

Nabiha & Thom

# Who not fear the Sea

The Hantalee family of the Urak Lawoi



# Kita suka ramai.

(Traditional song of the Urak Lawoi: „We like fun.“)



Who not fear the Sea

A portrait of the Hantalee family

During our journey through Malaysia to Thailand in February 2009, we had the opportunity to meet and photograph the Urak Lawoi (people of the sea) who are the natives of the Adang Archipelago. This was possible because we were introduced by our friends Heike and Christian, who left Germany years ago to live with the Urak Lawoi, learning their language and even being adopted as children by the tribes eldest.

The Urak Lawoi were confronted with „civilization“ roughly a generation ago. Nearly all are illiterate and from our perspective, they still live like in the Stone Age. In Thailand they are a neglected mininority driven away from their island home by well connected businessmen from the mainland, who use trickery, threats and violence to clear the way for more and more tourist resorts. These illegal practices are known to the Thailand Government, but help is not in sight. It seems the Urak Lawoi are in a race against time to keep their natural way of life and their culture alive, with tourism so strongly invading their environment.

We dearly thank Heike and Christian and all members of the Hantalee family („who not fear the sea“) for this special and exceptional meeting and for the cooperation we will continue.

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Ma (Mae Bun), 70 years



The Urak Lawoi

The Urak Lawoi (People of the Sea), once immigrated from Indonesia, live in the holiday paradise of Thailand.

In the 19th century, they followed their magician To Kiri from Sumatra to the Andaman Sea. In small rowing boats, with children, animals and all belongings, they were searching for new fishing grounds. To Kiri, not only shaman but also adventurer and businessman, was trading in seafoods. For him the Urak Lawoi, being excellent divers and swimmers, were perfect travelling companions.

In 1909, the governor of the southern Thailand province Satun asked his friend To Kiri to populate the Adang Archipelago. At that time, Thailand and British Malaysia were correcting their borders. With a „Thai population“ the governor could claim the resource-rich archipelago for Thailand. A great distance to the mainland, no natural harbor and unpredictable storms during the rainy season have until then prevented the population of the Adang Archipelago.

The Urak Lawoi were the only ones able to survive on these remote islands. Depending on season and the main wind direction they made camp in protected bays. They lived on the beach, built temporal huts from natural materials and made a living from what the island would provide. Living with the tides, they did not fear the sea. They respected their environment and also the spirits of nature and their ancestors.

This Paradise, once discovered, did not stay untouched for long. The fishing industry hit first: Turtle, lobster, sea cucumber and fish were hunted to extinction by increasingly sophisticated methods. In this, the Urak Lawoi were more victims than offenders: After traders got them used to drugs like sugar, coffee and alcohol, they had to sell their skills. The traders also brought with them new fishing methods: Trawl netting and dynamite fishing destroyed the reefs.

In 1975 the Adang Archipelago was declared „Tarutao Marine National Park“. Again to the disadvantage of the Urak Lawoi: They had to give up their settlements on the islands Adang and Rawi, and camping, an integral part of their traditional way of life, was forbidden. They were only allowed to live on the small island of Lipe.

But this island is a true pearl in a turquoise sea. Years ago, land speculators saw the possibilities. By trickery, but also with threats and violence, the Urak Lawoi were relieved of their land ownership papers. They have to move again. Tourists from all over the world are now relaxing in bungalows built over the ruins of a paradise.







Johan, 52 years





Emam, 7 years









Nau, 59 years & Johnny



Mida, 70 years





Gata, 41 years







Rosebel, 52 years



Freida, 2 years

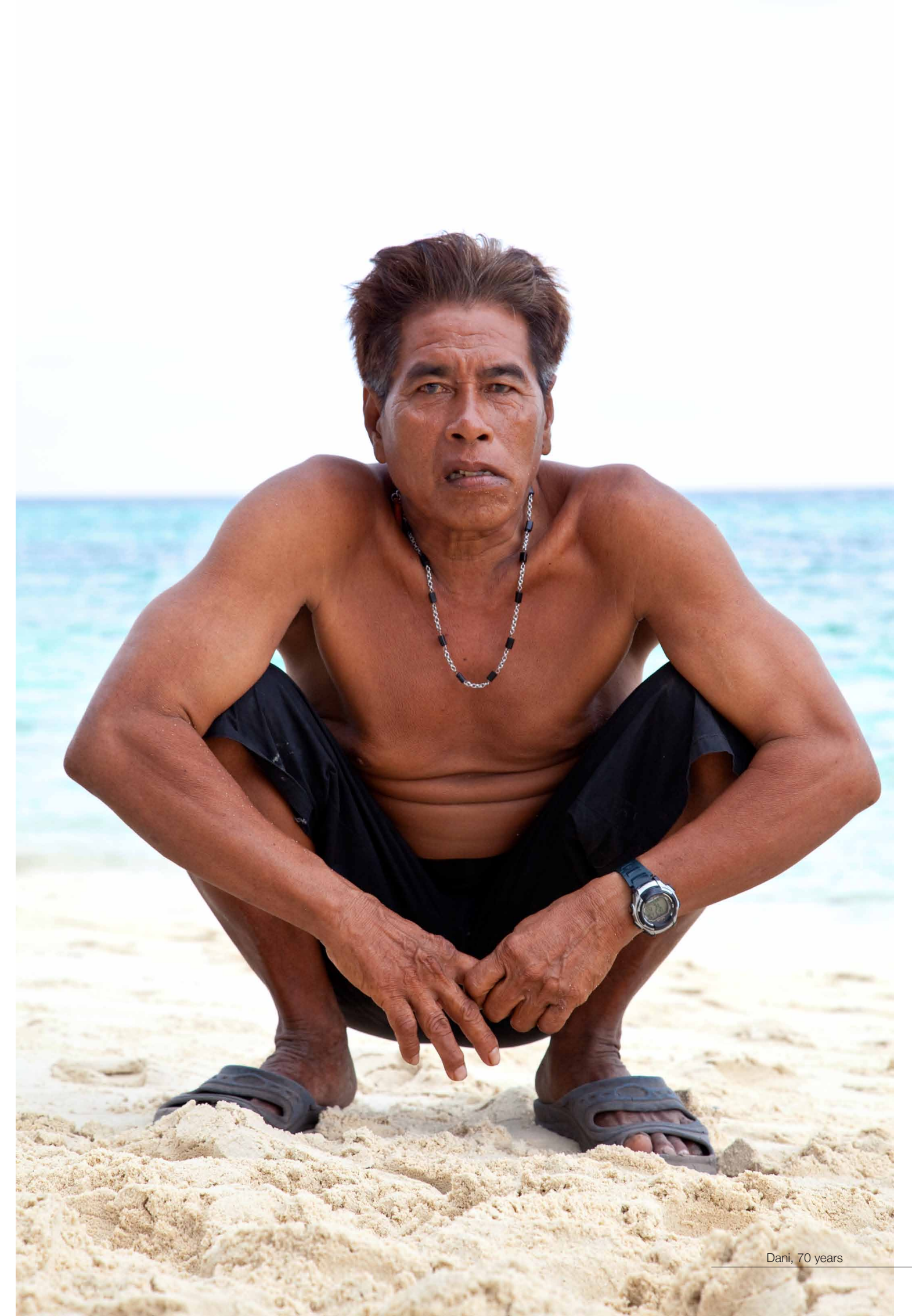








Dawin, 49 years



Dani, 70 years









Som, 9 years



Wog, 60 years









Tiau, 11 years



Gan, 23 & Khan, 2 years









Nim, 11 years



Ridet, 6 years





Jo, 35 years







Birth, 55 years











Ni Pun, 34 years



Punsa, 20 years





Jelly, 35 years







Pun, 40 years



Tamanun, 18 years





† Wun, 23 years





Bao, 21 years



Be, 11 years













Nedg, 29 years



Mitcheao, 23 years



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