

Living with Intricate Futures offers a close look at the complex patterns of Imyan society (West New Guinea, Papua) and the diversity of Imyan people's lives which are shaped by a variety of contingent forces, and by the ways in which people endow the world with meaning. Jaap Timmer shows how and why Imyan subdivide traditions of knowledge and related modes of activity as they shape their understanding through the enactment, reproduction, and invention of meanings. An important theme is the emphasis placed on tracing the emergence and the historical trajectories of certain key categories that have come to epitomise the traditions of knowledge. These categories come to the fore when Imyan discuss their own society, their customs, their futures, the church, and the government. Timmer traces the historical development of the categories and details the role of knowledge and secrecy to understand how conceptions of effective knowledge meaningfully relate to the traditions which shape behaviour which in turn (re)shapes the knowledge traditions. The result is a rich and empirically detailed ethnographic study that includes discussions of origin stories, male initiation, village construction, struggles for local leadership, opposition to Indonesian political control, criticisms of the early Dutch missionaries, and the advent of a new eschatology rooted in local myth and Christian doctrine.

Living with Intricate Futures
Order and Confusion in Imyan Worlds,
Irian Jaya, Indonesia

Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Sociale Wetenschappen

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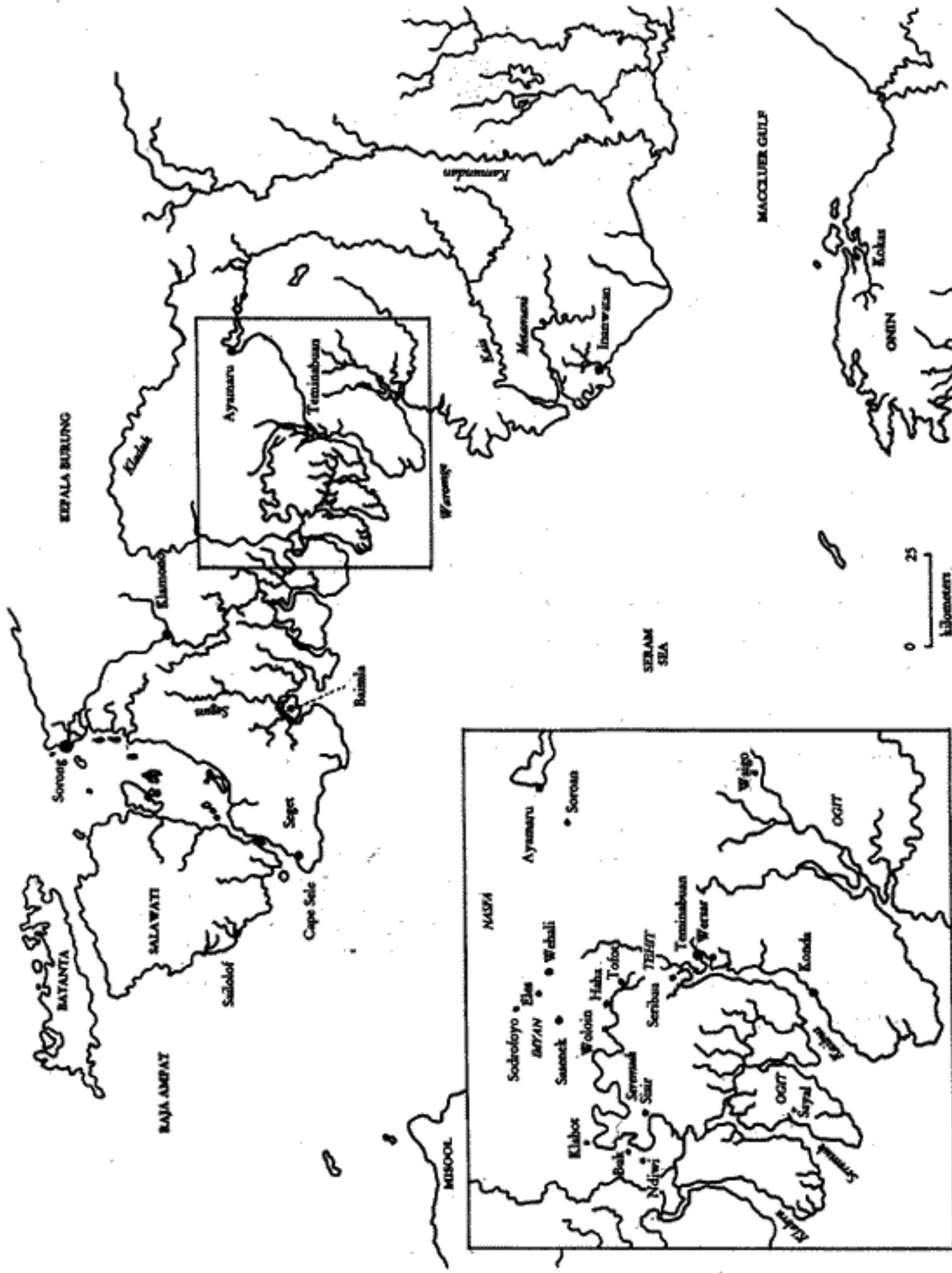
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In memory of
Arnaldo José Pereira Gomes



The Raja Ampat - Sorong - Klabra - Teminabuan - Inauwazan region. The inset shows the Teminabuan area with the relevant ethnic groups: *Imyan, Tebit, and Ogit*

Preface

This thesis is about the complex patterns of Imyan society and the diversity of Imyan people's lives which are shaped by a variety of contingent forces and by the ways in which people endow the world with meaning. The description and analysis is largely based on material collected during fieldwork in 1994, 1995, and 1996 among Imyan speakers who live at the upper streams of the Seremuk River, one of the two major rivers in the Teminabuan area in the Southwest Kepala Burung (Bird's Head, Vogelkop, Doberai) of Indonesia's easternmost province. Formerly and during the time of fieldwork, the province was called Irian Jaya and in colonial times it was known as Netherlands or West New Guinea.

With the expansion of Dutch colonial control over the western part of the island of New Guinea, the territory's eastern bird's head-shaped tip came to be named the Vogelkop. It is sometimes referred to as Doberai, a term of unknown origin. Since the Indonesian assumption of West New Guinea in 1963, the Indonesian translation of Vogelkop, Kepala Burung, was brought into fashion. In general in academic writings in English, the peninsula is named the Bird's Head. Until the end of the 20th century, Irian Jaya ('Victorious Irian') was the name for the part of New Guinea which comprises Indonesia's easternmost province.¹

During the time of fieldwork, Indonesia was still venturing self-confidently as a strongly state-controlled economy. Two years later, in May 1998, this situation changed when President Suharto was forced from office amidst rioting and student demonstrations in Jakarta. Indonesia has since seen the introduction of limited economic and administrative reforms, and bloody clashes between local groups, civilians against militaries, locals against in-migrants, and

1. On the history of naming of West New Guinea, see Sollewijn Gelpke (1993). Ballard (1999) discusses the evolution of naming for the territory as related to Dutch and Indonesian strategic interests.

Christians against Muslims in particular in Aceh, East Timor, the Moluccas, and Irian Jaya. Following Suharto's resignation, there has been an eruption of independence demands in Irian Jaya.²

When President Abdurrachman Wahid visited the province at the turn of century, he renamed it 'Papua'. Most Papuans, however, give preference to the name 'West Papua' as it signifies a really independent state. The Indonesian parliament has yet to officially endorse the new name and Wahid has regularly stated that his government would not recognise demands for independence. Except for bits of information in letters and e-mail from friends and contained in the news that has come to me through the Internet, I have no detailed information on the changes taking place in the Teminabuan area since the era of *reformasi* ('economic and political reforms'), as former President Habibie labelled the post-Suharto period.³

The changes in rulers and topographical names are indicative of the fact that over the last few decades, Imyan society has become entangled in a world that offers much attraction because of its wealth and power but at the same time poses many threats through its subtle forces of marginalisation. In many respects, Imyan speakers play a minor role in the processes of change that take place at a global level. The Teminabuan area is one of the out-of-the-way places of this world and its inhabitants are better known as 'primitive others' than fellow citizens of the global village. Not only did missionaries, colonial officers, and

2. As part of people's current attempts to claim either independence or autonomy from Jakarta, during the 1999 elections some political parties rallied with banners saying '*Membela dan Memperjuangkan Hak-hak Adat Masyarakat Papua*' (protect and fight for customary rights of Papuans) or '*Memperjuangkan Nama Irian Jaya Menjadi Papua*' (fight for changing the name Irian Jaya to Papua) (Mampioer 1999: 23, my translations). In response to such claims, the new Indonesian president, Abdurrachman Wahid announced on 31 December 1999 that the province be renamed Papua.

3. But see Visser (forthc.) reporting on recent developments in Teminabuan in which she stresses the recent heightened political and historical awareness and more openness to discuss events deemed crucial in obtaining justice. A current general label for discomfort among Papuans is HAM (*Hak Asasi Manusia*, human rights) conveying 'the transgression of indigenous and human rights' and thus also comprising the pressing question of 'how can it be that we remain poor, while living on top of the natural riches' (Visser forthc.).

travellers insist that the native people of New Guinea were primitive and backward, present-day Indonesian State ideology and its official representatives in Irian Jaya, together with immigrants from other Indonesian islands as well as well-to-do Papuans look down upon Imyan villagers. Alongside its threats, the outside world holds for Imyan many attractions such as money, modern goods, jobs, travel.

Already for more than five decades, this outside world has been both the source and the negation of its power and autonomy. In such a situation, as Thomas (1992) outlines in his review of similar processes in other Melanesian societies, the objectification of culture emerges profoundly. Keesing (1989) and contributions in Foster (1995b), in Otto and Borsboom (1997), as well as in Otto and Thomas (1997) point out that this objectification may also depend upon the politics of newly independent state's elites that produce a romanticised notion of the traditional past. Showing differences and parallels with processes of objectification elsewhere in the Pacific and Eastern Indonesia, Imyans, in their own particular way, objectify or epitomise the world in terms of meanings given to colonial and post-colonial governments, the mission and church organisations, and their own traditions. In the Conclusion, I compare the dynamics of Imyan culture with the analyses of cultural objectification in two Papua New Guinean societies by Otto (1991, 1992a) and Foster (1995a).

Preceding that discussion, I explain the variety of cultural worlds in Imyan society that are shaped by certain traditions of knowledge that form a surfeit of cultural meanings of which certain symbols are deemed meaningful by people who come to these traditions with particular concerns. The traditions thus come to the fore as representations that people use in practice; they are primary frames of reference in everyday situations. During fieldwork, I became aware of such references or cultural representations.

The research questions I addressed were (1) how cultural meanings are constructed and put into practice in the lives of Imyan people, and (2) what traditions of knowledge can be identified in the Teminabuan area. Cultural meanings are seen as providing the basis for the understanding of events, as they are what people use to interpret the meaning of objects, actions, and events. Thus

to gain a naturalistic picture of Imyan culture, I set out to discover the meanings that Imyan give to their institutions and traditions, to cultural representations and to other people's intentions. Investigating the knowledge that people employ to interpret and objectify their lives and being guided by several Imyan people's concerns, I soon began to realise that certain recurring terms with a distinctive source and history relate to particular sets of meanings and moral guidelines. I found that in Imyan society there are particular forms of knowledge related to contrastive ontologies that show inequality but may also overlap.

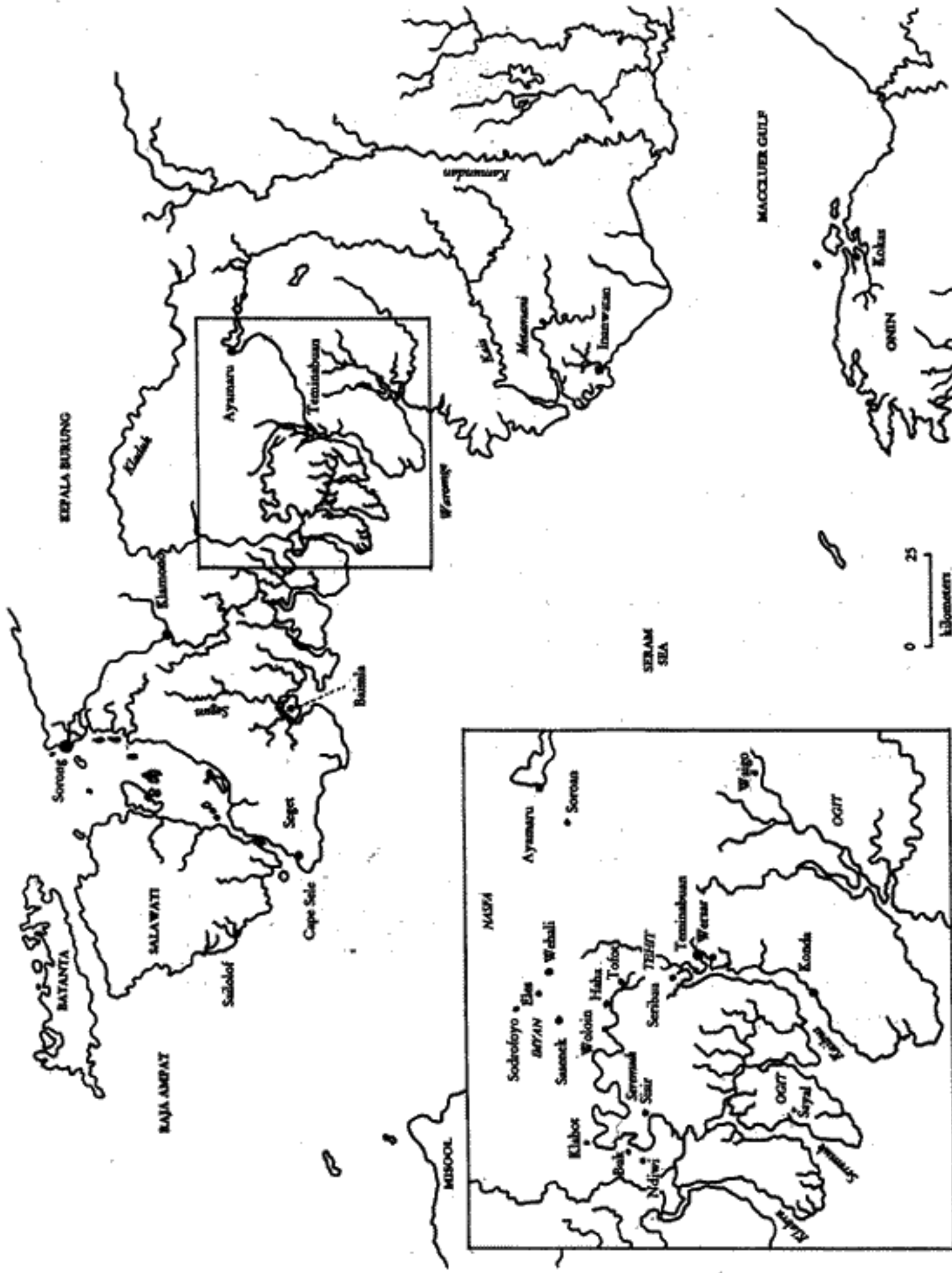
The traditions deemed important by Imyan relate to certain historical streams of knowledge that link up the Imyan communities with neighbouring areas but also to regions outside of Eastern Indonesia, embedding Imyan in systems of larger, and in some cases global, scale. Other streams are local in that they relate to age-old institutions and the knowledge traditions developed in the local setting. They are often taken to represent things traditional, conveying authenticity and are typically brought to the fore to indicate a bygone ideal state of affairs. This does not mean, however, that recent outside streams such as, for example, Christianity cannot just as well be depicted as 'traditional' and representing Imyan identity.

Like many other people in the Pacific (see, for example, Barker 1990), Imyan take Christian knowledge as belonging to an ancient Imyan tradition that was handed down by their own ancestors in times before whites knew about it. In the Teminabuan area, Christian missionaries began to work from 1927 onwards and currently most of the thirty-one village parishes in the sub-district are serviced by mission stations of The Evangelical Church of Irian Jaya. The way Imyan presently reflect on missionisation and Christian lore, shows the extent to which this stream of knowledge has contributed to the ideas and practices to which Imyan attach interest. In an historical process, that I sketch at several stages in this thesis, Imyan Christianity has become a meaningful tradition in relation to other traditions whose meanings have also altered. What makes these traditions meaningful can only be understood in terms of how they are embedded in the Imyan context of ideas and practices. It is only in the practice of Imyan that the traditions show their lived realities as key symbols and views of time,

history, and sociality. I define sociality, after Foster, as ‘the creation and maintenance of relationships’ (1995a: 12).

These realities will show that these ontologies can be at odds but also in agreement with each other, depending on what people mean to express in a particular context. What I want to appear from the thesis is the sense that these different ontologies resonate with people’s concerns because they provide useful, authoritative, powerful, or sensible paradigms for action and for the interpretation of events. The reasons that particular Imyan have for embracing certain traditions and articulating their symbols also determines the way the traditions are reproduced and, at a next stage, come to shape the lives of others.

Cultural meanings are, of course, not constructed out of nothing at each new event but are the result of an ongoing dialectic between structure and event. Moreover, the meanings result from traditions of knowledge which guide actors, while actors in turn reproduce old meanings and add new meanings to the tradition. In order to analyse the ways in which cultural meanings inform individual decision-making, I try to be sensitive to the ways in which people in their social interactions construct meaningful worlds and (re)produce cultural traditions. To bring out these aspects of Imyan culture, I regularly draw attention to individuals to indicate the play of multiple, shifting, and competing statements with practical effects. Giving privilege to individuals not only highlights these processes but also stems from the observation that globalisation enhances people’s capacities to envision possible lives, to fabricate individual characters or to imagine national communities and world-wide religious affiliations (compare Foster 1999 and Lederman 1998).



The Raja Ampat - Segun - Klabra - Teminabuan - Inauwazan region. The inset shows the Teminabuan area with the relevant ethnic groups: Imyan, Tebit, and Ogit

Imyan and Regional Others

The Imyan people (*na Imyan*),⁴ numbering around two thousand, are speakers of the Imyan dialect of the Tehit language that is spoken throughout the north-western part of the administrative sub-district (*kecamatan*) of Teminabuan, named after the town of Teminabuan. The sub-district government, the police, and the army have their headquarters in the town. The sub-district surrounds the Kaibus estuary and the Seremuk River and is situated in between the Klabra River to the west, the Waromge River to the east, the Seram Sea to the south and the Ayamaru Plateau to the north.

In the ethnographic literature, the indigenous people of Teminabuan are generally referred to as Tehit or speakers of Tehit.⁵ Most autochthonous Teminabuan people (*na fobi* ‘people from the land’ or in Indonesian, *orang asli*, *orang pribumi*) speak one or more of the dialects of the Tehit language and a majority speak at least some Indonesian or local Malay. Many Tehit speakers live in the town of Teminabuan, but most, including the Imyan, reside in villages of about two to five hundred inhabitants. The Imyan live in the villages of Sasenek and Sodrofoyo nestled in the lush green hills in the north-western part of the sub-district, and the villages of Woloin, Haha, and Tofot to the south. The southern villages are located near the swampy mangrove tidal flats along the headwaters of the Seremuk River. While the northern Imyan cultivate a variety of tubers, bananas, and peppers, the people living near the coast mainly harvest sago.

4. In this thesis, expressions in Imyan, local Malay, and Indonesian are italicised. Appendix C lists a glossary that includes all Imyan and local Malay words which occur more than twice in the text.

5. Tehit, sometimes also named Tehid, is classified as a Papuan or non-Austronesian language and is grouped together with other Southwest Kepala Burung languages such as Seget, Moi, Moraid, Yabin-Konda, and Ogit into the West Kepala Burung Family of the West Papuan Phylum, forming one group with the languages of North Halmahera (Voorhoeve 1975, 1984, 1989; Silzer and Clouse 1991). For references to linguistic studies of Tehit and its dialects, see Silzer and Clouse (1991: 80), Hesse (1993), and Stokhof (1995) or consult the overview of written materials on the Southwest Kepala Burung in the bibliography of this thesis.

The boundaries of the Tehit language coincide well with the sub-district boundaries. To all sides, there is an uninterrupted flow of population between Maybrat speakers to the north,⁶ Klabra speakers to the west,⁷ Moi speakers to the north-west,⁸ and Ogit or (Yabin-) Konda speakers to the east and south.⁹ Teminabuan people generally agree that they are culturally different from the Maybrat people (in terms of language, exchange practices, and mentality), Ogit people (in language, origins, and settlement patterns), and Klabra. Linguistically, Klabra is one of the dialects of Tehit and Imyan speakers recognise few cultural differences between themselves and people living in the Klabra River area. Only recently have people in Teminabuan considered Klabra with their rather isolated commercial and administrative centre of Wanurian as more traditional and backward.

6. The Maybrat figure prominently in the anthropological literature of the Kepala Burung and are also referred to as Ayamaru, Mejprat, Mejbrat, or Meybrat people. The Swedish anthropologist Elmberg has devoted two monographs (1965, 1968) and three articles (1955, 1959, 1966) to Maybrat exchange, kinship, mythology, and rituals, all based on fieldwork in 1954 and 1958. In his capacity as government anthropologist, Pouwer studied the cloth exchange of the Maybrat people (1956, 1957) and also described the ways in which a prominent 'big man', Abraham Kambuaya, dealt with major changes in Maybrat society (1993). In the 1970s, Miedema, while working in charge of a local church, visited the Maybrat for six short periods of one to three weeks and gathered material for his analysis of their fishing practices and cloth exchange complex (1986). In later stages of his comparative historical analysis of trade, migration, and exchange in the Kepala Burung, Miedema began to focus on the Maybrat, following Kamma's (1970) hypothesis which suggests that the Maybrat area represents the centre of the cloth exchange complex in the Kepala Burung (see, for example, Miedema 1994, 1998, in press). Various dialects of the Maybrat language have been studied and documented by Ajamiseba, Kafiar, and Silzer (1989), Brown (1990, 1991), Brown and Brown (1991, 1993), and Dol (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999).

7. Purba and Animung (1982-3, 1983, 1984) and Animung and Flassy (1987) have made studies of the Klabra and Seget languages respectively.

8. For references to studies of the Moi language, see Ichwan and Fautngil (1984), Flassy (1983), and Menick (1995, 1996).

9. There is virtually no material on the Ogit people. Imyan consider them as immigrants from coastal places further to the east (Yahadian, Inanwatan). Until missionary and colonial government activities took effect in the 1940s, the Ogit lived a nomadic life, canoeing the rivers and creeks in the coastal swamplands. Presently, they live in the villages of Makambar, Sayal, and Konda.

In relation to local ‘autochthonous’ groups, Imyan not only differentiate themselves as a group (*na sa*; *na* - ‘people’, *sa* - ‘source, origin’) by outward appearances and languages or dialects but also by the origins and cultural traits of other groups (*na sa wat*; *wat* - ‘other, different’). For example, Tehit informants have suggested to me that in the early days of missionisation in Teminabuan the still pagan hinterland people were called ‘*na Imyan*’, meaning ‘people in the dark’. Imyan do not appreciate this etymology of their present-day ethnonym, but neither do they dispute it or propose an alternative origin. While I do not mean to say that every name needs an origin in order to serve as an authentic label, I am inclined to believe that ‘Imyan’ has a missionary Christian origin.

Leaving aside its origin, Imyan people stress that ‘Imyan’ is very different from ‘Tehit’, by which the Jit speakers of Teminabuan town, Seribau and Wersar are indicated. The Tehit people occupy the tidal drained lowland swamps at the upper reaches of the Kaibus River, including the town of Teminabuan. In contrast to the powerful and rich tradition of male initiation (*wuon*) among the Imyan, the Tehit people have the less sacred *sidadik* dance house tradition (see Flassy 1981: 9-10). The differences in cultural traditions between Imyan and Tehit are due to different spheres of influence in pre-colonial times, that developed around the two major waterways that give access to the area: the Kaibus and the Seremuk.

In line with the origin of *wuon*, this ethnic boundary refers to different historical landscapes to which I pay attention in the following chapters. Some necessary background information is that to the north the Imyan, Sawyat, and Yatflé people border the Maybrat speaking population. Imyan, Yatflé, Sawyat, and several Maybrat groups consider themselves peoples of the hills (*na sfa*, *na* - ‘people’, *sfa* - ‘hill, mountain’; henceforth: Nasfa) who have the *wuon* tradition of knowledge in common.¹⁰ This *wuon* tradition comprises rituals that are important for the restoration of threatened social relations, for power, and for

10. Cappetti (1961: 24) suggests that Nasfa comprises all Maybrat groups. Imyan informants, however, pointed out that the Maybrat living near the Ayamaru Lakes do not belong to the Nasfa group. A discussion of the political and ethnic implications is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

wealth. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, *wuon* is central to the Nasfa people in that this tradition is recognised in a variety of ways as providing a rich way of being and an identity for all members of society distinguishing them from other groups.

The sub-district, covering an area of around 2,500 square kilometres, has a relatively dense population of about twelve thousand people.¹¹ The majority is of regional origin and around one-thousand are Buginese, Butonese, and Macassarese (BBM) from South Sulawesi. Together with tens of Ambonese and Keiese families, these Eastern Indonesian in-migrants mostly live in Teminabuan town. Just outside the Teminabuan sub-district, in the sub-district of Aitinyo there is a site named Moswaren where around two hundred Javanese attempt to make a living. Regional others or non-Tehit speakers making a living in or around Teminabuan town include Maybrat as well as immigrants from Inanwatan, Onin and Salawati.

Towards Indonesian outsiders Imyan tend to call themselves the Tehit people (*na Tehit*) in the local language or the Teminabuan people (*orang Teminabuan*) in the national Indonesian language. Imyan categorise Indonesian outsiders as *na osagali* or *na sebrang* ('people from the other side of the sea') comprising all people with straight hair (*kli*) and other languages coming from Seram, Ambon, Halmahera, Sulawesi, Java and ethnic Chinese. Imyan also distinguish between Javanese and Moluccan people in the administration and newcomers (*pendatang* or *na sekafak*) who either establish themselves as traders in the town of Teminabuan or at the specially constructed location at Moswaren. The people at Moswaren are mostly Javanese who have enrolled in the national Indonesian Transmigration Program which aims to resettle people from areas of Java that suffer from high population pressure to 'outer' islands like Irian Jaya. Another aim of the program is to contribute to the government policy of assimilating the people of Irian Jaya, with the goal of forging a single national identity. The official view is that the Transmigration Program is beneficial to the

11. The population density is around five persons per square kilometre (Lautenbach 1999: 69).

indigenous people of Irian Jaya because it enables them to ‘learn from the Javanese’.

Largely because these immigrants settle on land for which no compensation is paid, enjoy all kinds of government subsidies, and find it easier to gain employment in the administration, there is significant social tension between the in-migrants and the *na fobi*.¹² As the government seeks to increase the pace of immigration to Irian Jaya, matters as the loss of land and employment opportunities will in the future increasingly incite local Papuans to protest against degrading treatment and unequal access to resources. As it relates to much of the themes discussed in this thesis, I regularly return to Imyan prejudices towards immigrant groups which in general suggest that Muslim immigrants come to Irian to either enrich themselves or as part of conscious Jakarta strategy to obliterate Papuans and to ‘Javanise’ Irian Jaya. Imyan also are much less successful in education and business than, for example, Papuans from the Maybrat area who make successful livings in Teminabuan, but such ‘fellow-sufferers’ do not play an important role in Imyan otherings.

In this thesis I focus on the Imyan speakers who live in the villages of Haha, Woloin, Tofot, Sasenek, and Sodrofoyo. The villages of Sasenek and Sodrofoyo are located in the green karst hills in the north-western part of the sub-district, and the villages of Woloin, Haha, and Tofot to the south of this hill range, close to the headwaters of the Seremuk and the extensive stretch of estuarine swamplands with mangroves, muddy tidal flats, and vast areas with sago groves. For their livelihood the northern Imyan depend to a large extent on gardens which they make in the forest by slashing and burning small patches of land on which villagers grow a variety of tubers and vegetables. Their staple diet consists of tubers, supplemented by sago from the coast and a variety of plants, fruits, nuts, and game from the forest.

12. The autochthonous people of Teminabuan often see the newcomers as profiteers who are engaged in unfair business and foul the land of the Papuans. For an overview of similar reactions and the social and economic impact of Sulawesi and Tenggara (BBM - Buton Bugis Makassar) immigrants elsewhere in Irian Jaya, see Aditjondro (1986).

In contrast, the villagers who live close to the coastal swamplands cultivate sago gardens, eat sago porridge (*hlit* or *papeda*), together with tubers and vegetables grown in gardens and a variety of forest products, for their staple diet. People of the villages of Sasenek and Sodrofoyo often come down to meet their relatives in the villages of Woloin, Haha, and Tofot for family matters, to obtain sago starch or to process sago themselves and to catch shrimp and fish. Sago is a high-energy food rich in carbohydrates. Usually women process the sago starch. The extraction of the starch demands a high level of manual labour, for it involves pounding the pith, washing the pith with water and transporting the wet starch to be prepared for consumption. For the coastal villagers, sago is more important than farming, and hunting remains a major male activity. Alongside these traditional items of food, rice meals and doughnut balls are served during church feasts and to grace visits of government officials or church leaders from Teminabuan town.

Fieldwork

To the uninitiated the work involved in an expedition might appear to commence on the day arranged for the start, but this is by no means the case.

Captain Cecil G. Rawling,
The Land of the New Guinea Pygmies (1913: 26)

The treatise owes a great deal to interviews and observations conducted in the village of Haha. During 1994, 1995, and 1996, I spent about eighteen months among the Imyan, of which some fifteen months in the village of Haha, interspersed with visits to other Imyan villages, Teminabuan town, the villages of Wersar and Konda and some research among Imyan speakers in the city of Sorong. Although my focus was on Imyan speakers, I gathered a great deal of information on regional histories of Tehit (Jit) speakers in Teminabuan, Wersar and Seribau to which I only refer in passing. The account's regional focus is on the Imyan, and in illustrative cases I draw upon the more detailed material I gathered in Haha. Although there is a focus on people and events in one village, the cultural traditions that inform the behaviour of Haha villagers is in many respects similar to that of other Imyan villagers.

I embarked on fieldwork with little knowledge about the people of the Teminabuan area. Little had been written about the territory, and in the anthropology of the Kepala Burung they figure as peripheral to the Maybrat people who had been studied by Elmberg and Miedema. From some Dutch government reports and several conversations with the Mennonite missionary Herbert Marcus, who had worked in the Inanwatan, Ayamaru and Teminabuan areas from 1950 to 1958, I knew that the now defunct male initiation cult (*wuon*), death-dealing lethal powers (*lait, suangi*), and the exchange of cloth (*kain timur*) was important to them.¹³ The information from these interviews and the details

13. Marcus also gave me access to six volumes of his memoirs (n.d.) which also cover the period during which he and his wife, Mieneke, worked in Inanwatan and Teminabuan. Also rich in many other respects, this material provides an interesting

contained in official reports, letters, memoirs and occasional papers are embodied in the historical descriptions in this thesis. Particularly valuable were the reports from departing officials to their successors. These informative reports are called Memoranda of Transfer (*Memories van Overgave*) and are held in the archive of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs in the General State Archives at The Hague.¹⁴ The writings of Van Rhijn (1957a, 1957b, 1960, 1987, 1995[1957], 1996, n.d.) and Bergh's (1964b) paper on *suangi* ('evil powers') in the Kepala Burung proved valuable for assessing the traditions of male initiation and evil powers in Teminabuan land. After fieldwork, more details about *wuon* were offered by the schoolteacher Albert Westerbaan who had also taken a lively interest in male initiation practices while working in the area in the 1950s.

Before I could plunge into the Teminabuan region, I had to obtain all sorts of permits and recommendations from the Indonesian government. While collecting permits in Jakarta, I was surprised to notice that officials were more concerned with forms, stamps, order and regulations than with the actual work that I was going to do in the state's turbulent easternmost province, coloured by ethnic nationalism and its harsh repression. I was less surprised when these officials asked if I was not afraid to live with naked savages and primitive

insight into the relations between the mission and government, the role of Moluccan teachers and preachers and the process of missionisation in general in the 1950s (see Chapter 5).

14. Relevant to the Teminabuan area are the Memoranda of Transfer of the *Onderafdeeling Midden-Vogelkop* (Van Dijk 1940), the *Onderafdeeling Inanwatan* (Lotgering 1940), the *Onderafdeeling Ajamaroe* (Merkelijn 1951b and Van der Veen 1953b), and the *Onderafdeeling Teminaboean* (Massink 1955b and Cappetti 1961). The different names of the *Onderafdeeling* (sub-division) incorporating the Teminabuan area reflects the shifts of the government headquarters responsible for the south-west coast of the Kepala Burung (see Chapters 2 and 4 for more details). In 1954, the town of Teminabuan became the headquarters of the newly established sub-division carrying the same name (*Teminaboean*). Consequently, observations reported in earlier Memoranda of Transfer deal largely with Inanwatan and Ayamaru, the two previous major centres of administration and mission. The first government official to account for the coastal people of Teminabuan in detail is Cappetti in his 1961 Memorandum of Transfer. Diaries of government personnel, reports from missionaries and official correspondence related to Teminabuan are available from 1924 and 1928, whereas for other areas the earliest written materials date to the mid-1930s, when the sub-division of Inanwatan first became an independent administrative unit.

cannibals. An official at the National Office for Social and Political Affairs (*Sospol*) warned me that I would meet undressed black people with tails who take each other's heads and may also attack foreigners. Another, however, suggested that he was very interested in the culture of this far away place and that he looked forward to reading my reports.

After a long and tiring week of being bounced from office to office and desk to desk I was allowed to take a flight to Irian Jaya. In Jayapura, the province capital and then in Sorong, the district's (*kabupaten*) capital, I encountered a similar bureaucracy organised by people with similar faces and attitudes to those in Jakarta. After over a month of this unbridled bureaucracy in Jakarta, Jayapura, and Sorong, I arrived in Teminabuan, where administrative dealings were much easier. Shortly after having reported with local government and the military, I went to the village of Haha, about fifteen kilometres west of Teminabuan town.

All the interviews were carried out in local Malay and Indonesian. When I embarked on fieldwork my command of Indonesian was basic, based on a crash-course. During the first weeks in Indonesia, when I visited numerous offices occupied mostly by Javanese officials speaking a language that was rather different from the standard Indonesian of my Balinese teacher and on the course's tapes, my language acquisition did not make much progress. Once in Irian Jaya, I got in touch with people whose talk I could get the drift of much more easily. In particular in the Teminabuan area I achieved fluency in local Malay within a few months.

After having been in the field for three months, people began to remark more often that my command of *bahasa Irian* ('Irian language') was good and I began to study Imyan. I gradually learned to speak some Imyan but I never gained proficiency in the local vernacular. From the moment I could say such things as where I was going, where I came from, what I had done, and was able to ask where somebody was going and what he or she had done, people rejoiced, but would then continue the conversation in local Malay. Apparently, most villagers, in particular members of my generation felt that local Malay was more appropriate.

Indicative of the language shift taking place among the Imyan is that Indonesian, or rather local Malay, is deliberately used by parents when addressing their children. When asked about the reason for this, they say that Indonesian is today's modern language (*bahasa moderen*) and that command of this language is a prerequisite for success in school and, later, in Indonesian society. They hasten to add that this is one of the few things that they can do for their children who won't stand much chance against Javanese, Moluccan, and BBM immigrants who are clearly more successful in obtaining a good education, getting jobs, and running a business.

Besides being the main inter-cultural medium for communication with outsiders, local Malay is the language of most public gatherings, particularly when these gatherings relate to church or government activities. Mission work in the area was for the most part done in Malay, and this language is associated with Christianity, white and Moluccan missionaries, and early contacts with the outside world. All Imyan speak local Malay, though some older people, in particular women, usually have a rather small vocabulary. In addition to Malay, most Imyan have at least passive knowledge of Indonesian, the national language used in official settings and taught in schools. In daily conversation, Standard Indonesian is rarely used. In fact, at the beginning of my fieldwork, village heads and school teachers did their best to address me respectably with expressions like *engkau*, *aku* and standard forms of conjugation using fully-fledged affixed forms: *mengerjakan* ('do, carry out, work'), *menjalankan* ('operate, put into action'), *kebersihan* ('tidiness'), *perkampungan* ('settlement'), instead of the colloquial *kerja*, *kasi jalan*, *kasi bersi*, and *kampung*.

To give some indication of the difference, in local Malay the words enumerated above would sound as follows: *kerja* or *bikin*, as in: *Iyo, buat apa harus ada orang Jawa kerja diatas tanah kitorang ... kitorang tara pernah pigi bikin kabun di tanah Jawa toh?* - Why should we have Javanese living on our land ... have we ever gone to Java to make a garden there?; *kasi jalan* (*pemerintah maunya kitorang kasi jalan dong pu program-program* - 'the government wants us to put its programs into action'), *bersi* or *rapi* (*kami kasi bersi kampong kita karena Pak Camat mo datang* - 'we are tidying up our village

because the head of the sub-district wants to visit’).

Not having been able to speak Imyan fluently has certainly influenced the kind of data that I gathered. I have always tried to get translations into the vernacular for expressions which I thought were crucial in the sense that the way it is said reveals the way people think. After a while my assistants knew what I was after and started to volunteer proverbs and sayings in the vernacular. Working on translating a collection of proverbs helped me greatly to learn some of the subtlety of the language and the related worldview.

The task I had set for fieldwork was to see and grasp salient features of the social complexity and cultural processes in the Teminabuan area in order to collect material for a description of local culture in terms of individual variation in knowledge, the process of cultural construction and certain traditions of knowledge. As I explained above, I had learned that *wuon* and *lait* or *suangi* were of major concern to the people, and that the exchange of cloth was perhaps a central cultural institution regulating social behaviour. Most writings on the area deal with the exchange of cloths of which valuable old ones had their origins in the Moluccas, from whence they had been imported for centuries into the Kepala Burung in exchange for slaves and birds of paradise.

In the course of the field research, I began to concentrate on traditions of knowledge that structure or organise peoples’ worldviews. I thought that if I were able to trace the central concepts by which people express certain meanings I could then further collect information on the streams of knowledge that have influenced and grounded these traditions of knowledge. On the basis of Miedema’s studies of the Kebar (1984) and the Maybrat (1986), Otto’s analysis of cultural domains on Baluan Island (1991), Foster’s (1995a) examination of Tangan mortuary rituals defined as ‘customary’ in opposition to new and foreign practices of business, as well as Barth’s (1993) exploration of traditions of knowledge shaped in unfolding Balinese lives, I had formed some idea of how domains, categories, streams of knowledge, or traditions of knowledge may find expression in certain contexts.

I took these observations as examples of what I might find among the people I was working with. Still I was careful not to accept too readily categories such as *gereja* ('church'), *agama* ('religion'), *adat* ('tradition, custom'), and *pemerintah* ('government') as functioning in ways similar to the same concepts found by Miedema for the Kebar and Barth for North Bali, or similar concepts like *lotu* ('church'), *gavman* ('government'), and *kastom* ('custom') in Papua New Guinea as described by Otto and Foster, or even conceptual divisions such as church, tradition, government, and culture that structure our descriptions of Western societies. On the basis of an initial inventory of categories that recurred in expressions of Imyan identity and their ideas about their society, their tradition, their futures, the government, the church, but also a few initial explanations of what informants found what would be essential for a scholar who had come to study their culture (*kebudayaan*), I slowly succeeded in finding some structure in uses and meanings of recurring categories.

Because I introduced myself as a student from Universiteit Leiden interested in documenting their *kebudayaan* and planning to produce a book, many began to tell me that there was no *kebudayaan* left, but that *adat*, essentialised as *wuon* lore, marriage rules, and cloth exchange, was still strong. When I asked why there was no *kebudayaan*, people rapidly began to indicate the destructive roles played by the *pemerintah Belanda* (Dutch government), the *pemerintah Indonesia* (Indonesian government), the *pendeta-pendeta zending* (Protestant missionaries), and a process involving the loss of effective knowledge and ritual belonging to the *wuon* cult due to the abandonment of initiations and the dying of initiators and initiated men.

Inasmuch as the categories and associations that came to the fore in these accounts, I encouraged people to further explain what they saw as *adat*, *gereja*, *kebudayaan*, *pemerintah*, *agama*, *wuon*, and *lait* or *suangi*. I recorded how these categories are structured in relation to each other and what they entailed for individual concerns. An initial inventory was made after two months of conducting interviews in my house and in other people's houses and their gardens. These exploratory sessions were generally gatherings of two to five people, mostly men, whose conversation was for the greater part organised

around answering my questions. Though I continued having these kinds of interview sessions throughout the period of fieldwork, I tried as much as possible to attend public and private gatherings in which my presence was not always a matter of note.

Though I have tried to incorporate as much as possible the lives and views of women, the account is largely based on men's voices because most women found it difficult to put their trust in my project. Most women thought that I was trying to explore secret male knowledge and that my inquiries into their ideas and knowledge were only to confirm men's ideology that enforces inequality between the sexes. Nevertheless, through long conversations with a few women who were eager to share their concerns with me, I have been able to see things from a distinctive female perspective. When these accounts can, in my opinion, reliably balance the largely male bias of my analysis I attempt to convey something of what they tried to explain to me.

During fieldwork, I could also not get away from the fact that I am a member of a society that is most typically white, wealthy, and powerful. I share this with many other anthropological researchers who go to out-of-the-away places and to most readers there is nothing new about that remark. But to understand some aspects of data gathering and the sources of understanding of local people's thoughts about their own history, their identity and self-worth, it is necessary to explain how people saw me. Local people had clear associations with former Dutch missionaries, patrollers, administrators, army officials, but also with an American linguist who had worked there in the late 1980s and with tourists who irregularly come in small numbers to the city of Sorong.¹⁵

15. Commissioned to translate the Bible into the vernacular and while working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Hesse carried out extensive linguistic fieldwork from 1989 till 1991. Based on this research, Hesse wrote a thesis which describes the phonology of Imyan-Tehit (1993). Tour groups do not visit Teminabuan and tourism is mostly confined to diving tours around the Raja Ampat Islands. There are also old Dutch marines and Japanese veterans who pay a visit to Sorong or other places where they were posted during the Second World War or the early 1960s.

Dutch government officials, the Dutch missionaries, as well as some post-colonial great men of development have come to stand for the moral Other, an image of the European and Indonesian man as powerful and able to bring development and salvation (*selamat*).¹⁶ In his essay on the distinction between freedom and autonomy in Melanesia, Maclean suggests that under the conditions of colonialism, ‘the obsessive projects of exploration, conversion, development, and science are literally let loose, generally accompanied by the development of an increasingly heroic sense of self’ (1994: 672; see Conclusion). As a result, Kwima villagers in the Jimi Valley of Papua New Guinea, saw Maclean as an authority to be interrogated about the methods and secrets of Western or modern business, he ‘was constructed as a party to a *debate* about the truths of evolution, creation and the second coming’ (1994: 672). Similar constructions among Imyan people have played crucial roles in my engagement with the local people.

From the Imyan perspective on the colonial past and their ideas surrounding white missionaries and government officials, I was in any case seen as knowledgeable but also often as someone who is prone to mislead Papuans and withhold the relevant, efficacious knowledge, just as my predecessors had done. Most are convinced that whites know the secret esoteric knowledge that in fact belongs to the inner circle of initiated Imyan men. In reply to my questions about *wuon*, I was either straightforwardly told that it was secret or that there was no point in telling me because I could also ask elder men in Holland. Supporting the suggestion made above, some told me to visit Reverend Kamma because when he came to Sorong and Teminabuan in the 1950s and preached, it was obvious

16. As for the colonial period it can be said that almost all whites served as a model for the ‘other’ that now figures prominently in thoughts and stories about possible roads to a new society, the return of Jesus Christ. From the Indonesian period there are far fewer heroes because most leaders and representatives of ‘Jakarta’ are seen as corrupt and not having a heart for the Papuan matter. Only such people as Barnabas Suebu, the former governor of the province have become a hero. His popularity is largely due to the fact that he is Papuan, charismatic, and that he went to great lengths to reform village organisation and to broadcast ‘development’ to the village level by means of a series of illustrated booklets written in plain Indonesian, titled *Seri Buku Informasi Pembangunan*.

that he knew everything about *wuon*.

Similarly, forester Kalkman, who worked in the Beriat region in the late 1950s (see Vink 1998), is seen as using *wuon* powers in order to find his way through the forest as a stranger and the drive with which he fell trees. Stories about him seeing spirits that fly around and above the tree tops are widespread and were often recounted to support the claim that mature male whites know about *wuon*. More recently, the Bible translators who work in Teminabuan and Ayamaru are thought to have stolen powerful stones, pearls, pieces of wood, skulls, and other material items that are considered to possess crucial powers for ensuring prosperity. Many Haha villagers hold Ronald Hesse, the Summer Institute of Linguistics' (SIL) Bible translator, responsible for the observed drying up of the Sesna River and the deterioration of the land, due to him taking away sacred stones from a hole in the river-bed. Along similar lines, William Brown who also worked for the SIL is held accountable for the drying up of the Ayamaru Lakes because he took away a large pearl possessed by two large snakes.

When two archaeological researchers from the University of Groningen entered the Ayamaru area to excavate caves, rumours rapidly spread that they were also out there to steal some magical object that would make them rich upon return to the Netherlands. After having spent two weeks amongst the villagers in the area where they were working in an attempt to refute at least the most radical of these theories, I became more sensitive to similar stories about my own research by working in all candour and by staying away from sacred spots in the waters and forests.

Most of the data on Imyan ideas about the universality of *wuon* knowledge and a particular eschatology which stipulates that this knowledge will be returned to Imyan with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ which serve to underpin the final chapters of this thesis, was entrusted to me in discussions which arose out of Imyan curiosity about what I knew and how far I was prepared to go in revealing the truth. Resulting from the same unequal situation but also due to the traditional principles of secrecy in Imyan society, knowledgeable Imyan men were, as said, not prepared to disclose 'deep truths' about *wuon* to me. Both deeply rooted

feelings of distrust towards the whites who not only misled Papuans by withholding the truths but also politically bargained West New Guinea to Indonesia, made it hard for many Imyan to entrust the little knowledge (and power) of what is still in their hands to the anthropological passer-by.

In this thesis, I discuss the cultural and historical backgrounds of representations of whites who hold the key to prosperity and redemption ('cargo') and show that in fact they are mirror images of the arbitrary relationships of the colonial and post-colonial powers to the local moral order. Imyan think that the possession of the truth will enable them to built a new society, or, sometimes more radical: that this 'cargo' is God's Kingdom on Earth or Heaven in West Papua. I emphasise that suspicion and secrecy played virtually no role in the sharing of joy and sorrow with me. It thus needs to be stressed that most of my relationships with Imyan were characterised by their generous and affectionate nature and that the feelings of distrust were largely confined to situations in which I started about *wuon*, former rituals, and the truth of the Scripture.

A final point is that although I cannot guarantee the anonymity of the people that I write about in this thesis, the intense social conflicts and shifting political tensions in West New Guinea warrant that most persons in the case studies carry assumed names.

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Jaya and only knew New Guinea from its eastern side, in particular the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, where I had worked among the Huli in 1991 and 1992 (see Timmer in press). While I was still writing my MA thesis on Huli bodily adornment in the context of tourism, Jelle Miedema and Wim Stokhof were launching ISIR. They invited me to work in Leiden and to immerse myself in Kepala Burung anthropology, from the summer of 1993 onwards.

During the preparatory stage, I greatly benefited from Miedema's expertise on the histories and processes of culture of the Kepala Burung. Miedema was able to lend the Kepala Burung an air of familiarity and learning, and through his comparative analyses of the elaborate cloth exchange system in the Kepala Burung he made me realise how interesting and exciting a south-western coastal area like Teminabuan is. Other literature on the area such as Elmberg's detailed studies, J.M. Schoorl's thesis, Kamma's various writings, among others indicated that the area was also a potential field site for other subjects. As for theory and methodology in this exploratory phase, I greatly benefited from Ton Otto's and Frans Hüsken's command of anthropology. My gratitude for their unyielding support - intellectual and otherwise - during every step of this project cannot fully be expressed in words. What needs to be acknowledged here, however, is that their insights into processes of culture and the practice approach are intertwined with my own.

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17. Recently, following a conference held in Leiden, a wide range of papers by ISIR scholars and others were published together in Miedema, Odé, and Dam (1998), indicating a growing body of data on and insights into the various disciplines concerned with the Kepala Burung.

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18. Co-operation with Visser has also resulted in a co-authored publication (Timmer and Visser in press). For the demographic data in that article we relied on Lautenbach's (1999) report on her demographic survey.

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