
two families even moved to the southern part of Sipora island, where they
currently live in Sibagau, and perhaps further to the Pagai islands, as I came

The last story of Samongilailai’s expansion caused by the pig incident is de-
picted in Story 12 and is shown on Map 9.7. The story was collected in Mailep-
pet on Siberut. According to Story 12, I sketched Map 9.7 to show the de-
tailed migratory movements of the Samongilailai. This kin group was formerly
called Samaileppet. However, due to the conflict over land in Maileppet, the
group decided to separate from other families of the Samaileppet kin group
and thereafter they again called themselves Samongilailai. Therefore, we con-
clude that Story 12 tells about plots of land claimed by the Samongilailai kin

Map 9.6 Migration of the Samongilailai kin group to Sioban (16) on Sipora island
group’s ancestors more than telling about the migratory movements of the ancestors.

Story 12 tells about Sakerengan, the ancestral kin group of the Samongilailai in (1) Simatalu. Three main families constituted the ancestral kin group of Samongilailai, as the ancestor of the kin group had three sons. One family moved away to (2) Paipajet, another family remained in Simatalu, and the third family migrated to the southern part of Siberut. The family that went to southern Siberut first settled at the hilly place of (3) Teitei Sigarena. From there, the kin group split up into several family groups. Each of those families took along a particular object in order that they might recognize each other by referring to that object. One group of families moved to the valley of (4) Silaoinan on the banks of the (5) Koddobat river. There, they came to be called the Sakoddobat kin group. The ancestral families had an extensive plot of land located in between Bat Kalea and Bat Masat. While dwelling on the riverbanks of Koddobat, they received two plots of land, the plots of land called Sirau and Mapopoalat.

The group received still two other plots of land. One plot of land was received from the Sakaelagat kin group because of the generosity of the Samongilailai’s ancestor in providing the Sakaelagat with foodstuffs like sago and pork when the Sakaelagat ran out of food while fishing for sea turtles (mubattau). The land was called porak sakt sakkoko (land [porak] for the payment [saki(t)] of pork [sakkoko]). Another plot of land was received as payment for humiliating the family members of Samongilailai, which was done by the Sakaelagat. The land was called monen pakaila (planted land [mone(n)] for the payment of humiliation [pakaila]). Borders of both plots of land are delineated clearly in Story 12. The last plot of land that the Samongilailai families got in the valley of Silaoinan was called porak tuilu (land for sounding the wooden drums [tuilu]). The Samogilailai kin group received this plot of land as payment for threats. What happened is the following. Another family perceived the Samongilailai kin group as a serious danger. This family beat wooden drums to invite other families to gather in a house where they could agree to kill the Samongilailai together. Due to this threat, the Samongilailai received a plot of land. The prominent ancestor returned to Simatalu to inform his relatives about this plot of land.

The next generations of Samongilailai moved in different directions. One group moved away to (6) Taileleu. In the meantime, one group remained in Silaoinan. Another group moved to (7) Cempungan, but later left the place and proceeded to (8) Saibi Muara. Gradually, this group moved away to a place called (10) Maileppet. Before arriving in Maileppet, the leading ancestor of the group called Pajorot found a plot of land called (9) Beat Torongai, in which place the group lived. Thereafter, the group moved to the Rereiket river and settled in (11) Rogdok. The group had to surrender Bat Lakoko, Bat Simege
and Bat Labbaet to the people living in Rereiket as payment for assassinating some Rereiket people. Samongilailai’s ancestor carried out this assault. The last migration of the Samongilailai kin group was to go to Sipora island. The group wandered to Katurei Bay and further to Sipora. Most of the Samongilailai today live in Sioban on Sipora island.

Map 9.7 Migration of the Samongilailai kin group to Maileppet (11) on Siberut island
Looking at Map 9.7 carefully, it is clear that families of the Samongilailai kin group separated from each other several times. They began in the place of origin, where they divided into three groups. One of these three groups split into two groups. At first, one of the two groups migrated northward, and the other southward. But the first group reversed their journey and later migrated southward. After the separation, it seems the families did not meet each other anymore. Nevertheless, their knowledge of their relatives has stayed in their memory and is passed down to younger generations by means of family stories and particular ancestral objects like wooden drums or cooking pots that belonged to the whole kin group.

9.5 Migration as a result of the wild boar incident

Family stories of three kin groups describe the wild boar incident. Like the pig incident, the wild boar incident affected only one kin group, namely the ancestral group from which all three kin groups are descended. Due to the wild boar incident, the ancestral family of the three kin groups began to leave for new places by wandering around the island of Siberut. In the course of migration several kin groups came into being, and they currently exist as new kin groups with a new kin-name for each.

I investigated three of these groups, Saleleusi, Sakatsila and Satoko. Each kin group shows a unique case of family separation. The Saleleusi took a long journey before permanently settling in Paipajet, where they currently live. The Sakatsila seem to be a group that came into being after the migrating ancestors arrived at the place Saibi Muara and reunited with the families from the place of origin. And the third is the Satoko, which is a kin group made up of two different families that merged to create a new kin group. I begin with the story of the Saleleusi.

Story 13 tells about the dispersion of Saleleusi. The kin group initially lived in (1) Simatalu. Because of the wild boar incident, the family split up into two. One family moved to (2) Simalegi, while the rest remained in Simatalu. After the migrating family settled in Simalegi, a few family members from Simatalu went to Simalegi in search of their migrating relatives. But in the meantime, this family had left for (3) Terekan, because they wanted to avoid meeting their relatives who had come looking for them. After Terekan, the family moved on to (4) Sirilanggai, and then to (5) Cempungan. Afterwards the family went to (6) Saibi Samukop, before deciding to move to the southern part of Siberut, where they claimed a plot of land located in a place called Boriai, while dwelling in (7) Muara Siberut. The family expanded and split up into several groups. Some families entered the (8) Rereiket river valley, while others continued their migratory movements to Sakalagat (southern islands...
of Mentawai) and the rest moved to (9) Taileleu. Some of the families living in Taileleu pursued their journey to Sagulubbe, going to live at a place called (10) Kalea. In Kalea, they acquired the name Saleleusi, meaning ‘a group residing in hilly land’. Afterwards, some of these Saleleusi families moved to (11) Paipajet, where they currently live.
Map 9.8 shows the migrations of the Saleleusi kin group. Ancestors of this kin group travelled around Siberut island, but Story 13 gives no information about the family separating during those travels. After reaching Muara Siberut, however, Story 13 tells that the ancestors split into several families that migrated in three different directions. One family moved to Taileleu and further to Sagulubbe. In Sagulubbe, the Saleleusi families became a new kin group. In the last migratory movement, the Saleleusi settled in Paipajet. Although the distance between Paipajet and Simatalu, as sketched in Map 9.8, is relatively short, the Saleleusi did not move there directly. The kin group had pursued a long journey through several places. In those places, presumably other relatives of Saleleusi currently live.

Besides telling about the Saleleusi kin group, the wild boar story relates the migratory movements of the group called Sakatsila. Both of these kin groups, as well as a third group mentioned in the story, are actually related, as all of them are descended from the same ancestor, Silango. First, I relate the journey of the ancestral family of the Siriratei kin group according to a storyteller from Sakatsila, in Story 14.

Story 14 tells how Silango’s family became the Sakatsila kin group. According to the story, before dwelling in Saibi Muara, Silango’s family inhabited a place called (1) Bat Pojai in Simatalu. They moved from Simatalu to (2) Simalegi due to the wild boar incident. Then, they moved further to (3) Sikabaluan. On the way, they claimed a plot of land at a place called Teitei Saaleibagai. From Sikabaluan, they entered a place called Bat Mukop (in the valley of Saibi Samukop). In this valley, they settled in (4) Bat Bilag. In this settlement, relatives residing in Simatalu came to join the ancestral family in Bat Bilag (5). It seems that, after being apart for a while, the family decided to reconcile. A great number of people lived in one communal house. They spoke loud like thunder. They were therefore called Sakerenganleleggu (group loud like thunder).

Afterwards the ancestral family moved again. They went to (6) Bat Rereiket by going upriver to Bat Mukop. From Bat Rereiket, the ancestral family went downriver to inhabit a place called (7) Mongan Sabirut (Muara Siberut). They had a plot of land located in the village of Muntei. They planted sago palms at a place called Duluidui. Afterwards, they settled in a place called (8) Malupetpet, where they found (that is, claimed) two plots of land named Malupetpet and Bat Sakkelo. From Malupetpet, they moved over to Sipora island.

However, Silango returned to Siberut island after being on Sipora island for some time. He thereafter lived in (9) Taileleu where he died. Meanwhile, the families living in Bat Bilag decided to move to a place called (10) Sirilabat and acquired the name Siriratei. Because they built a house near a graveyard (ratei), they were called Siriratei. While dwelling in Sirilabat, the families got a plot of land as payment for the assassination of their relatives done by a group of people from Tatubeket at the request of the Sabuilukkungan
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kin group, which was the owner of the place (*sibakkat laggai*). The land they received is located in Saibi Muara (11). Afterwards, the Sabuilukkungan kin group moved away to the valley of Reriket, leaving their other plots of land unattended. They believed that the neighbouring kin group called Sataggau would take care of the land properly. Unfortunately, the Sataggau kin group in Saibi Muara vanished. The reason is unknown. As there was no other group of
people that could claim the land in Saibi Muara, the Siritoitet and Siriratei kin groups took over the ownership of the land.

Map 9.9 shows that the ancestral family of Siriratei passed through several places located in the northern part of the island. The valley of Saibi Samukop was the central place where the migrating family and the families living in the place of origin met each other. In the same valley, the larger families eventually separated again and each of those families eventually carried out the next migratory movement in different directions. On the map it is seen that the ancestral family migrated over the island of Sipora, but that the family returned and stopped migrating in Taileleu. It seems that the storyteller has a great narrative about his ancestral family. He not only tells about his kin group living in Saibi Muara but also about relatives in other places.

The last account of migratory movements of the descendants of Silango is told in Story 15. The group departed from (1) Simatalu and was called Sakerenganleleggu. From Simatalu they moved to a place called (2) Bat Bilag. Afterwards, they inhabited the valley of Saibi Samukop. They dwelled in a place called (3) Sakreake, where the kin-name changed from Sakerenganleleggu to Siriratei. Thereafter, they moved downriver in Saibi Samukop valley. There, a few families set themselves apart from the others and formed the Saririgka, Sakairiggi and Sakatsila kin groups, leaving only a few families to continue the Siriratei kin group. The Siriratei families occupied the coastal area of Saibi Samukop.

In further developments, these families merged with other migrant families from Sumatra who had Chinese origins. Both groups combined to create a new kin group called Satoko. As they lived on other people’s land, the Chinese families decided to buy a small plot of land for their homestead. Currently, some part of the Satoko kin group lives in (4) Saibi Muara while another part lives in (5) Sarabua near Saliguma. Story 15 is mainly about the growth of the Siriratei kin group. It starts with the wild boar incident and ends with the formation of the Satoko kin group. The storyteller does not tell about any long journey of the ancestor Silango.

Map 9.10 illustrates a simple and direct journey where the migratory line begins from a place of origin in Simatalu and ends up in Sarabua near Saliguma. Yet, if we compare the maps of the three versions of the wild boar story, the Siriratei kin group, the group currently known as Satoko, was one of the families who departed from the place of origin to Saibi Muara. Their ancestors seemingly did not migrate to the northern part of Siberut. So, Satoko families are descendants of Silango but migrated to Saibi Muara from the place of origin by another route.
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9.6 Geographical expansion of Mentawaians

Reasons for moving away from the place of origin were quite varied among kin groups in Mentawai. This variety of migration history affects current Mentawai demography. According to family stories, most separations of early Mentawai families residing in Simatalu were caused by simple conflicts. When a separation occurred, some family members typically stayed at the place of origin while others moved away. When the migrating families kept moving from one place to another, separations also occurred within the migrating families. Meanwhile, members of the family who had remained at the place of origin...
sometimes decided to move away as well. As members of a family or kin group separated out from another, they define their identity and qualities by taking a different name and living in a separate place. However, both groups keep remembering and respecting that they are genealogically related to each other. Migrations of kin groups occurred in different waves as well as in different places in the Mentawai Islands. If all families left the place of origin, the place sometimes was left unpopulated. In that case, other migrating groups came to the place recently depopulated and in the course of time claimed the place as their own, without knowing that an earlier group of settlers had once occupied the place.

The migrating pattern depicted on the maps shows that the migrating ancestors first occupied places near their place of origin and near rivers. If relatives from their place of origin came to join them in the new place, then they left and sought other places. This occurred several times. The migrating ancestors clearly wished to keep their distance from families or neighbours who lived in the place of origin or with whom they had had conflicts. Nevertheless, after passing through several places, the migrating ancestors eventually decided to settle permanently.

If they decided to move away from their place of origin, the migrating families did not have any contact with the families living in their place of origin anymore. This separation led to two or more related kin groups growing in different places. As told in the family stories, no migrating ancestors returned to the place of origin in order to stay there again permanently. They preferred to keep moving away. Returning to the initial place might remind the migrating families of the initial conflicts they had once faced. By moving away, they got away from the conflict as well as having the opportunity to occupy perhaps a more promising place. Furthermore, they certainly achieved a new status, which is to be the owner of a place (*sikabakkat laggai*). If they did return, as told occasionally in the stories, it was because relatives from the place of origin or another place they had once occupied succeeded in persuading them to return (see Maps 5, 9, 10 and 11).

According to the family stories, migrating families chose a place that had a rich variety of species available in the natural surroundings. A place with some flat land in the vicinity of a river, where the forest had plentiful fruit-bearing trees, bamboo clusters, and wild sago palm was considered an ideal place to live. If the place was not yet named, the migrating families gave a name to the place. This place-name was frequently used to identify the migrating families, and became the name of their kin group. It sometimes happened that other people had already named the place and the migrating families that came to occupy that place took on that place-name to identify their kin group. If the group used a new name, they no longer used their initial kin-name. This served to make a clear distinction among kin groups that formerly shared the same kin-name. In the course of time, those related kin groups did not have
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any contact for a few generations. The current descendants of those ancestrally related groups might not recognize each other anymore. However, if they want to find out who their relatives are and where they currently live, they look for such information in their family stories.

Migrating families on Siberut did not traditionally return to the place of origin from where they departed. They kept looking for new places around the island. They even tried to change directions in order to deceive groups that tried to follow them. In fact, they did not want to meet those groups. As the migrating groups rounded a valley or two, they sometimes after some time returned to the area they had once occupied. Nevertheless, they did not stay there permanently. They moved again, in other directions, in order not to arrive at places that they had occupied before.

As migrating families moved around, one family sometimes met other families. Two or more families sometimes united in order to be better able to protect themselves. They defended their place together. However, the first settlers of a place, in general, disliked the arrival of newcomers coming to populate their area. They did not want their natural resources to be exploited by newcomers. In order to get rid of the newcomers, the first settlers rejected them immediately. If they were late in doing so, that is if they waited until long after the newcomers had built houses for themselves, then the first settlers requested the newcomers to pay for the plots of land where they had erected their houses. If they failed to pay, the first settlers sought other groups living outside the area to assassinate the newcomers.

This might happen if the newcomers were perceived as exploiting the natural resources of the area and the first settlers did not get any profit from them. Due to such a conflict, newcomers were forced to leave the place and to seek another place. As migrating kin groups had already claimed most of the land on Siberut, a few families decided to move over to Sipora. This island is small compared to Siberut and the Pagai islands. Some families stayed on Sipora and others moved further south to the Pagai islands. A few families might have decided to return to Siberut if they did not find a satisfactory place on Sipora. After passing through many places and many generations, a lot of things happened. A migrating group might not remember their relatives in other places, or in the place once occupied by their ancestors. In some cases, migrating families still have relatives living in those places. In other cases, a migrating group has no relatives left at the place once occupied by their ancestors, owing to the entire kin group having moved away from there.

By means of a family story, a migrating family may learn about their relatives and the places once occupied by their ancestors. By means of such a story, migrating families can sometimes reunite with their relatives and try to get access to their ancestral lands in the place once occupied by their ancestors prior to the migratory movements. As we have seen, a group of Samongilailai on Sipora island returned to Siberut in order to find their relatives. The family
sought their relatives by asking people there. They eventually found members of the Samaileppet kin group in Maileppet. Part of the Samaileppet kin group had originally belonged to the Samongilailai kin group. In fact, Samaileppet was the union of several kin groups. They told each other’s stories of how their ancestors left a place on Siberut and moved to Sipora island. The relatives in Siberut recognized the story of some of their kin group’s families leaving for Sipora. The family stories finally connected the broken relationship among the related families.

Family stories tell us that conflicts and harsh assaults happened frequently in places where migrating families tried to live permanently. There was seemingly no place where migrating families might live safely. Many migrating families therefore decided to separate from each other and pursue their destiny by migrating in different directions. After a place had been claimed, a family or two stayed there while others moved again. In case no family stayed, a neighbour was asked to take care of the land. Natural hazards and deaths of family members from unknown illnesses might have compelled Mentawaians to decide to leave a place. The process of migration kept occurring. Several descendants of ancestors who had settled at a place permanently kept changing their dwelling places even if it was only within the village. Some families occasionally decided to return to the place where their ancestors once lived.

In short, family stories show us the social logic of the geographical and demographical expansion of the Mentawai ancestors. The social logic of the migratory movements explains Mentawaians’ understanding of ownership of places and land as well as how people acquire new status as owner of the place (sibakkat laggai) and/or owner of the land (sibakkat porak).

### 9.7 Genealogical expansion of Mentawaians

An important matter in the genealogical expansion of Mentawaians due to migratory movements is the formation of new kin groups originating from an initial kin group. As seen in the legends of the maps, one kin group split into two or more groups of families and created new kin groups residing in other places. Some of those kin groups kept using the initial kin-name, while others decided to use a new name. Each began to perceive themselves as separate from the others due to using a new kin-name. The kin-name was sometimes given to the new group by other groups residing in the same area where the new group settled. Siriratei is an obvious example, where neighbours were surprised to see that the new group was not afraid of building their communal house near a graveyard (ratei). Because of living near a graveyard, the new group was called Siriratei.
In some situations, a new group decided to use the name of their dwelling place for naming the kin group. In that case, the group first named the place and then used the place-name for their kin group’s name. The Salamao, Sakoddobat, and Sapalakkokoai kin groups, which settled Bat Lamao, Bat Koddobat, and Bat Palakkokoai respectively, exemplifies this situation (see Story 10 and Map 9.4). Unusual natural surroundings where a communal house was erected may be used to name a group. An obvious example is Siribetug. The group erected their communal house at a place surrounded by a bamboo cluster (betug) (see Story 7 in Chapter 5 and Map 9.1). A memorable event occurring in a place was also commonly used for naming a new kin group. Or a particular behaviour of the members of a kin group may be used to identify it. So, the name of a kin group may reflect a situation, a place, or a characteristic of the group.

A kin group in one place perceives itself as self-sufficient and independent of relatives living in other places. The group may survive while being away from their place of origin by cultivating plots of land owned by ancestors who had led the group during migratory movements. However, a group’s independence and self-sufficiency do not erase the existence of another reality: the group shares the same ancestral connections with its related kin groups residing in other places. Although they each have a new kin-name, they are still one big family descending from the same ancestors who occupied their place of origin.

If two related groups decide to merge, they do not use their kin-names used while living in separate places anymore. Instead, they speak of the initial kin-name, which is the kin-name used by the ancestors in the place of origin before the ancestral group dispersed. Related groups also agree that they all share the same rights to the ancestral land located in the place of origin. All members may cultivate the land. As a consequence of the kin group’s unity, plots of land found by any of the related groups during geographical expansion may be claimed as the property of all members of the kin group. They perceive each other as relatives because they descended from the same ancestral family.

Another significant aspect of Mentawai genealogical ideas is the concept of remembering and forgetting. Mentawaians recollect their ancestors’ names inconsistently. What one family member remembers about his ancestors is not always the same as what is remembered by other family members. Some people have a strong relationship with their ancestors and maintain the memory of the ancestors by telling stories about them. By counting the ancestors’ names in family stories, we may determine how far back Mentawaians go in their past. The stories indicate that Mentawai storytellers recollect their ancestors back to several generations. Some storytellers remember less than eight generations, while other storytellers of the same kin group recollect more than
ten generations. If we compare the order of the names according to family
generations, it is also told erratically. An ancestor in a story perceived as a son
by one storyteller may be mentioned as a grandfather in the same story told
by another storyteller of the same kin group. Nevertheless, they give several
similar names if we compare one list of ancestors' names to another list of
ancestors' names, even though the names are incompletely and inconsistently
counted up.

Details of someone's memory in remembering things that happened in the
past are strongly influenced by tradition. In Mentawai, someone's name may
change frequently as he or she goes through particular stages of social life. It
begins when a baby is born. A baby girl is called *sijijik* and a baby boy is called
*sikolik*. Then, at a certain age, she or he gets a 'real' name through a ritual. The
name becomes an identity of the person, like Sikoibatei in the wild boar story,
or like Emeiboblo in the pig story. Soon after Sikoibatei got married and got
a baby, he needed to find a name for his child, Boalai for instance. His child's
name would be his nickname. He would thus be called Aman Boalai (father
[aman] of Boalai). However, since the occurrence of the wild boar incident,
his nickname, which was Silango Siberi, was more popular than Aman Boalai.
He was thus called Silango rather than Sikoibatei or Aman Boalai. As he got
older, Silango would be called *teteu*, or for short *teu*, meaning 'grandfather'.
This term is added in front of his current name. So he was called Teteu Silango.
After Silango passed away, he would be addressed with the word *kalimeu* (de-
ceased) before his name, Kalimeu Silango. In traditional rituals, his spirit is
categorized as *ukkui* (ancestor's spirit). In the spiritual world he is perceived
as living together with other spirits, and they are called *sanitu* (see Schefold
1973 for further discussion of religious conceptions in Mentawai). It becomes
complicated to recognize someone's name when there are so many situational
changes of a personal name.

After someone's death, that person's name is infrequently mentioned ac-
cording to Mentawai traditional culture because they do not want to relive im-
ages and memories of the dead. Mentawaians believe that dead relatives have
gone to live in the other world, in the spiritual world. The world is interpreted
as a 'big village' (*beu laggai*). The ancestors are not supposed to be disturbed
unless they are called upon to be present at family gatherings, for instance for
rituals. In order not to mention someone who has died, relatives of the de-
ceased use other words to refer to the dead person. *Sapunuteteu* is a common
term used in family stories as the term for ancestors, and *kalimeu* is the term
for those more recently deceased. In rituals, the ancestors are called *ukkui*.

In Mentawaians' viewpoint, dead people always live near living people in-
visibly. However, they should not be present in the world of the living. If living
people mention a dead person's name again and again, the spirit of the dead
may appear to living people in an apparition. When the appearance of a spirit
of a dead person occurs in ordinary circumstances, a lot of family members
may get sick. In order to protect family members, shamans bless them. In this way, spirits of ancestors and living people may be present at the same ritual without knowing it. To show respect to the ancestors, their names are not mentioned. If it is necessary to do, Mentawaians purposely hide their ancestors’ names.

In the mango story, we see the involvement of an older brother and a younger brother. The real names of the two brothers are unspecified. That means that current storytellers do not recollect the names of those ancestors. Perhaps these family stories were intended primarily to convey a particular moral. Some of the stories tell us about ancestors doing something malicious, or displaying a bad character. In order to limit disrespect towards ancestors, people hide ancestors’ real names. However, there is an unwanted consequence to hiding ancestors’ names from the public: the younger generation may fail to learn those ancestors’ names. What often happens is that the ancestors are unintentionally forgotten by their current descendants.

In contrast, there are certain ancestors who are nonetheless remembered. Such a reason as being proud of having a few brave ancestors has encouraged Mentawaians to keep maintaining a few ancestors’ names. It turns out that those ancestors deserved respect and are remembered in family stories because those ancestors put efforts into forming and expanding their kin groups. In the pig story in Chapter 6 about the Samongilailai kin group, for instance, names of the prominent ancestors are mentioned all the time. One of the ancestors defended his family pride and led his group out of the place of origin and eventually reached other places of the Mentawai Islands with great success. Such names as Emeiboblo, Pajorot, and Sikora are significant and heroic ancestors for the Samongilailai kin group. These names are more important than their other ancestors’ names. Spirits of the heroic ancestors are purposely mentioned to protect the Samongilailai from any troubles.

Young members of the kin group are taught through family stories to show such leadership qualities. And the pride of having such ancestors is expressed in the happy faces of the storytellers when they enthusiastically told me about the fearlessness of their ancestors while dealing with other kin groups that wanted to harm them. The storytellers’ voices became louder to express their ancestors’ anger, and body language like wide-opened eyes and hand gestures portrayed a kind of murdering action. All this expressive body language indicates how important the ancestors whose names are mentioned are considered to be.
9.8 Concluding remarks

The family stories presented and discussed in this book describe migratory movements of the Mentawaians. Many kin groups of early Mentawai families had left their places of origin in Simatalu. Some families of a kin group left earlier than others, with a few families remaining in the place of origin. In such cases, not all family members left for a new place at once. The families remaining in the place of origin did not always stay there permanently either. They usually eventually left for a new place where there was less competition for land and other resources.

Migrating families followed rivers and coastlines and crossed over hills in order to arrive at a different place. The river was an important natural element in searching for a new place. Highly preferred was a valley with deep and long navigable rivers. Early migrants preferred to stay in the interior of the islands. Besides following the natural landscape, early Mentawaians sometimes moved from one place to the next by tracing the steps of migrating relatives.

Some kin groups just moved around on the island of Siberut, while other groups crossed over to the southern islands of Mentawai. Some of the groups that had migrated to the southern islands returned to Siberut. When they returned to Siberut, they did not always go back to their initial settlement but sought other places to settle instead. This kind of migratory movements often resulted in related families living in separate places. Due to contact not being maintained over the generations, it is not surprising that many families who are (distantly) related to each other but widely dispersed do not currently recognize each other.

As a migrating family group moved, they sometimes arrived at a new place that was not yet populated by other people. As they did not see other people living in such a place, they declared themselves to be the owners of the place (sibakkat laggai) and the owners of the land (sibakkat porak). If the family group decided to move again, they sometimes left the place unattended, thus giving later migrants of other kin groups a great opportunity to take over the place. In order to keep the place, some groups, as related in several of the family stories, would have a couple of families stay at the claimed place in order to maintain it and to protect it from being claimed by later migrants. If the whole group of families eventually decided to move away, they traditionally still keep their ownership of the place. They prove their ownership of the place by telling stories of the place as well as pointing out the planted trees growing on the place as theirs. Migrating families brought stories, memories and particular objects from the early places to the newly found ones.

Family stories also reveal genealogical ties among migrating kin groups. Every kin group has several identifying marks, namely stories, ancestral lands, ancestors’ names, family and group names, and place-names of origins that
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can be used to establish whether one kin group has ancestral and genealogical connections to another group. If members of several groups can find ancestral connections among them, they may agree to share their communal possessions. If they do not see any connection, they will refuse to recognize each other as relatives, and refuse to recognize joint ownership of communal properties as well. People who are not recognized as relatives will not gain anything from their ancestral heritage.

Regarding landownership, each kin group may possess land in just one place or several plots of land in different places. Entitlement to a plot of land is usually transmitted through family members exclusively; in this way the plot of land remains in the hands of the same family. Mentawai families do not simply allow other people to take over their possession to a plot of land. Other people who want to live in a place have to ask permission from the landowners before they may live on the land and exploit natural resources on the land. If they do not get that permission – for instance because the landowners do not like the newcomers – they have to look for some other place. Traditional cultural values do not allow other groups to claim a plot of land that has already been claimed. In order to respect that, other kin groups seek other places.

Traditional customs and family stories affirm a situation where a plot of land may not be claimed twice by two different unrelated kin groups. This is a way to prevent conflicts over land. Nevertheless, a plot of land actually quite often has been claimed by two or even more unrelated kin groups. That happens because of ancestors’ migratory movements. Stories tell that after leaving a place, migrating families did not return regularly. In fact, most migrating families did not even return at all. Besides assaults and conflicts with family members or neighbours, another reason migrating families did not go back to the places they once occupied is because they were afraid of headhunting practices. Moreover, the distance between the currently occupied place and the old settlement is often great.

If the owners of a place did not look after their place due to migratory movements, then other groups of people who migrated more recently occupied the unattended place. The later migrants not only exploited the unattended land, but also tried to take over rights to the land. In the course of time, the later migrants begin to assume they had extensive rights to the land. In this way, conflicts over land rights sometimes occurred, although traditional customs and family stories confirm that the later arrivals do not have rights to the land that had once been claimed by an initial migrating kin group.

Nowadays, a great opportunity is available to visit the old places and settlements. Descendants of migrating ancestors can easily return to see their place of origin because it is currently safer and easier than a few generations ago. The Dutch colonial government stopped the tradition of headhunting raids in the early 1900s and the Indonesian government continues to forbid the tradi-
tion. People do not have to worry about being killed by headhunting, nor do they have to paddle their canoe for several days and nights. As contacts are made with relatives residing in old settlements and in the place of origin, migrating families eventually recover their rights to their ancestral plots of land. It is a simple reality that Mentawaians believe that a ‘forgotten’ land still belongs to the initial claimers, even though they do not maintain the land. The migrants’ ownership of their ancestral land may once again be recognized. Some families return for a short period of time. Some return in order to live there permanently. A few families return to become acquainted with relatives. Others return to defend their plots of land from other kin groups that try to sell them to buyers. Sometimes, families return to sell plots of land to buyers. The nature of migratory movements of early Mentawai families is the most important underlying factor of current conflicts over land rights in Mentawai.