

PRODUCING HUMAN LIFE OR PROTECTING WILDLIFE?

People, Park, and Space on Siberut Island, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION: PROTECTED AREAS AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

On 23 June 2010, a group of Siberut National Park officers visited Simatalu, a village on the west coast of Siberut Island (West Sumatra). The officers intended to conduct conservation work and a regular boundary patrol. It took them eight hours to cross the treacherous Indian Ocean by speedboat from the park office in Maileppet on the island's east coast. The villagers were already waiting when they arrived. Some men asked the officers to stay on the boat and not enter the village. Then, the village head of Simatalu organised a meeting to interrogate the park officers. Some villagers attended the meeting, bringing bows and arrows to intimidate them. Finally, an elder stood up and addressed one of the senior members of staff:

I know you. Many years ago, you said our land and forest belong to the park and *kebutanan* (Ministry of Forestry). You and your friend said that you have the Conservation Law. We cannot even take a leaf from the park. We will be jailed if we kill a game. We can grow sago only around the settlement. The forest and the animals are reserved for scientific activities. Back then, we were afraid of the government and easily tricked. Now, we are here. Does your ministry have land here? Do you feed

the animals and plant trees in the forest? This is our ancestors' land. We live with and from the forest. Our food is there. Our medicine is there. We cannot be separated from the forest.

After tense negotiations, the park officers were allowed to stay overnight in the village head's house. The following day, the locals visited the park and questioned: Who are the owners of the land, forest, and animals in the park? Why did the park divide their ancestral land into conservation zones where people must follow conservation rules? Why did the park prohibit the Mentawai from exploiting forests but allow forest companies to extract timber outside?

Those questions were a nuanced political response to—and an astute critique of—the establishment of a protected area. They illustrate the conflict associated with territorialisation and state control over Indigenous territory (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995) by introducing a park and Conservation Law. They also represent critical questions about the production of space in a protected area, which separates nature, non-human entities, and humans (West 2006; Brockington 2002). Many scholars have shown that a protected area is not only a way of protecting animals, plants, and ecosystems, but involves a complex process of social engineering and development where the idea of nature is developed and the production of space takes place (Escobar 1999; Peluso 1993; West 2006;

Brockington 2022). A park is not a natural place, but constitutes a specific idea about nature, a particular way of thinking about the world, viewing the world, and acting upon the world (West and Brockington 2006). However, the park is not only the product of sociocultural constructions (image, discourse), but also encompasses material productions and social relations (Lefebvre 1991). Hence, the park is not a natural space, given its ecology and evolution and its enactment of an idea about nature. Instead, it reflects the triad of 'spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces' (Lefebvre 1991: 33) in which discourse, imaginaries, experience, institutions, actors, place, and locations are entangled through particular practices, social relations, and powers are encountered.

Neill Smith (1996: 50) argues that protected areas were derived from a particular idea about nature and the environment, a historical product of European social processes and derived from the dualism in European thought. Nature is seen as external, outside the social, and is considered absolute, fixed, and separate from the social. The vision of separation between nature and humans travelled across the world to justify the domination of people and places and became naturalised and instituted in the form of parks, sanctuaries, and reserves, well known as 'fortress conservation' (Cronon 1996; Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002; Jepson and Whittaker 2002). Nevertheless, fortress conservation areas are rarely, if ever, established in an empty space. The space reserved for protected areas has been occupied, claimed, used, and guarded by various groups of people (Kelly 2014; West and Brockington 2006). Many Indigenous and local peoples living in and around the park have produced space (land, forests, and other landscapes) and social relations in their particular ways, which often, but not always,

differ from the way states, private sectors, and conservationists produce protected areas (Ball 2012; West 2006). They see place and space as animate and sentient, inseparable from the totality of the lives of human beings. Sometimes, natural space is also enmeshed in a combination of mythology, storytelling rituals, and sensory experiences and intimately tied to the reproduction of social practices, beliefs, personhood, and institutions that would have been termed 'culture' in anthropology (West 2006; 2016).

Unsurprisingly, a protected area is a space constantly negotiated by different parties and always changing (Kelly and Gupta 2016). Elsewhere worldwide, a park or wildlife sanctuary becomes a middle ground for different actors entangled in social practices (Cronon 1996; White 1991; Graham and Concklin 1995; Highly and Oakley 2020; Faier and Rofel 2014). This middle ground takes the form of empirical questions, bringing into being the actors that appear in conflict or cooperation. The analysis of space (Lefebvre 1991; Smith 1995) offers a processual approach to understanding how a protected area as a middle ground is created, produced, and sustained through a shifting set of social practices and power relations (West 2006; Kelly and Gupta 2016: 178). The shifting involves constant negotiation and is influenced by interpersonal relationships, laws, regulations, social norms/values, and practices on multiple levels. The notion of a middle ground is paramount here as many Indigenous people have forcibly or voluntarily engaged with biodiversity conservation projects and agencies to survive asymmetrical power relations (Rubis and Therault 2020; Cepek 2018). The middle ground also captures the resilience of Indigenous people as they constantly revise and rupture their epistemes to understand the dispossessions they have experienced (DiNovelli-Lang 2013, West

2016). Recognising the resilience of Indigenous people facing conservation institutions has contributed substantially to our appreciation of the agency of Indigenous people in asserting their histories and world-making (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; Escobar 2016) as well as the way conservation agencies have shifted their position and approach to adapt to a new context and political relations (Kiik 2019).

This article is an ethnographic account of dialectical processes of the production of space through the establishment of the Siberut National Park (hereafter, we refer to this space as the park or simply SNP) on Siberut Island. Specifically, we investigate how the Mentawai engaged with the idea and the agency of biodiversity conservation over time. We try to answer a significant question: Why, despite the Mentawai harbouring deep resentment toward the national park as shown in the quote above, and seeing the protection of nature as fundamentally problematic, do they not overtly reject the presence of the park? We argue that the people's resentment is derived from the different ways the Mentawai and the park see the relationship between humans, the forest, and space. For the Mentawai, the forest is an undomesticated space that must be transformed into a social space through human activities. Social activities (clearing, cultivating, transforming, etc) in the forest and social relationships around the forest are valued and necessary to produce human life. SNP has introduced zonation, separating humans from forests and other non-human entities, reproducing the literal and figurative divisions of space and imposing the idea that a specific forest area is strictly for protecting plants and animals. The park neither reflects the Mentawai social process of producing nature nor recognises the value of productive activities and the history of human labour invested in the land and

forest. We further argue that conservation and the park are a contact space for cross-cultural encounters (Massey 1994; Faier and Rofel 2014; High and Oakley 2020), where park agencies and the Mentawai have become entangled in a network of social practices and mutual (mis) understanding.

In the first part of the article, we describe how the Mentawai produce space, especially forests. We discuss the Mentawai's relationship with the forest, how they see forests, and how their cultural reproduction and social practices are tied to the conceptualisation of the forest as a social space associated with the creation of life. The second part of the article describes the production of natural space through a biodiversity conservation campaign and the park's establishment. The last part of the article demonstrates the negotiation and engagement between park agencies and the Mentawai. We contend that the park's production is shaped not only by conflict and antagonism but also by a more prosaic process of encounter and engagement. We will show that the park has become a porous space for social intercourse. This engagement has contributed to the transformation of the park's attitude towards the Mentawai and the development of new aspirations and desires for the park among the Mentawai. Our case is a valuable example of a park that can be examined as a negotiated space, where Indigenous people might continue their cultural reproduction within a protected area.

The main ethnographic description in the article is drawn from our decades-long engagement with the Mentawai on Siberut Island. We began engaging with the people and the island as students researching how the Mentawai developed a relationship with natural resources two decades ago (Koen Meyers 2003; Darmanto 2006). We then worked together

on a UNESCO project (2002–2011) that supported collaborative and community-based forest management involving the Mentawai, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and SNP. The second author initiated the collaborative management project in 2000, and lived on Siberut for two years until 2003. He then visited Siberut for a week every year until 2011, and every three years since 2012. The first author joined the UNESCO project in 2004 as a volunteer while conducting fieldwork for his BSc thesis on Mentawai shifting cultivation practices. He then became the manager of the UNESCO project in 2005 and lived on Siberut for almost six years. Later, he visited Siberut regularly and completed 14 months of fieldwork (March 2013–June 2014) for his Master's and PhD theses (Darmanto 2016, 2020). However, the ethnographic materials we present in this article were mainly gathered during our participation in the UNESCO project (2001–2011). Our understanding of the relationship between the park and the Mentawai living in six villages in the South Siberut subdistrict and Simatalu in West Siberut accumulated during the UNESCO project. We inadvertently employed anthropological methods for the project to understand the relations of the Mentawai with the forest and the relations of the park and the Mentawai. We deployed various methods, including focus group discussion (FGD), interview, and observation] through direct participation and collaboration with the park's staff and the Mentawai before and during the project. Nevertheless, we visited eight other villages in Siberut during the anti-logging operation campaign and other activities. We covered 14 of 20 villages on Siberut Island and engaged personally with more than 800 Mentawai men and women during our stay on Siberut. The secondary data (maps, documents,

and notes) were gathered from government archives, NGO reports, and local newspapers.

The park staff and the Mentawai generally still refer to us as conservationists and supporters of the park when we now visit Siberut, even though we have become a researcher and international NGO staff working outside Siberut, respectively. However, most park staff and the Mentawai see us as long-time friends since we have engaged with them in the framework of a project and via other modes of engagement. We fluently speak the languages used on the island (Indonesia, Mentawai, and Minangkabau) and have developed continuous reciprocal relations with specific Mentawai families throughout the writing process. Our positionality allowed us to capture the direct encounter between the park's staff and the Mentawai in various places. In the meantime, our involvement with the park and the Mentawai also shapes our argument and how we present it in this article. We occupied a delicate position in close and constant contact with the Mentawai and as part of the Siberut conservation history. A few park staff sometimes perceived us as blind supporters of the Mentawai, while some Mentawai often half-jokingly accused us of being conservation zealots. While we have various positions and perceptions, our long-term and deep engagement with the park and the Mentawai enable us to critically navigate the balance between being researchers and conservation actors. This article is, then, our critical reflection on our participation in biodiversity conservation interventions and our understanding of the agency of Indigenous Mentawai as close and engaged observers.

THE MENTAWAI AND FOREST IN THE PARK

The Indigenous Mentawai traditionally claimed the land and forest on Siberut Island (Figure 1). The Mentawai population is around 70,300 (BPS 2021), and it is socially organised in connected and extended family groups locally called *uma*. An *uma* is patrilineal and exogamous, equating with the anthropological term ‘kin group’ or ‘clan’ and the most important social institution. One *uma* consists of roughly two to ten families with five to hundreds of members. The approximately 300 *uma* spread across the island have their versions of their origins, migration processes, and claims over forests and land. The *uma* migration, separation, and expansion story has revealed how the Mentawai define claims and rights over land and forests (Tulius 2012; Darmanto 2016). Over centuries, different clan expanded, separated, migrated, discovered new land, and established their *uma*. Along the way, they claimed, cultivated, abandoned, and recultivated the land, progressively turning the claimed land into the ‘land of the ancestors’ (Tulius 2012), a common theme in Austronesian societies (Keller 2008; Fox 2006). As a result of this historical process, there is no land and the forest remains unclaimed. Even those living outside the park have retained strong claims over land discovered by their ancestors within the park area.

Land, including forest land, traditionally cannot be claimed by individuals, but is the property of an *uma*. Each *uma* can trace its genealogy to an ancestor who discovered the land and claimed the rights. However, individuals are allowed to collect products from the forest of other *umas* without a formal permit from the claimants, mainly for subsistence needs and domestic purposes. It is different when an individual ts to create an agroforest

or extract forest products commercially. In the latter case, permission to access the land and forest should be obtained from the claimant of the land, which usually involves the payment of compensation. Over centuries, conflicts, internal feuds, external marriage, migration, search for a suitable place to grow crops, and social and economic exchange in parts of the landscape (forest, agroforestry, and rivers) have complicated the Mentawai tenurial system. Hence, the land and forests in the park are often subject to multiple, overlapping, and conflicting claims from hundreds of *uma* living inside and outside the park boundaries. The Indonesian state does not officially recognise the Mentawai tenurial system and claims. Instead, the state designated the island as a ‘state forest’ under the Forest Authority (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995), dividing it into various logging concessions and the park.

Within the boundary of SNP, there are more than 10,000 Mentawai (Aji et al. 2015; BPS 2021; Persoon 1995). Most have settled in the villages of Simatalu, Simalegi, and Sagulubbek, located on the island’s west coast. Most people living in the park are, to a large extent, still horticulturalists and dependent on forests for their livelihoods. People obtain daily sustenance from various resources found in the forest. Sago has always been the main staple, supplemented by tubers and bananas. Small fish, shrimps, and sago grubs are protein sources from gathering and fishing in rivers and along the forest margins. Chickens and pigs are the most important domestic animals, consumed and shared only for communal rituals. Non-timber forest products such as rattan are exchanged for ironware, tobacco, clothes, sugar, rice, and other products. Coconut and patchouli have been commercial crops for many years, while, recently, cacao, bettlenut, cloves, and bananas have been the primary source of cash.

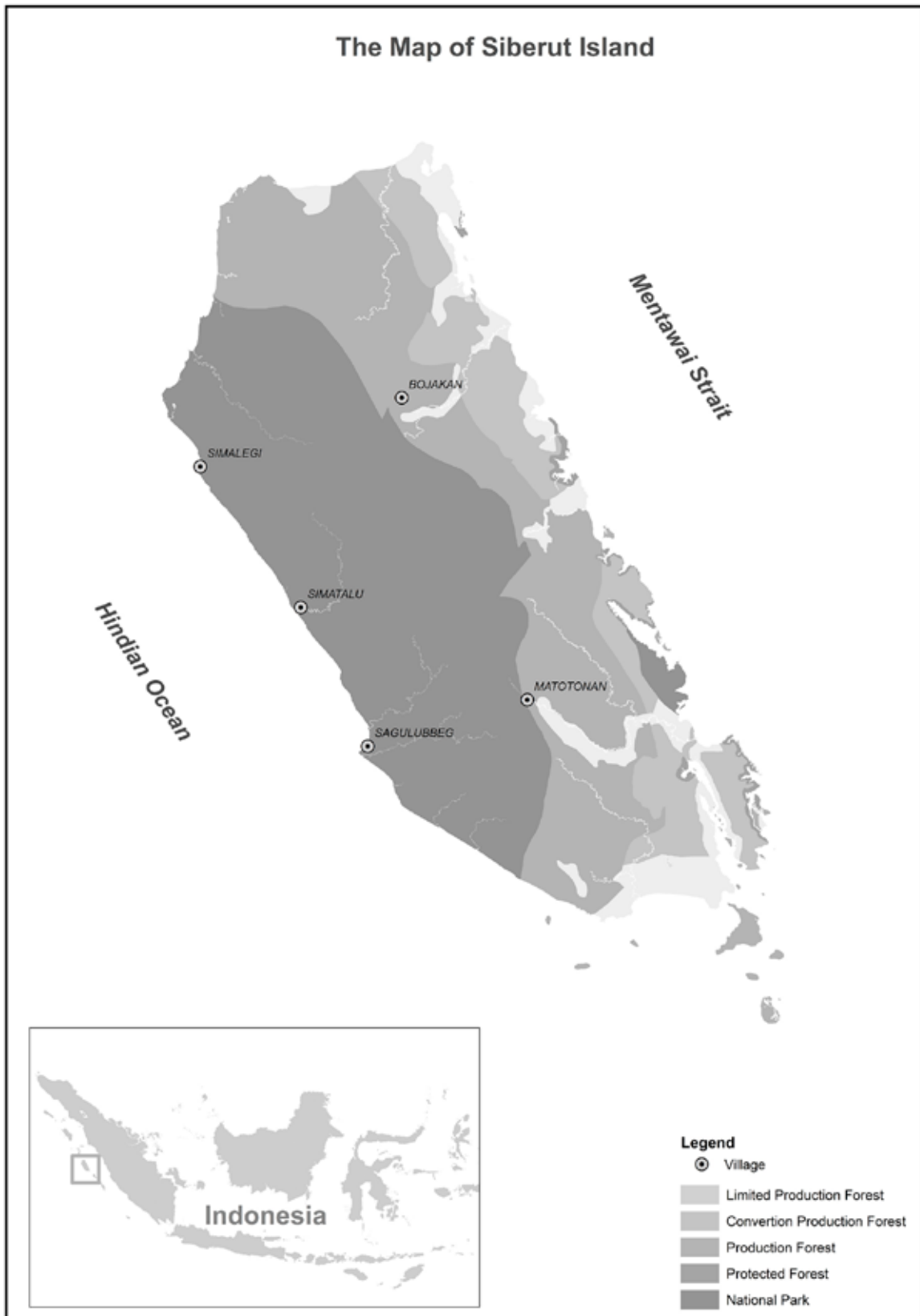


Figure 1.

Opening up forests to establish agroforests, sago gardens or taro gardens is central to the livelihood of the Mentawai, their definition of themselves, and their place in the world (Bakker 1999; Darmanto 2020). Few people have non-farm jobs, such as local government officers, teachers or nurses. All subsistence and commercial activities in the park rely heavily on forest availability, as people have limited livelihood options compared to those living on the East Coast. The narrow coastline and the dangerous waves from the Indian Ocean have prevented people in the park from diversifying and developing coastal livelihoods (gathering sea products, extensive coconut farming, and surf tourism).

THE FOREST: THE HOUSE OF SPIRITS, THE SOURCE OF MATERIALS

The Mentawai refer to the forest as *leleu*. The term connotes an extensive uncultivated spatial area. Physically, *leleu* is characterised by higher altitudes, giant trees, densely uncultivated plants, and nondomesticated animals. Nevertheless, the term *leleu* is neither a simple classification of a physical appearance nor a type of ecological classification or vegetation. The forest is considered an undomesticated and uncultivated space (Reeves 1994). It has been and is still believed to be the space for autochthonous forest spirits (*sikaleleu*), who are a source of blessings (Schefold 1980a). In local myth, the *sikaleleu* were also humans, but due to fears of scarcity, humans and *sikaleleu* carried out a primordial act: *sikaleleu* would become invisible and live in the forest. In contrast, humans would carry on living in the settlement (Schefold 2002). Since that time, they have lived in separate domains but have continued to be respectful of each other. In the forest, *sikaleleu* have their own

'culture', generally an inversion of human culture (Schefold 2002: 442). They have houses, tend wild plants, and keep animals as pets. People can take a *sikaleleu's* pets and plants by making an offering through a ritual. A *sikaleleu* is a source of blessing and life. Hence, humans should maintain reciprocal relations with the spirits and be respectful (Hammons 2010), especially in the forest.

Leleu is considered the space of ancestral spirits, such that when humans die, the soul (*simagre*) is thought to leave the body (*tubbu*) and enter the forest, joining the autochthonous spirits. The soul becomes an ancestor spirit (*sateteu*), a source of blessings, whose guidance is requested by living humans through rituals. However, the soul that has suffered an unnatural death (*pito*) is dangerous (Schefold 1991). *Pito*' wander at the margins of the forest and can disturb people. They emanate power (*bajou*) that causes harm to living humans, especially those unknown to the spirits.

As well as the *sikaleleu* and *sateteu*, various other dangerous spirits are believed to reside somewhere in or around the forest. These spirits have an even stronger *bajou*. People must be careful when entering the *leleu* because every corner contains spirits that can unexpectedly cause illness. The forest is consequently strongly associated with death and danger. People are reluctant to go into the forest alone and stay there. They venture into a patch of *leleu* with diffidence, taking practical and supernatural precautions. Traditionally, the Mentawai are required to follow specific steps before they can extract and transform the forest without any risk of upsetting the spirits. Rituals asking permission from the spirits need to be performed. Activities such as cutting giant trees, collecting commercial rattan, and clearing trees for a new garden always involve a small offering to the spirits (*panaki*). Gathering minor

products (rattan and flowers) may not involve an elaborate *panaki*, but a short utterance to ask permission from the spirits of the forest is undoubtedly necessary.

The forest is a source of life, since the ancestral spirits' and other benevolent spirits' blessings are essential for the growth of a man or woman, a family or an *uma* (Hammons 2010; Reeves 1994). The ability to feed a family, cultivate the forest, and expand the clan depends on the blessings of ancestors and forest spirits. The ancestor spirits are remembered, summoned, and invited to attend life-cycle events (death, marriage, and a new birth) through various rituals to observe their descendants' future growth. In this sense, the forest provides cosmological material for the souls of living humans. The blessings of ancestral spirits ensure the prosperity of future generations. Without the ancestors, life, growth, and the future aspirations of new generations are impossible. Hence, the forest is a space where humans and more-than-human subjects continue reciprocal relations in a regenerative process.

However, the forest also provides the ecological material that makes people's bodies and provides for their needs. The forest is an essential source of food and materials. People collect mushrooms, the shoots of wild palms, and wild fruits in the forest. They hunt large game such as wild pigs, deer, primates, and the pied hornbill (*kailaba*) for food, ritual purposes, and decoration. The forest also provides essential trade items. Calamus rattan (*Calamus manan*) and agarwood (*Aqualaria malaccensis*), two of the most valuable and sought-after products on the local market, are extracted from the forest. Non-timber forest products, including bark for bowstrings and loincloths, and various herbs, climbers and roots for dyes, poisons, and the manufacture and decoration of baskets, utensils, and other objects, are also taken from

the forest, as is timber for domestic construction. The forest is most valued as a place where one can transform undomesticated space into a social space and produce a new garden (*mone*), a settlement or another cultivation site.

TRANSFORMING THE FOREST, PRODUCING HUMAN LIFE

The importance of the forest is linked to how the Mentawai define their socially perceptible qualities as human beings. They commonly identify themselves using phrases such as 'we are forest cultivators' (*kai sipumone*). Their self-identification as forest people is enmeshed in their myth of the origins of the Mentawai and non-Mentawai people (Bakker 1999: appendix; Darmanto 2020: 237).¹ The Mentawai proudly distinguish themselves from others by skillfully making social spaces in the forest by clearing, cultivating, hunting, and gathering. The forest has, therefore, been transformed and classified into specific social spaces according to the objects or species cultivated or extracted from it, the aims and methods of appropriation, and their arrangement. The central socially valued spaces derived from *leleu* are sago gardens (*pusaguat*), forest gardens (*pumonean*), taro gardens (*pugetekkat*), dwelling places (*barasi*), home gardens (*bebe-t-uma*), and coastal zones (*nusa*).

Transforming and cultivating forests are, then, the essential work of the Mentawai. As forest cultivators, the Mentawai chop down swathes of the existing forest to make a clearing. They remove the natural vegetation and replace it with culturally valued products—pigs, sago, taro, fruit trees, bananas, and commercial crops. Once they have transformed this portion of the forest into a social space, they frequently build shelters and may spend a considerable amount of time (even years) in these houses. Thus, through

human agency, forests become social spaces. Human actions transform both undomesticated and domesticated spaces. These changes are reversible. Just as a forest can be converted into gardens or a settlement, the settlement can become a forest when humans abandon it. Converting the forest into cultivation sites is also the basic criterion for the definition of Mentawai personhood. A Mentawai person is, thus, distinguished from non-human creatures such as spirits and wild animals, since non-humans do not make gardens and take what is available in undomesticated space. The main difference between humans and non-humans is that humans produce their food and gardens, while others do not.

Transforming the forest also forms the most basic schema in Mentawai culture: activities that transform natural things into social products acquire value and define them as human. Cultivating and transforming forests is associated with intention, self-conscious activities, and something that will eventually provide a specific result that has already been imagined, taught, and anticipated. This requires planning, and it takes time to produce results. A man does not suddenly come to the forest and slash giant trees and all the shrubs. He must plan with another member of his/her *uma*, or at least with his wife, which part of the forest to turn into a garden and how large the plots should be; he must also predict how much effort this will require. Creating a garden requires activities carried out over a period of years before finally yielding results. A man will undoubtedly discuss his plans with others before making a new garden. A series of rituals is also required. Extensive cooperative labour is not common, but a person needs the cooperation of others (at least his wife, if not other members of their clan) to realise his imagined sago garden or agroforest, as the land he will cultivate belongs

to the group and is only produced within the *lalep* (household) institution (Darmanto 2020).

The Mentawai think that part of the forest is dangerous and should remain untouched, but they do not consciously preserve it in an ecological sense (Persoon 2001; Meyers 2003). Instead, they value forests for the raw materials they extract from them and see them as potential sites for social spaces. The forest is, thus, dotted with named places that have meaning in both a cognitive and affective sense, giving meaning and connection to the person's relationship with it. Some of the forests were once, in fact, abandoned gardens and settlements. Durian trees, jackfruit or sago can be found in the deep forest, delineating sites of former human settlements. Such localities are frequently named, referring to past inhabitants or events at particular spots. Those places are still fondly remembered, evoking affective memories for present-day Mentawai, and are an essential justification for claims relating to particular places.

THE CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN, ICDP, AND THE NATIONAL PARK

This section outlines the making of SNP and the production of space within it. We start with the history of conservation ideas and campaigns, the process of establishing SNP, and how the park introduces zones as spaces for conserving biodiversity. While the park was established in 1993, protecting the Siberut rainforest had been promoted and enacted since the mid-1970s. Western biologists, conservation managers, and various international organisations (IUCN, Survival International, WWF, UNESCO) raised concerns about the island's future when the Indonesian government permitted four companies to extract timber there (McNeely

1979; Schefold 1980b; Whitten et al. 1980). Siberut, for a conservationist, was an 'Island paradise for wildlife and people' (McNeely 1979: 159), where traditional Mentawai lived harmoniously with nature. It is important to highlight the historical connection between the scientists, Siberut's biodiversity, the marginalisation of the Mentawai, and threats from logging operations. This connection indicates that the region's biological and cultural significance first drew conservationists to the image of the fallen paradise (McNelly 1979: 163). The presence of logging caused the lost paradise and justified the need for modern conservation.

Scientists and NGOs expressed the idea of biodiversity protection in a Conservation Masterplan and international campaign, 'Saving Siberut'. They gained support from a section of the Indonesian government. In 1980, the Directorate of Nature Protection (PHPA) of the Ministry of Agriculture began discussing conservation projects based on the master plan. It designated a small area as the nature reserve of Teitei Bati (5600 ha) to protect the four endemic Mentawai primates (WWF 1980). The Teitei Bati area was designed as a strict conservation zone. Human activities were prohibited, and the only permissible forms of human intervention were biodiversity research and species propagation projects. The pursuit of livelihood-related activities was not allowed. However, the forest rangers recruited to manage the reserve, mainly Mentawai, did not enforce the regulations and understood that preventing Mentawai from claiming land in Teitei Bati would be socially awkward and could generate severe conflict. The 'Saving Siberut' campaign began to receive strong support from international institutions soon after the island was officially accepted by UNESCO's 'Man and the Biosphere Programme', which was intended to solve human problems through an integrated

social and ecological approach (Mitchell 1982). The campaign and master plan were pilot projects on a small scale and primarily provided policy recommendations. The area's reserve and biosphere status existed only on paper, as the reserve's management unit was virtually absent.

Siberut, as a conservation space, did not come into being naturally. It was initially produced by biologists and international organisations who cared for the forests and the people. The idea of a fallen paradise and the urgency of protecting endangered primates and other wildlife from logging constitute the policy, regulations, and conservation intervention. The conservation space was enacted when the West Sumatra province proposed oil palm plantations and transmigration at the end of the 1980s. This time, the actors and the discourse enacting conservation were somewhat different. A Jakarta-based NGO, SKEPHI (Indonesian Network on Tropical Conservation), led the second wave of the 'Save Siberut' campaign, lobbied the newly established Ministry of Population and Environment (KLH), and linked up with several government agencies in Jakarta to halt any resource extraction activities (SKEPHI 1992; Tenaza 1990). With the support of scientists working for the 'Saving Siberut' campaign in the 1980s, SKEPHI created SOS Siberut, an international campaign to cancel the plan for the plantation and end the logging operations, forced resettlement, and transmigration. SKEPHI and the SOS campaign successfully persuaded President Soeharto to issue a decree to terminate all forest exploitation projects. The decision was also influenced by international pressure on the New Order Regime development policy, which marginalised Indigenous people and destroyed the environment, and the emergence of global environmental governance (Goldman 1998), notably represented in the 1992 Rio Summit.

ICDP AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SNP

Following Soeharto's decision, the national government started accommodating the idea of eco-governmentality for Siberut. The termination of logging was followed by the US\$18 million Integrated Conservation and Development Project (ICDP) project, a prominent 1990s global conservation initiative supported by international financial institutions (Wells et al. 1999; West 2006). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded the project. The island's high degree of primate endemism, the protection of the forest, and its unique Mentawai society and culture were mentioned as part of the rationale for the project (PHPA 1995: 2). The central premise of ICDP is that biodiversity conservation can be achieved through the sustainable development of economic markets. ICDP was intended to campaign or provide a policy recommendation and to put conservation ideas into practice. ICDP envisioned that biodiversity conservation could stimulate economic development for the Mentawai. At the same time, this development could be integrated into the protection of 'biodiversity' (Wells et al. 1999; West 2006) through non-extractive modes of resource governance such as ecotourism, the harvesting of non-timber forest products, intensive agriculture, indigenous crafts, and other conservation-related enterprises.

The essential objectives and activities outlined in ICDP was establishing a 190 500-ha national park (Barber et al. 1995). The creation of SNP marked the triumph of a two-decades-long biodiversity conservation effort. With lavish funds, ICDP hired hundreds of staff, constructed offices, provided all the necessary equipment (maps, boats and radios), and paid international consultants and researchers to manage the park. In the mid-1990s, the

inhabitants of Siberut had seen many people from the mainland and abroad preparing maps, conducting surveys, training, and monitoring Siberut's biodiversity. ICDP claimed that educating the Mentawai about the national park was critical for conservation success (PHPA 1995), illustrating the process of environmental subject-making (Agrawal 2005). The project then contracted a local NGO to increase the Mentawai's awareness about the national park's aims and the importance of biodiversity conservation. The local NGO—YASUMI (Yayasan Suku Mentawai)—consisted mainly of Mentawai but primarily contracted the young and inexperienced. The ICDP awareness programmes were a form of cultural engineering and social intervention, which were as oppressive as the establishment of zonation. They suggested that the Mentawai needed to learn about nature and the possibility of connecting with the forest, the land, and surrounding environmental objects.

While ICDP promoted development, SNP's immediate effect was the introduction of the 1990 Conservation Law. YASUMI and the SNP staff were trained to socialise others about the park and conservation. They informed the Mentawai that the 1990 Conservation Law is the legal framework for establishing the park. The hunting of animals and the presence of humans were not to be tolerated in the park. The Mentawai, especially in the villages of Sagulubbek, Simatalu, and Simalegi, understood the YASUMI explanation of the rules and purpose of SNP in terms of the restrictions and prohibitions. The ICDP understood the historical connections of the Mentawai to the forest, plants, and animals and their dependence on forest cultivation for centuries but paid little attention to the *umas'* claims to the land. The Mentawai eventually perceived that YASUMI was selling their ancestors' land to SNP

(Eindhoven 2009: 172), which meant that their traditional practices were not only prohibited but also unlawful activities.

The attitude of the SNP staff could have been better calibrated to gain sympathy among the local people. With uniforms, modern devices, and a lack of understanding of the local culture, the staff frequently told villagers that the land inside the park now belonged to the Indonesian state and, to a certain extent, was a global possession, standard rhetoric used by conservation agencies (see Li 2007). Most of the SNP staff had Minangkabau origins, seen as arrogant, dominant, and superior people who always looked down on the Mentawai (Persoon 2002). They are renowned for their solid Islamic tradition and see the religion as an integral part of their identity, in contrast to the Mentawai animism and their choice of Christianity (Eindhoven 2007). Moreover, the Minangkabau are the mediators and representatives of Indonesian state policy, which positions the Mentawai culture as backwards, underdeveloped, and marginal. The conjunction of state policy and asymmetrical ethnic relations compels the SNP staff to feel superior and impose the Conservation Law without contextualising the local culture.

The 25-year ICDP plan was abruptly terminated after just six years of activities. An ADB report (2001) cited that the project needed to increase community awareness and provide possible alternative livelihoods. The report partly addressed the project's failure by blaming it on the absence of established and capable NGOs and the inexperience of YASUMI in mediating between local communities and the park management (Eindhoven 2009). The report also claimed that the Mentawai were unwilling to adopt the project strategy to transform their lifestyle of subsistence agriculture into a sustainable market economy. However, the

main reason for the failure was articulated in economic terms (Wells et al. 1999; ADB 2001). As a development project funded by a loan, ICDP needed to be more effective and efficient in generating income in the long run. In contrast, the Mentawai saw the failure of ICDP as resulting from the absence of their consent regarding their land and forest. They had never been asked or seriously consulted about any plan or activities implemented on their land. Another issue was the abuse of project funds. The Mentawai became seriously irritated and disappointed to see project money lavished on luxury infrastructure, facilities, and expensive research and consultants. At the same time, they got only a tiny amount of money, cigarettes or a cup of coffee in return for their participation (Darmanto 2011).

Despite being terminated after just six years, the ICDP project has had a lasting impact. SNP remains a powerful institution on the island. The Indonesian state and international conservationists used the park to mould mental structures and impose common principles of vision (and division) of land, forests, and nature that altered how the Mentawai see themselves and their forest. Furthermore, the establishment of the park introduced and produced an entirely new understanding of space, both discursively and materially (Brosius 1999; West et al. 2006). Even though the ADB report did not mention a single word about the impact of the zonation system, SNP created Siberut as a space symbolically and materially through conservation topologies and zonations.

THE ZONING SYSTEM: HOW CONSERVATION PRODUCES SPACE

While the Mentawai see land, forests, plants and animals as part of cultural reproduction and as representing a productive, positive nexus

of social practices and mutual imbrication, conservatism conceptualised Siberut as a distinct space marked by cartographic boundaries and strict regulations. To reconcile the need for biodiversity conservation and the need to preserve people's livelihoods, the WWF masterplan (1980) and UNESCO (Mitchell 1982) divided Siberut into three zones (Figure 2). The first was the 250 000-ha development zone, where commercial logging was permitted with regular monitoring and control. Agricultural development could also occur in the development zone according to strict regulations, along with the collection of rattan, the extraction of timber, and the planting of commercial crops. All hunting with nontraditional weapons was prohibited, and killing Mentawai gibbons, Mentawai macaques, and dugongs were strictly forbidden. The second zone was for traditional use. All traditional activities, such as hunting with arrows and collecting non-timber products, were permitted in the 100 000-ha traditional zone. The Mentawai could clear 0.3 ha of land on gentle slopes and establish a forest hut, but not a settlement. The last zone was reserved for the Siberut Nature Reserve (50 000 ha). In the reserve zone, some subsistence activities, such as collecting fruits and rattan, were permitted, but not for commercial purposes, and it was impossible to establish new agroforest areas (*ladang*).

The establishment of ICDP and SNP followed WWF's proposal under the Biosphere Reserve framework, where development and conservation are reconciled through a zoning system (PHPA 1995; ADB 1995). Yet, the ICDP's zoning system was slightly different to the WWF zoning. ICDP divided the entire island into two main zones: the support zone (213 500 ha) and the park area (190 500 ha) (Figure 3). Like the WWF development zone,

the support zone was reserved for development activities such as commercial logging, settlement, and agricultural activities. The park area was divided into three zones. The sanctuary zone (56 000 ha) was reserved strictly for biodiversity protection. Collecting forest fruits and minor forest products was allowed, but hunting and making new agroforests were prohibited. In the traditional zone (100,000 ha), taking forest products, hunting, and opening new agroforests were allowed if traditional methods were used. However, the traditional zone was not for human habituation. Human settlement was restricted to the 30,000-ha park village zone along the island's west coast.

WWF and SNP have been revised recently to accommodate local development needs. Currently, SNP has a more complicated zonation system, dividing the area into six zones (Figure 4). The three main zones (forest, sanctuary, and traditional use) resemble the WWF and ICDP zonation with slight modifications. The largest is the forest zone (109,710 ha). In this zone, people can harvest non-timber products, gather food, and hunt animals using so-called traditional methods. Using a gun, chainsaw, or modern device to slash trees is strictly prohibited. The sanctuary zone (34 021 ha) is the core zone of the park for natural protection, where all human activities are strictly prohibited. The traditional use zone is focused around the valley containing the major rivers in the park, where humans cultivate taro, tend pigs, plant sago, and grow cash crops such as cacao, betle nut, and patchouli oil.

The three other zones are new additions to provide a legal platform for the Mentawai to extract forest resources, construct infrastructure, and rehabilitate the degraded land surrounding the settlement. The special zone covers 1781 ha of coastal land along the west coast of Siberut, where people can fish, establish small businesses,

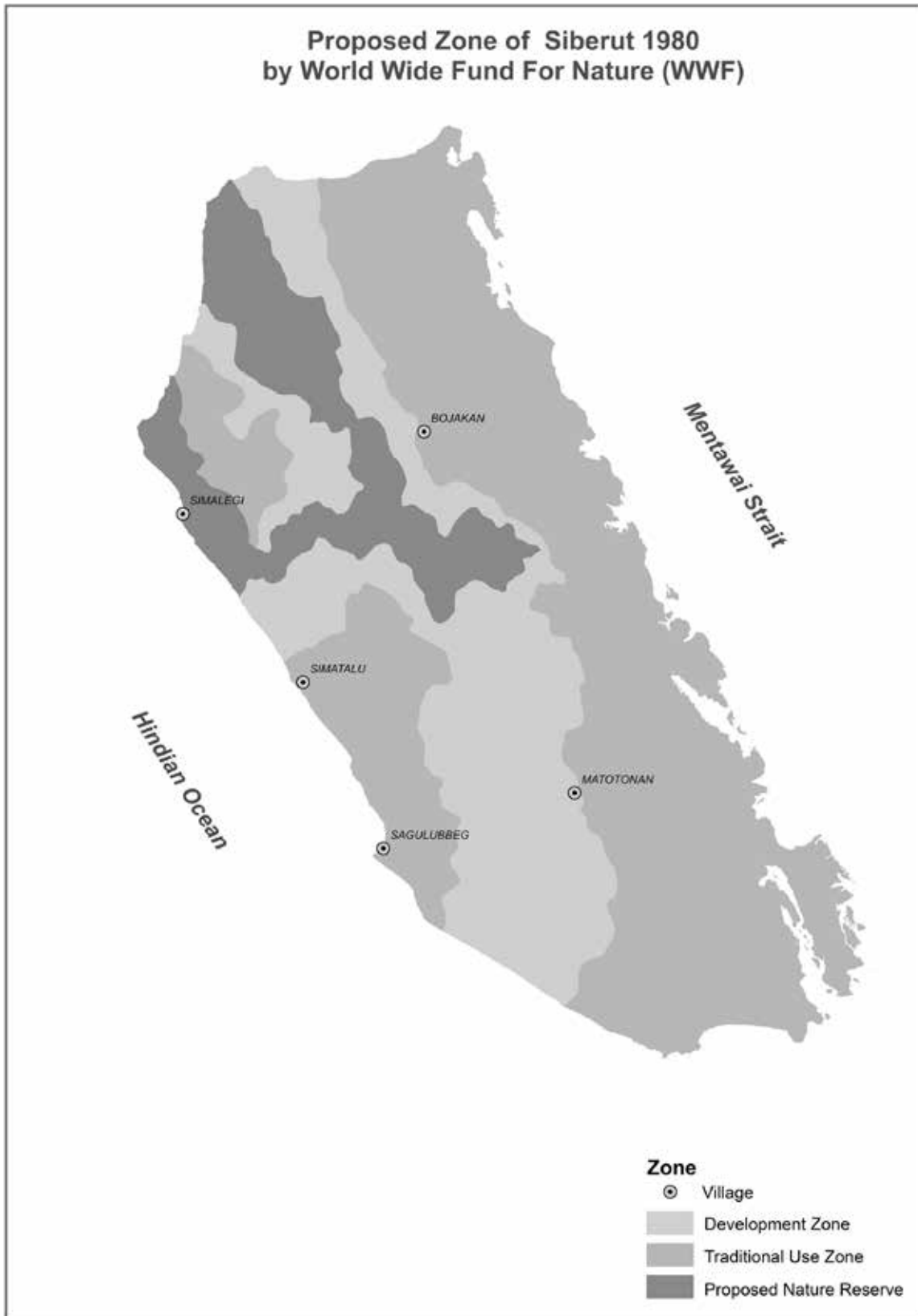


Figure 2.

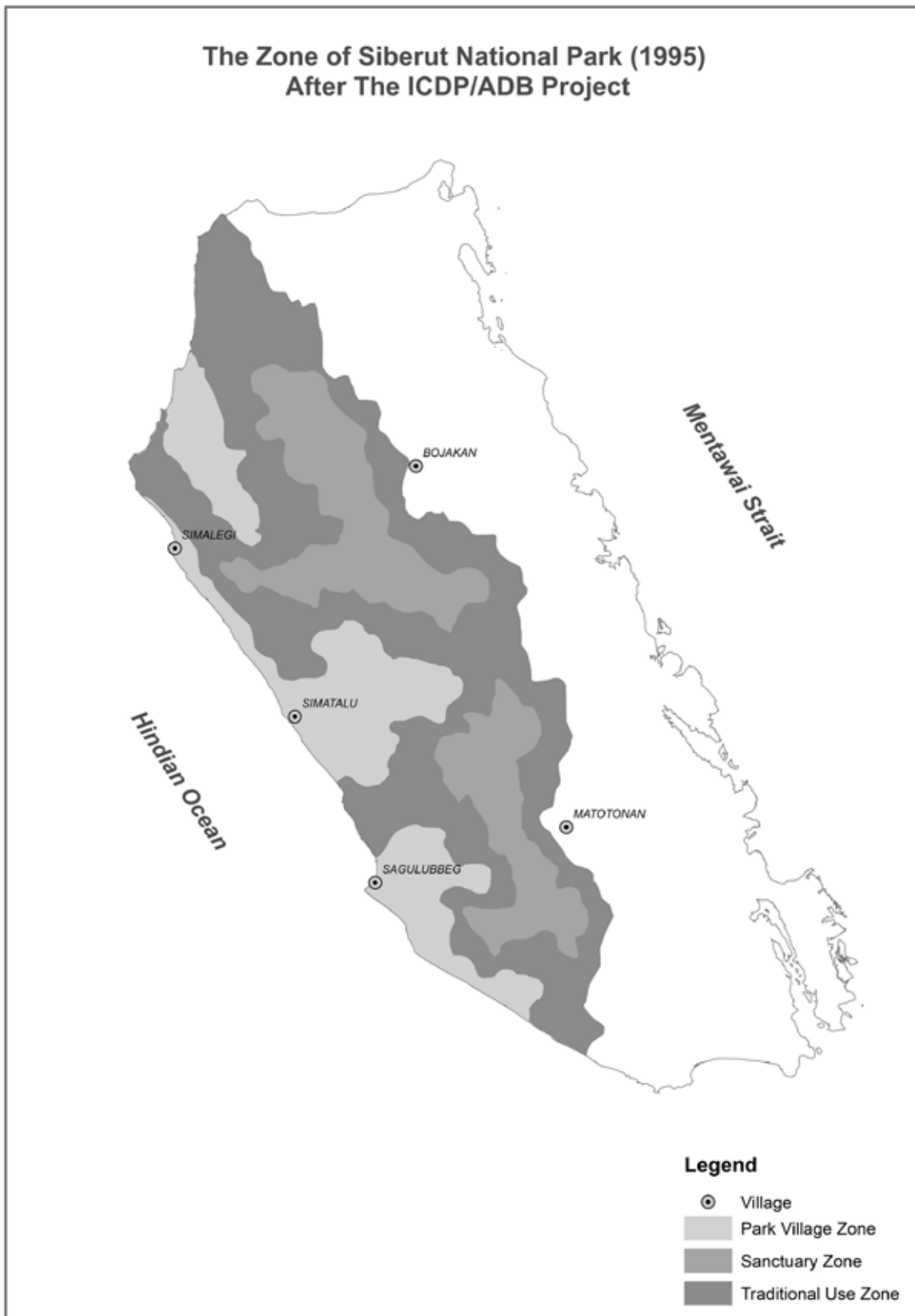


Figure 3.

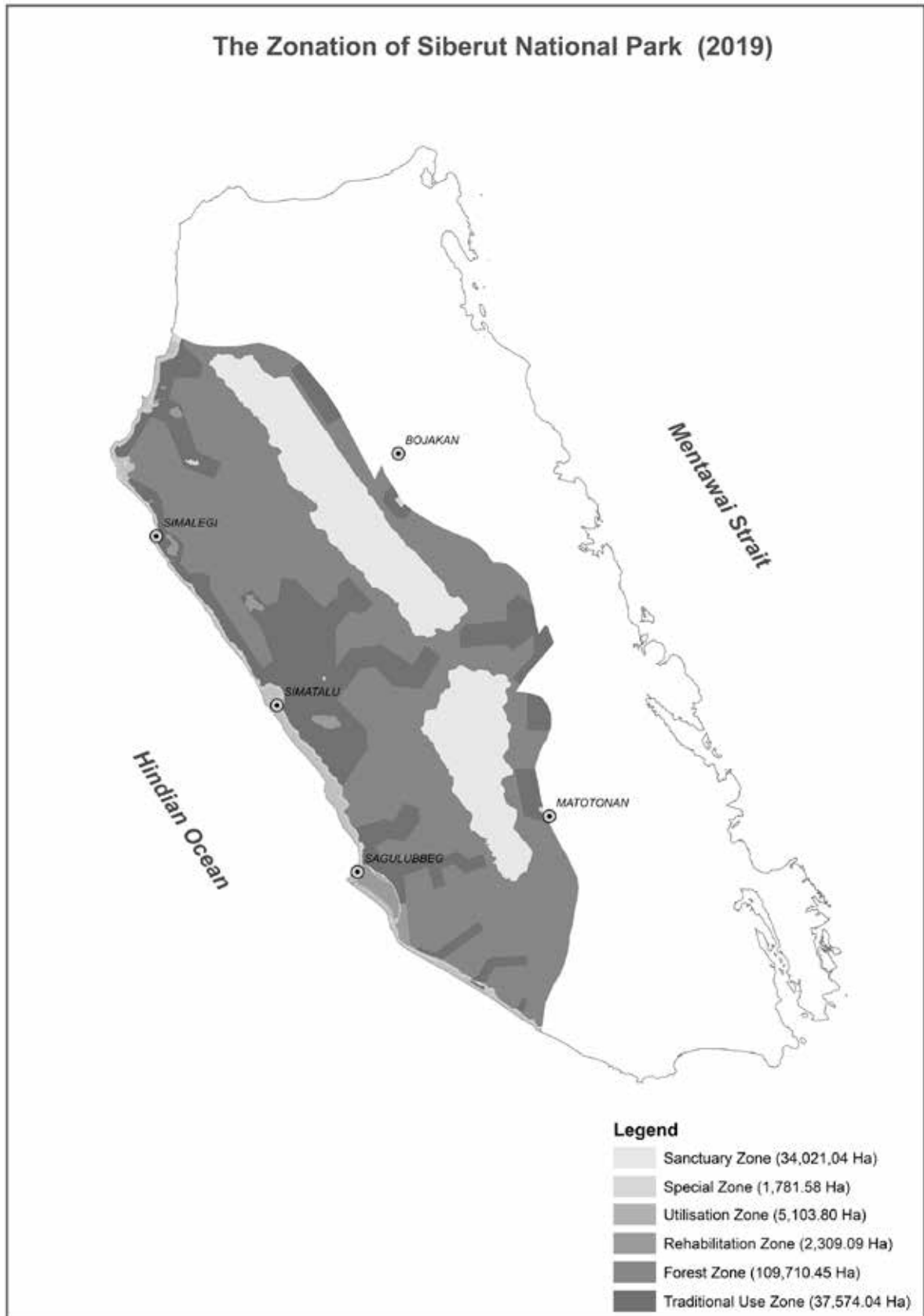


Figure 4.

and construct schools, medical facilities, and other government services. The utilisation zone is also reserved for the future development of villages and government services. It contains hamlets, villages, and traditional settlements, and covers 5103 ha of land. The utilisation zone accommodates the establishment of human habituation and activities, which was legally prohibited in the 1990 Conservation Law. The last zone is the rehabilitation zone, designed to restore degraded forest after agricultural activities. SNP uses the rehabilitation zone to deliver conservation and development projects such as organic farming, replanting, and restoration activities.

While the revised zonation system is intended to accommodate the interests of the Mentawai, the fundamental assumption of the necessity of zonation for biodiversity protection is firmly intact. The zonation system produces a space profoundly different from the Mentawai land tenure and their environment's emic classification and division. The Mentawai have never traditionally believed that all plants, animals, and other living and non-living objects should be conserved and divided into specific zones (Schefold 1970). The entire island is the historical sedimentation of their genealogy, identity, material processes, and social values necessary for the creation of life. Understanding the forest as a site that produces human life is extremely difficult to reconcile with the conservation ethos, which focuses on keeping animals and plants untouched or prohibiting land transformation (Keller 2008). Thus, the zoning system makes no sense to the Mentawai. More bluntly, it turns their world upside-down, rupturing the long-standing nexus of forest-human-non-human relationships and disrupting social histories. It constitutes what Zerner (2003: 48) calls a 'nature plantation', where Mentawai practices and production

are controlled, delineated, and expected to be only traditional and support conservation. Meanwhile, the area beyond SNP is an 'economic plantation, where private companies carry out extractive practices and pursue economic development under state control. With zonation, land, forest, and human activities have become spatially and ontologically separate and legally bound. Zonation is a world model that ignores the complexity of Mentawai social activities and relationships with the forest. It conceptualises nature and forests as separate from people's livelihoods, cultural history, and daily social practices. It defines what people can and cannot do in bounded space and creates an imagined space where humans minimise their intervention in nature, imposing Western imaginaries on the separation of nature and culture (Strathern 1980; West et al. 2006).

THE MIDDLE SPACE: PEOPLE, PARK, AND LIVELIHOOD PURSUITS

The park has, unsurprisingly, become the most unpopular institution on the island (Eindhoven 2009), subject to resistance and contestation. However, the Mentawai have not overtly rejected the park and conservation activities. Open conflicts are exceedingly rare. In the 30 years of the park's history, not a single Mentawai has been criminalised for taking something out of the park. In part, this is because SNP is a 'paper park' (White and Courtney 2004), where conservation rules and regulations have never been seriously enforced nor implemented, and the presence of conservation does not significantly alter the daily relationship between the Mentawai and their forest. The notion of a paper park does not necessarily imply that SNP is crumbling due to a lack of funding. While it does not have a lavish budget like ICDP, the

park receives steady funding from the central government, and the number of permanent staff has increased over the years (SNP 2017). In recent decades, the park has set up more field offices in a few villages inside the park and hired more park guards.

Although the Mentawai may have lost their sense of legal ownership over their ancestral land, the park has neither fundamentally altered their relationship with their forest nor *de facto* prevented them from accessing natural resources. Park officers might have confiscated a few pet primates from villagers, but they have never applied physical force or actual violence to enforce conservation rules (Peluso and Watts 2001; Dowie 2011). Instead, they allowed the Mentawai to live in the villages inside the park and tolerated all forest-related activities. There is a general understanding that enforcing the conservation law or carrying out armed patrols would provoke social unrest and may not be the best strategy to convince the Mentawai to accept the idea of conserving biodiversity. The forest is still the space of ancestral and autochthonous spirits where humans continuously practice reciprocal exchange (Schefold 2002, 1980; Hammons 2010). The Mentawai continue to practice the old ways of opening forests for fruit gardens and other cultivation sites. The park is not present in the daily life of the Mentawai. The large swath of forest inside the park is still *de facto* claimed, extracted, and utilised by all *uma* to expand their clan, generating life and increasing human quality and value (Darmanto 2020). The people in the park are still the forest cultivators, continuously transforming the forest as their ancestors did for being the Mentawai. The paper park allows the Mentawai to use the forest for social and cultural reproduction.

The park staff only occasionally visit the villages and carry out conservation activities. Many of the park's activities are focused

on assisting agricultural development and biodiversity monitoring. The activities could include small-scale projects such as local training, making plant inventories or handing out development packages. Forest guards occasionally perform forest patrols or boundary checks, but they do almost nothing if they find some new gardens inside the park. They might talk to the people about the importance of conserving forests, but are generally reluctant to enforce the Conservation Law. The Mentawai have generally welcomed the park's activities and view the park staff as just doing their job as civil servants. So long as the park officers do not openly claim the land, prevent people from creating a new fruit garden or arrest a hunter, the villagers do not openly reject or resist their presence. Indeed, they commonly ridicule the park staff through jokes and rhetorical questions regarding the true purpose of the national park and why primates should be protected. The park is constantly derided, and the Mentawai always ensure that the SNP staff feel it. Villagers always cite and exaggerate the claim that the Conservation Law would punish anyone even if they took just one leaf from the forest. The rejection of the presence of SNP staff in Simatalu, quoted at the beginning of this article, might be an extreme expression of this resentment.

CONSERVATION SPACE AS MIDDLE GROUND

Contemporary relationships between the Mentawai and the park and conservation interventions, in general, are closely shaped by the broader political and economic processes. In recent decades, better education and transportation, and the proliferation of development and the surf industry have rapidly connected the Mentawai to the broader

world transforming the way the Mentawai see themselves and others. These transformations have come with expanding communication, transportation, mobility, and cultural exchanges (Bakker 1999; Hammons 2010; Eindhoven 2019) and brought new desires and aspirations. The Mentawai are now more concerned with sending their children to institutions of higher education on the mainland, building a brick house, and accessing modern medicine than confronting representatives of SNP. They are willing whenever an opportunity arises to participate in conservation or SNP activities. The benefits of conservation work might be marginal, sporadic and temporary, but they can be substantial in the local context, complementing earnings from forest cultivation. The willingness of the Mentawai to work with the park also reflects a broader phenomenon, whereby the Indigenous community develops a social craft to sustain its pursuit of development and cultivate ties to outsiders with access to jobs, cash, power, and influence (Conklin 2020: 344; High and Oakley 2020). The new aspiration includes participating in park management. The villagers often claim that the park is better off employing the Mentawai, who know the forest, animals, and plants, than non-Mentawai, who cannot even walk in the mud. The aspiration to participate in park management illustrates an attempt to pursue recognition of their identity by state agencies (Eindhoven 2019).

While Mentawai engagement with SNP is mainly aimed at material benefits, it does not prevent a strategic collaboration that exceeds pragmatic objectives. Occasionally, the Mentawai are willing to collaborate with the park and conservation agencies when encountering larger extraction projects outside the park (DTE 1999, 2006). In 2019, a few *uma* from South Siberut supported SNP. A symbolic cultural performance was employed

to show that they share a common ecopolitical agenda of conserving Siberut natural forest when the Ministry of Forestry issued a permit for a company to establish a forest estate and a proposed oil palm plantation in Central Siberut (Jakarta Post 2017; Harbinson 2019). The Mentawai often employ environmental rhetoric, share conservation agendas with national and global environmentalists, and are willing to fill the 'tribal slot' (Li 2007; Trouillout 2003: 7) to build alliances and seek political support from conservationists. They understand that the presence of the park gives Siberut a national and international profile and exposure that can help them when they come into conflict with timber companies or oil palm plantations. Even those who support resource extraction frequently join conservation projects and deploy environmental rhetoric to increase their bargaining power in negotiations with timber companies. The changing and dynamic positions and responses to SNP are part of their strategy to navigate their relations with both conservation and extractive agencies from outside, and their answer to the division of their ancestral land into both protected and extractive zones. Another example lies in the engagement of an *uma* in Siberut with conservationists through informal relations and even a campaign to protect primates (Puailiggoubat 2017; Cahyaningrum and Setyawan 2021). Mentawai responses to the park and conservation illustrate the complexity of Indigenous subjects: they simultaneously conform to and deviate from Indigenous images and imaginaries (High and Oakley 2020: 238).

Furthermore, the park is not a static institution. Decentralisation and the global movement of Indigenous people also tip the balance of power relations between the park and the Mentawai. The Indigenous movement since the mid-1990s (Persoon 1998; Li 2000;

Afiff and Lowe 2007; Davidson and Henley 2007; Darmanto and Setyowati 2012) and the recent political dynamic of customary rights issues (Rachman and Siscawati 2016) have strengthened the position of the Mentawai in asserting land claims when they encounter conservation agencies. The power balance has forced the park to adjust its approach. The park never criminalises people hunting primates by enforcing the Conservation Law. The power balance also encourages the park to engage with NGOs, anthropologists, and social activists, learning the benefit of understanding the land rights issue. They somehow *de facto* recognise Mentawai's rights over their land and resources. The encounter has forced the park to abandon law enforcement activities and change the direction of park management policy. The park is difficult to differentiate from any other state institution, given that it mainly provides small-scale and nonviolent development activities rather than enforcing forest patrols or capturing a hunter.

The Mentawai, SNP, and conservation agencies are in constant negotiation and have arguably developed the park as a contested space (Faier and Rofel 2014) or a 'middle ground' (White 1991; Conklin and Graham 1995), a pragmatic and temporal space of accommodation, cooperation, and resistance. The park has a programme, a state budget, and the power and authority to conserve the Mentawais' forest, and they need the Mentawais' participation and acceptance. The Mentawai have customary land rights and *de facto* acknowledgement from the park. Conservation strengthens the Mentawai and the park by asserting their mutual interest in conserving biodiversity and claiming ancestral land in the face of extractive activities outside the park. The middle ground they occupy is, of course, fragile and uncertain. However, at least

they can avoid open conflict and create a space where the conservation campaign and activities are welcomed, even if not entirely accepted and implemented. One of our interlocutors from Simatalu succinctly summed up the relationship between park staff and the Mentawai as follows:

We are both looking for food in the same forest for our families. We are both Indonesian citizens. We both understand that the forest is important. People of the park have kids going to university. We want a better education for our children, too. They live from protecting our forest. We do our work in the forest to continue our lives. They would not evict us. They want to return home safely and reunite with their kids and friends after work. They are afraid of doing nasty things as some did in the past. They know that they need us. They try to make friends with us. They enjoy the banana and taro we cultivate in the forest when they visit us. Sometimes, they give us something. Probably to persuade us not to go hunting. We do not need them to continue our life. We do not need them [to tell us] how to prepare for our future. We have been cultivating forests for generations and will continue to do so. As long as the park allows us to do the things our ancestors did, we have no problem with them.

There is a general view that the SNP staff are government employees carrying out their conservation duties to feed their families and obtain a better life. The Mentawai are pursuing the same thing by clearing land, cultivating forests or hunting animals for the markets on the mainland. The notion of 'food and family' here is key, since it succinctly illustrates how the middle ground between the park and the

Mentawai is embedded in the pursuit of a better livelihood (Highly and Oakley 2022) by both sides. It also shows that Mentawai ideas of human and forest relations remain intact even though they slightly accepted the presence of the park in their place.

While there have been prominent social accommodations in the park, if a random Mentawai were asked about the park or conservation NGOs and their activities, they would say that the idea of conserving forests, animals, and plants is still strange. The accommodation and acceptance of the park illustrate that biodiversity conservation has come to permeate local language and speech, but, at the same time, unsettled the way the Mentawai develop relations with the forest. It shows how the park becomes a reality and is envisioned to penetrate the local realm. Mentawai's willingness to participate in park activities reveals that the park is not only a discourse, but already part of the social fabric of Mentawai life, which has cosmological and material effects in producing space and identity. However, we might also argue that the Mentawai have wisely tried to accommodate conservation ideas and practices in their cultural reproduction to reduce the pressures of conservation and to defend a space for survivance (Rubis and Theriault 2020) and the resurgence of Indigenous world-making practices (Escobar 2016) in the context of an ongoing imbalance in power relations.

CONCLUSIONS

We have described two contrasting ways of producing a forest as a space. For the Mentawai, transforming the forest into a social space and establishing connections with the non-human entities in the forest are central to the production of human life. Since the campaign 'Saving Siberut' and the establishment of SNP,

however, the Mentawai have continued to confront different ideas, images, and relations with the forest, which starkly contrast with their own. For biodiversity conservationists, a forest is a natural space constituted by maps, boundaries, a list of protected animals, regulations, and policy pronouncements for protecting wildlife. Moreover, conservation activities highlight the production of conservation space, encompassing global ideas, images, discourse, networks, campaigns, development, finances, project support, and desired social practices (Lefebvre 1991; Smith 1996). The park has become a new cosmology of space—a way of seeing and being in the world through the lens of nature protection (Brosius 1999; Watts 1993; West 2006; West and Brockington 2006). The encounter between the Mentawai and conservation intervention reveals two completely different visions of space and two fundamentally different visions of the forest-human relationship.

These visions represent a contraposition of humans, nature, and life (Keller 2008), with mundane social practices and engagement situated between these two polarised visions. Neither the park nor the Mentawai is an unchanging agency dictating spatial relationships; they are involved in constant negotiations. The Mentawai have realised that they do not have enough power to cancel the presence of the park or challenge the Conservation Law but recognise their strong position in the contemporary discourse on Indigenous rights and decentralisation. Both know contemporary political relations prevent park officers from employing Conservation Law, force, and actual violence in their duties. SNP is a paper park (White and Courtney 2004; West and Brockington 2006) and does not conform to a standard storyline of the displacement, dispossession, and expropriation of local populations that can be found in the political

ecology literature of parks in Africa and elsewhere (Peluso 1993; Neumann, 1998; 2004; Brockington 2002; West et al. 2006; Kelly 2011). We contend that the status of SNP as a paper park is not caused mainly by a lack of resources, poor design or ineffective enforcement. Instead, it is both produced by the Mentawai's various strategies to survive against a backdrop of powerful conservation institutions (Rubis and Thériault 2020) and the changing political-economy dynamic of the Indigenous people and the outside world, especially after the national decentralisation process aligning with the global Indigenous movement. The Mentawai do not feel defeated by the presence of the park as other Indigenous/local groups around the globe have felt (Keller 2008; Dowie 2011). Their current cooperation with the park and other conservation initiatives not only points to their aspirations and desires to cultivate relations with external conservation agencies (High and Oakley 2020), but also illustrates their confidence in continuing their 'world-making' (Escobar 2013, 2016; Cepek 2008).

In extending the critical literature on the violent creation and impact of protected areas, our article indicates that the shift in access, subjectivity, political relations, and social practices regarding protected areas (Kelly 2014; Kelly and Gupta 2016) does not always worsen Indigenous people's livelihoods, lives, and well-being. Instead, our case inadvertently points to the way forward to transform existing conservation practices. Various scholars (Büscher and Fletcher 2020; Massarela et al. 2023; Perfecto et al. 2019; Kashwan et al. 2021) call for a radical transformation for violent, racialised, and militarised protection to create a socially just, democratic, inclusive, decolonised, and regenerative form of biodiversity conservation. Although these are significant and timely

endeavours, it is equally crucial that conservationists and anthropologists alike document the transformations that have already occurred in protected areas (Kelly 2014; Kelly and Gupta 2016) in which Indigenous people's agencies play crucial roles without simply elucidating the latest jargon, ideas or arguments.

The Mentawai might not offer a sophisticated radical critique of Western ideas of human nature underlying conservation and the global political-economic structure underpinning the existing conservation agendas. Nor do they openly challenge the structures of powers in the park and park management as radical social movements do. Nevertheless, they force the national park to accommodate their way of relating to the forest and the more-than-human world in the forest that resembles the ideas of regenerative ecology (Kashwan et al. 2021; Altieri and Toledo 2011). They have pushed the park to acknowledge their land rights and recognise the co-existence of human and non-human nature, avoiding legal enforcement and violent approaches and accepting the direct democratic Mentawai's governance of the forest as recently promoted by convivial conservation scholars (Büscher and Fletcher 2020; Massarela et al. 2023). In doing so, the Mentawai reshape the park as a new space where their interest in engagement with biodiversity conservation is part of the Indigenous way of being (Cepek 2008, 2018), whereby forests and other natural resources are continuously a part of the production of human life. Paying careful attention to the negotiation space might open our eyes to the diverse and prosaic forms of Indigenous politics in protected areas already before us.

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NOTES

- 1 We wish we could describe the myth fully here. The myth recounts that the ancestors of the Mentawai, Western, and mainland people were siblings, but had different attitudes towards working in the forest. The Mentawai and the mainland people's ancestors loved working in the forest, while Westerners' ancestors loved working with steel, computers, and reading books. Nevertheless, the mainland people's ancestors followed in the footsteps of Westerner ancestors, learning how to make machines, but forgetting how to live in the forest. In this myth, the forest not only affected social relations between the ancestors of the Mentawai and others, but also explained their differences.

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