

Chapter Three

Origins and Sociality

Kaman luwa lait mres wkafa fyen wadyén wanak;
'Poisonous snakes do not fight with each other'
(Lourens Kemesrar, Haha, 12 November 1995).

This Imyan proverb stresses the importance of sociality. The evil snake (*luwa lait*) may be any of the varieties of insidious poisonous snakes that live in the swampy areas where Imyan have their sago gardens and hunting and fishing grounds. These small poisonous snakes are thought to be able to project their poison over a fairly large distance (within a range of ten metres) to the victim who, when hit, will start feeling tired and dizzy and probably die within a couple of hours. When the snake attacks, Imyan say that they fight (*wkafa*) with the snake. The vicious snakes are generally associated with a damaging power sent by other people. People who encounter such a snake take it as a sign that someone else, capable of applying certain evil techniques (*lait*) wants to inflict sickness or death on them.

These alleged senders of evil are typically persons who are regarded as infamous. Establishing such an accusation is a complex social matter in which many different concerns, strategies, opinions and emotions converge. From an analytical point of view, all imputations of *lait* can be seen as a strategy of rejecting and excluding a person or a group of people. The accusation is successful only when there is consensus about the imputation of infamy. The proverb suggests that those people who enable these evil powers will never besiege each other; they apparently have a sense of solidarity or sociality. The meaning of the proverb is that this sociality among evil people should also apply

to normal humans to gain strength and to protect each other from evil powers.¹ As Lourens Kemesrar explained the proverb:

If these evil snakes can be friendly to each other, why can't we humans get along? This is worrying because we have reason and *lait* is disorderly. If we would not be hostile to each other and continuously be at odds with each other there would be no *lait* or Satan in our midst to weaken and kill us.

Lourens Kemesrar, November 1995, Tape 81B: 051-068

This chapter outlines the Imyan sense of order and sociality that in current debates is evoked by *adat* and comes through readings of the past as it is known through origin stories, myths, and memories of past forms of social organisation and rituals. The claims about the order of bygone times suggest that *adat* holds many truths for those who resort to it. Two crucial aspects of *adat* are *wuon* rituals and *lait* practices. The core meaning of the *wuon* rituals appears to be the order in social life and the fruitful exchange with the spirits.

Central to the *adat* tradition is its explanation of disorder and anti-social behaviour as brought to evil powers (*lait* and *suangi*). Most significant, these evil powers have disrupted the cosmological order which made the Imyan suffer from loss of knowledge until the present-day. Being a major threat that is hard to contain, the secrets that make *lait* work play a dominant role as people's reflections on their own and other peoples' histories as these events evoke pictures from the pre-colonial past and pre-Christian morality. As such, they turn people's attention to matters of the past that deviate from the widely held view that formerly people were able to peacefully live together and effectively work together as opposed to the present-day lack of co-operation and general disorder.

1. Krenak lists a similar proverb and comments the following on its meaning: 'Ruthless or ferocious animals do not do wrong to their friends, let alone man who has intellect' (1986a: 80-1, my translation). Another proverb on evil powers, snakes and sociality is also found in Krenak (1986a: 101).

The images and values of order that the past evokes are mostly brought to the fore in reflection on the currently perceived disorder of society and decline in moral standards. In evaluations of events, reference to *adat*, *wuon*, and *lait* typically reflect moral issues. The image of a bygone order evoked by reference to past ideal states of affair is most concretely recounted in origin stories. When these origin stories move from mythological eras to more recent migrations and settlement patterns, the emphasis on the disorder in society as well as declining fertility of the land increases. Imyan feel that they have moved from stability to instability and in most accounts of why this has happened, people refer to ancestors who have transgressed the *adat*, to the use of evil powers, to the increasing lack of morality, and, most crucially, to the devastating impact of lost knowledge affecting the potentially bounteous exchange between humans and spirits. The disorder will come to a head at the end of times which Imyan expect within the near future.

Below, I begin with a discussion of Tehit and Imyan origins and pre-colonial forms of social organisation among the people that now live together in the village of Haha. I then discuss the deterioration of morals related to the abandonment of the initiation cult and the perceived increase in the practice of death-dealing *lait* attacking society. There are Imyan who suggest that without initiation, men will remain women and will never become as strong, disciplined, and powerful as their forefathers. After a recount of the way Imyan got to know the positive powers of *wuon* (some basic aspects and the structure of *wuon* are discussed in Appendix A), I discuss its antithesis: *lait*. As *wuon* played a crucial role to contain *lait*, the current chaos and people's lack of morality is related to a perceived rise in *lait* attacks killing children and inflicting social disruption.

The disruption is also related to men's concern about their status, in particular those men who are attempting to reassess their control over the world. In the explanation below, we will see that initiation practices involved the ritual exchange of goods and knowledge by a select group of initiated men from different descent groups and settlements. It promoted individual male status and the celebration of hierarchy based on divisions between those who know and those who do not know the secrets. *Wuon* provided men with crucial knowledge

on how to communicate with sky beings and use expertise to combat evil powers.

The secrecy surrounding *wuon* creates a sense of power and magic beyond the reach of non-initiates. Despite the ‘loss’ of *wuon* teaching and practices, the ritual remains prominent in current millennial beliefs of the Imyan. Presently, Imyan perceive their loss of control over their sky beings as the result of the introduction of Christianity, and this loss contributed to the present predicament of their society. Before going into the details of this break with the spirits, let me first spell out the confusion entailed in the earthly order.

Tehit Origins

As indicated in the Preface, Imyan consider themselves as belonging to the Nasfa (‘hill people’), together with the Yatffé, Sawyat, and several Maybrat groups. Though the Nasfa share the tradition of *wuon*, the different groups trace different origins and, in addition, have their own histories. When concentrating on the oldest known origins, Nasfa informants readily distinguish between those groups that are autochthonous (*na fobi, orang asli, orang pribumi*), basically referring to humans whose first ancestors came from the ground where Nasfa people now live, and those who have settled and became Nasfa at a later stage. Also considered autochthonous but subject to many migrations, are the groups that came out of the *kefi* tree, usually located to the north-west of the Teminabuan sub-district.

The *kefi* people (*na kefi*) resided in a large hollow tree until they were disturbed by a by-passer named Mlikflé who was out hunting with his dog. When they were close to the tree the dog started barking at the tree. Curious to see what the dog had discovered, Mlikflé came to the tree and examined it. He heard voices from inside the tree and did not know whether these voices belonged to wasps or humans. He did not know what to do and he went back to his house. The next day he returned with his axe to cut the tree in order to see what was inside. A large number of people and large black ants came out of the tree and

spread in different directions. Among those who trace their origin to the *kefi* tree include the following Tehit people: Salembau, Sarefe, Saflesa, Sesa, Solosa, Asmuruf, Sagisolo.²

Imyan often name these groups Salembau or *na kefi* and stress that they are among the first inhabitants of the Teminabuan area. Furthermore, *na kefi* did not know about *wuon* but built small houses in which men collected huge amounts of food that were ritually shared, usually after wars or raids. This complex of celebratory feasts is known as *sidadik* and is considered the most important and most typical Tehit cultural expression.³ According to Imyan informants, *sidadik* was, in comparison to *wuon*, little more than a gathering of Tehit groups to celebrate their kinship ties and to eat huge amounts of food and to dance and sing. The feasting would last for several months.

Tehit informants agreed that *sidadik* was less sacred than *wuon* and that it did not entail the teaching of secret knowledge and communication with spirits. Tehit people learned about *wuon* after Imyan introduced it into the area. In particular the *na kefi* were successful in adopting the new initiation practices. They did not, however, raise initiation houses but instead sent their boys up into the hills in order to get schooling in *wuon* among Nasfa people. Because Tehits failed to properly conduct male initiation, Imyans classify them as *na sa dli* or *bangsa perempuan* ('female group') as they are not vested with the powers of initiation to achieve 'pure' manhood.⁴

Other Tehit groups that do not belong to the *kefi* group have origin stories that mention encounters with the Wamban people who descend from Syoklo Wamblesa who lived at the island of Ni, close to the jetty of the present town of

2. Two stories about the *kefi* tree were also entrusted to Kamma in the 1950s (in Miedema 1995b: 15-17, 18-20). My Imyan informants were not able to recount these stories with similar details and stressed that as immigrants they were not supposed to know all the facts about these autochthonous people.

3. Onim (1988: 45) writes that the last *sidadik* was staged at the end of the Second World War, to celebrate the victory over the Japanese soldiers that were billeted in Teminabuan. When Dutch soldiers came to scare away the Japanese from such places as Teminabuan, they rewarded local people who collected the ears of the Japanese they killed.

4. See also Van Rhijn cited in Miedema (1995b: 32 n. 1).

Teminabuan.⁵ Some trace their origins to the Onin Peninsula, at the other side of the MacCluer Gulf and claim that they came through eastern coastal lands to the Kaibus. The Momot people are an exception to this. Early Momot ancestors came out of a cave near the later place of Wanurian. The first to encounter the Wamblesa people were the Thesya and Momot people. Some Momot informants suggested that the Momot gave the name Wamblesa to Syoklo and his people. They said that the Wamblesa or Waflesa means ‘the oldest, the first’. Though they are generally recognised as the first inhabitants of the upper stretches of the Kaibus estuary, some Wamblesa informants traced their origin to the Saman people who lived in the area where the village of Waigo was later established.

A discussion of the detailed and confusing histories of the Wamblesa, Momot, Thesya groups, as well as other groups that are generally classified as Tehit, is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁶ Interesting to note, however, is that the telling of ancestral myths and the production of genealogies has increasingly become a matter of concern to people of the Teminabuan area in light of the need to claim land as a prelude for precedence in the eventual payment of land compensation. In 1995 and 1996, plans were made to hold a large meeting (*sidang akbar*) to resolve, ‘once and for all’, the ownership of lands in and around the town of Teminabuan: the villages of Kohoin, Wermit, Wersar, Aibobor, Seribau, and Kohoin; and the following descent groups: Thesya, Salambauw, Momot, Wamblesa, Kamesok, Safledrar, Kondororit, Flassy and Kondjol. Announcements of the *sidang* indicated the importance of resolving these controversies because they hamper development. To the best of my knowledge, the *sidang akbar* has not been held yet, because knowledgeable men do not want to recount histories in public and would rather discuss historical problems individually. For the same reason, written historical accounts produced

5. *Rajas* of Rumbati are said to have built a warehouse on Ni Island. The Dutch built a larger structure in the late 1940s on the foundations of this warehouse.

6. During my visits to Teminabuan, Wermit, Wersar, and Seribau, I collected numerous origin stories of different Tehit groups. I did this partly by discussing stories that were collected by Kamma in the 1950s (see Miedema 1995b). A collation of these earlier versions with more recent ones would reveal interesting aspects of the politics of tradition, in particular in the light of the increasing importance attached to precedence in

for the *sidang* are often difficult to follow because ‘secret’ parts are left out.

Some stories also have an identity referent, in that they show that certain people are in fact Javanese who first came to the island of New Guinea and only later came to be known as Papuans. Such stories are rare however and contrast sharply with Imyan stories that suggest that humankind and its cultures originate from New Guinea, the location of the Garden of the Eden (see below). Other narratives assert that a certain group played a vital role in the arrival and advent of Christianity. Most also have a cosmic referent, in that they insist that well before the arrival of missionaries, the people of Teminabuan had been close to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. All these origin stories have in common assertions of close relationships with sites of power (God, Christian doctrine, Java, Garden of Eden) and the belief that this power is intrinsic to Papuans.

While the most important detail in other Tehit groups’ histories is their claim of precedence, which is backed up by early contacts with the Wamblesa people, the Kondjol people of the village of Wersar suggest that they arrived even earlier. Some Kondjol leaders have come up with interesting histories. I discuss some of these details because they show the creative use of recent knowledge. Currently, many Kondjol people are changing their surnames to Onim or Onin to stress their origins and ethnic identity as their migrations histories relate to the Onin Peninsula, where they lived together with the Anggiluly people.

Among the Onim or Kondjol people, many claim that almost every important and heroic historical event in the Teminabuan area was due to the powers and influence of their ancestors. Jusuf Onim (1988: 26) claims in his MA thesis that it was due to the efforts of the Onim ancestor, ‘Raja Angguok’, that missionisation in Teminabuan, Ayamaru, Aitinyo, and Ayfat got off the ground so quickly and smoothly.⁷ Presently, there is a strong Onim/Kondjol political

claims for compensation for land use by the government and recent in-migrants.

7. See Kondjol (1996: 4). Spelled as Anggok, this *raja*, is mentioned by the government official Dumas in his 1911 Memorandum for the *Afdeeling West Nieuw-Guinea* (1992[1911]: 12) as the only person among the people living in the Kaibus River area on whom the Dutch traders and government officials could count. In current local histories of Kondjol people, Angg(u)ok plays a heroic role. Part of these histories is a song about his courageous travels in the area between the Kaibus River and the

lobby to claim the status of first comers and thus ownership of Teminabuan town and the Kaibus River. Their heroic history also wants that the Onim/Kondjol people have contributed to the advent of Christianity. In evidence, they often refer to the important relations that the Onim/Kondjol people had with *rajas* and the sultan of Tidore (see below).⁸

Some go even further to suggest that the Onim/Kondjol history is still more authentic and more deeply grounded in larger spheres of power. Ado Kondjol (37), assisted by Tofilus Kondororit (42), recounted in detail a history claiming that they descend from Javanese. Their having possession of a Javanese wavy double-bladed dagger (*kris*) and a small Buddha statue afford further proof of this. Alluding to common descent, the Kondororit side with the rulers. Others who recognise the Javanese as having shifty characters and hold 'Java' responsible for the oppression of Papuans and keeping them from access to wealth and autonomy, accused the Kondjol of collaboration when I told them the story. The story that was told to me by Ado Kondjol goes as follows:

We originate from the island of Java, at Tanjung Priok, the present-day port of Jakarta. In the tenth century, there was a war between Islam and Buddhism. This was a religious war [*perang agama*]. Buddhism lost and was dispelled to Bali. Our ancestors kept a *kris* and the [Buddha] statue of a

Seremuk River. Apparently, he was very successful in capturing people whom he sold to *rajas* at Onin and occasionally to *rajas* at Salawati (see Wanane 1991: 55). He is often portrayed as a mighty man who ruled over the coastal area stretching from Inanwatan all the way to Cape Sele. As Cator (1942: 81-83) states, such entrepreneurs should not be seen as 'governors'. Cator points out that their main function was not to exercise authority but rather to maintain a trade monopoly or *sosolot*. Also my Imyan informants contest the Kondjol claim of Angg(u)ok's authority and his realm of power. According to them the coastal area from Sele to the Seremuk River belonged to the *raja* or *kapitan laut* of Sailolof. Their claim is supported by Van Hille who reports that during his travels in the area around the turn of the nineteenth century, the head of Sailolof was a 'Kapitan Laut who acknowledges the supremacy of the *rajas* of Salawati and whose authority extends along the coast west of the Seremuk River to Sele and further north into the Strait of Sele. The people there recognise him as their lord' (1906: 457, my translation).

sitting woman. Because of this war, our ancestors, named Onain, fled to the island of Ternate.⁹ They sailed to Ternate with a sailboat [*perahu layar*]. They arrived at Ternate in the afternoon at around 4 p.m. and encountered the Anggiluly people.

During the first night, the Anggiluly people accommodated the Onain people and the next day our ancestors built a house for themselves. In the early nineteenth, a religious war broke out. The Onain and Anggiluly people wanted to leave the island because they were afraid of Islam that was laying siege over the whole of Eastern Indonesia. Where could they take refuge? Each group loaded its possessions on a sailboat and headed to Irian. They already knew where Irian was because they had been there to get birds of paradise.

At 8 a.m., they left from the beach of the island of Ternate, met the sultan, and steered towards Irian. In the middle of the night, it was so dark that they lost track of each other. The Anggiluly people went to the island of Ega. In the morning they saw an island shaped in the form of the letter O. They called it Onin. The Onain people travelled to Kowiai and saw that its shape was similar to a fez-like cap [*songkok*]. They named the island after the Ternate word for this cap: Kowiai.¹⁰

On Kowiai, Onain bore a son whom they named Kaimin, freely after Kaimana, the place where they then resided.¹¹ After having lived for half a century in Kaimana, they met people who came from the interior. They asked them if they could get birds of paradise for them. In exchange, they would give them the *kris*. The next morning they all went into the forest to find birds of paradise. Onain and his son Kaimin and the rest of the family travelled to Onin and stayed at the island of Ega from where they also

8. See Konjol and Sesa (1986).

9. On my question to which religion their ancestor belonged, Ado answered that she was not sure but that they must have believed in the Christian God and therefore did not want to side with the Buddhists and the Muslims.

10. Kowiai is the southern coastal stretch of the Onin Peninsula, east of the Kamrau Bay, the mouth of Arguni Bay. It is an area that played an important role in early Seram Sea trades (see Van Logchem 1963: 13, 39-40, 55; and Visser 1989b).

called in at the coast at a place called Werabuam.¹² From there they sailed to the north and landed at the northern shores of the MacCluer Gulf at the mouth of the Waromge River. There Onain died and was buried.

While still residing at the first landing place, Kaimin encountered the Yaben people who lived at a place that later became the village of Konda. Kaimin could not communicate with the people whom he called Na Morait. Later the Anggiluly people also arrived at the Waromge. They decided to travel further inland. Anggiluly went ahead and arrived at a place called Sengelion.¹³

Kaimin followed after he got a son named Faibi. Before he arrived at the banks of the Waromge River, Kaimin saw a red-coloured tree trunk floating in the sea. He took the trunk as a sign for where to steer. He sailed all the way to the Kaibus and landed at Sengelion. He entered the tidal forest by sailing up the Naya Creek. There he saw smoke rising up from the island of Kenari.¹⁴ Kaimin went there to see who was making a fire. He arrived at a place that he named Werabuam. He met a man named Drimis. The name Werabuam means ‘public harbour’ and was later changed into Teminabuan. At the banks of the Wermit River, Kaimin planted a sago tree, which he had taken from the place at the Waromge River. Kaimin decided to settle at a place called Tengki. There he and his wife, Gwayak, died. Their son, Faibi, married with Drimis Kondjol-flé. Later, the Thesya people arrived. They were afraid to be killed by the Anggiluly people after they asked for fire without knowing the Patipi language spoken by the Anggiluly people.¹⁵

11. Kaimana is the name of an urban centre at the Kamrau Bay.

12. Ega is a small island off-shore the southern coast of the Onin Peninsula. Werabuam is situated at on the mainland of the Peninsula, west of the present-day town of Fak-fak.

13. Informants located Sengelion at the western bank of the Kaibus, opposite the creek that leads to the village of Wersar.

14. Kenari is the island that others, like Thesya and Momot informants indicate as Ni Island.

15. This is reminiscent of a conflict that arose between the Wamban and Kondjol people as recorded by Kamma (in Miedema 1995b: 8-9, 46-47; see Miedema 1995a).

The story continues to describe how the cultural neighbours of the Kondjol or Onim and Anggiluly people settled in the area and established relationships with the alleged first comers. In the part of the story reproduced above, we see a creative blend of recent knowledge about Java, quite some idiosyncratic details about name giving (as other knowledgeable persons would indicate by saying that, for example, this is *omong kosong* - 'twaddle'), the historical role of sultans, the importance of Kowiai and Onin in Seram Sea trades, and the importance attached to religion. In this course of this thesis it will become clear how these subjects also play a role in Imyan recountings of their history as well as in their reflections on the present-day situation.

Ado and Tofilus obtained bits of information on these historical events from their friend and relative, Jusuf Onim. Onim, reverend and teacher at the Theological College 'I.S. Kijne' in Jayapura, is seriously engaged in collecting local histories and finding other pieces of evidence in order to document the precedence of the Onim people. In a recent paper (1997) he advances his arguments with much reference to historical documentation provided by Sollewijn Gelpke (1993, 1994).¹⁶ The issue raised here indicates how different versions of local history reflect the ongoing process of creating histories. I now go on to show in more detail some Imyan histories and the motivations behind the creation of meaningful history.

16. Onim presented this paper at the Perspectives on the Bird's Head conference in Leiden, October 1997 but it was not included in the conference's proceedings (Miedema, Odé, and Dam 1998). The paper is currently prepared for publication in *Irian, Bulletin of Irian Jaya Development*. The essay and other narratives relate in different ways to migrations from the Onin Peninsula to the south coast of the Kepala Burung Peninsula. Onim's paper contains useful historical information and also provides a beautiful example of how history is constructed in present-day Irian Jaya. An analysis of this text, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, should take into account the bits of Onim history as presented in Onim's MA thesis (1988) and the collection of stories compiled and edited by Miedema (1995b).

Toror and Imyan Origins

Different Imyan refer to different localities, names and trade relations, but they all share one origin, namely Toror. Toror is the perfect state of knowledge that is related to a time when mankind was still close to sky deities and maintained good relationships with the dead. Toror is the beginning and the powerful and vital core of all beings, and the undisclosed world of the dead and sky beings known only by ritual leaders (*na tmak*) and other initiated men (*na wuon*). Below I describe that Imyan histories suggest that in former or mythological times people were powerful and lived in this state of order that has never since been equalled. Besides sharing one place of origin, the Imyan also have in common a history of contact with the sultanate of Tidore and are generally eager to recount the introduction of the ingredients for the development of the *wuon* cult. I then go on to discuss the formation of networks among the four different Imyan groups that later came to live together in Haha. Before I recount Imyan histories it is necessary to emphasise that the influence of Christianity is great and that Imyan usually do not draw distinct lines between their own narratives and biblical stories.

The Imyan stories I present below are versions that are not always accepted by knowledgeable men who are considered to hold the truth and are mostly *na wuon*. While these men agree that different accounts of historical events exist because of differences in oral traditions between descent groups, they all suggest that they know all these different vantage points and that only they are the ones who really know history. The *wuon* specialists use their knowledge competitively in disputes when land, wealth, or relationships are at stake. In such contexts, the knowledgeable men may twist information to serve political ends. Significantly, the parts of the histories that are considered most important in these contexts deal with wars, early disputes over property, and accusations of the use of *lait* in order to kill others to get access to wealth and land.

Knowledge of such events belongs to the category of *kahan* ('secrets') and was generally not entrusted to me. The specialists considered parts of the stories that I present below and in other chapters of this thesis as untrue.¹⁷ They sometimes accused the narrators of being *yomon* ('one who reveals *kahan*'). In political contexts, identifying someone as a *yomon* introduces the possibility that he or she will be put to trial by powerful *na wuon* (see Appendix A). In the context in which I collected and discussed such stories, I have always been careful not to put my informants in such a vulnerable situation. On the other hand, the carefulness of non-initiates and non-powerful people not to release knowledge in an uncontrolled way was sometimes laughed at by *na wuon* who then provided me with the necessary details.

Significantly, the last living generation of *na wuon* is also inclined to become more relaxed about *kahan* because they see that the depletion of ancestral knowledge, which is held to account for the decline in moral standards, needs to be counteracted by revealing secrets to their sons. All specialists, however, stressed that they cannot reveal certain parts of their knowledge about spirits or the primordial perfect state of being called Toror (see below), or else they and also the rest of society, or the whole world, will be overtaken by disaster. Perhaps less radical, and in any case not under control of the *wuon* elite, is the growing decline of knowledge and deterioration of morals from the moment that Imyan left Toror.

Na wuon suggest knowing the details about Toror but shroud it in mystery. This mystery, in particular in the present situation in which living *na wuon* are exceptional individuals who retain the meaningful tradition of a once-dominant elite, leads to a multitude of conclusions about Toror. The themes discussed

17. This does, however, not mean that they would object to this dissertation, because, as they often explained to me, the value of *kahan* depends on the context of who is telling what story and thereby insults or threatens others who, on their part, would then suggest that the story-teller is not telling the truth. In fact, this remark suggests that the specialists know the game they are playing and that, perhaps, their monopoly over true knowledge has more to do with the powerful play of secrecy than the real existence of secrets. In any case, the specialists who entrusted 'secrets' to me allowed me to also play the game and analyse their stories and enter into debate with other specialists as well as non-specialists.

below are derived from this richness of ideas which reflect the ways in which Imyans observe the current status of their system of knowledge and the uncertainty they feel when they compare their *ilmu wuon*, with *ceritra Alkitab* (stories contained in the Bible'), *pengetahuan* ('modern knowledge'), and *ilmu Barat* ('Western knowledge', the secrets held by whites). What has become apparent is that during Toror everything was in the proper condition. There was no division between dark and light, between the sky and earth, invisible beings (spirits) and visible beings (humans), and people's lives were untroubled.

Toror is the original cosmic totality as represented by Omalyce for the Iqwaye, as discussed in Chapter 1. As Omalyce represents the original complete cosmos (Mimica 1988: 75), Toror appears to picture for Imyan completeness and unity before the present world came into being. According to Flassy (1985a: xii-xiv), this period is called *qolm mqsya* in Tehit, meaning 'the carrying spirit or the guardian spirit'. What Flassy means to say is that Tehit believe that in Toror there was only one spirit. Some informants explained to me that I should understand this *ni mres* ('one spirit') as *kahan* ('the truth, the core secret, the first and most powerful'). This primary state of being is seen as a world were one can get to only when all power and lost knowledge is returned to Imyan.

Most informants readily compared Toror with the Garden of Eden, which indicates how easily they could map biblical locations onto local images of Toror. Moreover, widely held beliefs, mostly cherished by Kemesrar people, build on the non-Toror, earthly origins of the Mejefat group as well as the stories that stress relations between *lait* and the Klaflé immigrants. A story that Seppy Kemesrar (37, Haha) told me illustrates this and some of the variety of ideas held about Toror:

The old *na wuon* suggest that at first there was Toror. We do not know about Toror because it is their secret. But from the Bible we know that God created man. Maybe he did create man but not all human beings. From there, the soul [*thalye*] went to other people. Adam was created directly by God. I indeed believe that Allah did this. He created Adam in His own

image. Adam was similar to God. But I don't believe that after that, God created all other human beings. He did not give *thalye* to every single person.

What we see in the world today or what we hear from the many stories that are doing the rounds here, there are people who originate from a certain place and others from another place. This means that God created humans as animals, some appear here, and others appear there. Maybe God gave the breath, but where humans would appear was not restricted to the Garden of Eden. For example, the *kefi* people came out of a hole in a tree. There are also people who came out of the ground, like the Mejefat Lumna. How can this be?

These people are not children of God. They are animals who might have got their *yhalye* by God but they were not created in His image. He brought these beings into being but he did not create them. There is difference between bringing into being [*menjadikan*] and creating [*menciptakan*]. God created Adam but he brought humankind into being. All our genealogies go back to Adam. I therefore question the story that people here tell about their ancestors coming from a hole in the earth. Like Sagisolo, what is the truth about their origin story? The Sagisolo people come from the *kefi* tree. Flassy people came out of the ground. There also the Saflembolo people who came out of the ground at an ant hill [*krarin, saflem bolo*].

Perhaps the reason behind this is that there were not enough people to inhabit the earth. When God realised this he found other ways to bring people into being. He did that to fill this earth with human beings. God has already promised to the people of Israel in the Old Testament that there should be many people. As many people on earth as there are stars in the sky.

Seppy Kemesrar, May 1995, Tape 28A: 450-end, 28B: 000-066

Seppy's discussion should be viewed from the fact that among the four groups in the village of Haha, the Kemesrar people most closely relate to Toror and that by

extension, others are perhaps animals and may not be God's children. This Christian twist to origin stories marks the importance attached to closeness to God and Toror and the general concern with the cosmic unity in the world. The Toror which Seppy describes is the state of being of his Kemesrar ancestors when they still resided at Baimla.

Baimla was an 'entrenchment' (*m̄la*) situated on an island in the estuary of the Segun River, some forty kilometres east of Cape Sele on the westernmost point of the Kepala Burung Peninsula. Baimla was important to the *rajas* as a place where forest products and manpower could be gained. Baimla might have been one of the nine *negorijen* or native villages mentioned by De Clerq in 1858 (in Kamma 1947/8b: 540).¹⁸ Although the inhabitants of Baimla enjoyed a good life at Baimla, one major problem concerned them.

The story that recounts the migration of the Kemesrar people tells how the inhabitants of Baimla feared the death of new-borns because of the suffering endured by expectant mothers. As prevention, they had to cut open her belly to save the child at the expense of its mother's life.¹⁹ All children in Baimla were thus raised as motherless children and fed with water instead of breast milk. The people of Baimla cut children from their mother's womb until there came a woman from the Krimadi people who was exchanged for cloths by the Kondjol people at the Kaibus River.²⁰

18. As mentioned earlier, people from Biak founded these villages as colonies or trading posts on the mainland of the Kepala Burung. In this part of West New Guinea, above all Biak people had trade relations and spread the Biak language as a trade language throughout the western and northern coast of the Kepala Burung, the Raja Ampat Islands and Eastern Maluku (see Donohue 1996: 715, map 78). The origin story of *wuon* in which Bauk brings a metal axe into the interior of the Teminabuan area relates to this trade history (see Kamma and Kooijman 1973: 25-26).

19. The idea that formerly birth could be given to a child by means of a 'Caesarean' only, is also reported to exist among Inanwatan people (Lotgering 1940: 19). After having seen a dog bearing puppies, the women realised that they should do it in a similar way.

20. This trade was set in motion by Naklen (*na* - 'people, man', *klen* - 'bird'; 'the bird man'), a name given to any assistant of a *raja* at Onin or Salawati. Kamma (1995[n.d.b]: 24, 57) has jotted down in his fieldnotes the same name for the 'bird man' or 'bird people' in a slightly different spelling: 'Nachelèn'. That assistants of *raja* are referred to as the 'bird man' could indicate that the trade in bird feathers was one of the

After living with the people at Baimla for some time, the Krimadi visitor taught her hosts the proper way to give birth to a child. When the people saw that the new techniques worked, they began to admire their guest for her knowledge. For that reason, the people of Baimla moved to the birthplace of the Krimadi woman, in the direction of where the sun rises. They readied their canoes, sewed sails, and prepared provisions for the long journey. In another version of this story, the people of Baimla left unprepared. Because of a conflict surrounding the adulterous act of a Kondororit person, the Kemesrar people had to flee. Others stressed that the story is a Christian story that tells that people had to move away from Baimla because water was overflowing the island. It suggests that Baimla is in fact the biblical Babel and that Noah saved all living creatures from Baimla, the actual origin place of all people. A similar tendency to read Babel in local myths is presented below where I discuss the origin of the Woloin people (see also Flassy 1985a: 8,11).

In all cases, the Kemesrar travelled into the interior and established themselves among the Nasfa people. Despite a fear for raids, the local Nasfa people in the hinterland of Teminabuan welcomed the Kemesrar people from Baimla. Yunus Kemesrar (64) explained this:

Kapitan Ras, Kapitan Kamerin, and three women, Waye, Krik, and Moroko left Baimla with a canoe (*kma saogit*) made from soft wood (*briyan*) and flew to the east where they landed on top of a high iron wood tree (*wkoit dlyen*) called Kasah, meaning the high place from where they could see where they came from.²¹ The two *kapitans* and three women survived the landing. Scared and disoriented they sat in the tree for one night. The next morning they were discovered by Skolo Bikya who looked up to the tree in

important aspects of the relations of the people of the south-western Kepala Burung area with Biak entrepreneurs of the kingdoms of the Raja Ampat Islands. The name could, however, also refer to the mythical origin of *rajās* of whom some descend from birds as sky beings (Mansoben 1983: 188).

21. In another version of the story the two *kapitan* sailed the meandering Seremuk River stream upwards. When they saw the mountain range looming above the mangrove and nipa palm vegetation they moored and walked further inland. There they climbed a hill

which he wanted to place bird traps.

Because they did not know each other's language, they communicated in sign language. Skolo Bikya conveyed to the two *kapitans* that he would return after four days and take them to his home. After four days, he came back to check the traps he had placed. He made a long rope with the help of which the two *kapitans* and the three women could descend from the tree. With Skolo Bikya, they walked to the top of a hill called Sfakoin. Skolo Bikya handed over this place to Ras and Kamerin.

When they had established themselves there, they met a Sawen man of the Woloin people. He showed them a creek where they could fetch water and he handed over this creek to them. He also gave them a woman named Raur. They settled near the creek, but they returned to Sfakoin because Skolo Bikya offered them a woman. Skolo Bikya and his people did not want them to move because they were after the wealth and powers that the Kemesrar people took along.

The two *kapitans* were in possession of a powerful cloth called Heya, the iron knife used for cutting the bellies of pregnant women, and white chalk (*dlele*) to draw the marks of Klen Tadyi on the *wuon* novices' breasts. Moreover, they were wearing textile shorts. At Sfakoin they stayed and all Kemesrar people descend from them. Together with the Krenak and Kaliele people, we still bear the title *kapitan*.

Yunus Kemesrar, March 1996, Tape 124B: 000-210

Expanding on how they became people of fame, Yunus explained how the ancestors of the Kemesrar people provided the Nasfa people with important knowledge. The Nasfa people apparently already practised initiatory rituals. However, they did not know how to perform these rituals properly, that is, they were still *morait* ('not knowledgeable'). Therefore, many novices died and the Nasfa people were in a desperate situation. Knowing that the Kemesrar people came from a very powerful place with wealthy objects and bearing titles of nobility, which were regarded as manifestations of power and authority, the

(Sfakoin) to see where they had come from.

Nasfa welcomed them warmly.

The general picture that emerges from a study of the stories told by senior Kemesrar, Krenak, and Kaliele men is one of an autonomous *wuon* domain that provided the powers for war leaders (*na sebe*) and men who control the exchange of cloths (*na kohok*). Surrounding the Kemesrar, Krenak, and Kaliele *na wuon* was an array of allied descent groups, including such autochthonous groups as the Mejefat Lumna. Informants suggest that *wuon* allowed an ordered system of allied Nasfa groups sustained by cloth exchange and the initiation ritual which also distinguished them from the Tehit groups near the Kaibus.

In many of their historical narratives, Imyan look at the kingdom of Sailolof with admiration for its power and knowledge, but they also stress that people feared the continuous threat of raids (*honggi*) organised to get people and forest products, especially those organised by *rajas* at the upper reaches of the Kaibus River. According to the Imyan, those *rajas* were related to the Tehit people. They say that the Tehits were not familiar with the powers of *wuon* and that they claimed power through their former close relationships with the *rajas* on the southern side of the MacCluer Gulf.

In the historical accounts which I have recorded, the Seremuk River forms a borderline between two cultural landscapes which are founded on different origin stories and different contexts of trade and power relations: the ‘Tehit-Onin’ and the ‘Imyan-Raja Ampat’. This division is important for local people to distinguish between cultural traditions and cultural identities. The most crucial factor that established the borderline is the tradition of *wuon* and the historical circumstance that Tehit became a female group as they were not granted with the powers of initiation to achieve ‘pure’ manhood.

Besides being important for achieving manhood, *wuon* represents order as it relates to Toror. Leaving Toror or Baimla behind, the world has become the scene of competition, discord, wars, and transgressions. In particular, incidents of attack by evil powers have influenced migration patterns, causing warfare and precipitating new bouts of warfare.²² Partly because the details of these touchy

22. Haenen (1998) describes how migrations in the Bintuni area of the South Kepala Burung are also influenced by ‘secret killings’, *suangi*, or what locally is known as

events were avoided, I do not attempt to relate them here. It remains important to note, however, that people realise that these events are in people's minds and play a role when people assess moral behaviour.

The Other Descent Groups in the Village of Haha

The Woloblé people in the village of Haha also recount in their origin stories a time that they now see as similar to the Garden of Eden. The Woloblé appear to belong to a group of people called Woloin. Although some Woloblé information called the Garden of Eden Toror, they do not situate it at the island of Baimla as the Kemesrar people do. Nimrod Krimadi (70), a knowledgeable *na wuon* in the village of Sasenek, told me the following story:

I know what Toror is but I have to keep it secret. I can tell you that Toror is the time when our ancestors lived in peace and had everything they desired. This was the case when the Woloblé people, together with all the other Woloin people lived at a place near Brenlo.²³ The Woloin people made a tower [*wkoit dyi*] because there was a flood. This was in the same time as the story about Noah's Ark [*kma sene*]. Instead of building a boat, the Woloin people built a tower in order to survive the flood. They thought that if another flood would come they could escape to the sky [*dyi*].²⁴

They used *kayu narak* - *narak* in the Bible but *natak* in our language - for the tower. It is a very strong timber. At that time, there were many people. Many climbed the tower but many stayed below. Those below arranged the wood and brought it up. Those at the top built one layer on top of the other, and so on. Up until they reached the sky. They looked and saw the clouds moving away. The tower also began to move. The top of the tower moved away from the upper part. There was a woman in the middle.

jomur.

23. Brenlo is situated near the present-day villages of Buk and Ndiwi, some fifteen kilometres downstream the Seremuk River from Haha. It comprises a vast swamp land with sago trees.

She said, ‘Older brother, the tower is going collapse’. Those who heard this got mad at her, saying ‘Why are you talking nonsense? What if there is going to be a flood; where will you go?’.

Those at the top asked for timber but those below gave them ropes. The situation was in disorder [*kacau*]. The tower collapsed and everybody died, except for one woman. She was pregnant at that moment. She gave birth to a boy who later had intercourse with his mother. From there the Woloin people descended: the Woloblé, Woloblé-Ogin, Woloin-Kedefat, Kolin, Syenin. The timber was also spread all over. Before it only grew here, but now you can find it in Konda, Soroan, Sorong, the Netherlands, America, everywhere. We call it *natak* wood. At that time, the Kemesrar people were still in Amaksahen at Baimla, like other people who remained at their place.

This is the clearest parallel between *adat* and the Bible. Therefore, everybody ponders over the tower. The only difference between the two is that here everybody died except for the pregnant woman. But biblical stories tell how humankind was spread over the world. As for the *kefi* tree story, things are different because in that case people did not gather but instead appeared from the tree. Those people are the first people to live in this area and we do not know much about their history.

Nimrod Krimadi, December 1994, 8B: 337-480

The Woloblé people consider themselves the most authentic Imyan, together with Bolhok-Imyan and Mtrar-Imyan. Some suggest that the Kemesrar people and others from the island of Baimla are not really Imyan but when asked to substantiate this, they agree that in fact, nobody really knows exactly where the tower was built. Most Woloblé elders are inclined not to make a fuss about it and quickly agree with Kemesrar people who argue that in fact all Imyan come from Baimla and that the Tower of Babel was also built there. When the die is cast that way, the only people in Haha who do not relate their history to Toror, Baimla or Babel, are the Mejefat and the Klaflé.

24. Compare Tonis Klaflé’s story about *agama* recounted in Chapter 6.

The Mejefat are the only people who claim to be original inhabitants of the area. Their ancestors, Mejefat-Lumna are considered to be *na fobi*. The first inhabitants were two brothers, Silyofatflé and Silyofatkaya. Informants said that where the Silyofat men come from is secret. Part of the mystery is that the Mejefat ancestors came out of the ground, an event that is not taken seriously by those Imyan who relate their origin to the sky or Toror, as made clear by Seppy quoted above. Similarly, others find that the ground or earth is dirty and is the domain of snakes, pigs, and ants, as opposed to the sky where stars, birds, and the sun dwell, and where the canopy and the clouds merge into one another.²⁵

Silyofatflé and Silyofatkaya came out of ground at a place called Kalsiki, which is considered sacred. Kalsiki is situated in the hills surrounding the upper stream of the Sefese Creek. The spot is near a cave, which was formerly used as a shelter when people resided in the hills and went down to the sago forest at the Seremuk River, as described in Chapter 2. People describe Kalsiki as extraordinary because sago trees and mangrove grow there amid a rather different hilly vegetation. The scenery, however, can only be seen by *na wuon*; uninitiated people's eyes are closed for these wonders. After the two men came out of the ground, they established the first group of people called Lumna, which is said to mean 'the people that came out of the ground'. How the two men got offspring is a secret because it relates one way or another to the origin of *lait*.

It was regularly suggested to me, in particular by Klaflé informants, that the first Lumna were able to get children by using powers that were later used for evil ends. This story would commute the blame that is always put on the Klaflé people (see below). The Duwit people from Soroan claim that the Mejefat people in Haha are in fact Duwit descendants who ran away after they had committed adultery or killed people with *lait*. They fled towards the Seremuk River. In order

25. This marks a contrast with the south-coastal Kepala Burung Inanwatan people, who locate a kind of Toror, called Kekea'o, under the surface of the earth. Van Oosterhout (1998a: 141-2) writes that Kekea'o is 'one single person with one single body' that includes the Opido, 'the real owners of the land and the water' and mirror the upper world. Interestingly, in an unusual Imyan story recounted in the Conclusion of this thesis, a Kaliele informant refers to underground paths that lead to Western riches or 'cargo'.

to establish themselves they adopted the two Silyofat brothers and adapted the name Lumna. They started using the Duwit-fat name later, albeit expressed according to the local dialect: Mejefat. The Mejefat-Lumna line of first-born sons counts nine generations and comprises initiated men right after the Lumna met the Kemesrar people and initiation houses were established in the area.

Mejefat informants stressed that during the first generations the Lumna people did not encounter other people. They do not agree with the Duwit version of their history. They also dispute the Kemesrar claim of having introduced items of wealth and powerful pieces of knowledge. Having evaded all the insulting and otherwise intolerable historical events, Yuwel Mejefat (48), suggested that the Mejefat people always lived on good terms with the newcomers because there were initiation houses:

Formerly people were on good terms because they came together for the initiations. They danced, sang, and mourned when novices were taken there and cried and celebrated together when they returned. The knowledge of *wuon* also unites people because it enables people to fight together against evil powers and to place sanctions on people who transgress the rules. This is unlike the church, where one's personal responsibility seems to count. The ways of *wuon* are not individual in nature but characterised by co-operativeness.

Yuwel Mejefat, January 1996, Tape 98A: 350-374

According to Yuwel, a Klaflé man was the first to be welcomed by the Lumna people. He came with nothing and did not say where he came from and why he was looking for a new place to settle. This man was accused of having used one of the worst forms of evil powers while he still resided among the Saman and others in an area south of the Ayamaru Lakes. When he came, he suggested that he did not know anything, was not able to do anything, and was sent away everywhere for reasons unknown to himself. The Lumna people decided to give a piece of land where he could make a new garden (*byele*). He did not marry and lived alone.

Ketyari Mejefat made sure that the new Klaflé man would be allowed to attend an initiation staged at Bolotraba. After his initiation, the Klaflé man became Wontifi Klaflé ('the first Klaflé *na wuon*'). The Mejefat people gave him about half of their territory, the area between the Sesna and Sefese Creeks, all the way down to the Mario Creek and to the north as far as the Kla Flé River. Mejefat also shared their land with the Kemesrar and Woloblé people and that is the reason why they expect to be called 'elder brother' (*tamon*) until the present-day.

However they might trace their origins to different places, the Mejefat and Klaflé people strongly believe in the existence of a kind of Garden of Eden in bygone times. Together with the Kemesrar and Woloblé people they tend to refer to this earthly paradise both as a place of origin of all Papuans and as a time when they maintained trade relations with *rajas* at Sailolof. In both cases it is seen as a state of being that stands in contrast to current hard times. When people travelled away from this utopia, they entered a land in which the terrestrial and celestial domains eventually got divided through the coming of whites, Indonesians, and Christianity.

Sociality and Discipline in Haha

As discussed in the Preface, the topic most often discussed and brought to the fore as the main reason for Haha's failure to carry out government and church programs is the conflict between the upper and lower parts of the village, or broadly speaking, between the Mejefat/Klaflé faction and the Kemesrar/Woloblé faction. This conflict has recently intensified due to a growing dissatisfaction about the village's leadership under Amos Mejefat. Among many other conflicts, there is a long-standing struggle between two groups over the leadership of Haha village. The village of Haha has existed as a communal residence of several households since 1938. Some older men claim that the Kemesrar people, who lived scattered in the hills north of the present village, received an official letter from Queen Wilhemina of the Netherlands in which she commanded the people

to build a village near the coast. An older Kemesrar informant recalls that,

Because our Queen commanded us, we promptly started searching for a good location near our sago forests to build houses. Then four descent groups [*na sa*] started living together in what until today is known as Haha. All these groups have different histories, trace their origins to varying places, and have different specialisations, and abilities.

As Kostan Woloblé (32, Haha village) explains:

Formerly, the groups [who now live together in Haha] were organised according to their specialisation. These specialisations relate to every group's tradition. For example, we the Woloblé people have a close relationship with sago and therefore we were always in charge of rites and harvests in the sago forest. The Kemesrar held *wuon* and thus led cloth [*kain timur*] exchanges and organised initiations. They played an important role in rituals performed at all kinds of occasions. They were also war leaders.

The Mejefat people relate to the land because they descend from the first people in this area. They were in charge of the division of land and resources and made sure to propitiate the spirits of the land when others made new gardens or started to harvest many sago trees. Finally, the Klaflé people say that they are traders and would know best how to engage in business [*ekonomi*]. Perhaps they have access to certain secrets with which they can become rich, but I do not know about this.

Kostan Woloblé, May 1996, Tape 134A: 136-153

The differences in specialisation are also related to different mentalities. For example, the Klaflé people, associated with business (*ekonomi*), are considered unreliable because their history is filled with trickery and dangerous games with *lait*. Opposed to the Klaflé are the Kemesrar who are considered politically sensible and good managers. Their long tradition of leadership over other groups

is derived from the fact that when Kemesrar people came to their present habitat they brought *wuon* knowledge with them, together with wealth in the form of cloths, loincloths, and shorts. As described above, together with these cloths, they also possessed valuable knowledge to attract ceremonial cloth and, even more impressive, a special kind of chalk (*dlele*) used for drawing motifs on the chests of novices during initiation. Applying these motifs appeared to make the already existing initiation ritual more successful. Moreover, they had contacts with *rajas* in the Raja Ampat area. In due time Kemesrar people ruled the circulation of cloths and controlled initiation rituals.

Logically, the already powerful Kemesrar men assumed leadership in the new forms of administration that were the result of the process of village formation during the Dutch colonial administration. Over time, however, as more people in Haha became literate, informed of God's Word, and familiar with the affairs of church and state, the traditional leadership position of the Kemesrar group came under scrutiny. In 1974, Amos Mejefat was appointed as leader of Haha because of his command of Indonesian, his knowledge of state affairs, and his ability to preach and organise the church.

Amos was educated at the Dutch *Jongens Vervolgschool* (three year secondary education for boys) in Teminabuan. After the Indonesian assumption of the territory in 1963, Amos attended a religious school in Mieï to be allowed to preach and teach God's word to villagers. While Amos was leading services elsewhere in the area, the head of village and famous *na tmak*, Trithoin Kemesrar, called him to his native village in 1974. Trithoin had come to realise that the times called for an educated leader. Trithoin had little command of Indonesian and devolved his power to someone who could easily communicate with government officials and was able to lead the church to assure the future of Haha's youth and the community at large. In one go Amos became village leader and pastor.

Although they agreed with Trithoin's decision at that time, it currently galls members of the Kemesrar descent group that the Mejefats hold offices in all three important modern institutions: administration, church, and school (Amos'

younger brother is principal of the local primary school). The Kemesrars seem to lag behind: they claim to hold access to *wuon* knowledge, to have the last *na wuon* in their midst who co-ordinates the exchange of cloths, can curtail the use of evil powers, and heal people. Often they express their anger and argue that the Mejefats do not respect history and simply enrich themselves at the expense of others. They blame them for the ongoing failure of government development programs and lack of co-operation in the village. In 1996, many accused Amos of having signed a contract for Javanese immigrants, which allows them to come to Haha, without consulting members of other groups because government officials bribed him with the equivalent of around US\$ 170.

On many fronts, there is tension between the Kemesrar and Mejefat descent groups and the other two descent groups have in the meantime taken sides in the dispute. As a result the village is splitting up along the lines of initial settlement: the Kemesrar families and the families of the Woloblé group living at the west side of the village and the Mejefat and Klaflé families living at the east side. An increasing sense of individualism has also emerged from this development. The lack of co-operation in the implementation of government programs as well as in organising Christian religious festivals is often explained as the result either of the lack of respect of Mejefat people for historical facts or the arrogance of Kemesrar people claiming leadership while being mere immigrants. This envy often finds expression in people accusing each other of the misconduct of their respective ancestors, in particular the Klaflé ones who are accused of having introduced some bad varieties of evil power.

In many respects, the present chaos and decline is opposed to the former ideal state of Toror (or *adat*) and seen as the outcome of the struggle between positive (*wuon*) and negative (*lait*) forces. Because it entertains the relationships between the earth and the sky, the *wuon* cult is also considered as bringing order. To understand these two forces in terms of the ways in which they shape the interpretations of Imyan people, I describe the basic characteristics of *wuon* and *lait* in the following sections, progressing (as Imyan do) from good to evil.

Wuon and Lait

In general, in the lives of Imyan people *wuon* has the quality of being important, first because its lore comprises the keys to power and wealth and, secondly, because it used to perform a sanctioning and disciplining role in society. Alongside the widely held idea that *wuon* knowledge is extremely powerful, people stress that *na wuon* and experienced *na tmak* in particular used to be the guides in people's lives, the *pelita* ('torch-light'). *Na wuon* are valued because they possess far-reaching knowledge about the world and can predict natural disasters. In the medical field, *na wuon* can heal sick people by traditional curing methods. Moreover, they advise the people to correct themselves by critical self-appraisal and to watch out for attacks of epidemics of certain diseases. Before the epidemic becomes active, *na wuon* perform preventive rituals by raising a woodcarved statue and reciting magic formulae at the entrance roads to the village, so that the epidemic will not stop by in the village. This statue, the form of which no informant could show nor describe, is named *nsoso egi tinye*.

In the field of gardening, *na wuon* recite magic formulae in which Na Ha or Na Ago (God) will be asked for a plentiful harvest. This active role of *na wuon* in gardening is important for finding of a location to make a garden, for felling the trees, for the burning the areal, and for planting the crops and, finally, for successful harvesting. At every stage, the *na wuon* will precede all others and perform their magic acts. For example, when harvesting the crops, *na wuon* perform some magic acts after which first the ritual leader's assistants (*sibosi*) may enter the area followed by women and children.

Most informants suggested that formerly, when Imyan were threatened by raiding parties and regularly in war with neighbouring groups, they were able to ensure safety and maintain peace because *na wuon* reminded people not to live in disagreement, not be at odds with others and not to quarrel. *Na wuon* brought people who were at odds with each other together by means of certain rituals. For example, they would recite magic formulae at a black cloth, which was then torn in two by two relatives who had a quarrel. *Na wuon* were also highly trusted in hearings held for those who were considered guilty of misbehaviour and

essentially made available the legal institution for all members of society who are accused of being guilty in order to prove the truth (see Appendix A for more details).

Only *na wuon* and women who deal with *lait* (*nadli lait*) know and can find out about *lait*. Others who are not initiated and women who are not *nadli lait* do not know how to use, detect, and counter-attack *lait*. When a woman bequeaths evil powers to another woman this is called *mhnak lait* ('she gives *lait*'). When bequeathing *lait*, the two women involved have to find a prey, a victim to kill. As described in Chapter 2, every bequest of *lait* requires a human sacrifice of the receiver's descent. For that reason one can distinguish regional forms of *lait*: *lait Haha*, *lait Saifi*, *lait Woloin*, *lait Sasenek*. Women only possess *lait*. Men avoid it. When a man is accused of possessing *lait* this must be a secret (*kahan*). *Lait* can lead to conflict with fatal results. Yunus Kemesrar (64) from Haha expressed his concern about *lait* as follows:

Certainly, many people see *lait* as a threat to their lives, but there is also another use of this power by means of which women can bring peace to the people. For example, by forbidding people to go away, leaving their houses, eating certain kinds of food because she knows that outside the village, near one's house or in one's food there is the threat of *lait*. We are grateful to God that *gereja* is here because it has changed our *adat*. But it has to be noted that when there is no *na wuon* left anymore, *lait* will act violently and arbitrary and kill all people. Therefore, the practices of *wuon* need to be resumed so that the power of *wuon* can again be put into effect.

Yunus Kemesrar, September 1995, 45A: 577-end, 45B: 000-060

In the year 1967, a *wuon* teaching was organised at the cleared forest ground called Foyolo, a few kilometres from the village of Sodrofoyo. Lourens Kemesrar was present in the initiation house and told me that the sky beings who were present include Bitik Foyolo, Bitik Snahantit and Klentadyi Siroro Sigen. It was the last time an initiation was conducted because it was subsequently

forbidden by the side of the church and the government. Most people would agree with the following statement by an initiated man: ‘According to the church, *wuon* teaching/initiation is idolatry or belief in idolatrous gods’. Others, like Yosias Woloblé, see such sayings as part of attempts to avoid discussion and to keep outsiders from eager searches of *wuon*’s truths:

Na wuon say that *gereja* prohibited initiation because they were afraid that initiation would compete with Jesus’ teaching. The existence of *wuon* and the church are like the middle finger and the index finger, meaning that the status of the two is almost the same. According to *na wuon* they are actually representatives of God who possess the capacity to take care of the health of the people, agriculture, and war. *Na wuon* are like the *pelita* in people’s lives.

To assess this evaluation and the importance attached to control of evil powers in Imyan society, I analyse the nature of Imyan interpersonal existence and Imyan ideas about dangerous powers that threaten not only individual lives but also their society as a whole.

Imyan Views on Damaging Powers

Unseen or mysterious powers that cause harm and that could be compared with Western notions of ‘witchcraft’ play an important role in Imyan society.²⁶ The power of *lait* draws directly on fear of death, evil, and the unknown. It is not associated with a formal institution or form of organisation that ensures its

26. In anthropology, there is little agreement on the definitions of witchcraft or sorcery (see Geschiere 1997). *Lait* among the Imyan may be described as a kind of witchcraft, but to avoid misunderstanding as a result of associations with Eurasian traditions of witchcraft or anthropological studies of witchcraft in other places, I will describe the mysterious powers of certain women that profoundly damage society and all the other unseen forces that are glossed as *lait* or *suangi* by using the indigenous Imyan term, *lait*.

reproduction. To Imyan, *lait* is enigmatic because in contrast to other forms of unseen powers such as those belonging to *wuon* it does not make use of formulae, concrete transmittable teachings, or ritual communication with spirits. Moreover, the origins, the methods of reproduction, and the techniques of *lait* are highly secret and are said to be largely unknown, even to the women who are accused of employing *lait*.

The origin story of *lait* recounts how a cassowary bird transferred this power to two Nasfa women of Karsau origin. Unlike the disclosure of *wuon* knowledge to Bauk (see Chapter 1), the cassowary planted *lait* inside the women's vaginas. The two Karsau women then proceeded to plant taro. Due to the *lait* possessed by the women, this taro garden became extremely fertile. Jealous, Bauk approached the women to find about their secret. The two women told Bauk that they would give him the knowledge on the condition that he killed his son first. Till the present day the transmission of *lait* is believed to necessitate the offering of a child.

Bauk, disgusted by the necessity of sacrificing one of his children, urged the Karsau women to stop their *lait* practices. Some time later, Bauk learned the more ethical *wuon* knowledge. As Yosias Krenak (36) from Sasenek explained,

Bauk made *wuon* on this side and at the same time the women came who made something like *wuon* on the other side. They also wanted to raise a school and impart their evil knowledge to everyone. That what Bauk made was good. But what the women made was not good because it is made for killing people. Until the present-day women use this *ilmu* to inflict disaster. The Karsau method is wrong.

Yosias Krenak, July 1995, Tape 132A: 216-258

Essentially, *lait* denotes a form of supernatural danger: wandering spirits or souls (*klebet*) of women who plot against someone whose soul they are going to steal and whose intestines they are going to eat at night. These wandering souls usually take the form of vicious snakes (*luwa lait*), owls (*klen sok*) or crocodiles (*wiyar*). The invisibility of the *klebet* and the fact that their attacks do not leave

any sign on the physical body of the victim, are major reasons why people fear *lait* and why it can lead to long-lasting and unsettling accusations and disputes. Moreover, Imyan realise that those who employ *lait* to kill, act with intention, but they also have to take into account those who had intentions but did not commit the crime. The tragic of *lait* has to do with the virtual incapability of people to do anything against it. But to be able to assess the impact of *lait* and the Imyan fear of having their souls stolen by *lait*, we need to know how Imyans conceive of the soul.

A human being (*na* - ‘person, people’) exists of a body (*wkan*) composed of skin (*wfalek*), muscles (*wfokot*), bones (*wkodois*), blood (*when*) and intestines (*wkomat*). This material body provides a vessel for what it is that gives life: *thalye* (‘my breath, my soul, the mind’), and a soul or spirit (*klebet*) that is manifest as one’s reflection, shadow, or double (*tawya* - ‘my double’). In analogy to the Christian concept of soul, *klebet* is also called *arwah*, *roh*, or *jiwa*. *Thalye* and *tawya* are mutually dependent: if both are present in the body one can speak of an individual (*na mreis* - ‘one, single person, self’) and a true human being (*na tkoin*) in contrast to a dead person (*na taigi*) or her/his double.

It is important to realise that Imyan people see *thalye* as inseparable from the body, whereas *tawya* is a free agent: the *klebet* can wander about independently of the body. When people die, their *klebet* will go to a next world called *mla smingir*, currently often equated with the Christian hereafter (see Chapter 5). *Mla smingir* lies at the top of a hill in the north-west of their territory, close to the upper streams of the Kladuk River to the north of Nasfa territory, or a place in a dense sago-forest beyond the village of Ndiwi, close to the Klabra River. Near these places people sometimes hear the whistles of *klebet*. *Na wuon* can actually see *klebet* and communicate with them. They are therefore the obvious persons to ask *klebet* for favours (a rich harvest, prosperous exchange of cloths, strength for warfare, etc.).

The departing of *klebet* can also take place without the individual actually dying. In that case, *thalye* remains in the body and only one’s ‘double’ goes out. *Klebet* can also depart the body during sleep. People consider their dreams to be adventures of their *klebet*. Normal people are thus unable to exercise any control

over their *klebet*. When they awake the *klebet* returns to its own body by itself. There is always the risk of ‘awakening’ too early for the *klebet* to return. In that case, only a *na wuon* can attempt to call it back by using specific formulae. If he fails, the body will remain alive in a lamentable state for some time, after which the person will eventually die.

People are particularly concerned about wandering *klebet* when children are ill. When a child is sick, panic breaks out because its *klebet* is extremely vulnerable to *lait*: the *klebet* of *nadli lait* are unremitting in their search of the *klebet* of small children which they catch and consume, little by little till the child dies. These evil *klebet* usually operates at night when its owner is asleep. Night-time is the time of these women, but also when more than one woman takes an afternoon nap, the patient and her or his relatives and friends may tremble with anxiety. As the schoolteacher Hendrik Klaflé (38) explained,

Women who employ *lait* to ruin other people’s bodies never do this alone. They arrange the killing. For example, if my aunt wants to kill Yance she will first make an agreement with Yance’s wife. She will tell her about her plans and propose to kill Yance first and then her own husband. Alternatively, if she wants to kill Yance’s son, she will agree to kill her own son too: mutual reprisal [*baku balas*]. It is no matter to them these people are dying, what matters is that they can go on with their evil game.

It becomes a social problem when other people learn about their game and begin to accuse them of murder. If others do not find out about it or keep quiet, the women will continue. With a formula or spell, the matter can be cleared. If not, within their *ilmu* the women will make new agreements and thus keep on killing. They will make plans to kill another and another and have plans for others in the meantime. But with the use of an oath they should decide to hide the *lait*, burn it, throw it in a river, or put it away in a cave.

But although they dispose of it, *lait* will have transferred itself

elsewhere. It will thus never stop. *Lait* is a wicked *klebet*, it is Satan. When one wants to throw away or hide *lait*, a woman's *klebet* comes to pick it up again. For example, *lait* from here may be disposed in a cave or hole in another village or somewhere in the forest. The *klebet* of the woman who was in possession of this *lait* will travel at night to the hiding place to take it away and bring it home. She will then store it in her house for future use.

Hendrik Klaflié, September 1995, Tape 45B: 172-263

This account of the dangers of *lait* shows the uncontrollable nature of *lait*, making people concerned about their *klebet*. As *lait* is a subject that causes the most anxiety in Haha, we can understand that it is important for Imyan people to be able to have control over their *klebet*. This control involves different aspects.

At first, one has to take care not to become ill. But because one way or another this will happen either to oneself or to one's children, kinsfolk, friends or partner, people attach importance to knowing the formulae and specific leaves used for healing and methods to cure the patient and to protect him against further attacks. If someone feels ill, his or her relatives and friends generally waste no time in starting experiments with a range of 'traditional' methods. Recently, different methods introduced from outside have supplemented these local methods. If people from Haha travel to Teminabuan or Sorong to meet up with relatives and if they get the chance to meet people from Ambon, Seram, the Kei islands, Java, they usually consult them in search for knowledge with the aim of gaining more control of *lait*. Sometimes more easily to approach but in any case subject to close scrutiny by Imyan are the Moluccans and even BBM and Javanese immigrants who live in the Teminabuan area.

What appealed most in the period that I was working with Haha villagers were small mirrors sold by Javanese women at the transmigration site in Moswaren. Although nobody from Haha ever purchased this object, most could tell in detail that these mirrors are extremely successful in detecting and scaring *nadli lait*. If a *nadli lait* would look in the mirror she would see a very ugly,

devilish face and, terrified, either run away or start screaming. When you place the mirror on the wall near the entrance of your house, the mirror would scan all entering women. Other methods include spells and kinds of body lotion that would protect men from evil powers. Some people turn out to be successful in applying new knowledge while others fail to do so. If all of the new or old forms of knowledge that are more or less shared by most members of the society fails to work, people consult a ritual leader who then applies one of his highly secret methods.

Such measures become particularly urgent when the *klebet* is thought to have fallen prey to *lait*. In that case, people's hope is placed in the hands of a ritual leader, because he can divine who is leading the *lait* conspiracy. Unless the *klebet* is wholly devoured, they can try to persuade the women involved to lessen their greed. In the meantime, others devote themselves to unbridled speculation and the accusation of potential culprits. The illness, former cases of *lait*, and many social wrongs are widely discussed. Tempers rise and the resulting accusations lead to quarrels. Within a few days, few women remain free from suspicion as accessories. Amongst those who are severely blamed, there are regularly some who commit suicide.

If the attempts of the ritual leader to heal the patient remain in vain, he can decide to proceed to a *lait* trial. During my stay in Haha such a trial was not conducted and according to most informants it is not actually done anymore: it belongs to the past. As outlined in Appendix A, there are several kinds of *nadli lait* trials. The one most often recounted consists of the drinking of poisonous sap from a liana or root (*smirit*) by the accused women. If the accused vomits, she is guilty; if not, she will be sick to death and sometimes die of poisoning. Usually the women who are declared guilty will eventually commit suicide because most people cannot stand them anymore.

Secondly, sudden misfortune, fear, injury, or serious illness will lead to the loss of the soul. These causes constitute the main body of people's explanations of child mortality. In almost all instances of child mortality during my stay in Haha, it was explained that the child's *klebet* was retained by *nadli lait* and in due course eaten by them. Most of them were babies and the oldest was three

years old. None of the mothers could see the point in taking the child for the five to seven hour walk to the health centre in Teminabuan.²⁷ According to them modern medicine is not able to deal with *lait*.

Thirdly, social pressures often lead to quarrels that can provoke *lait*. Therefore, people need to be careful and check regularly if their behaviour causes discontent or criticism. Most people in Imyan villages find it hard to cope with the social conditions of a small and timid society where social control often seems to be the only diversion. Indeed, villagers often appeared to be morbidly devoted to gossip. Without elaborating further on the subject of gossip, I think the point is clear that detached *klebet* can fall prey to *lait* with fatal results and that this can only be anticipated by proper knowledge.

Besides *lait*, there is the continuing threat of other supernatural agencies. Imyan people are acquainted with a category of spirits (*ni*) that control harvest, catch, and people's health. The most important are *ni mlasa* (sky beings) who take cover in *mila* ('entrenchments') like treetops, hilltops, and caves. *Ni mlasa* can make people ill and cause natural disasters (bad weather, floods, and thunderbolts). *Ni mlasa* are superior to other *ni* who consider them as the heads (*sa* - 'head, above') of the *mila* dwellings and the authorities who rule over a great many lower ranking *ni* in a certain territory. One of the well-known *ni* is the *ni kmayan* who lives in the rivers where people wash, sail and fish. *Ni kmayan* normally rocks (*yan*) people's dugout canoes (*kma*).

Imyan feel that they can do little to influence the decisions of *ni*. The least they can do is to conform to basic moral codes because the actions of spirits are believed to be directed towards those who misbehave. The generally held view is that the will of the spirits is like fate, but that the good performance of *wuon* rituals and the offering of appropriate goods by ritual leaders can keep them from threatening human lives. Now that many are supposed to believe that these spirits are the henchmen of Satan, most consider God as the highest deity.²⁸

27. There is no local health service post (*posyandu*) in Haha and people's knowledge and awareness of paediatric diseases is poor.

28. I will deal with this in more detail in the Chapter 5.

Also classified as *ni mlasa* are Klen Tadyi and Bitik, two agencies that play a role in initiation practices and in an often recounted but now defunct ritual in which poisonous root sap (*smirit*) was used to catch fish in a fast-flowing river. Before the poison is mixed with the water in the upper course of the river, *na wuon* fight with the two sky deities at the head of the river. In this struggle they deprive Klen Tadyi and Bitik of their wealth, that is, the fish that are in their possession. During the fight people downstream hear growling sounds. When the sounds stop large amounts of fish come to get the surface which make it easy for people to get hold of this outcome of a struggle between humans and the sky deities.

Another *ni mlasa* is Tali. Tali is the sun and possesses the strongest powers. Tali is the highest one (*na ago*, meaning ‘above, up’) or the greatest one (*na ha, ha* meaning ‘strong, hot, great’) and is seen as God (Na Ago, Na Ha). Imyan think that God revealed Himself to humans as Mamele and Tali. While Mamele is considered a mysterious trickster, Tali is a just God who cares for mankind while punishing misbehaviour and disrespect. Unknown in the pre-Christian cosmology is Satan who has now entered the scene, sometimes as Mamele but most often as *lait*.

Other supernatural agents are ‘fools’ (*na koli*) who live in forests and in between sago palms. They are taller than human beings and have big eyes surrounded by black rings. In evenings and at night one can hear their voices when they bathe and make fun. People try to avoid them and if one accidentally comes across one, the best thing to do is to give the *na koli* a smoke. According to informants, *na koli* make a fool of people, invite them to have sex and tell lies about other villagers’ misbehaviour. The latter often leads to false accusations. On the other hand, having met a *na koli* can be used as an excuse for people who are accused of talking idly.

However threatening the spirits and fools may be, *lait* is the main source of anxiety. During my stay among the Imyan, the village of Haha exploded six times in commotion because of alleged incidences of *lait*. Alongside such village-wide screaming rows there were outbreaks of anger and protests over

suspected *lait* in smaller social circles almost every week. These outbreaks most typically followed a serious illness or death of a person. It is certainly not the case that all deaths and illnesses in Imyan society are attributed to attacks of *lait*. People may recognise other, ‘natural’ causes of death: in recent years knowledge of human health and the workings of modern medicine, though relatively poor, has broadened the range of explanations of illness and death, but the Imyan also recognise that coincidental accidents can explain misfortune.

Odd events like the accidental falling of trees, attacks by wild pigs, crocodiles, cutting oneself with an axe while clearing gardens, falling from trees, falling into fires and the like are to many comforting explanations for a person’s death. Moreover, murder without the use of unseen powers can be considered as an intentional act of a person. The murderer may then be punished by having to compensate for his or her act by paying valuables or may be killed in turn by relatives of the victim either physically or by using extraordinary powers such as *lait*.

Thus, in contrast to most discussions of ‘witchcraft’ in the anthropological literature, Imyan do not preclude accident in explaining misfortune.²⁹ Besides this reliance upon ‘natural’ accidents, Imyan also often hold death to be a basic modality of life. In particular concerning the passing away of older people, there is often no discussion about *lait* because there is general agreement that old people die naturally because of old age. People preferring to see the evil hand of unseen forces, however, often dismiss these naturalistic explanations.

Consequently, there is almost never unanimity when explaining misfortune: different perspectives on the same event prevail. The reality of Imyan is one of plurality and choice, and therefore it is important to understand why people look differently upon the same event or act, and in what terms and in which contexts these different opinions are advanced. Recognising these different understandings not only shows the divergent interests and concerns there are

29. Goldman (1993: 63-97) discusses the treatment of misfortune in ethnographic descriptions of African and Melanesian societies. Based on his Huli (Papua New Guinea) material he challenges these theories of misfortune to argue that ‘Melanesian societies possess notions like ‘pure accident’’ (1993: 97).

within one society, but also takes seriously the Imyan observation that it is difficult to establish a truly common view about who is responsible for the evil forces that bring about misfortune.

In explaining the present deterioration of morals and the falling apart of society in society, people often refer to Satan (*Iblis*, *Setan*) who works by means of *lait*. Humans are powerless to do anything against the devil who brings misfortune to the entire village. As men consider *lait* as a female affair, they readily suggest that *nadli lait* are not afraid of God's wrath. With the same conviction they expound that God will listen to confessions by *nadli lait* and forgive them their misdeeds. They think, however, that these women do not have the courage to alter their behaviour and become good Christians.

When asked about evil powers, women say that they are sure that *lait* would not have any chance against good Christians and that there is thus no reason for Christian men to be afraid. Responding to this, men react laconically and are quick to suggest that if all villagers knew how to call upon God everybody would live happily and become prosperous. Some go a step further and argue that if *wuon* practices were to be rehabilitated and combined with the Word of God and the church services, nobody in Haha would suffer again from Satan or *lait*. One informant once concluded such a speech with the words 'give honour where it is due', indicating that *wuon* has been neglected at the expense of the church with the net cause that *lait* will kill all people and bring the end of all things.

The moral contrast that is generally drawn between *lait* and *wuon* along gender lines is surprising if we realise that origin story of *lait* tells of how the Karsau women used it to fertilise a taro garden. Also the origin story of the Mejefat people recounts that the first Lumna were able to get children by using *lait* powers (see above). In both instances, the storytellers quickly added that later Bauk learned *wuon* knowledge that is more ethical than *lait*. The fact that *lait* was used to make the taro grow big and to get offspring is neglected in most present-day recounting and explanations of the origin of *lait*. The subtle conflict that is entailed in the story that actually suggests that through *wuon* man attempted to get a knowledge as powerful as *lait* seems to be transformed to a

black-and-white opposition between *wuon* (male, good) and *lait* (female, bad).

I suggest that due to increasing self-respect in terms of new discourses and expressions from the church and the state, women have become increasingly responsible in social contexts. For men this seems to be enough of a threat to cherish the idea that women possess something invisible and unknowable. *Lait* is not only threatening because of its enigmatic character but also because it is linked with ‘anti-social’ women, and ideologised as uncontrollable. A striking case in point is Lourens Kemesrar’s wife, Wilhelmince (53), who is concerned with the status of women in the village. She is one of the village’s most educated women. Over the last ten years she has taken courses in nutrition, household management, sewing, weaving, economic development, and childbirth offered by the P3W women’s organisation in Teminabuan. Because she has taken courses, health officials have appointed her as an official local health agent for women and a consultant on matters pertaining to women and development in the village.

Wilhelmince often participates in the all-male meetings of the church council and village elders to discuss matters pertaining to ‘development’. Besides her political involvement, Wilhelmince is the official modern midwife of the village. She faces an uphill battle against female distrust of modern child delivery. Some women see her advice and guidance to pregnant women as interference in family affairs. Wilhelmince runs the risk of *lait* accusation from conservative women confused and overwhelmed by recent changes. Her knowledge about women’s emancipation also meets with resistance and harassment from the wife of the present head of the village who wants to control female affairs. However, according to Wilhelmince, the village’s first lady is not knowledgeable and cannot even sew her own dress.

The ideology of men that also puts women as Wilhelmince in their black books is sustained by referring to the church, the Bible, and their active role in development. The power of the argument relates to the widely held idea that in principle Christian rituals are similar to the *wuon* rituals. The only difference they observe between the two is that while Christian ritual is public, *wuon* ritual is secret; women and children are not allowed to see it. Interestingly, this gender contrast is becoming part of women’s worldview. The way Martina Woloblé (31)

explained the difference between *lait* and *wuon* to her fourteen-year-old daughter, is a case in point:

People consider small children stupid and women cannot see *wuon* rituals because a long time ago our mothers are considered to have a pact with Satan or *lait*. Everybody knows that Bauk produced *wuon* and Karsau produced *lait*. When *wuon* ritual was performed for the first time, Karsau felt sorry for her brother and wanted to see him. She called out but he did not come. After a while, she went into the initiation house. They did all the normal rituals but she never came out. Karsau transformed into stone.

My father, your grandfather, has told me that according to the Bible she is one of the priests of Baal, while Bauk is Elijah. When Elijah and the priest of Baal prepared a sacrifice, the *ni mlasa* of the latter gave no sign of life, whereas the sacrifice of Elijah was kindled by fire from Heaven in answer to his prayer. The *na wuon* prayed and were rewarded, but when *nadli lait* pray this will result in destruction. Later, Elijah went to Horeb, the mountain of God. Horeb is the mountain that our fathers called Baukolo. This is where God offered all the powers and knowledge to Bauk. But the first initiation did not work, because *lait* was also there. Therefore, from then on women have their own [*lait*] and men have their own [*wuon*].

We may conclude with the observation that *lait* as a powerful imagination among Imyan has become an icon that stands for, and even explains to a large degree, the disruption of recent times. Ideas about these evil forces are prominent in most domains of Imyan everyday life and come to the fore in many expressions (myths, stories, debates, dreams, and prayers). In the Imyan social arena, as I make explicit in the following chapters, these unseen damaging forces pose existential dilemmas and looming threats.

I want to emphasise that many Imyans are concerned with truth and competence in applying knowledge in order to improve their living condition. This concern relates to claims that link alleged powers from outside to the specificity of local identities and forms of local knowledge. In most narratives, talks, arguments, and remarks that I have recorded, there is an explicit or implicit claim linking outside powers to the specificity of local identities and forms of knowledge. The specific local identity is in essence the Imyan person who descends from Baimla or was left on her/his own after the dispersal of mankind when the Tower of Babel collapsed, and in any case relates in one way or another to the tradition belonging to *wuon*. The knowledge which has enabled whites and Indonesians to become wealthy and powerful is not acquired through their own efforts but merely by profiting from the kernel that Imyan once lost.

Knowledge in that sense cannot be equated with *adat*, but is essentially a specific genre of knowledge that Imyan identify and label as *wuon*. It is knowledge that is true by definition because Klen Tadyi revealed it. Also as an ancestral legacy, Imyan define *wuon* knowledge as holding unchangeable true beliefs. The truths of *wuon* are fixed and indisputable. This contrasts with the Western notions of knowledge which range from acquaintance or familiarity with persons, places and subjects to the more philosophical notion of what a person in a certain context at a certain point in time holds to be true (see Valeri 1994: 195-6).

The Imyan concern with knowledge can thus only be investigated and described, just as any other cultural meaning, with reference to actors' experiencing of the world and their acting upon it. This approach would promise a fairly good picture of the degree to which internal differentiation of knowledge and the politics of knowledge play a role in daily life and the ongoing construction of meanings and the reproduction of traditions of knowledge. In this chapter I have shown that the *lait* and *wuon* traditions hold different ideas about efficacious knowledge and the ways to access this knowledge. In particular as they signify gender differences, the traditions comprise different criteria of validity and moral standards and are therefore used in different contexts where these validities have significant expressiveness.

In most instances, the understandings about origins, *adat*, *lait* and *wuon* are shared but sometimes there are also novel interpretations, which are not shared, or shared among a select group of people. However, even in the situation in which there is the suggestion of commensurability, claims are diverse, concerns are different, interests are personal, and politics sometimes local and, at other times, formulated from the perspective of a community opposing the government or the church. Individuals may compete with each other over natural resources or debate over the truth of an event or a story. Groups or segments of society may oppose each other in struggles over power and come up with arguments that relate to ‘traditional knowledge’ and/or ‘modern knowledge’. In those cases, the knowledge that is deemed important and founds the claims that are made is largely shared by all members of society.

Commitment to the truth or propagated belief in things, appears to determine and regulate social hierarchies, relations between generations, gender relations, and relations with Western and Indonesian outsiders. Being committed to the truth, Imyan men consider the possession of the *wuon* skills by initiated men as implying that they possess knowledge, the truth, the kernel of all power, might, and wealth. Women and children do not have access to it and whites and Indonesians use the lost core of *wuon* knowledge to look after their own interest only. In the following chapter, we will see that along this line of reasoning, many Imyans challenge the view that promised result of the Pancasila related *pembangunan* and the presence of the Indonesian government are unique sources of blessing.

