

## CONTEMPORARY MENTAWAI RECAPITULATES ANCESTRY: THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SIBERUT SOCIETY

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### ABSTRAK

*Orang Mentawai yang mendiami Pulau Siberut, Kepulauan Mentawai, dikenal sebagai masyarakat adat yang memiliki aturan-aturan yang bersumber pada ajaran Arat Sabulungan. Di satu sisi aturan-aturan itu dianggap berguna bagi tatanan sosial masyarakatnya, sedangkan di sisi lain aturan menyubordinasi kelompok tertentu, khususnya kaum perempuan. Misalnya, nilai-nilai ideal bagi perempuan selalu merujuk pada tatanan adat (arat) yang sesungguhnya secara kultural dikonstruksi oleh kaum laki-laki. Konstruksi itu dilanggengkan melalui praktik-praktik kultural. Pelanggengkan itu memosisikan perempuan sebagai subordinat dari dominasinya laki-laki, tetapi sekaligus juga memunculkan resistensi dari kaum perempuan. Dominasi laki-laki yang dilakukan dengan membangun klaim-klaim kebenaran dengan legitimasi adat (arat) mendapatkan perlawanan dari kaum perempuan. Perempuan-perempuan juga menciptakan klaim-klaim kebenarannya sendiri dan mempertanyakan nilai-nilai tersebut.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Arat Sabulungan, dominasi, konstruksi budaya, resistensi*

### ABSTRACT

The indigenous Mentawaians, who reside on Siberut Island, the archipelago off the west coast of Sumatera, are located in communities whose culture and cosmology stem from the traditions of Arat Sabulungan. The guidance is valuable for the social relation of the community, nevertheless the practise subordinates certain groups in society, especially women. For example, the gender roles in particular for women stem from the traditional norms of Arat. However it is essentially a social construct that favours men, and has been perpetuated through cultural practices. The continuing position of women is being subordinated to male dominance, which has led to resistance from women. Male dominance built on truth claims derived from indigenous legitimacy in arat, is resisted by women. Women are now constructing their own truth claims, and are questioning the status quo.

**Keywords:** *Arat Sabulungan, cultural construction, domination, resistance*

### INTRODUCTION

Countless literature on gender-related issues gives examples of women, being in a subordinate position to men. Ortner and Sack (in Moore, 1998) considered the subordination of women as something that is universal, and not something

inherent in the biological differences between the sexes. As Eleanor Leacock (1978:274) argues, the public is not divided into classes, and men and women are autonomous individuals, although the autonomy of women in an egalitarian social structure differs from that of men. However, Leacock (1978) views the subordination of women

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by men, as well as the development of the family as the economic unit and marital monogamy, as associated with the private ownership of the means of production. Private ownership of the means of production in the Mentawai people is important when they are settled, are farming, and holding livestock, although there are still families living together in one *uma*. *Uma* in this context means clan house (communal-house), while usually *uma* is used as a reference to describe the clan unit, who live in the *uma*. Robust *uma* affiliation within the communal house by the families is the norm, so that the building is called *uma* by the Mentawai, especially on the island of Siberut (Hammons, 2010:xvii).

According to Schefold (1985:222), despite the principles of solidarity applied to the *uma*, the work of an individual family (*lalep*) belongs to the family concerned. According to the Mentawaians, this is due to the pride of the individual family members. For example, if someone has many boars in their possession, it will be a topic of conversation. The owner will always be praised by the people in the neighbourhood, and even by people outside the village. At present, although the *uma* remains the centre of the clan, and each nuclear family *lalep* is a unit of production, there are many families who do not permanently share an *uma* anymore on Siberut Island. In respect of private ownership, being separate from the *uma* may allow more to be accomplished, because if the family stays together in the *uma*, the obligation to contribute to another family's feast even when it is not appropriate, cannot be circumvented. In addition, with the recent introduction of commodity cash crops such as clove, patchouli and cocoa, the family can now increasingly try to increase the value of surplus production, so as to benefit the household. Previously, production was merely limited to subsistence needs. In line with this argument it is proposed by Dove in Pujo Semedi (1995: 15) that the production of each farming household tends to be adjusted to reach a balance for individual consumption purposes, following the ratio of producers to consumers.

For Siberut Mentawai women, household life revolves around production and consumption, and does not mean that they are separated from the *uma*, because life remains bound by the *uma* culture. Traditionally women in Mentawai who are married usually move in with the relatives of her husband, and join the social groups of her husband's *uma* (Coronese, 1986; Schefold, 1991; Roza, 1997; Delfi, 2005). Patrilocal principles cause women to move away from their immediate relatives. The displacement of women joining the social groups of her husband cause her to become more dependent on her husband, by being separated from her own group. On the other hand young males are dependent on their father to gain access to resources, particularly land (Moore, 1998:94). Generally, married couples do not just build a new home (*lalep*) in their husband's extended family, but also receive a new field for farming within the family grounds, that is controlled by males (Tulius, 2000:71). Although a wife moves to her husband's family, she is not considered a permanent member of her husband's *uma*, as her membership depends on her husband's existence. It is known that in the event of divorce, or her husband's death, that she will then return to her original *uma* and clan of origin (Schefold, 1991:15; Roza, 1994:22). At this point she will usually participate in the household and economic efforts of her brother, or father (Schefold, 1991). Women can normally only stay in the *uma* of her deceased husband, if she re-marries one of her husband's brothers, or if she is asked to remain in the clan by her son, who would usually already have been married (Delfi, 2005:138). But if the father or the brothers of her deceased husband do not approve, she would have to follow their wishes and return to her original *uma*.

After marriage, a woman despite being a member of her husband's *uma*, is not allowed to use her husband's *uma* name. If she has children from her husband, then her name will be changed to "mother of child 'A'". In Siberut, this is usually Bai child A, or *Inan* child A, depending on the

locality on Siberut Island. Married women are usually called *kalabai* or *sikalabai*, that is also the name given to the second timber pole of the *uma* communal house. According to Mentawai cosmology, the second post of the communal house or *kalabai*, has motherhood qualities of support and so the woman is responsible for food provision to all members of the *uma* (Coronese, 1986:109). If she performs badly in the provision of food, she could be called lazy. The ideal character of a *sikalabai*, includes the expectation to be a wife and mother of good character, diligent, and patient, and would not complain about her everyday tasks, that need to be completed.

An important task of women, is preparing food for her husband and children, and it is said that she would 'deserve' punishment from her husband or children, according to the tradition, if these duties are neglected. Such punishment may take the form of the traditional reprimand of being lazy, or for a repeat offence, to be lawfully expelled back to her *uma* of origin. When asked which rules have been violated, the usual answer would include reference to the rules that ancestors have put in place.

In Mentawai, a woman is not only required to be diligent, but also to be patient, in times she faces arguments from her children or husband. Even her own relatives give advice that she ought to be patient. Hitherto, many women have started to question why they ought to be patient, when they are being called lazy, or being told to return to their original *uma* and some have claimed instances of domestic violence. Why it is that "patience" has grown into the most important objective for women to be re-considered in Siberut?

Based on the description above, I was interested in understanding more about what the cultural outlook of a good *kalabai* in Mentawai was. Why is a *kalabai* labelled lazy, if she has not been able to prepare food for the family? Who determines such matters for women in Mentawai?

Then, what if the cultural practices based on the rules dictated by the ancestors contain a hidden or symbolic violence, directed at women? Should she accept this, or is this something that ought to be opposed through resistance?

This paper is based on the observations and experiences of living with the Mentawaians in the villages of south Siberut Island, especially in the government relocation village of Muntei. My discussion in this paper is intended to answer the above questions. Firstly, I will explain the cultural views and local customs, related to the treatment of women, which include symbolic violence towards her. Then I will discuss the legitimacy of norms that allow male dominance to be maintained, followed by matters related to the essence of resistance by women against such domination.

## **TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FROM ANCESTORS**

Each community has different guidelines. There are various directives that determine how women and men should behave. Women in Mentawaiian marriages are frequently labelled good spouses when they are diligent, not complaining, patient, prepare food for their husband and children, and take good care of the household (Roza, 1994). Siberut Mentawaiian women may catch small fish in a swamp, but should not slaughter boars, and men should not be fishing in a swamp, but may hunt and slaughter boars. Therefore, rules are made, but rules by whom? The guidelines of the past, also known as *zaman siburuk*, are the modus operandi of earlier ancestors, or *teteu siburuk*. Many times did I hear this expression to affirm the truth of the applicable commands.

The rules of the ancestors' *adat* also govern the bond between human beings, including the relationship between men and women, between humans and nature, and between humans and the invisible spirit world. Mentawaiian traditional guidelines, especially in Siberut, are often associated with the values of the local religious belief system or *Arat Sabulungan*. *Arat* means

custom, while *Sabulungan* is derived from the word *bulung*, meaning leaf or a collection of plants often used in ritual practices in Siberut (Sihombing, 1979; Coronese, 1986; Ermayanti, 1988; Roza, 1997). *Arat Sabulungan* are the customary directions originating from the ancestors, also known as the ancestral religion, containing the rules for the inhabitants of Mentawai, and are collectively called *kapuaranan* Mentawai (Delfi, 2005:91). Consequently, it can be said that the *kapuaranan* Mentawai is the *kapuaranan* set by the *teteu siburuk*, or the ancestors of Mentawai.

The rules of life are distinguished from rules derived from Arat, or outsiders. Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism and Bahai are Arat *sasareu* containing rules for living outside the so-called *kapuaranan sasareu* (Delfi, 2005:90). In Siberut Mentawai most people have embraced the Catholic religion, and according to Reeves (1999:51), Catholicism is a manifestation of outsiders Arat that has been adopted by *simatawe*, the Mentawaians. Although the Siberut Mentawai people have claimed to be followers of Arat *sasareu*, especially Catholic Arat, the people in the villages in Siberut still refer in particular to the rules derived from Arat *Sabulungan*, rather than those of the *sasareu*. People continue to build the legitimacy of claims by using the assessment, “according to the rules of *siburuk teteu*; the rules that make women dependent on men.”

One such dependence can be understood through the practice of giving *alak togha* (bride price). *Alak togha*, in everyday conversation, is too often equated with “charge” so that in Mentawai, it is called *saki* (buy). For example, if the unmarried men in Siberut should be asked why they did not get married, they would often reply “*Siokok mabesik sakinia*” or marriageable women are expensive to buy. It was not that they did not get married because they did not love someone, but simply because they were not able to pay the *alak togha*. In the area of Mongan Poula, in north Siberut, according to Fitrawati (1997), a *patumbak* exchange was noted. Apparently two marriageable women were exchanged, to enable two marriages to proceed with agreeable men, due to the payment of

*saki* or *alak*, being very high. Ideally, according to Siberut customs, the man who marries a woman has to prepare an *alak togha* as dowry. *Alak togha* is not exactly the same in all places in the Mentawai, even in the same river valley it may be the same, as the *alak togha* depends on the negotiating parties of the *uma*, of the man and woman. They negotiate about the number, type and how the *Ama* (the receiver *alak togha*) will receive the price. As an example, in South Siberut, the *alak togha* can be 10 durian trees, 5 boars, 10 fully grown laying chickens, 2 palm trees, 5 *sago* trees, 10 big pots, 10 axes, 1 mosquito net, 1 taro field and 1 fish pond in the swamp.

In the area of Silakoinan in Siberut, according to Hernawati (2007:71), a woman is not “purchased” in the conventional sense, because she does not accept the dowry. But she receives *Alak togha*, by taking the children of the marriage. It should be noted that *Alak togha* is given to the males in the *uma* of the bride’s family, as compensation like exchange, as the children born of the marriage follow the patrilineal line, increasing the number of members in the husband’s *uma*, (the father of the child) but not the mother’s *uma*. If a young man desires to have a wife, he should be prepared to gather an *alak togha* for the exchange. Under the terms of the Mentawai custom, the husband’s *uma* also receives a donor *alak togha* return gift or *punu alaket*, from the *uma* of the woman. This replacement or *punu*, is of a lesser value than the *alak togha* received by the relatives of the female partner, in the marriage bride price exchange.

Furthermore, Hernawati (2007:72) argues that *alak togha* also serves as a show of appreciation and respect from the male family to the female family. A high *alak togha* will give the impression that the females they offer are fine partners, and not of a lesser category. That means that if a bride is obtained without an *alak togha*, she could be considered a cheap or low value partner. This begs the question, if the *alak togha* is high, does it indicate that Mentawai women have a higher social status in the community? Here we describe how the rules of actually securing the amount needed for the *alak togha* creates a

possible symbolic violence to women. Referring to what was raised by Bourdieu (in Jenkins, 2004:157), that the imposition system symbols and meanings referenced specific groups in a way that was secretly considered valid and affirming of the legitimacy of power relations, and leading to coercion was successful.

An *alak togha* that is high is called *saki siokkok*, or purchasing the lady. Even though it is phrased as purchasing the lady, in reality women do not receive the *alak togha*. The *alak togha* belongs to the men in the *uma*, that the lady is leaving. The existing *togha alak*, such as taro gardens and the pond in the swamp, are mainly for women to work on. Taro gardens are managed for family meals, and the pond in the swamp is for fishing. In the event of divorce, the garden and the pond will be returned to her former husband's relatives, and looked after by the other available women in the *uma*.

What the parts of the *togha alak* that women receive, is set by the men, as well as the type and amount involved. People who are eligible to receive *alak togha* in Siberut are generally called *Ama*, which consists of the father of the bride (Fa/Father), his father's brother (FaBr/Father Brother) and brother of the woman (Br/ Brother). Thus *Ama* is all male (Fa, FaBr and Br). Thus, those who set the rules in regards to the quantity and distribution of *alak togha* are all male. It is dependent on the demands of the men; father, father's brother and brother of the woman getting married. Therefore, it is an agreement among men, as to the 'selling' prices or *alak togha* of females.

*Alak togha*, the bride 'payment' also depends on the return gift (*punu alaket*), with the number and type of *alak togha* adjustable in the agreement or transaction, of marriage. This seems in line with what is proposed by Bourdieu (2002:551), that one mating strategy is determined by the principle of male supremacy, which through bride price, is intended to maximize the material and symbolic benefits that come from marriage transactions. Therefore, according to Bourdieu (2002:552), marriage is a cultural institution that has the goal of increasing or maintaining the mode of production,

and is tailored to the constraints of tradition. Linking *alak togha* or *saki* with production values, may be endorsed by that which is raised by Frederick Engels in Megawangi (1999:130). He proposed that the value of the production cost is a "selling tool", along with the wishes of the family (husband) to increase agricultural and livestock production.

In the Siberut case, such items as boars and chickens are important for animal *alak togha* payment, as well as the more productive plants, such as coconut, durian, and *sago* which are also significant, and belong to the men in the community. Men are considered the owners of resources and are legitimized by the culture and values of a male-controlled setting, which has relegated women to a position of servitude and reliance on a husband (Megawangi, 1999:87). Therefore, in many places, a high dowry can be the cause of women being subject to violence (Sarmini, 2008; Nur, 2012). If a woman who has 'received' an expensive *alak togha* she might be labelled as lazy, unable to work and take care of the family sufficiently, as deserved by the *uma*. A divorce prevents the repatriation of the assets back to the original *uma*, while the undesired woman returns to her original *uma*. After the return to her original *uma* the woman remains essentially reliant on the male father and/or brother. Dependencies eventually resulted in the subordination of women. According to Leacock (1978) the kind of subordination of women by males is associated with the private ownership of the means of production.

Today, with private ownership, Mentawai individuals are also increasingly improving each families (*lalep*) opportunities to settle in a *barasi*. Also important is the growing recognition of commodity crops, such as clove, patchouli, and cocoa, amongst other cash crops. Nevertheless, liabilities dictate when a feast or *punen* by *uma* members, is given. If a certain family has more wealth, then the donation will also be more than others.

Ownership of assets such as livestock, in Siberut, is also important because it gives high

prestige to the owner. Generally, boar and land belong to men, and even mantras or *ghaud* made in the presence of animals (boars and chickens) belong to men. Knowledge *ghaud* possessed by men show that they have the cultural capital, that determines their power over resources. Marriage rules including *alak togha*, are also a cultural construction of men.

The high price that must be paid by men to their female relatives (*uma* group women) through *alak togha*, just raises the notion that a woman should serve her husband and possess a good and patient character. Where a woman has secured a hefty price in the *alak togha*, it is appropriate that she ought to work with diligence to serve her husbands, children, her husband's relatives and even previous ancestors. In relation to female modesty, ancestral guidelines must also be followed, one of which is the ceremony or *punen abinen*. Through the *punen abinen* a linkage can be traced to the understanding of gender role socialization embodied by the ancestors, one of which is through mantras uttered by the *rimata* (head of the *uma*), or *sikebbukat uma* (the elder in the *uma*) during the ceremony. Different mantras have been prepared by the ancestors for boys and girls, and are said to have become customary by Mentawai people, while *Arat Sabulungan* provides the basic rules of their lives (Sihombing, 1979; Coronese, 1986).

The mantra prepared for boys is as follows:

"I'll be waving flowers above your head so that you're always happy, you are always able to collect food in the forest, when you hunt you will get hunted. We hope you will be faithful to your wife, and you can live in harmony with your brothers, and your body will always be strong enough to bring back boars" (Coronese, 1986:124).

The mantra for girls is:

"We're waving *Sikopuk* leaves above your head so that you have patience and you become industrious, diligent, and energetic in carrying

out your duties, and you are not so quick-tempered as a man." (Coronese, 1986:125).

Observing the mantra for boys as written above, it seems that the ancestors expect Mentawai men to be loyal to their wives. If are being faithful to their wife how can they have been empowered by their ancestors to expel their wife? Could the ancestors meaning of "faithful", be one wife only? Schefold (1991) suggested that the Mentawaians hold monogamous rules. The principles of monogamy are the ideal rule in the Mentawai community. It can also be found in the myth of "*Saba Ibailiu Sirimanua*" (the python metamorphoses into human being) is associated with the origin of marriage, which shows that the Mentawai people have always been monogamous in marriage (Coronese, 1986:56-58).

Through mantra Mentawai men are expected by their ancestors to hunt, while women are expected by the ancestors to have patience. A Mentawai woman is expected to be diligent and persevering, and being someone who is not easily angered. Evidence that those women who are diligent and persevering it is to work. Even doing jobs usually done by the men is considered a normal Mentawai idea, such as feeding the pigs, tending coconut groves and the banana plantation. Lifting and processing *sago* and finding rattan (with her husband or not) is also done by women. But in contrast, men doing the work usually done by women, like catching small fish in the rivers swamps, and tending taro is detested. The value of woman's work seems despicably low to men, which make women themselves feel embarrassed, if a man were to do those jobs. Those feelings are also engendered by the instructions given from the Mentawai ancestors.

These rules are socialized, and through customary legitimacy, leads to the dominance of one group over another group. Finally, cultural values legitimize the patterns and structure of hierarchical relationships, within the family. For example, in the Mentawai culture values of being a good wife and mother, are ingrained in young girls from when they were babies.

### **LEGITIMACY ARAT (CUSTOM): PERPETUATE DOMINATION**

The issue of domination and resistance is not to be separated from the question of power relations. The existence of power relations, which resulted in the dominance and resistance, will always be there, as both are a dialectical process and can therefore be demonstrated in ways that are different (Foucault, 1980; Bourdieu, 1995; Ortner, 2006). There are groups that dominate other groups, and therefore the question arises of how such dominance can continue? Domination practiced by power, technology, and ideology lead to knowledge, social relations and cultural expression that serve to actively promote the status quo. (Freire, 2002:17). Ancestral rule is embodied in various forms of social relations, and is being justified to perpetuate the dominance of a particular group. Apparently ancestral influence is very strongly entrenched in many things in Mentawai communities, even though the ancestors are long gone, and cannot protest if their rules are not enforced. The same is seen with ancestor relationships of others, such as those encountered by Laksono (2002:376) in his research with Kei community, in reference to the customs of the girls, that have been associated with the road their ancestors took.

Societies appear to continue to look for ways to keep in touch with their ancestors. Truth claims built by men in Mentawai, also refer to the habits of ancestors, so the legitimacy of the rule of *siburuk teteu*, is used to perpetuate male dominance. In the end the legitimacy serves to make people obey and comply with the existing rules. Through the practices in everyday life in *Barasi Muntei* in terms of power relations, the dominance of men over women in the domestic sphere (*lalep* and *uma*), can be seen. Cultural practices were legitimized by customary ancestral rules called *arat*, cementing the subordinate position of women and their positions in power relations, within it. The values contained in the *arat*, are the construction of men (patriarchy). Therefore, symbols, or female modesty of a

*kalabai* are determined by the men, for instance with the symbol of the second *pole uma kalabai*, marks women as being responsible for providing food their family members. Hence, also diligence and patience are attached to female modesty in the women of Mentawai, and the unavailability of food in the home is contrary to the attitude of female modesty.

The processing of the staple food *sago*, by Mentawai people is said to be the duty of men, but many women also participated in *Barasi Muntei* processing of *sago*, though in a different way from men. Men processing *sago* using feet, or *pasideret akhek sago*, while women used hand processing, or *sago pasibutcit*. If the *sago* is not available, substitute foods such as bananas and tubers ought to be offered, and it is the duty of women as *kalabai*, to prepare those. Through those demands women may be seen to receive symbolic-violence. The dominance of injustice to women becomes something that is considered unquestionable, and perceived to be normal (Bourdieu, 1986). With an atmosphere like that, the position of women in a domestic role is, involves a deluge of work and limited time.

The above description, shows that the division of labor by gender, will be interpreted differently by people of different cultures, because the interpretation of the distinction, is also influenced by different social structures that can eventually give birth to subordination. The discrepancy that may indicate the status and power of men and women in the society, is also different (Mosse, 1996:5). Different status and power in society, leads by implication, to that group being in a position subordinate to other groups. This picture of the relationship of men and women, has become a social reality, and has been historically formed by a variety of social processes, which then become a power structure in which women find themselves in subordinate positions, in their gender role (Firestone in Abdullah, 2001:48-49). The power structure that places women in such a position are related to ownership and production facilities.

The position of Mentawai women is framed by the male centric society and confirmed through the process of socialization, and later developed into a socio-cultural value, determined by men, in terms of the structure of patriarchy. Therefore, the value of good and bad women, are constructed by male culture, and can be detrimental to women. Finally, this patriarchal structure, also perpetuates the subordinate position of women in society. Marginalization in the family *lalep* or *uma* and social groups, stereotypes or unfavorable labeling of women, ultimately leads the public to think that the condition and position as it exists now, is something that is normal and natural. These conditions are favorable to a particular group, in this case being males. The subordinate or subordinated status of women, is not inherent, but is an attached social construction.

The dominance of a person or group of people is very dependent on capital owned, where capital can be used as a tool for domination and power (Bourdieu, 1986). The more capital owned by individuals or groups, makes it increasingly possible, and easier, to dominate another person or group. Capital, from the perspective of Bourdieu (1996:114) is a collection of resources and power, that can actually be used. Every person has different capital amounts and types, and therefore truth claims that are built, were associated with cultural capital possessed by each person. Do Mentawai women receive domination by men against them, because of limited capital? And does it raise resistance in Mentawai women? In the following sections we will discuss those angles.

### **FEMALE RESISTANCE TO MALE DOMINATION (ANCESTORS)**

Following the activities of everyday women in *Barasi* Muntei, allowed me to engage in the work they do together. Through daily conversation among them, it turns out in practice, that women actively resist the dominance. Mothers displaying modesty and “good” traits, engage in relatively long working hours. So much workload needs to be completed, that they have to start as early

as possible. Even Irawati (2008:33), observed women awaken earlier than the chicken. Although they work long hours, this does not translate into women accumulating economic capital. The *Alak togha*, such as boars, *sago*, durian trees, and coconut trees, that are symbolically reserved for women, are in reality not a women’s property rights, but belong to the men in the women’s *uma*.

*Alak togha* as economic capital can be easily converted in the form of money or property, because capital is relatively more transferable between domains (field), and also more easily passed on to others (Bourdieu 1986:243). While the taro gardens and ponds are symbolically reserved for women, they in fact remain the property of the men, in the *uma* of her husband. Taro gardens and a pond just represent work, rather than capital to own. Custom rules in fact restrict women, to not accumulating economic capital.

These rules, may in fact be the unwittingly ordered ancestors guidelines of oppression, and the oppressed should accept them? Should they not want to free themselves from the shackles of the experienced oppression? Hence, ancestor rules implied like this, favour a particular group, while the oppression for others, remains, according to Paulo Freire (2002:17) - who debates not only the dominance of cultural expression that affects the oppressed in their daily life, but also about how the oppressed (women here) internalize the effects, and even help preserve it. For example, when women complain that their workload is excessive, another woman often then reminds her to ‘be patient’. It shows that the symbolic violence by the victims (women), are not even seen or felt as a duress, but as natural and reasonable (Haryatmoko, 2003:17).

A large workload is felt by some women, as something unbalanced. If on the one hand, they are not diligent and patient they are branded as lazy women, while on the other hand, there is also a symbol of *kunen sinanalep mauju* or clumsiness, which is often intended for them because they do jobs that are considered for the old or feeble. In this case, for example, women



labour with her hands, squeezing the grated *sago* or *sago pasibutcit*. By contrast, men manage it by trampling the grated *sago* or *sago akhek pasideret*. The processing of *sago*, as performed by men who are considered fast, produces a lot of starch. The way women labour, is considered old and deficient (*mauju*), and require a lot of power, while the results are lesser. Though *kunen sinanalep* indicates inefficiency, it may be caused by the excessive workload of women, that requires them to have long working hours.

The perspective of men, in their judgement of the work that women do, creates symbolic violence, that is committed possibly unwittingly, and is not considered as a form of tyranny. Symbolic violence can manifest as the dominance or strength (power) used to cause other people to not the question dominance anymore - for example, accompanied with an unpleasant insinuating noise (Bourdieu, 1995:51). The measuring of woman's insulting laughter at the expense of men, is one form, according to Bourdieu (1995), of hidden protest. Derogative laughter, will reduce the truth, of triumph by men (Lerclec in Haryatmoko, 2003:19). Finally, though women may engage in go slow practices, due to the workload, the men still need them. In the hamlet of Muntei for example, women often protest by means of 'pretend' pain. The pretence is recognized as a way to take a break from the routine workload, which is heavy. For example my informant, *Inan Rubi*, admits that she must feign illness, because she had worked hard during the week. At the time, she received an order for 150 sheets of *tobat*, or *sago* leaf roofing material, from a *sasareu* migrant, who lives in the district town of Muara Siberut. To enable her to do the leaf weaving she needs bamboo, so she ought to visit the bamboo forest first, that is located on the outskirts of the *barasi*. The previous day, the author also helped her collect the *sago* leaf, that was cut from the tops of the trees, by her son. As it is considered strenuous or dangerous for women to climb *sago* trunks, men do this work. After combing, *Inan Rubi* then cut the *sago* leaf sheath, and then stack and tied it, to take home. The next

morning, she was up early to catch fish at the mouth of the river with three other women, and in the afternoon she fetched *salok* or *sago* bark, for firewood to be used at home.

She looked tired, but did not want to be labeled lazy' so she had to pretend to have a headache, and tied her head with a cloth so that the children believed that she was really sick. *Inan Gori* also admitted to be tired of the *kalabai* routine, that repeats every day. Several others women also admitted to this practise, so as not to be labeled as a *kalabai* who was lazy.

Resistance is thus more likely to occur with subordinated woman, but carried out in a hidden transcript as proposed by Scott, (2000). This was a weapon of the weakest ones, to minimize risks. When using Bourdieu's outlook, weak women here can be interpreted as being in a capital deficient group, when compared with men. Not only in terms of economic capital, but also with cultural capital, and even more with symbolic capital. According to my understanding of the hidden transcript (Scott, 2000), and the secret code indicated (Bourdieu, 1995), both are expressions of resistance against the dominant force in Mentawai.

Mentawai women began to realize that they need capital, such as education. Some women have more diverse capital than other women, such as those who have the knowledge and ability to speak *sasareu* (Indonesia and Minangkabau). With the capital of culture (language), it is likely that they will get along with *sasareu* more intensely. Even some women who already know the *sasareu* language, choose to marry *sasareu*. In one on one talks with women in the *barasi*, many of them wish to have a *sasareu* life partner.

It was not just because of the assumption that those who marry *sasareu* are more advanced, but some Mentawai women also began to realize the weight of their workload, if they marry Mentawai males. Although as *sasareu* wives, they still have to take care of their husband and children, many women think this role is not as laborious as other women in Mentawai. The relationship

between *sasareu* and Mentawai women, and their education levels, also affects their perspectives on the principles patrilineal relations. They began to question the principles that apply in the Mentawai populace. According to them, it is possible that children born, can opt into the clan of the mother. In Siberut Mentawai, usually children born out of wedlock, become a member of the *uma* of their own mother, while children born in agreed though not yet formalized marriages, will become a member *uma* of the father.

## CONCLUSION

In this essay, attentiveness has to be focussed, as the dominance in each and every *lalep* is different, resulting in differences of resistance. However, a clear dominance of a particular party, facing the other party will bring resistance. Differences of possessed capital will affect the form of resistance. Mentawaiian women generally have not been able to accumulate capital in the economy, so that dependence on men is significant. However, the dominance of men in Mentawai is already causing resistance from many women, although more in the way of a hidden transcript or a secret code. There are three reasons why I say a new measure of women's resistance was detected: the first is because the dominance in each *lalep* is diverse. The second is probably because I myself have not been able to understand fully and thoroughly all the types of resistance that Mentawaiian women carry out to reduce male dominance. Finally, some women really think of the dominance as being fair, and therefore do not question their position. The same reason has led to the claims of truth by women, that are based on different aspects of dominance. Nevertheless, at least a resistance has begun. There is even at the beginnings of questioning measures in the ancestor's totalitarian wisdom, in the Mentawai society, as well as the principle of patrilineality.

In a reflection, should the rules of the ancestors, i.e. cultural values, that favour certain groups, and oppress other groups, be preserved? Or should they be dismantled? If it is not the

women or oppressed groups, who seek to unload themselves from various forms of oppression, who will? Should 'the dominated' do it? Mentawaiian women themselves who answer this are determined to resist it.

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