

Aga Szydlik (/aga-szydlik)

Keepers of the rain forest

Project info ▾

Focus of the projects was to document life and culture of the Mentawai tribe. The Mentawai are an ancient tribe that for thousands of years has lived on Siberut Island, an isolated jungle island lying some sixty miles west of Padang, Indonesia. With Indonesian independence in 1950, an aggressive government campaign was launched to modernize the Mentawaians of Siberut. Traditional cultural practices such as tattooing, tooth filing, and the wearing of loincloths were forbidden because they were considered "pagan" and "savage." In the 1990s, cultural oppression against the Mentawai took on more brutal forms of forced relocation from jungle villages to resettlement sites in government-created villages. Mentawai religion (shamanism) was outlawed, and police stripped practicing shamans (sikerei) of their medicine bundles, sacred objects, loincloths, and their long hair. Several Mentawai clans made a courageous decision to leave their ancestral villages and move deeper into the jungle in an attempt to retain their original culture, living in the remote interior of Siberut succeeded in escaping the disruptions and dislocations of the government.

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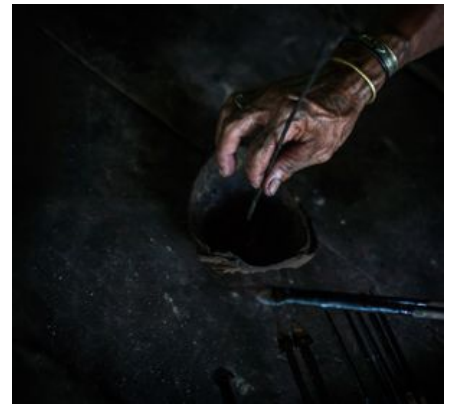
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