



# **The Lepki people of Sogber River, New Guinea**



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# Preface

## Background to my stay in West-Papua

In August 2003 I was to become the first foreigner that was to be enrolled as a full time student at Cenderawasih University (UNCEN), the oldest and most respected university in the Indonesian province of Papua. The University is located in two separate areas. The “kampus lamah” (Old-Campus) which are the location of the oldest buildings of the University is found in the suburb of Jayapura called Abepura. The other area “Kampus baru” (New-campus) is located beautifully at a hillside in another suburb of Jayapura called Waena, this is where the Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics is found, and the place I found myself taking Anthropology classes.

Before becoming a student at the University I had spent 3 months in 2001 on the Island of Bali, and had just visited Papua briefly during that time. I did not visit the University back then, and it wasn't before I was back in Norway I read about the University on the internet. I could at this time not speak a word Indonesian, but managed to contact one of the Universities lecturers, Sam Renyaan, who were at this moment working at the University of Leiden in Netherlands. He recommended me to leave for Jayapura, and apply directly to the Faculty. This is what happened, and I spent 3 months persuading the Bureau of National Education in Jakarta that I wanted to become a student in Jayapura, but I did not manage to get their support, West-Papua were to dangerous and was a red-area according to them. Even after explaining myself to a military commander invited to review my application, in connection with this process, I found it hard to get permission. It wasn't before I brought an Indonesian friend had family bonds with one the former Indonesian presidents, that I got my papers, straight away, in less than 1 hour.

Back in Papua I started my student life and was soon integrated with the other students. It took me approximately 2 semesters to being able to have an academic conversation and to understand adequately Indonesian, since I had no more than 4 weeks with Indonesian course in Yogyakarta behind me. At the University I also found myself active among a group of students to organize study-circles and fields trips. We got support from the most active and resourceful lectors. I feel the obligation to mention the people in my student network who shared with me their friendship and knowledge about the great “land of the morning star” (West-Papua). These are among others: Maximus Kadam, Fitri Labaidi, Hans Yawan, Eke Gwijangge, Aquarisa Imbiri, Lenny

Magdalena Ivong, Ananias Warombri, Alfares Asjerem and Millis Magayang. The resourceful lecturer and curator of Museum Loka Budaya, which I have already acknowledged above, was enthusiastically assisting us and did a great deal to ensure our students motivations.

After having completed 2 years of theory at the University, I spent most of my time researching Papuan ethnography and doing field work. My research trips brought me to different corners and cultural groups (tribes) in Papua, among these: Sentani, Sause, Kaure, Kosare, Dani/Yali, Tabla, Ketengban, Yefta and finally the Lepki.

During my 4 years in Papua I feel that I got to know the people, the land and their history very well. My biggest challenges were that of my physical health, especially concerns rising in the planning of long field trips beyond villages which had airstrips. Malaria was a major concern which I contracted about 10 times within 4 years, both the subtypes *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium Vivax*. But I learned from Indonesian health personnel and local people how to presume a malaria attack and what combinations of Medicines to use, so I felt I had control, even though I had to work with the constant threat. Living a healthy life, with modest exercise, little stress and a healthy diet proved to be a key to strengthening the immune-system against the parasite. I mostly suffered from Malaria after a physical experience including high level of physical exhaustion and/or poor diets.

## Background to the research among The Lepki

During a field trip to the Ketengban people in November 2006 I landed on airstrip in the central mountains called Nongme and walked north to the villages of Urabool, Umtambor and Sekame. The key goal of this trip was to write about the material culture of the Ketengban people of this area as well as to explore the possibilities of populations of other tribal groups living in the lowlands north of Umtambor and Sekame. The people of Sekame had been in recent conflict with some people in the lowlands to the north, and which supposedly had claimed the lives from both parties, so I was at that time told, not to venture into these areas. It became apparent to me that the area was scarcely populated and I did only meet Ketengban people living in this region, although I heard rumours that a few Lepki woman was intermarried in a settlement north of Sekame. The Ketengban of this has irregular contact with the lowland people Lepki and also

Kosare, residing further to the north/north-east. But the unsettled area between the Ketengban people of this area, prevents them in having regular communication.

I had also at a previous occasion visited a Kosare group residing between the village of Hulu Atas and the junction between Nawa River and Idenburg (Taritatu) River. Some work have already been done on the Kosare people, but the Lepki people who reside south of them, were undocumented by anthropologists and no research, apart from a few missionary notes from a two of the villages (Terablu and Aboy) had been completed, and the outskirts of these villages where completely undocumented. I felt a strong motivation to help fill in this gap, in the interest of the conservation and knowledge about the Lepki people.

Back in Jayapura I started to work with basic notes from the region, given to me by the American missionary Roger Doriot. Doriot<sup>1</sup> who was my only source of information from the Lepki area and was the first missionary and outsider to venture into the northern Lepki area (Terablu), an area isolated into the 1990's.

During my Christmas vacation in my hometown of Bodø in Norway in 2006, I wrote what was to become my official request for my bachelor thesis. I decided that I would write about some of the basics of the Lepki culture, and do a much needed population survey.

My class-mate Maximus Kandam originating from the Muyu Tribe in south-east Papua was to join me on the field trip. Maximus<sup>2</sup> was due to more specifically studying land rights and the management of conflicts by the Lepki.

We landed on the airstrip of Terablu a morning in late March 2007 after a 45minites chartered flight with the missionary Cessna-airplane owned by TARIKU.

We stayed in the Lepki area for 3 months, and we covered almost the total territory of the Lepki during the stay, which we divided practically in 3 parts for our fieldwork:

1. The Terablu area
2. The Murme/Yuaban area
3. The Aboy area

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Doriot helped in the building of the airstrip and commenced baptisms of some of the villagers in 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately Maximus Kandam could not complete he's field report from the Lepki, because of difficulties in arranging transportation to the area, after my departure from Papua. At the time of speaking he is conducting research among his own tribe, in the village of Mindiptanah. (January 2008)

It became apparent for us already the first days that the territory was resided by people also originating from other tribes, but most of these people were confined to areas close to the 3 airstrips (Terablu, Luban and Aboy). Our population surveys mostly cleared up who belonged to which tribe.

Difficulties which we had to deal with during our stay were the level of involvement in dealing with sick people, deaths, and ongoing conflict between certain clans and people. Three young people died in the Terablu area in March from different medical conditions. We saw two of the them, but failed to identify the disease they suffered from, and felt from an ethic and rational perspective that we couldn't interfere in the situation without having clear indications that our help would have been lifesaving.

Reputedly two homicides of two young people believed to have practised magic, also occurred in the area during April which made the atmosphere in the area to become less stabile, as the issue sparked new tensions on the belief of people practising magic.

We also found ongoing conflicts between certain clans to be a real challenge when we worked our way threw the area. During our stay in the bordering area between Askei and Murme some 5km from Terablu, we had a disturbing night where members of a rival clan came close to our household and a game of shouting and showing off verbal encouragement started. The situation seemed fierce as the men in our household had their arrows pointed to the forest nearby and the woman hide themselves and their kids under pieces of bark which normally was used as covering for the floor. The contact lasted for maybe 15minites but it felt like it was less, as we were so focused on the potential outcome of the situation. Finally the aggressive character of the shouting became less threatening and something like a laud serious conversation was going on between our house and the men in the forest. I could from the voices I heard identify that there were at least 5 men in the forest. Finally when they walked away it felt like they had come to a sort of agreement, although I could almost not understand a word exchanged between the two parties. In the hours following the episode I was explained that the conflict which had roots in an unsettled conflict over a woman, now intermarried in the household in the clan I resided with. The men in with their bravest voices explained me about the fierce battles fought, before the light of the fireplace faded, and everyone was taken by the night but the oldest men still clinging to their bow and handfuls of tobacco.



At another occasion family members from a Yefta clan, living on the Yetfa side of the Sogber River, arrived in Terablu shooting arrows at the houses and threatened to shoot the family members and claiming payment, from a Lepki family, where one woman from their clan, had recently died of disease.

At the times we experienced conflict and death close we were utmost focused on presenting us as open and respectful as possible to the people, nurturing our relationship with them and acting within what we learned to be the most respected way for them.

Maximus was particularly sick in the last period of our stay in the region, contacting both diarrhoea and malaria. I was lucky to not contracting much apart from a few bacterial infections of my sole and some ringworm also on my feet. Exhaustion and food shortages was also sometime imminent at times we had to walk great distances and had to rely on local food supplies which often were monotonous and low in protein. But as matters seemed depressive, Maximus met up with one of his far out relatives: Daniel Matongo which was a Muyu man originating from the hillsides south of the central mountain range. Daniel had 20 years before walked from his tribal lands, over the 4000m high mountains in search of life hood and ended up marrying in Aboy, not even a village then. He explained that the element which gave him reason to stay was his desire to help the isolated and “back forth” people of the area. He was an influential and utmost resourceful person who was very helpful to us during our final stage of our research.

One morning late in May we got a massage from the radio-operator at Aboy that he had been able to get us an AMA-missionary Cessna, to pick us up from his way from the village of Batom to Jayapura. Within 10 minutes the airplane appeared and made one round around the village before he touched down at the grass-strip. I could see the joy in Maximus face and we were soon above the tropical forest en route to Jayapura airport Sentani.

Back at Cenderawasih University we were surprised by a massive student demonstration the following day of our arrival. But the Papuan Independence flag (Bintang Kejora) was desperately downed by the police from the Administration building and contemporary silence fell over the campus. In the aftermath of the demonstration, I was constantly followed by vehicles with men behind black windows, which followed me to the University as well as to my house in Abepura. My student friends grew concern in spending time with me at the times this happened, as they



feared that their presence with me could have gotten themselves into trouble, with the unidentifiable men behind the windows, which they believed was Intelligence officers from the Police, Military or both.

But after the situation made it possible I went to my Faculty and reported our arrival from the field and started my work on this report.

Eventually in August I found myself standing facing a committee of 5 lecturers, including my 2 thesis advisors and the faculty's dean. It was my thesis oral examination conducted in order to be graduated later in that upcoming autumn.

Leaving West-Papua, my "hometown" Jayapura (Abepura) and my friends in October 2007 was a tough deal. I owe my greatest appreciations to the Cenderawasih University, its staff and students which let me be a part of it for 4 years. My friends in my student group and the Cenderawasih students in general, I share kinship (Kerabat) with you now, I will honour our bonds.

A few weeks after my arrival back in Norway at 21 November 2007, one of my friends and classmate, Pieter Dawir, 24 years old, from Sentani-Yoka, died of kidney failure in Jayapura.

- I wish to dedicate this work in his memory

# Contents

Illustrations .....	xii
Introduction .....	xv
<b>1. The Setting .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Lepki culture area .....	1
1.2 The neighbouring people .....	2
1.2.1 Cultural and linguistic similarities.....	4
1.3 Language of the Lepki .....	6
<b>2. Population Data .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	10
2.2 The villages .....	11
2.3 Tribal composition .....	13
2.4 The Lepki clans .....	15
<b>3. Economic Aspects of the People .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 The food quest .....	16
3.1.1 Hunting .....	17
3.1.2 Gathering .....	18
3.1.3 Animal husbandry .....	19
3.1.4 Domestication of land .....	20
3.2 Sharing of workload and distribution .....	21
3.3 The preparation of food .....	21
3.4 Contemporary trends: The agar wood seekers .....	23

<b>4.</b>	<b>Material culture .....</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1	Houses ( <i>Nim</i> ) .....	28
4.2	Attire and self-decoration .....	29
4.3	Tools, utensils and others .....	31
4.4	Art .....	32
4.5	Sinas and <i>waswal</i> .....	32
<b>5.</b>	<b>Folk stories, songs and oral history.....</b>	<b>39</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	39
5.2	Folk stories .....	40
5.2.1	The Yetfa Man who ran away with a Lepki woman .....	40
5.2.2	The Meku clan conflict with the Kuatnyera clan .....	41
5.2.3	Lepki/Yefta conflict with the Kosare people .....	42
5.2.4	The last major conflict (in Yuaban) .....	43
5.2.5	Conflict between Agar wood seekers and the native people in Terablu .	45
5.3	Folksongs .....	47
5.3.1	Songs relating to nature .....	47
5.3.2	Songs relating to homicide .....	49
5.3.3	Songs used in dances .....	52

Wordlist

Bibliography

Appendix: Distances between villages

# Illustrations

## Tables

1.	Lepki tribe population chart .....	14
2.	Overview of the Lepki-clans .....	15
3.	Wordlist .....	54
4.	Distances between settlements .....	56

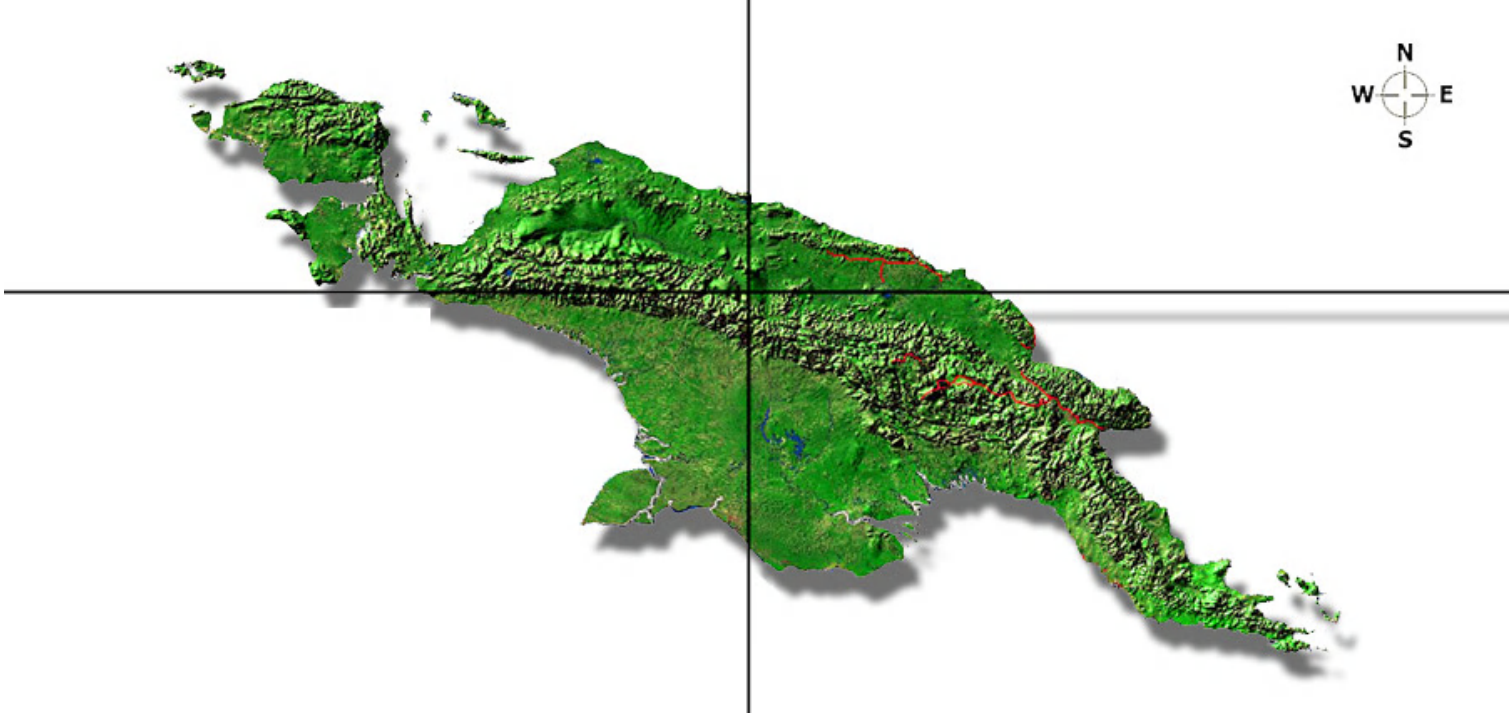
## Maps

1.	New-guinea island .....	xiv
2.	Map showing the tribes in the area .....	xvii
3.	Settlements and rivers within the Lepki territory .....	xviii

## Photographs

1.	Man from the Deira clan in traditional wear .....	Front page
2.	The Sogber River .....	8
3.	Village of Terablu .....	8
4.	Kelnje river flows into Sogber River.....	9
5.	Aboy village and airstrip .....	9
6.	Sago pounding.....	25
7.	Sago container .....	25
8.	Sago prepared around hot stone .....	26
9.	Baked sago .....	26
10.	Earth-oven in Terablu .....	27
11.	A pig is brought from the forest .....	27
12.	Elder with perforated ear .....	35

13.	<i>Tinmin</i> house beside Sogber river .....	36
14.	<i>Tinmin</i> house in the forest .....	36
15.	<i>Yunim</i> houses in Murme .....	37
16.	Canoe in Dakerto river.....	37
17.	Traditional drum .....	38
18.	Hand marks on house-pole .....	38
19.	Man with decorated string-bag .....	38
20.	Weterus Difur with bow .....	38
21.	Woman and child in Murme .....	53
22.	Genis Kwelkwapra and son in Askei .....	53
23.	Solamon Tefra in traditional attire .....	53



## - Introduction -

The Lepki people live in the interior of the Indonesian part of the island of New Guinea, which is commonly referred to as West-Papua. The area is located in the lowlands on the western side of Sogber River (*Armasi*<sup>3</sup>), a river which flows into the larger Idenburg River<sup>4</sup>. The Lepki inhabit a rather small area compared to other tribes in the vicinity, their territory being approximately 400 sq. km of land. The area is 170km south of the provincial capital Jayapura. There are a few hilltops within the area but elevations higher than 400m are not found. Coordinates of the approximate centre of the Lepki area is S4 08.0 E140 26. The Lepki people today number only 328 people compromising them also to one the less populated tribes in the region.

The Lepki are hunters and gatherers that practise some gardening in a small scale. Their settlements have traditionally not been village-based, but each clan have their own settlement within their clan-area. The clan settlement usually consists of one house that has been built as large as to fit all its inhabitants. A house is built strategically near natural resources such as the valuable sago palms. Sago grains (starch) that can be extracted from the sago-palm are the main carbohydrate source of the Lepki. Other plants and fruits are collected from the forest. Whenever the natural resources, most significantly the sago palms in the area close to the settlement declines in availability, the clan will leave the old house behind and move to a new location where a new house will be built. Because of the small size of the population in the area there seems to have been no scarcity of natural resources and the hunter and gatherer practise has not been challenged in favour of more gardening and animal husbandry.

The region where the Lepki people live were for a long time thought to be uninhabited, but they were put on the map, after the exploration of the neighbouring tribes of Kosadle (Kosare) and Ketengban, in the early 1980's. One reason which might explain why the people of this region were not discovered before this were the lack of large settlements, domestication of land, or other signs which could lead to the discovery by outsiders. Villages are a new concept for the Lepki,

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<sup>3</sup> Sogber River is named *Armasi* in both the Lepki and Yetfa languages.

<sup>4</sup> Also refereed to as Taritatu River.



and outside influences didn't penetrate the area much before the first airstrips were built. The first outsiders to take interest in the area and to practically influence it were foreign missionaries. The first settlement which was large enough to be called a village was Aboy in the early 80's, which is found at the southern border point of the Lepki, located in the distance of the Ngalum village of Apmisibil which by then had seen modern influence for a decade. The village were a result of foreign missionaries' aid, Papuan church volunteers, and finally Indonesian government presence. The government administration which manages the population in the Lepki area is currently the District of Aboy, which is a part of the 'Pegunungan bintang' Regency.

But beside this there exist no further administrative control over the area by the provincial administration.

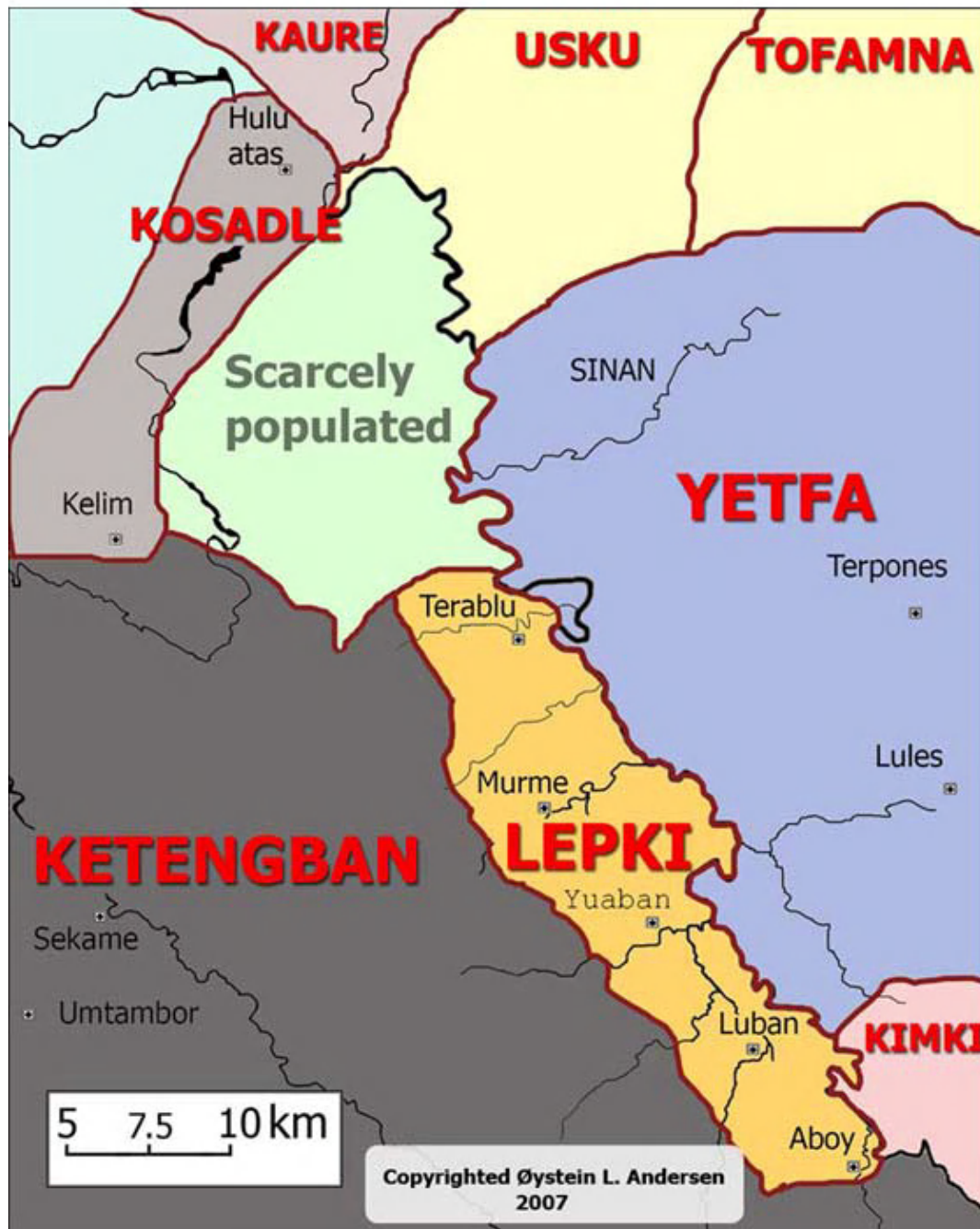
Today there are 3 airstrips on Lepki territory. The most recently built airstrip were constructed in the early 90's in the northern Lepki area under the lead of the American missionary Roger Doriot (UFM). Doriot learned about this undeveloped area and its very traditional people with the assistance of Lukas Mirin who was sent walking into the northern Lepki territory in 1990. Lukas findings made Doriot decide to visit the area with the help of helicopter, and further exploration and cooperation with the population led to the decision to construct an airstrip<sup>5</sup>. The people in the area were requested to gather at the location of the Airstrip, and the village of which became known as Terablu, emerged. After the airstrips in at the villages were built people were naturally exposed to all kind of new concepts starting from organized-religion, government control, new material products, modern technology and money. The pre-literate Lepki society started to acquire new knowledge about the outside world.

Today some of the Lepki people reside in the newly constructed villages, together with a large proportion of immigrants from other tribes which border the Lepki territory<sup>6</sup>. However the majority of the Lepki still live on their traditional clan territory, and not in the villages, although the villages today serve the people as hubs for communication and trading.

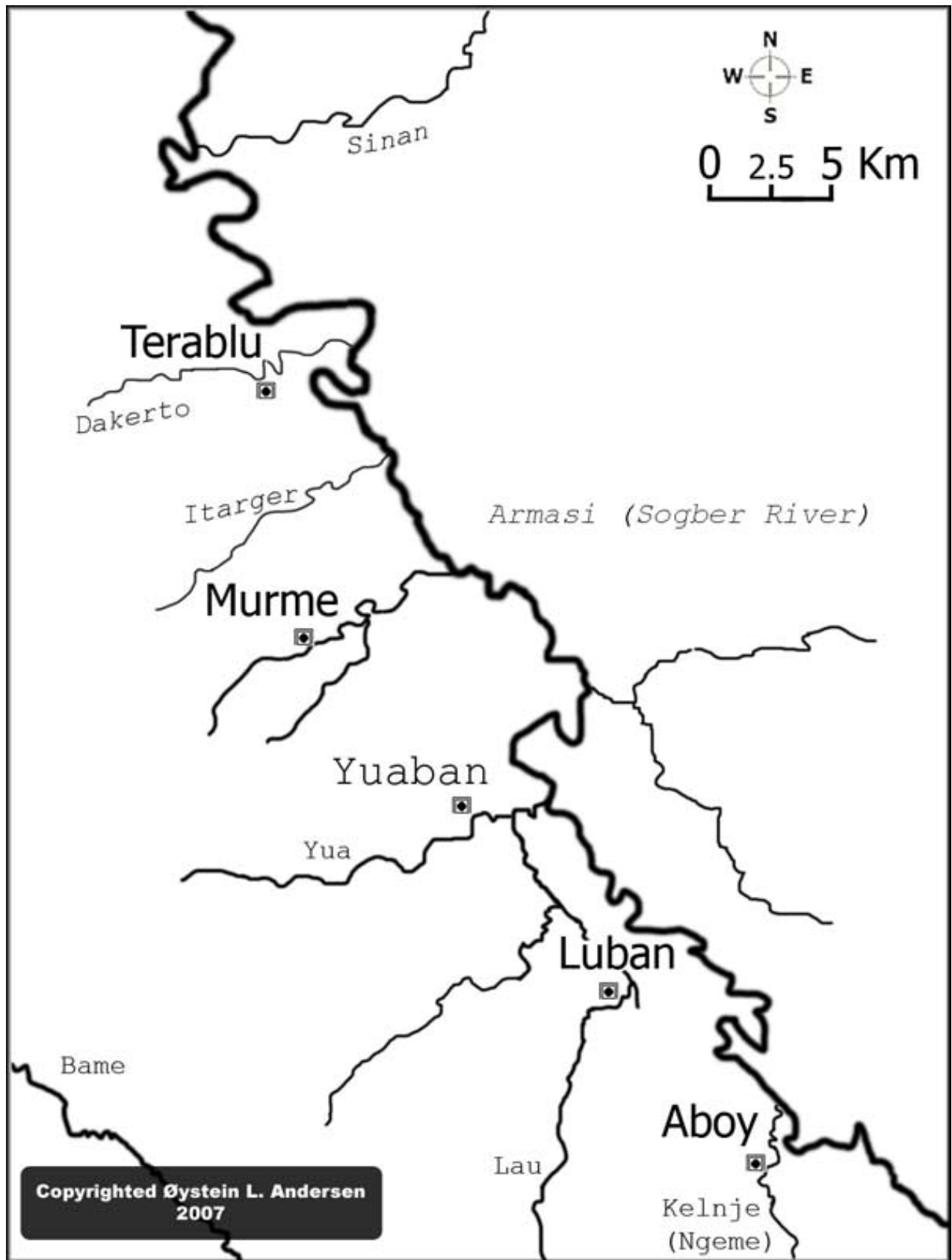
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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Lukas Mirin 20/04/2006

<sup>6</sup> I use the phrase 'Lepki territory' even though the precise borders are somewhat diffuse.



Map 2. Map of the tribes in the area.



Map 3. Map of settlements and Rivers within the Lepki territory

# **-Chapter I-**

## **The setting**

### **1.1 The Lepki culture area**

The word Lepki may be a word that was coined by the Ketengban people, presumably meaning “the people living in the lowlands”. Another name for the Lepki is *Bridals* which originates from the Lepki language. The name is a combination of two words: *Bri* which means ‘lowland’, and *Dalme* which supposedly mean “our language”. Throughout the whole area both names are used by the people belonging to the tribe and by others, although the word Lepki seems to be the most widely recognized name of this people today.

The Lepki culture area covers approximately 400 sq. km of land which stretches from the village of Terablu (S3 59.46 E140 26.68) in the North to Aboy (S4 17.75 E140 38.32) in the South, a distance of approximately 45km. Within the area we find 3 villages that have their own airstrips, Aboy, Luban and Terablu. Beside these villages there are also 2 settlements that are large enough to be called a village, this is Murme and Yuaban.

Before government and missionary intervention there were no large settlements (villages) in the area, the people built their houses based on their respective clan area. Meaning that the Lepki people live dispersed over a large area. The clan areas are solely inhabited by people from the clan and people who have been married or adopted as clan members. Names of the clan areas often relate to a natural resource, such as an important river, hill or other natural resource. Examples of names of clan areas within the Lepki territory are: Askei, Iorger, Itarger, Yalembri, Dali and Raskilo. But often the areas are simply referred to by the name of the Clan. Most Lepki people still reside in their clan areas, but some also in the villages mentioned above.

The Lepki share direct borderlands with 4 tribes, which all are located within an area not larger than the island of Biak. The most obvious and clear border of the Lepki territory is the eastern border that they share with the Yetfa. This eastern border is bounded by the Sogber River which

flows from the south to the north. The Yefta reside the eastern stretch of the river, and the Lepki on the western side. The Yefta people also tend to claim part of the western side of the river close to Terablu village, but the area is so scarcely populated that the question of ownership seems not to have turned into a real dispute. The border with the Yefta runs along the whole Lepki territory except a part of the southern stretch which they share with the Kimki people. The western borderlands are shared with the Ketengban people, but a large number of Ketengban today also reside on Lepki land, and some territorial disputes have occurred. A north-western border with the Kosare (Kosadle) people is located approximately 15km from Terablu village. The southern borderlands are shared with the Ngalum people.

Beside the large tribe populations which today make border the Lepki, it is noteworthy to add that as the arranging of villages in the Lepki culture area have brought changes to the area, it have also brought with it immigrants from other areas, as will be discussed in Chapter II.

## **1.2 The neighbouring people**

The Ketengban are mountain people which origins from the mountainous region to the west of the Lepki. They occupy a large territory that extends from Yapil in the eastern highlands were they border the Ngalum people, to the west the Ketengban border the Mek and Una people and to the north-east were some Ketengban live in small settlements in the hillsides bordering the lowlands of the Lepki and Kosare. The Lepki people differentiates between the Ketengban which originates from the villages in the mountainous region and the Ketengban which they name 'Omkey'<sup>7</sup>, who inhabit the hillsides and lowlands bordering, and even residing in their own territory. Many of the Ketengban must have resided for a long time in the bordering area to the Lepki, as some people of both the tribes has adopted cultural aspects from each other and have language abilities in each others language. Beside the proportion of the Ketengban who have adopted some of the Lepki way of life, most of the Ketengban are mountain people in general and share more cultural similarities with the other mountain tribes living to the east and west of them, as the Mek and Ngalum people. The bordering region between the Lepki and the Ketengban is

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<sup>7</sup> The Lepki word for the Ketengban people residing in the lowlands: Omkey. But for practical reasons I will refer to all Ketengban people as Ketengban, in this report.

very sparsely populated and the borders are somewhat diffuse up until today. The larger Ketengban villages that are located not far from the Lepki area are: Borme, Umtambor, Sekame, Meikame, Kwime, Onya, and Waro. The Ketengban people who now reside in the Lepki area have undoubtedly originated from these areas.

The Yetfa live at the eastern side of Sogber River, or *Armasi*, as the river is called in both Lepki and Yetfa language. Some Yetfa people also live within the northern Lepki territory in the village of Terablu and some in Murme. The Terablu area is located on the border areas of the two tribes, and the village has a fair portion of people of both tribes. The Yetfa living in the northern Lepki area are not only woman traded in for marriage, but also whole families which origins from the other side of the river.

Villages located within the heart of Yetfa culture area is Sinan, Terpones and Dules, the latter 2 which also were more or less arranged (with influence) by outsiders. The Yetfa also share the hunter and gatherer lifestyle and have not been known to gather in large settlements, but like the Lepki, to live in within clan areas. The cultural similarities between the two tribes are many and interactions between them, especially in the border regions have been frequent and important. The Lepki have been known to have trading relations with the Yetfa throughout history, from the trade of natural resources to the trading of woman.

At the southern tip of the Lepki area we find a few settlements where the Kimki people reside.

The Lepki people at and around Aboy village, naturally has most interaction with them. The Lepki people at Aboy have also named them *Rane*. The closest Kimki village to Lepki territory are Yupli and Baser village which also in recent years have seen the building of airstrips. The area between the Lepki and Kimki have been very scarcely populated, although the completion of the airstrips probably will see the influx of more Kimki people from the eastern territories of the more populated areas like Batom. The Lepki people in the South live border the Kimki area, but because both populations are small and the distances between their settlements are great, communication and abilities in each others languages are limited<sup>8</sup>. Indonesian language is mostly used among them for communication.

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the communication today between the Lepki and Kimki today takes place in Aboy village, and Indonesian language as a medium for communication seems far more the rule than the exception.

At the northern end of the Lepki area, more precisely north-west of Terablu we find the Kosare (Kosadle) people. Formerly at Hulu Atas just west of the juncture Of Nawa and Idenburg [Taritatu] rivers. Presently moved to the east<sup>9</sup>

The nearest Kosare village that is located approximately 10km northwest of Terablu village is Kelim. The interaction between the Kosare and Lepki in the north can be compared in frequency to the contact between the Lepki in the south with the Kimki people and the language abilities between the two tribes seem to be limited, but again better among the Lepki clans which share borders and trade relations with the Kosare.

### **1.2.1 Cultural and linguistic similarities**

To the southeast, where the Kimki people live, through to territory of the Lepki and Yefta, to the Kosare and even as far as the Kaure and Usku people in the north, I have noticed many cultural similarities. The large houses which the people traditionally have been known to build in these tribal areas are very similar in shape and sizes. Traditional wear (a short round-shaped penisguard) which men have been known to wear has been the same in almost the whole area, from the Aboy in the south to Senggeh and Ubrub in the distant north<sup>10</sup>.

The marriage practises (systems) of many people in this lowland region are the same, especially for the Yefta, Kosare (Kosadle) and Lepki societies. The most important factor when arranging a marriage among these lowland tribes is the availability of females. A female is usually due to trade by the family at a young age. Traditionally trade did take place among families which had prepared each their female, so that they could trade them at the same occasion. But people have also been known to trade a female into the family, with the promise that one of their young girls would be handed over to the other party in the future.

Not fulfilling a future trade like this before the planned time or expectancy of the acquiring party, could easily lead to (verbal or physical) confrontations by the acquiring party. I witnessed<sup>11</sup> a confrontation between two clans in May 2007, between the Lepki clan Kwelkwapra and the

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<sup>9</sup> Silzer & Clouse 1991:59

<sup>10</sup> Short round-shaped penisguards collected from Senggeh and Ubrub in the 1980's, today found at the Museum Loka Budaya in Abepura, show the similarity.

<sup>11</sup> I have also this confrontation in the Preface, of this report.



Ketengban clan Difur. The Difur clan which were the claiming party confronting us, as the rumours had it in the aftermath.

This is what I wrote in my field-diary:

*We have just been under a serious confrontation with some unidentifiable people arriving at our hut at Askei [in the house of the Kwelkwapra clan] . They arrived before the break of the morning at approximately 0400, we did not get any visual of the people who entered our territory without being noticed. Everybody was struck by a fierce shouting game originating in the forest by the river and the men in our hut responded by grabbing their bows and within seconds responded verbally. The woman and the children hide under the bark clothing on the floor and I hide behind my back-pack ....*

*-21st May 2007: 0600 (translated from Norwegian)*

Apparently this confrontation dealt with the Kwelkwapra clan in having failed to hand over a girl to the Difur clan. During the hours after the confrontation the men of the Kwelkwapra clan explained, and expressed difficulties in being able to fulfil the trade, because of lack of woman in their (rather small) clan, which recently had experienced several deaths of children.

Back in time supposedly the majority of the females traded were still very young, many yet to have reached puberty. The situation at the time of speaking shows indications that the former habits (system) of marriage are changing, as the people are being exposed to new ideas and life motivations. Today for example most females that are traded have at least reached puberty, and the bride price payments<sup>12</sup> have also become frequently more important, sometimes even replacing the demand for the trade of females between the two families.

Another interesting fact that I have noticed are linguistic similarities I have found between the Lepki, Kosare, Yetfa and possibly the Kembra tribe. In the Lepki area almost all the clan names end with the word *Ra*, which in the Lepki language means, person/people. For example (Widibera, Lukaipra, Deira and Tefra). Among Kosare (Kosadle) clan names which ends with *ra*,

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<sup>12</sup> Bride price which serves as a important medium of exchange among the mountain tribes bordering the lowlands, paid by the bridegroom family to the bride's family, has traditionally among the Lepki not played the same important role.

is Udamesra and Sumatra. The people of Kembra<sup>13</sup> supposedly living to the northeast of the Lepki, west of a village called Malu<sup>14</sup>, also possesses a name with this corresponding ending.

We shall presume that the cultural similarities as well as the linguistic similarity show that there have been former important interactions, or origins, between/of these lowland peoples. However, enough isolation (time and/or natural boundaries) between the tribes has resulted in languages that are totally different, but cultures which still show similarities. The lowland tribes in the region therefore share more similarities with each other rather with the tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions located close by, small groups of the Ketengban that live in the bordering zone to the Lepki territory being the exception.

### **1.3 Language of the Lepki**

The Lepki language does not seem identical<sup>15</sup> enough to any of the other neighbouring tribes so that the Lepki have any privilege of inter-communication with the other tribe's languages, using Lepki language. Some identical words can be found among the Lepki-Yefta languages.

The native Lepki speaking population is today 328 people<sup>16</sup>. Some additional non-native Lepki speakers can also be found from other tribes such as from the Ketengban tribe or the Yefta tribe who have resided among them for some time. The Lepki population often tend to use their language as distinction to distinguish between themselves and members of other tribes. Among the Lepki speakers themselves we also find small language-differences, most evident between the people of the southern area and the northern area. This may indicate two possible dialects within the language and that the people of these areas have had limited contact or kept more to themselves, so that these differences could evolve. The whole Lepki culture area have been sparsely populated up until today, and the fact that the people have not been known to live together in villages, but in separated clan-areas have naturally hampered communication and

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<sup>13</sup> SIL 1991

<sup>14</sup> Described in: 6234 Trek; Roger Doriot, 1991

<sup>15</sup> Because a linguistic study was not one of my major research subjects, the data I possess are based on a basic comparison of the vocabularies of the Lepki and of the Yefta/Kosadle/Ketengban/. Collection of Lepki language wordlist was also completed.

<sup>16</sup> For detailed census data read census chart at page 14

contact between them. The Lepki language are until today one of the few languages in New Guinea which are still unclassified<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> SIL:Grimes 2000



*Photo2. The Sogber River (Armasi) divides the Lepki and Yefta territories  
The photo show the Northern stretch of the Lepki territory  
The mountainous region in the background mark the border area  
to the Ketengban people. (March 2007)*



*Photo 3. The village of Terablu. (March 2007)*





*Photo 4. Kelnje River (left) flows into Sogber River, 2km northeast of Aboy village. (May 2007)*



*Photo 5. Aboy village and its airstrip. (May 2007)*

# **-Chapter II-**

## **Population data**

### **2.1 Introduction**

A population census was completed in two areas, respectively the Terablu and Murme area (April 2007). Population data from the other areas of settlement were available from local church sources. The main goal of the enquiry of population data was to determine the size of the Lepki population and current composition of tribes within the Lepki territory<sup>18</sup>.

A list of questions were the basis of my census, and the method of enquiring the data was through interviews at the settlements, and where it was possible, direct conversations with the people concerned. People in the designated areas responded positive to my intention of gathering information on the population. A group of young men and literate people assisted me with information and interpretations in interviews, through my whole census in both Terablu and Murme. Some problems were encountered during the census and it was most frequent in concern with the high mobility of people, and habitations which were located in distant places which I could not visit<sup>19</sup>. An ongoing inter-tribal conflict among two clans in an area close to Murme also hampered my visit to a few settlements. In these situations I had to rely on the local people's knowledge about these habitations and their people, and cross-checking whenever possible with other sources of population data.

I acknowledge that my overall population statistics and conclusions are somewhat compromised, especially whenever I had to base my data totally upon other sources than my own census.

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<sup>18</sup> The Lepki territory which are presented at Map 3 are results of my study of the Lepki peoples territorial orientations.

The following information was Recorded/Collected:

1. **The proper name.**
2. **Clan affiliation.**
3. **The gender.**
4. **Place of birth.**

## **2.2 The villages**

I have used “village” (or village area) as the category of choice<sup>20</sup> for my general gathering of population data, including my own population census, because this is the category which already is being used by the local church and government for statistics. The population of villages also include the people living outside the villages themselves, but are located within the village area.

The recent rise of villages and the local government’s implementation of village borders seem to be a functioning structure in managing the population. Since people got familiar with this new system, it has also become a categorization widely used by the villagers themselves, and has made a new sense of belonging for the people. The people naturally have separate names for the specific area which they live, often being the clan territory, as the Lepki live within distinct clan areas. Especially is this the situation for the majority of the Lepki which not physically live within a village. I will now give a basic physical description of each village and their areas which are located within the Lepki cultural area.

**Terablu** is the northernmost village in the area and is located at S3 59.460 E140 26.680 at 234m. The village took shape in the early 1990’s after the word spread about the building of a airstrip, which today is located beside it. Dakerto River flows on the northern side of the village and drains into the Sogber River a few kilometres below, where a simple harbour is constructed.

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<sup>20</sup> Another possible category and maybe a more natural approach, would have been to make statistics based on each clan area, but since I was not able to visit all the settlements, this approach were not chosen.



Numerous Lepki settlements are located in the Terablu area, and many of these people now own a house in Terablu as well as in their respective clan-territory. People from other tribes, as the Ketengban have arrived from settlements like Weime, Meigame and Bautme. People from the Yefta tribe have also moved into the area in larger numbers after the completion of the airstrip. The immigrants who reside in the Terablu area live in or close to the village itself, supposedly because of their lack of land right further outside the village, where the Lepki clans maintain full possession.

A frequently used path from Terablu leads us 11km south to the village of **Murme** (273m) located at S4 05.383 E140 26.844. It is situated at a top of a hill overlooking the Kabanker River and the hills to the west. Murme is a compact village which are composed of not more than 20 houses. The majority of the people here is Ketengban, many of them who are immigrants which moved in from Onya village to the west, in search of more fertile lands. The Lepki settlements in this area are located to the north, south and east. But most of them are found in the near the rivers and streams that flows into the Sogber river on the eastern side of the village. At my stay at Murme (April 2007), the Village was practically empty, supposedly because most of the people, especially the Lepki population were working in their settlements in outlying areas.

**Yuaban** is the nearest village to the south of Murme and a small path in poor condition connects these two villages. Yua river runs trough the area. The village was attacked in the late 1980's by people from the northern Lepki area, which supposedly killed a large proportion of the Lepki population back then. Today most of the people which live in the village are of Ketengban origin, and a few Lepki live outside the main village. The Lepki proportion of the population in this area is the lowest trough the whole Lepki territory.

**Luban** village (S4 13.030 E140 33.580) which is a day's walk from Yuaban is found in area which has more flat terrain, compared to Murme and Terablu. The village and its surrounding settlements have the highest percentage of Lepki representation in the whole tribal territory. The village has an airstrip and a simple harbour<sup>21</sup> (at Sogber River) where (motorized) canoes can make the short trip downriver to Terablu, or upriver to Aboy.

**Aboy** (S4 17.75 E140 38.32) (257m) functions as the northernmost boundary of the Lepki and the borderlands to the central mountain range is visible here. Today it is definitively the most developed village in the whole area; it has an airstrip, a closely situated harbour on the Sogber

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<sup>21</sup> The harbours in Yuaban, Aboy and Terablu does not have any facilities apart from being situated practically by the River, but described as a harbour because of the function it provides today.

River, a health clinic and a newly opened district office. This has attracted not only people from the Ketengban people, but also Kimki and Ngalum people, the latter group which origins in the mountains to the south.

## **2.3 Tribal composition**

The total population of the Lepki territory is 1333, a respective proportion of 768 (57.6%) males and 568 (42.4%) females. The Lepki themselves number 302 individuals, making up only about 22% of the total population in the territory. The Ketengban people are the majority of the population making up 65.35% of the total population, and they compromise the large majority in the total area and in 4 of 5 of the villages. The majority of the Yetfa people reside in the northern areas, and make up just a bit fewer than 7% of the population. The Ngalum which also are a distinctive group (1.72%) in the statistics are mostly found in the village of Aboy. The other tribes which are included in the *Others* category are: Kimki (some people residing in the Aboy/Luban area), Lani (mostly individuals working for the church in the villages), Kosare (Some girls who origins from this tribe are inter-married in this area), Sentani (1 girl from Sentani is married to a Ketengban man from Terablu)

In a table below I show the tribal composition of each village area, and the Lepki territory as a whole:

Village area	Population: Male / Female			Tribal Representation
Terablu	239	136 (57%)	103 (43%)	Ketengban: 94 (39.5%) Yefta: 87 (36.5%) Lepki: 42 (17.5%) Other: 16 (6.5%)
Murme	203	117 (57.6%)	86 (42.4%)	Ketengban: 160 (79%) Lepki: 40 (20%) Yefta: 3 (1%)
Yuaban <sup>22</sup>	272	153 (56.5%)	119 (43.5%)	Ketengban: 268 (98.5%) Lepki: 4 (1.5%)
Luban <sup>23</sup>	384	233 (60.7%)	151 (39.3%)	Lepki: 183 (47.5%) Ketengban: 181 (47%) Other: 20 (5.5%)
Aboy <sup>24</sup>	235	129 (54.9%)	106 (45.1%)	Ketengban: 168 (71.5%) Lepki: 33 (14%) Ngalum: 23 (9.5%) Other: 11 (5%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1333</b>	<b>768</b> (57.6%)	<b>565</b> (42.4%)	<b>Lepki: 302 (22.65%)</b> <b>Ketengban: 871 (65.34%)</b> <b>Yefta: 90 (6.75%)</b> <b>Ngalum: 23 (1.72%)</b> <b>Other: 47 (3.52%)</b>

<sup>22</sup> Population data from Yuaban was gathered at Aboy district office, in Aboy 2/5/2007

<sup>23</sup> Population data from Luban was gathered from the Head of Luban village. 7/5/2007

<sup>24</sup> Population data from Aboy was gathered at Aboy district office, in Aboy 3/5/2007

## 2.3 The Lepki Clans

I will now show the geographical distributions of the Lepki clans, numbers of members according to clans, clan distributions and origins. Clan origins are based on people's knowledge of history and land ownership. Clans which have 0 members indicate that this clan is thought of as extinct. Information of extinct clan's origins from oral-statements from Lepki people themselves.

Name	Total	Area	Origin
Belbora	24	Luban	Luban
Bera	34	Luban/Aboy	Luban
Borgertora	0	-	Yuaban/Murme?
Bukdamtora	28	Yuaban/Luban	Luban?
Dalidam	0	-	Luban?
Dalitora	21	Luban	Luban
Deira	13	Terablu	Terablu
Digiseira	0	-	Murme
Diyapra	15	Murme	Murme
Kedapra	25	Luban	Luban
Kremtestora	0	-	Yuaban?
Kromtisra	8	Terablu	Terablu
Kuatnyera	10	Aboy	Aboy
Kwelkwapra	9	Terablu	Terablu
Lora	0	-	Terablu
Lukaipra	0	-	?
Mapkertora	0	-	?
Nukaipra	33	Luban/Aboy	Aboy
Nyanyera	4	Terablu	Terablu
Tefra	6	Terablu	Terablu
Timisnyera	36	Aboy/Luban/Murme	Luban
Toborgertora	0	-	?
Tuapra	1	Murme	Murme
Widibera	27	Murme/Terablu/Yuaban/Aboy	Murme
Winma	8	Aboy	Aboy
<b>Total Population : 302</b>			

## **-Chapter III-**

### **Economic Aspects of the People**

Economy is the system of production, distribution and consumption. Wherever we find people, there will always be economic activities. It is one of the central aspects of human culture, even as different societies, classes and people deal with economy in various ways, in different settings. In this chapter I will give a brief description of the economic activities of the Lepki which as I see it still can be characterised as not much changed since the arrival of foreign influence. Even though the economic activities have been altered in some ways, which are closely connected with the obvious influence which communities like the Lepki get from outsiders and their knowledge.

Hunting and gathering has been the most important and central activities of the Lepki. The forest provides them with food, medicines, raw materials for housing and utilities. Settlements as I have already mentioned above, are seldom permanent, the newly organized villages being the exception. When the people consider the natural resources in their surroundings to be insufficient, they will move on to another area which offers what they need. The frequency of how often they tend to move depends on the natural resources, which can be 5 years or more. Therefore the Lepki people could be classified as people having semi-nomadic habits.

I will now describe the most central economic activities of the Lepki which naturally is limited to activities relating to their subsistence lifestyle.

Starting with the food quest, one of the central economic activities were the different sources of food and their handling will be discussed. A contemporary trend, originating from contemporary influence from outsiders, is the search for the valuable agar wood (Gaharu) will be described at the end of the chapter.

## **3.1 The food quest**

### **3.1.1 Hunting**

Hunting is the work of finding and killing or capturing animals for food. The Lepki communities have had hunting in common as the main activity of supplying meat to their diet. Hunting in itself is almost exclusively the work of men, even though women have been known to become a part of trips where hunting has been a main objective, especially where cooking expertise has been needed or threats from other peoples could endanger them.

Notably women also have been known to collect frogs, rats and birds.

Traditionally hunting has been done with bows and arrows. Young boys practise with miniature bows which are made by the relatives, until they are old enough to use a normal-sized bow. The bow can be as long as almost 2 metres and the arrows almost the same length. A skilful hunter can hit a bird in a tree or a running Cassowary bird from up to 30-40m range. Hunting can be done at all times of the day as there are different species of animals which are active in the day and at night time. Before flash lights from the outside were introduced to the area, it was the moon which could be relied on at hunts at night.

The Lepki often domesticate dogs for the purpose of hunting. Dogs are very appreciated by the people and, and some families can have up to 15-20 of them. Many of the dogs are usually taken on hunting trips with the men, and they are extremely skilful in noticing the presence of animals.

“Dogs can become bored too!” - a man from the Terablu told me with laughter in his face.

*“They can be bored of trips too, especially if the people who he follows are not his family or younger members which he don’t trust. Then the dog will just leave the people and return the settlement which he belongs. Dogs can leave us and go on their own even though they had to cross many large rivers and walk days to reach home”*

*Genis Kwelkwapra 20 April 2007*

Animals which are hunted are among others: Wild pigs, Tree-kangaroos, Turtles, Bats, Cassowary birds, Parrots and Crocodiles in rare occasions.

Because of the low population density in the whole Lepki area and no access to more “precise” hunting equipment than the bow and arrow, animals in the area are still numerous and can often be seen. But the situation can radically change as it has been known to do in other areas in Papua, after they have seen the arrival of air rifles.

Almost no knowledge about local traps for animals is known by the population today, except traps which admittedly originate from immigrants of other areas (Ketengban and Ngalum). Fish traps and nets placed in small streams and rivers are the common exception, but are today rarely used because of the influx of modern nets and other utensils.

Not only fish are found in the rivers, but also turtles which also are caught and eaten. Crocodiles are found in numerous numbers in the Sogber River but the Lepki claims they rarely hunt them because of the river which also functions as the border between the Lepki and Yefta are found here, and most of the river area belongs to the Yefta. The Yefta supposedly also have made a refusal of Crocodile-hunting. Crocodiles are said to be fewer in the southern areas of the Sogber, as in the Aboy region.

### **3.1.2 Gathering**

Food that is collected by the people is numerous, many of which are continuously available and some which are limited or subject to seasons. The Lepki have relied more on the gathering of edible sources of food than the tribes originating from the mountains, as they have not been known to domesticate land on a larger scale. Different plants, fruits and nuts have greatly supplemented their diet. The most important source of carbohydrate for the Lepki and many of the lowland tribes is Sago.

#### **Sago (*Ma*)**

Sago palms are widely available in the whole region. Some of the palms are found wild today, but most of them have been moved to new locations and planted by man.

A mature sago palm (*Metroxylon sagu*) can reach 10 meters or more in height and develops a thick trunk. In the clan areas where the people have their current settlement the sago palms is acknowledged as the most important resource, and the decline in palms which has reached maturity<sup>25</sup> is reason enough for the people to move to another area. Sago is almost pure starch, being composed of 88 percent carbohydrate, 0.5 percent protein, and minute amounts of fat, and contains only a trace of B vitamins<sup>26</sup>.

Sago starch is the product of Sago grain which is extracted from the Sago-palm with a specialized sago-pounder. The sago pounding is usually the work of the men and is done with a sago pounder made of wood and a stone functioning as the head. The total time needed to pound a whole trunk can be more than 3 days if done by a single person. The next step in the process is the extraction of the starch from the grain. This is the woman's work and is a process where water is added to the grain and squeezing of the grain results in the starch become separated from the grain, leaving any woody fibre behind. The starch which mixes with the water runs into a separate hollow sago trunk, where the sago starch accumulates. The sago starch is usually packed in large packages made from large leaves.

### **3.1.3 Animal husbandry**

The Lepki does not domesticate animals in the same scale as many other tribes in the area, notably the mountain tribes. This does not mean that they haven't domesticated animals. Domestication of pigs, various birds, dogs, bats and birds are common. The animals which are domesticated are usually animals which have yet to reach maturity, and are caught rather than killed in hunt. The animals are not held for breeding motivations, except for the dogs. The motivation behind the domestication seems to be without great exception raising the animal to maturity, which ensures the family meat.

Animals are usually kept in cages under the houses until they have become more or less familiarized to the new settlement. After successful familiarization, animals like the pigs and the cassowary birds will be released so that they can look for food on their own. These two particular animals whenever released can travel far on their own, even returning after interaction with wild animals of the same species.

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<sup>25</sup> A palm which has reached maturity will generally have a crown formed formation of leaves at the top of the palm.

<sup>26</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. (2006).



New trends of animal husbandry are usually confined to the villages where Lepki people also have started to domesticate pigs in larger numbers. Newly introduced animals are some chickens and ducks, but this influence has mostly only been noticed in Aboy, Luban and Terablu.

### **3.1.4 Domestication of land**

The Lepki have not been known to clear large areas of forest for the purpose of gardening. People I had conversations with who visited the areas before there were organized villages in the area tell me that they believed gardening must only have been strictly confined to small areas around their settlements. A typical Lepki garden could consist of a few banana trees, some taro and sweet potato plants, betel nut palms and plenty of tobacco plants. Around the settlement a fair number of betel nut palms and tobacco plants can commonly be found. Tobacco and betel nut are very appreciated by the people; both sexes and children use it regularly.

The interactions between the highland and lowland tribes in the area have probably led to the lowland tribes, like the Lepki acquiring knowledge about the domestication of Taro and the Sweet potato, as these tubers are the main carbohydrate staple of the highland tribes in the area. New habits in the domestication of land have also occurred after the rise of villages and new motivations of work were introduced. These changes are dominantly found in the preparations, maintenance and size of gardens. Changes which tend to occur in gardening have close relations to the exposure the Lepki get to the traditions of the people which origins from the highland areas, but reside in their territory. Slash and burn cultivation with recurrent clearing and burning of vegetation and planting in the burnt fields is a tradition which I assume has been taken from the Ketengban people. Newly introduced species which are now planted by people are among others: corn, the white potato, tomatoes, coconuts and pineapples

## **3.2 Sharing of workload and Distribution**

Both sexes usually start working early each morning. Women spend most of the time in the forest, collecting food, maintaining gardens, making firewood and caring for the young children at the same time. When the women return to the settlement they cook for the whole family and if there is spare time they will work with other things which have to be done in the house. Men have the privilege of less work which is subject to routines. The parts of the workload which are done by men are hunting, gathering material which is to be used in connection with housing and other facilities. Men assist in the in collecting food as well, but most of this work is done by woman. Men also are naturally more mobile than the woman, as they often visit other settlements to pursue their interests, to maintain good relations with other clans and overseeing their territory. Food and other products of the Lepki is distributed among the clan itself, and very little are made available to others. After the building of airstrips and the influence of money occurred, new motivations for trade slowly emerged. This have resulted that some vegetables, fruit, meat and animals end up in small markets set up by the people or traded otherwise. This is only common among the clans residing near a village, and never the case among people which rarely or never visit them. Other activities which are worked with in the pure motivation of the acquiring of money or goods from the outside are the search for the valuable wood like Gaharu, as will be discussed further down.

## **3.3 The preparation of Food**

There are 3 distinct ways of preparing food: Boiling, baking or steaming, with the use of heated rocks. Baking food directly on the flames or preferably in or under the hot ashes is the most frequent method of choice. Sweet potatoes and taro is usually baked with the skin without any other covering, meat is often – but not always, baked with a covering leaf to protect it from being polluted with ash. Sago can also be baked on the fire directly or using stones. Stones are heated in the fire, sago is placed around the stone with leaves around it, and thereafter baked (see photos in the end of the chapter). The hot stone method ensures that the sago get baked properly.

Sago which is the only dish traditionally being prepared by boiling, popularly called *papeda* in the Indonesian language, is sago starch mixed with hot water. Before modern cooking utensils were available, stones and a container made of tree bark were the method to heat water. Stones were heated in the fire and placed in a container which contained water. The water would effectively become hot, and sago could be added. Sago starch draws up the water and become a thick clear (yellow-red) mass. It is eaten alone or with whatever food available, preferable meat or fish.

The preparations of meat have traditionally been done by baking the meat directly in the ashes or on the fire. Another way of preparing meat and vegetables are by making earth ovens. This method of preparing food is in Papua popularly named “Bakar batu”<sup>27</sup> in the Indonesian language which can be translated into “earth oven” or “burning rocks” (See photo in the end of the chapter)

An earth oven is another mean of preparing food. It is made by stones which are heated in a fire until they are hot. The stones are then arranged in a layer and meat (and tubers and their leaves) are placed on top of them. Another layer of hot stones are then placed on the top of the food. Large leaves are then laid on the top of the structure to keep the hot steam from escaping. Depending on the quantity of food, cooking time is measured by the people. Earth ovens may be an adoption from the Ketengban tribe, as the mountain tribes commonly use this method or it has been tradition even before these tribes start to have fluent relations<sup>28</sup>.

Lukas Mirin and Daniel Matongo, two early immigrants which arrived in the Lepki area respectively 20 and 15 years ago, described me that they had rarely seen Lepki people making “earth ovens”. Lukas said that he never saw people preparing earth ovens in the Terablu area before he met with people originating from the Ketengban areas. He was sure that the Lepki did not know about any other ways to prepare meat, than directly in the fire or in the ashes.

Daniel Matongo on the other side had lived in the Northern part of the Lepki area, in Aboy and Luban, told me that making earth ovens were not frequently done in the past, but had been made, and agreed that it was more a part of the cultures of the mountain tribes than the people

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<sup>27</sup> *Bakar batu* is Indonesian language for “burning rocks” It is a common mean of preparing food among the mountain tribes trough the central cordillera, but also among people residing in the coastal areas.

<sup>28</sup> The Ketengban tribe make the same foundations as the Lepki. Other mountain tribes like the Dani or Yali tribe to the west dig holes where they make these “Earth-Oven” foundations, making it more airtight, so that steam won’t escape.

of the lowlands. He also thought of the practise of having recent roots from either the Ketengban or the Ngalum.

Food can also be stored, but is generally not kept for a long period since it is usually distributed among family and clan members. But people have been known to store sago reserves for months by packing sago in packages made by leaves, and putting these under mud to be stored.

### **3.4 Contemporary trends: The Agar-wood seekers**

Agar wood (*Aquilaria*) is a highly valuable tree known in Indonesia as gaharu. The wood has been traded for thousands of years throughout the Asian world; it used to be commonly found in many tropical countries, from India to Indonesia. From Asia to the Middle East, agar wood is used for religious purposes, for the good smell, for cultural ceremonies and for medicine<sup>29</sup> Formation of agar wood occurs in the trunk and roots of trees that have been infected by a parasite ascomycetous mould, *Phialophora parasitica*, a dematiaceous (dark-walled) fungus. In natural forest only 7 % of the trees are infected by the fungus. This means that the valuable wood is not present in all trees. The tree which sometimes contains agar wood is found trough the whole Lepki area, but the particular trees which harbour the agar wood inside is said to be found more often in the hilly areas which border the Ketengban territory. Word about this valuable wood was brought to the area by outsiders and the local people have not been known to collect or use this wood before. The first people who came to the area survey for the wood arrived in the early 1990`s and trees with the valuable wood were discovered. Since then people have arrived regularly to the area. The people who search for the wood in Papua tend to be from all over Indonesia, but the majority of them are Papuans. Often there will be one or two persons (usually from Java or Sulawesi) who organise the survey trips, and/or provisions for the workers. Provisions are handed out without the workers paying for it directly, as they are supposed to pay for it whenever they found wood, as they often are obligated to sell the wood to these “managers”. Some people acquire large debts and may live months in the forests before they found enough wood to pay pack the debt. But success stories also can be

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<sup>29</sup> WWF magazine, `notes from the field, Gaharu, Eaglewood, Aloeswood, Agarwood... It's All The Same`

heard, of people that have found large quantities of wood and have earned enough money to buy both a house and a car in Jayapura.

Some of the Lepki now days also search for the agar wood, but mostly these are confined to the ones who live in or close by a village. Men in all ages, even children join in the search for the wood, and at my visit in the area it was obvious that the trend had become popular for Lepki as well. Many Lepki have also found wood in quantities which gave them enough money to charter airplanes to Jayapura, where they spent the money on various things. The money which they acquired could potentially bring them more wealth, but until now none of the people I met had been able to bring home anything with real value. Many men, especially the youngsters spend their money in Jayapura on alcohol and visits to “massage girls”. Gambling which is considered illegal in Indonesia has also become the part of some of the wood seekers life, as I personally observed in Terablu and Aboy. A decade ago when the first wood seekers arrived, there occurred conflicts between outsiders and the Lepki, supposedly because the outsiders failed to compensate the land owners for entering and taking out wood from their territory.

Today the landowners generally know how to be compensated for land usage and even limit entrance for outsiders in areas where wood have been known to be found in the purpose of finding the wood themselves.



*Photo 6. Sago pounding (Askei April 2007)*



*Photo 7. Sago is kept in containers made of bark from the Ginimo tree. (April 2007)*





*Photo 8. Sago is prepared around a hot stone, and placed inside leaves before it is baked. (April 2007)*



*Photo 9. The sago has been baked, and the hot stone is removed. (April 2007)*





*Photo 10. An earth oven is opened, people and their dogs gather to take their part of the baked meat and vegetables. (Terablu April 2007.)*



*Photo 11. A pig is brought from the forest. (Terablu 2007)*



## **-Chapter IV-**

### **Material Culture**

The Lepki utilize materials found in their environment to fulfil their needs for housing and basic equipment. But the material culture as a whole can be said to be rather “simple” in comparison to other peoples in the area, especially when comparing their traditions of artwork and technology. There seems to be no great deal of advanced inventions or any important artistic trends found through the Lepki area.

I will in this chapter describe the basic material culture of the Lepki.

#### **4.1 Houses (*nim*)**

The Lepki today differentiate between 3 types of houses, although there may have been other buildings erected in the past, like spiritual houses, that now just exist in folk stories.

The house which can be regarded as the traditional house of the Lepki people are the *Tinmin*, today also named *rumah payung* in Indonesian. The Indonesian word can be translated as “Umbrella house” and indicate the shape of the cone-shaped houses.

The *Tinmin* are usually very large in size, and are often erected at the site where naturally standing tree poles can be integrated into the building. There are no walls built on these houses. Many Lepki claim the reason why walls are absent, is because it gives a greater ability to defend themselves during a potential attack. Walls would make it hard to spot enemies, and even harder to be able to launch arrows. The houses have already been built a few meters over the ground on stilts, so the floor will act as a shelter during an attack and also floods.

Dried smoked sago leaves are used as roofing. Houses can be built to harbour more than 30 people, and a fireplace is built for each of the extended family who will live here. Houses with more than 12 fireplaces have been known to exist, but at my stay in the area the largest I saw was 7 fireplaces. These houses are built large enough to harbour the people of each respective clan, and it is the responsibility of all the men to contribute in the building.

Woman with the youngest children occupy one end of the house, and one the other end is reserved the men and elder boys. A dancing floor is also sometimes erected in the house which is a floor that is made like a lowered floor, which is attached to rattan rope. The floor is highly flexible in horizontal movement, particularly valued for dancing.

The building of large cone shaped houses like the *Tinmin*, are not exclusively a part of the Lepki culture, as these type of houses have been known to be built by many lowland tribes, from Batom in the southeast to Pagai and Kaure in the north (see also: Cultural and linguistic similarities, page 4)

Houses will also be abandoned whenever the people decide to move to another area, in the search for available natural resources. In the past corpses of dead people were sometimes left to rot in houses, and the family would abandon the house and move to another area to build a new house. Today the *Tinmin* houses are not so frequently built, and many of the houses still in use are located far from the villages. The reason for this might be that the *Tinmin* is a larger and more complex built house, which takes more effort to build

*Yunim* is the most frequently built house today and share many similarities with the *tinmin*. The only remarkable difference is its smaller size and the absence of an “umbrella roof”. This is the house type which is most frequently built by the Lepki today.

*Yunim* is the Ketengban tribe style of houses and are often adopted by the Lepki who resides in the villages. It is round in shape, has walling made of timber and one entrance. It usually harbours only one or two families, which also means that the responsibility to build also falls on these people. Among the Ketengban it is tradition to relocate the elder boys (and widowed men) to separate houses, until they have the opportunity to make family and build on their own. The Lepki who reside in villages, sometimes also follow this pattern.

## **4.2 Attire and self-decoration**

A short ball shaped penis guard (*nega*) have been the attire used by the men in the Lepki area. It should not to be confused with the characteristic elongated penis guards of the highland people of Papua. As already noted above (in chapter I) the ball shaped penis guard has also been used by other lowland tribes in the area. The *nega* is made by the same process as the

other penis guards found among the Highlanders, although this particular guard is made from a round shaped fruit, contrary to the elongated fruit from which the longer guard of the highland people is made of. After harvesting the fruit, it is hollowed out and hardened in hot ashes. The guard is not attached with strings, and is only placed on the forehead.

Reed skirts (*net*) have traditionally been worn by woman. The reeds are grown by the woman themselves. Reeds are cut, dried and tied multilayered to a string. In the village of Murme I also observed some women wearing skirts made of long bark made strings. Throughout the whole Lepki population the users of traditional attire have declined substantially in the last decade. Today almost all families have managed to trade clothing with people in the villages. More woman (maybe 60 +/-), than men use traditional attire. Few men (40% +/-) still use the *nega*. Traditional attire is today often a substitute used in situations where people did so to spare their modern clothing. Ironically some men still wear the *nega* underneath their modern clothing.

Aside general attire, self decoration also contributes to personal appearance of the people. Traditional self-decoration among the Lepki have been limited to simple ornaments, body paints and body perforations. Ornaments have been known to be products of leaves, shells, wood, animal skin and bones. Materials which are normally used in the making of ornaments mostly origin from the explicit areas where the Lepki live, aside a few exceptions like some particular round-shaped shell rings which usually are traded in from the Yefta area. These rings are worn as a necklace, and are named *kipfan* in Lepki and *telaga* in Yefta.

Painting as body decoration is often prepared before special events, like weddings and arrangements where dancing is included. Paint is generally taken from certain soils (yellow, black, grey and white), red colour origin from bark or and also red soil. The paint is baked in the fire using leaves and then smoothened. Before applied the paint must be mixed with water.

Body perforations of the ears and nose (nasal septum) have been very common among men, but are seldom performed today. The operation is done with sharp bamboo or sago spines. Men wear a piece of bone, usually a curved pig tooth through the nasal septum. In wartime or and especially in ambushes, men used the curved pig tooth and other decorations to differentiate themselves with the enemy. Woman and kids commonly wear small objects like strings, and today, safety pins in their ears.

Tattooing is today done by many of the people in the area, especially by woman. The practise might be a newly arrived trend from the eastern areas where tattooing have been more

common. The Ketengban people to the west (Nongme/Umtambor) also today practise tattooing but they too claim that the practise is new. A simple needle is used to pierce the skin and battery acid applied which leaves the intended tattoo.

### **4.3 Tools, utensils and others**

Materials which tools and utensils are made from apparently originate from the area which the people live. In former times stone adzes presumably were imported from the Ketengban area. Hunting equipment consist of a long bow made from a very flexible tree which can launch an arrow in great speed. Arrows are found with 3 different arrow-tips, two that are made from tree and one which are made from bamboo. The different arrows are used in different situations. The arrow which has a thin and long tip made from bamboo is typically used in pig hunts. An arrow with such characteristics is needed to penetrate the pig fat and so as to be able to kill. A 3 tipped arrow is used when hunting birds. The tips which are separated by typically 1 cm will reduce that chance that not just its feathers will be pierced. The third variant has a lean surface with sharp curves, used in the hunt for tree-kangaroos, rats and larger birds.

Fishing on the other hand has also depended on a suitable tool for a successful which the people made from rattan. Rattan strings were made into a tunnel shaped foundation which was wide in the opening and narrower the closer you get to the end. At the basis of the foundation a circle of sago spines are placed in an inward looking position. A lure like a dead fish or small animal is placed at the basis and the rattan shaped tool is placed in an intended river or pond. Fish get caught when they venture past the inward-looking spines to get the lure and get pierced by the spines when returning. The foundation that had a length from 1 to 1.5 meters is not in use anymore today, since modern fishing nets are too effective and available for the traditional equipment to survive.

String bags (*am*) are produced by all the tribes in the area and are generally known by the Papuan people by the general term *noken*. It has been the woman who produced these string bags. Up until today traditional strings have been made from the bark of the *ginimo* tree. The men decorate their string bags with bird feathers, animal bones and pig tails.

Ginimo bark is also used in the making of water proof containers that are used in the cooking of water and in food making (See photo 6). Similar containers made from this bark have been made by people in the many areas; even coastal people like the Sentani or Kemtuk produce them. Other products of bark are covering for the floor in houses, something which is practical and makes the floor comfortable for sitting.

Another rather important matter for the people of this region is the vehicles of transportation. Canoes and floats are alternative methods of transportation in the areas where the waterways make such travel possible. Floats are simple constructions made from floatable timber that are tied together with rattan or another liana. Obviously this craft can just navigate downstream, but can spare people for long walks and heavy loads. A canoe takes days and weeks to construct, but is an important investment for the people living close to navigable rivers. It is traditionally propelled with paddles. A skilful person can even travel upriver on the large Sogber River, with carefully choosing going through the areas which has a slow going current.

#### **4.4 Art**

There is nothing like a massive and collective ongoing tradition in the making of artistic products today, although scattered artistic works of art are found.

Products of art which are widespread and might belong to a collective tradition are simple engravings on arrows, canoes and houses. Some drums are also found through the area which are said to have been made by Lepki people, but few or no people make them today. Poles in the houses are sometimes decorated with hand-marks; traditional paint from soils is frequently used.

#### **4.5 *Vasumek and Waswal***

*Waswal* (or *walya*) is a small fruit which is a very feared because of its strength as a magic drug. A person who chew the *waswal*-fruit with betel nut will go into a state where he's body will shake, sweat and becoming "unreachable" for other persons who try to make contact with

him. People who have been known to get into this state are known by the name: *vasumek* or *sinas*<sup>30</sup>. The person going into this state can meet up with dead peoples “souls” which can help him to find and kill enemies. The enemy is believed to become sick and proceed to die. Killings done in the *vasumek* state is often called “silent homicides” by the people. A *vasumek* have also been thought to be able to heal people. The *waswal* fruit have also been known to be able to kill people, by burning the fruit in fire, and wind will carry feared smoke to the enemies.

Beside from the *waswal* fruit, there is often talk about people which with the use leftovers of food, tobacco, betel nut spit (something that the victim has had in his mouth) can harm them. These leftovers can be placed it in the earth, under the bark of some specific tree species and under the skin of certain fruits. This act will silently cause the other persons illness and eventually death. A person which is known to have practised this is also called a *vasumek*. Persons reputedly being able of practising *vasumek* are much feared, and mysterious deaths in the Lepki area are often blamed on them. In April 2007 one girl from Kelim village and one girl from the Luban village were supposedly killed by villagers who claimed the girls had caused the death of people in the village. The girl who were reputedly killed in Luban were said to admit her involvement in the illness of her husband. She thereafter revealed the secret place where she had placed a betel nut which her husband had chewed. Her husband became healthy, but some time later fell ill again and finally died. People told me that the girl died after being lynched by angry family members of the dead husband.

Elder people having the reputation of being a *vasumek*, who have more extended networks of family and allies, are the most feared *vasumek*, as people are reluctant to confront these, because of the fear of massive retaliations.

At Terablu village in May 2007 I observed a village meeting under the official village head (the village head is an Ngalum man from Yapil) where the *vasumek* topic was seriously discussed after the recent deaths of 3 young people who died of different illnesses within a month (April 2007) in the village. At the village meeting, the village head and other church leaders condemned the recent illness and deaths of people in the area, claiming people practising *vasumek* as being the ones responsible.

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<sup>30</sup> I will use the word *vasumek* because it is more commonly used among the people today.

Life and death is still something “mysterious” in the Lepki area. Even though the church has some of the area and claim to have baptized a large proportion of the populations, most people still explain their world and certain phenomena through traditional beliefs.



*Photo 12. Elder with perforated ear. (Sekame Nov.2006)*





*Photo 13. A Tinmin house beside Sogber River, east of Murme. (May 2007)*



*Photo 14. A Tinmin house in the forest (Terablu area April 2007)*





*Photo 15. These houses, called Yunim by the Lepki, today also built by the Lepki, origins from the Ketengban people. (Murme, April 2007)*



*Photo 16. Canoe in Dakerto river, (May 2007)*





*Photo 17. A traditional drum*



*Photo 18. Hand marks on a house-pole*



*Photo 19. Man with a decorated string bag (noken)*



*Photo 20. Weterus Difur is known as a skilled hunter in Murme (April 2007)*

# **-Chapter V-**

## **Folk stories, songs and Oral history**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Peoples own interpretation of the environment, natural surroundings, myths and experiences is often represented in songs, folk histories and dances. History of past events is also known to be preserved in these cultural products, as preliterate societies like the Lepki has relied completely on oral tradition for the preservation of history. For the Lepki people, songs and dances have been central in many events were performances have played a central part of the event itself, and in other situations where it suited the people. Dances have mostly been the result of planning or some kind of organization. Formalizations like marriages and the making of alliances between clans are examples. But simple gatherings and meeting between clans and even other tribes in the area have led to such performances. In the times of intertribal or tribal warfare dances have also marked the start and the end of conflict. Songs which are so also an important component in dances are based upon legendry, myths, historical events, nature and bravery.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the people in the newly organized villages got introduced to church service and as some people have learned to read and write, we can expect that familiar cultural aspects of the Lepki will in the future probably inspire and lead to new products and performances, although in a new and possible very different setting than before.

The folk stories were collected from different Lepki people who either could speak Indonesian language or the song would be translated by a third party after the recording. The language used by the story teller is as much conserved as possible, from my own translation into English. Songs were collected directly at events where songs were sung, and translation was completed with an interpreter with language skills in both Lepki and Indonesian afterwards.

## **5.2 Folk stories (Oral History)**

### **5.2.1 The Yetfa Man who ran away with a Lepki woman**

One day there was a mother accompanied by her female relatives. They were working extracting sago starch from a sago palm in the forest. In the afternoon they started to pack up the day's harvest of sago, and they began to walk on the path leading to their house.

On the same path a man from the Yefta tribe was walking, and he saw the mother, who he found very attractive and beautiful. When he passed her on the path, he quickly whispered to the mother "you are so beautiful; I want to be with you. "In the middle of the path you excuse yourself, run and meet me at the old sago field"-the Yetfa man told. The mother agreed, and she and her relatives went on walking.

In the middle of the path, where there was a felled iron-tree, the mother said [to her relatives] "I need to urinate", so she went into the nearby forest. In the forest she ran fast, until she arrived at the old sago field and met up with the man. There they gathered sago and firewood. They proceeded to an old house close by that were not in use anymore.

Arriving at the house, they roasted sago, slept and stayed for days. Until one day the father of her husband saw smoke in the forest, went to see what it was, and discovered the couple in the old house. He went straight back to report to his son that he had found his wife that had been missing for days. The husband gathered 20 people from the Borgertora, Kwelkwapra and Kromtisra clans. They walked together until they found the mother and the Yetfa man. They went to the house, tied the man, and sent the mother home. They beat the Yefta man until his face and eyes were full of blood.

The next morning when all the Lepki people had returned home, the Yefta man awakened. He walked along Itarger River until he arrived at the large Armasi [Sogber] river. There he made a canoe and when he was finished, he paddled to the other side, and arrived home. He proceeded to report his family about what happened, and that he wanted to revenge by burning the *waswal* fruits. (See above: Chapter 4:3 Sinas and waswal)

The relatives gave him advice "Don't do it. It will kill all the people at the other side of the river. It was you who was wrong and they punished you. Forget about it!"

### **5.2.2 The Meku clan [Ketengban] conflict with the Kuatnyera clan [Lepki]**

The Meku clan who are Omkey [Ketengban] people one day decided to attack the Kuatnyera clan of the Bridal [Lepki] people, who reside near Luban in a sago field named Raskild. The night of the attack, the females of the Kuatnyera clan were out collecting water from a nearby river. At the same time 20 people from the Meku clan was approaching their settlement, and waded through the same river as the women were working.

It was full moon this night and the Kuatnyera women only saw shadows from the people approaching. When the women arrived back in house, they found their husbands in an entertaining conversation with each other. The woman reported what they saw and said: “don’t speak, we saw shadows and heard noises when they passed the river. Its many people, they will attack us” The men responded “Ahh, don’t be ridiculous”.

As they were speaking the Meku people were surrounding their house. Suddenly rain started to pour down and heavy thunder in the skies. [The Meku clan] walked to take cover under the house of the Kuatnyera. The house was very big, as it had at least 6 fireplaces.

Early in the morning the weather started to clear up. When the Meku clan entered the house they found everyone sleeping. There were “layers of people”, many families. At this moment they started to shoot arrows. The Kuatnyera clan got surprised, but succeeded in shooting dead 15 people [from the Meku Clan], but the victims from their own clan were so many that they could not be counted, there were almost no one left. The Kuatnyera clan were almost extinct, as all were killed except a few who were in the forest at this particular moment. One old man succeeded in escaping. The arrows could not hit him, because “bad spirits” had entered him, like clothes. He was being watched over and he took off like a bird. The Meku clan tried to shoot him but they couldn’t. It was he who succeeded in killing the 15 of the Meku clan, alone.

The old man invited people to assist him with a revenge attack on the Meku clan. He succeeded in gathering people in numbers which could not be counted. From the Lepki, Yefta, Murkim and also from people living in far away areas like from the Towei hitam area. They started to walk towards the mountain side, not far away from Yuaban village. Here the Meku clan had a large house with 8 fireplaces.

They did not follow the main path to Yuaban, but went through the big forest. Before they arrived, a feast was arranged. They ate pigs they had hunted in the forest, and they danced.

Females were also included among them, not only to cook, but also to carry additional reserve bows and arrows. When they arrived at the big house of the Meku clan they killed all the people. But there were 4 girls who weren't killed. When the girls approached the Kuatnyera men the men shot arrows toward them, but the girls caught the arrows with their hands. The girls said to the men "We are nobody's girls, were still young, don't shoot us" The girls then proceeded to hold the men's arms as a sign.

When this war raged between the clans, the Kuatnyera wore costumes, so that they knew who was their own and who the enemy was. The costumes consisted of feathers, pig teeth [through the nasal septum], a rattan string around the stomach, and sago leaves covering the upper body so that arrows could not penetrate. The woman helped in assisting the men with arrows so that they could shoot a lot. Also if the bow string broke, they could hand over a new bow. When the war was over the Kuatnyera men brought the 4 girls with them, so that their clan could grow in numbers again.

### **5.2.3 Lepki/Yefta conflict with the Kosare people**

Once there were a group of Kosare tribe who were walking from the Armasi [Sogber] River delta towards the Lepki and Yefta area close to Terablu. They walked for one day, and as they approached Dagerto River they saw a man from the Modal clan who was making firewood. They directly shot an arrow. People witnessed the killing from a hill above, and they went to report it back to the Yefta and Lepki people residing in the area.

30 people were immediately gathered, and they descended to the riverside, where they saw the Kosare woman, who was busy working on a sago palm. Their men had left for the home village leaving the woman behind. The Lepki and Yefta people launched an arrow at one of the Kosare woman and the rest of the woman watched her die. The rest of the woman ran home to their village of Kelim. The Yefta and Lepki group thought that the Kosare men wouldn't return that particular day, so they agreed among themselves to make a fire. After dark they baked some sago in the fire and smoked tobacco which they had gathered in the forest. One of the elder men admitted that he wanted to watch for the Kosare people in the path underneath the hill, that lead to the Kosare area. When he went there he saw wild fruits in a tree. He decided to climb the tree so that he could sit there and enjoy them.

As he was sitting in the tree, the Kosare people suddenly arrived, but the old man did not see them as they approached. As the Kosare people came closer they heard sound from the tree. They saw the old man. One of the Kosare men raised his bow and sent an arrow. The arrow hit the leg of the old man and he jumped into the small stream that was situated underneath the tree. The other [Lepki and Yetfa] men had now heard the noises from beneath the hill and quickly grabbed their bows. In this area they fought for a whole night, and there were casualties on both sides. When the sun rose, they all split up and went back to each of their territories.

#### **5.2.4 The last major conflict (in Yuaban)**

The Kromtisra clan had a pig that they reared from it was newborn, until it was huge in size. The woman who took care of the pig usually brought the pig with her in her string bag, but when it had become big, she let the pig free so it could find food on its own<sup>31</sup>. The pig tail and a part of the ear were cut off by the woman, so that she could keep it in her string bag.

One day the pig ventured for food far from its owners house, near the Itarger River. Here the pig was killed and by the Deira clan and within a short time the Deira had forgot about the whole episode. The Kromtisra clan who had lost the pig started to look for the pig. After they had searched for a long time they realized that the pig was killed and who were behind the wrongdoings. They thought much about revenge, until one day the Deira clan started to build a new house. The Kromtisra went to the place where they found the almost finished house of the Deira clan. There weren't anyone around. The Kromtisra used the situation to bury the pig tail and the part of the ear which the owner of the pig had cut, when the pig was still young, long before it had disappeared.

The Kromtisra returned to their house. When the Deira people returned they finished building the house and at mid day they decided to prepare some food. As they made up fire in the fireplace, "warm air"<sup>32</sup> from the fireplace appeared. This "warm air" originated from the pigs ear and tail. It killed all the persons in the Deira clan who had eaten the stolen pig.

The news about the death of many of the Deira people reached a man from the Difur clan who had relatives in the Deira clan. He became very angry and started to search for the people who were behind the killings. Within some time it became obvious for him that it was the

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<sup>31</sup> Even though the pig will be able to free to move around, a reared pig will always return everyday to its human owners. See also Chapter 3:1:3

<sup>32</sup> Some kind of poison which they relate to the work of Magicians, see chapter 4:5



Kromtisra who had buried the pig parts that finally killed his relatives. He faced the Kromtisra about the issue and he asked for a girl in compensation. The Kromtisra promptly refused to accept the demand. The Difur man did not like what he heard and became even angrier. He became so frustrated that he went straight to Aboy. [At this point Aboy were a official village with a local government administration]

In the village he reported the incident to the village Hansip<sup>33</sup>. Representatives from Hansip agreed to catch the people responsible for the wrongdoings, -the Kromtisra. The members from the Hansip walked all the way from Aboy to Askei, the area which is owned by the Kwelkwapra. Because they were afraid that the Kwelkwapra [which is the neighbouring clan of the Kromtisra] people would report their presence to the Kromtisra, members of Hansip decided they should catch the Kwelkwapra first. After they had tied up the Kwelkwapra people they stayed in their house for the night. In the middle of the night they released one man from the Kwelkwapra clan, so that he could show the way for them. When they approached the house of the Kromtisra clan they took position and entered their house. Inside they tied up the Kromtisra, including the woman and the children. The smallest children were put in string bags which were hanged on the house poles.

Members of Hansip also killed all the pigs and dogs that the clan owned, every one of them became a casualty. The next day they decided to bring the captives to Aboy village. Before leaving they made an earth oven and ate one of the pigs they had killed the other night.

After arriving in Aboy the Kromtisra got beaten up, the men as well as the woman. Some woman also got raped. They were held captured for days in a swamp outside the village. After a few days a woman who had common relatives with the Kromtisra decided that she would release them, and so she did. The Kromtisra left quickly back to their land.

When they arrived, they met with the other clans in the area (Kwelkwapra and Deira<sup>34</sup>) Everyone was angry at the Difur man who had organised the capture of the Kromtisra, they felt for revenge. An agreement was made among them to gather people. Some called for people from the Yefta tribe and others called for people from the Kosare people.

After they had succeeded in gathering more than 20 men they made a dancing event in the Deira clan's house, where each tribe had performances. They started to walk the day after to

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<sup>33</sup> Civilian defence units (Under the Indonesian government legislation) often given neighbouring patrol tasks

<sup>34</sup> Note that the original victims (The Kromtisra) of the first killings now had forgotten about the incident, and now teamed up with the other clans, against the Difur clan which in the beginning had supported them, against the Deira clan. This was because one man from the Difur clan had reported the Kromtisra attack on the Deira to the Hansip, and thereby caused the Kromtisra much trouble.

Yuaban, the place where they knew the Difur man was. The weather was very bad the night before arrival, rain, thunder and lightning.

In Yuaban people were attending church, so they decided to wait. The group surrounded the village and watched the community leave the church. Some of the villagers began to work, some had a meal and some were washing themselves in the river.

Suddenly the group appeared and sent a rain of arrows. Men, woman and children, all were killed, except the Difur man and his younger brother who managed to escape. When the group finally realized that that the man they were looking for had escaped, they caught a young girl who were still alive, and brought her with them to Terablu. They also brought with them pigs from Yuaban.

As they arrived back to the Terablu area they gathered in the house of the Deira clan. In the river nearby they washed the blood of the arrows they had used to kill with in Yuaban. They also washed their hands. People that were not involved [directly] in the killings poured clean water in the mouths of the people who were directly involved<sup>35</sup>.

After they were finished with this, they dressed up with different ornaments, eat food which the woman had prepared. But no dances were allowed, except the blood dances<sup>36</sup>. They danced until the morning, when they finally split up and travelled back to each their home territories.

### **5.2.5 Conflict between Agar wood seekers and the native people in Terablu**

The people who came and looked for gaharu<sup>37</sup> arrived in Terablu in a helicopter belonging to TNI<sup>38</sup> in 1999. They did not come alone, but with a group of Indonesian army personnel. The group including the army personnel made a camp by the Dakerto river delta. The gaharu-seekers started to look for gaharu on the land of the Lepki and Yefta people, without seeking permission from the landowners. The people got angry because they had arrived without permission, like thieves. After they saw the gaharu seekers return with the wood, to the camp which they hade made, they made a decision to seize the wood back.

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<sup>35</sup> This was done in the believe that that if they did not do this, which had as goal to completely remove the blood of the enemy, the enemy would surely revenge themselves. Or people who were involved could also die from sickness. A potential threat which could spark new problems among the clans, especially for the people who organised the killings.

<sup>36</sup> I did not witness a “blood dance” as in the dances performed after a killing.

<sup>37</sup> Gaharu is the Indonesian word for Agar-wood. (See above: Material culture: Contemporary trends: The Agar-wood seekers p.22.

<sup>38</sup> TNI (Tentara National Indonesia) is the Armed Forces of Indonesia

The gaharu seekers reported the incident to the army personnel who were staying a bit further downriver. The army personnel responded quickly and got hold of the local people who were involved in the seizing of the agar-wood. They were tied up at night time in Terablu village and brought back to the gaharu-seekers camp by the river. The villagers were afraid because the army personnel brought with them guns, so they did not dare to run.

Beside the Dakerto River one of the men escaped and the army personnel shot many times in the direction where he had escaped. The others who were still under captivity were beaten up and submerged in the river by the army personnel. The morning after the captives were brought back to Terablu village by the army personnel. There they gave an order that the captives had to return the seized gaharu wood and also give a pig to the gaharu-seekers.

The army personnel killed the pig with bullets and brought it back to the camp. The people in Terablu did not accept the situation, and felt the need for revenge. But because there was an influential man in the village who said: “We arrange it step by step” the people cooperated and a meeting between the two parts was finally set up.

The local people asked for money in compensation from the gaharu seekers for the use of land. The outcome was positive in the end, and money was received. The money was used to acquire iron-sheeting for the newly built church.

## 5.3 Folksongs

### 5.3.1 Songs relating to nature

*This text tells a story about the poisonous snakes which are found in the area, and the potential danger that it possesses.*

Origin: Murme

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Jerdadiko samudaei</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b>	<b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Tidur puas dan</b> <b>jalan</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b>	<b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Sleep satisfied and</b> <b>walk</b> <b>Snake-snake</b>
<b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b> <b>Jerdadiko samudaei</b> <b>Meda-Meda</b>	<b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b> <b>Tidur puas dan</b> <b>jalan</b> <b>Ular-Ular</b>	<b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Snake-snake</b> <b>Sleep satisfied and</b> <b>walk</b> <b>Snake-snake</b>
<b>Ya laneneso</b> <b>laneneso</b> <b>laneneso</b> <b>amidkafo</b> <b>amidkafo</b> <b>amidkafo</b> <b>Ya kai</b>	<b>Duri</b> <b>Duri</b> <b>Duri</b> <b>Pegang tapi lepas</b> <b>Pegang tapi lepas</b> <b>Pegang tapi lepas</b> <b>(Dia) Berteriak</b>	<b>Snakebite</b> <b>Snakebite</b> <b>Snakebite</b> <b>Hold it and release</b> <b>it</b> <b>Hold it and release</b> <b>it</b> <b>Hold it and release</b> <b>it</b>  <b>[He] Screams</b>

*Among the Lepki (in the northern areas) a heltkola tree is a large tree with large branches which have a bright physical appearance among the other trees in the forest. These trees are thought of as of possessing supernatural powers. Kawinisa (Jee Mountain) is a mountain located to the north of the Lepki area, in the Yefta area, and is visible from the northern Lepki area. This mountain is thought of as evil and dangerous. Deaths (killings) are often related to the Heltkola tree and Jee Mountain.*

**Origin: Terablu**

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Jeyajure Heltkola-jure Reihalo-ijo Reihalo-ijo</b>	<b>Saya bunuh seorang Sampai di pohon Heltkola Dia mati di pinggir pohon Dia mati di pinggir pohon</b>	<b>I killed someone near the <i>heltkola</i> tree He died beside the tree He died beside the tree</b>
<b>Jeyajure Heltkola-jure Reihalo-ijo Reihalo-ijo</b>	<b>Saya bunuh seorang Sampai di pohon Heltkola Dia mati di pinggir pohon Dia mati di pinggir pohon</b>	<b>I killed someone near the <i>heltkola</i> tree He died beside the tree He died beside the tree</b>
<b>Ya Kavinisa Kainisa x 4 Ya kai</b>	<b>Gunung Jee Gunung Jee x4 [Dia] Berteriak</b>	<b>Jee Mountain Jee Mountain x 4 [He] Screams</b>

### 5.3.2 Songs about homicide:

*This text tells a about a person which possesses supernatural powers (magic) who have the ability to kill without direct physical contact with the victim. A person which possesses these supernatural powers is called a sinas/vasumek.*

Origin: Terablu

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Wo sibeiveivo</b> <b>Wo nontotneio</b> <b>Nontoneio</b>	<b>Saya bunuh</b> <b>seseorang kasih</b> <b>tinggal dan jalan</b>	<b>I kill someone</b> <b>Leave him and</b> <b>walk away</b>
<b>Sibeiveivo-veivo</b> <b>Nontoneie</b> <b>Nontoneio</b>	<b>Saya bunuh</b> <b>seseorang kasih</b> <b>tinggal dan jalan</b>	<b>I kill someone</b> <b>Leave him and</b> <b>walk away</b>
<b>Votsjnowige-</b> <b>ywervo</b> <b>ywervo</b> <b>ywer-vo</b>	<b>Orang lihat saya</b> <b>dari rumah</b> <b>Saya duduk [di</b> <b>rumah]</b> <b>Saya duduk[di</b> <b>rumah]</b>	<b>People see me</b> <b>from their house</b> <b>I sit [in a house]</b> <b>I sit [in a house]</b>
<b>Ya vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b> <b>Akado x 4</b> <b>Akado Kai</b>	<b>Vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b>  <b>Tangkap bunuh</b> <b>x4</b> <b>Tangkap,</b> <b>berteriak!</b>	<b>Vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b> <b>Vasumek</b>  <b>Catch and Kill x 4</b> <b>Catch, Scream!</b>

*Jee Mountain is often related to as a mountain in possess of something dangerous in the Terablu area. In this two texts were a homicide is described, the relation between Jee Mountain and darkness is in focus.*

**Origin: Terablu**

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Verva-vervaije Memeya-jura</b>	<b>Saya jalan dan tangkap seseorang [lalu] saya kembali</b>	<b>I went and captured someone [then] I went back</b>
<b>Terala ijo Terala ijo</b>	<b>Di tengah jalan Di tengah jalan</b>	<b>In the middle of the road In the middle of the road</b>
<b>Revalo-ijo Revala-ijo Memeja-jure Memeja jure</b>	<b>Di tengah jalan Di tengah jalan Saya kembali Saya kembali</b>	<b>In the middle of the road I went back I went back</b>
<b>Juraro Juraro-jau Juraro Juraro-jau</b>	<b>Matanya merah Matanya merah, mati Matanya merah Matanya merah, mati</b>	<b>He's eyes were red He's eyes were red , dead He's eyes were red He's eyes were red , dead</b>
<b>Yo kavinisa Kavinisa x 3 Yo x 5 Ivinisa x 3 Kavinisa x 2 Ya kai</b>	<b>Gunung Jee Gunung Jee x 3 Berteriak x 5 Kegelapan x 3 Gunung Jee x 2 Berteriak</b>	<b>Jee Mountain Jee Mountain x 3 Screams x 5 Darkness x 3 Jee Mountain x 2 Screams</b>

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Jeyajure Memeja-jure</b>	<b>Saya bunuh seseorang Saya kembali</b>	<b>I killed someone I went back</b>
<b>Revalo-ijo Revalo-ijo</b>	<b>Di tengah jalan Di tengah jalan</b>	<b>In the middle of the road In the middle of the road</b>
<b>Memeya-jure Heltkola-jure</b>	<b>Saya kembali Sampai di pohon Heltkola</b>	<b>I went back I went back</b>
<b>Juraro Memeya-jure</b>	<b>Matanya merah Matanya merah, mati</b>	<b>He's eyes were red He's eyes were red , dead</b>
<b>Jeyajure Memeja-jure</b>	<b>Saya bunuh seseorang Saya kembali</b>	<b>I killed someone I went back</b>
<b>Juraro Memeya-jure</b>	<b>Matanya merah Matanya merah, mati</b>	<b>He's eyes were red He's eyes were red , dead</b>
<b>Ya x 2 Kaviniso x 5 Ya kai</b>	<b>Berteriak x 2 Gunung Jee x 5 Berteriak</b>	<b>Screams x 2 Jee mountain x 5 Screams</b>



### 5.3.3 Song used in dances:

*This text is often sung in relation to a dance event, as a marriage or after a successful hunting trip.*

Origin: Yuaban/Murme

Lepki	Bahasa Indonesia	English
<b>Dovja-e Dovja-e</b> <b>Tidefo Dovja-e Dovja-</b> <b>e</b> <b>Aso-aso Dovja-e</b> <b>Dovja-e</b>	<b>Menari di tanah</b> <b>Kaki licin - Menari</b> <b>di tanah</b> <b>Jatuh-jatuh -</b> <b>Menari di tanah</b>	<b>Dance on the</b> <b>ground</b> <b>Slippery, dancing</b> <b>on the ground</b> <b>We fell, dancing</b> <b>on the ground</b>
<b>Kai-kai jo trida jo</b> <b>Kai-kai jo peka jo</b> <b>Kai-kai jo trida jo</b>	<b>Menari kembali</b> <b>lagi</b> <b>Menari lihat ke</b> <b>sana</b> <b>Kita menari</b> <b>kembali</b>	<b>We dance and go</b> <b>back</b> <b>Dance and look</b> <b>back</b> <b>We dance and go</b> <b>back</b>
<b>Dovja-e Dovja-e</b> <b>Tidefo Dovja-e Dovja-</b> <b>e</b> <b>Aso-aso Dovja-e</b> <b>Dovja-e</b> <b>Kai-kai jo trida jo</b> <b>Kai-kai jo trida jo</b> <b>Kai-kai jo trida jo</b>	<b>Menari di tanah</b> <b>Kaki licin - Menari</b> <b>di tanah</b> <b>Kita menari</b> <b>kembali</b> <b>Kita menari</b> <b>kembali</b> <b>Kita menari</b> <b>kembali</b>	<b>Dance on the</b> <b>ground</b> <b>Slippery, dancing</b> <b>on the ground</b> <b>We dance and go</b> <b>back</b> <b>We dance and go</b> <b>back</b> <b>We dance and go</b> <b>back</b>



*Photo 21. Woman and her child. (Murme April 2007)*



*Photo 22. Genis Kwelkwapra and son  
(Aksei, April 2007)*



*Photo 23. Solemon Tefra in  
traditional attire (April 2007)*

# Wordlist

Pig <i>Yogh</i> Dog <i>Nan</i> Fish <i>Ken</i> Turtle <i>Buael</i> Crocodile <i>Kenwisi</i> Bird <i>Rau/Afai</i> Burung Tahun-Tahun <i>Wes</i> Cassowary (bird) <i>Brap</i> Cenderawasih (bird) <i>Wibni</i> Parrot (Bird) <i>Dolhai</i> Mambruk (bird) <i>Ikwai</i> Water <i>Ker/Ter</i> Sago <i>Ma</i> Cassava <i>Mis</i> Suger cane <i>Krar</i> Banana <i>Si</i> Red fruit (buah merah) <i>Das</i> Tobacco <i>Halbe</i> Taro <i>Kop</i> Forest <i>Tam</i> Mountain <i>Dei</i> Rock <i>Sap</i> Betel Nut <i>Fin</i> Bow <i>Fena</i> Tanah <i>Tetep</i> Canoe <i>Kop</i> String-bag <i>Am</i> Drum <i>Wout/wite</i> Garden <i>Yamais</i> Mud <i>Tobor</i> Knife <i>Temakes</i> Stone axe <i>Kep</i> Rattan <i>Yelkoye</i> Skirt <i>Wak</i> Penis Guard <i>Neka</i> House <i>Nim</i> Dancing <i>Walhebrisko</i>	Illness <i>Sosrogo</i> Head <i>Hucel</i> Teeth <i>Tar/Kal</i> Hair <i>Yet</i> Blood <i>Jide</i> Eye <i>Imol</i> Ear <i>Boi/Boiga</i> Nose <i>Maguam</i> Mouth <i>Dop</i> Arm <i>Yi</i> Morning <i>Metetol</i> Midday <i>Momjido</i> Afternoon <i>Aswendom</i> Evening <i>Kisela/Tisela</i> Sun <i>Momjido</i> Rain <i>Kernido</i> Wind <i>Hopkit</i> Child <i>Nel</i> Man <i>Raur</i> Woman <i>Kwenan</i> War <i>Sepo</i> Hello! <i>Yelago</i>  Sogber River <i>Armasi</i> Terablu river <i>Dakerto</i>
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Distances between villages (in Km)

<u>Aboy</u>	<u>Borme</u>	<u>HuluAtas</u>	<u>Luban</u>	<u>Murme</u>	<u>Nongme</u>	<u>Omban</u>	<u>Senggeh</u>	<u>Terpones</u>	<u>Terablu</u>	<u>Ubrub</u>	<u>Sentani</u>	<u>Oksibil</u>
—	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy	Aboy
25.1	25.1	68.1	12.4	31.5	49	25	96.4	35.6	40	59.6	191	54
Borme	—	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme	Borme
25.1	25.1	69.5	24.1	33.9	30.1	7.2	113	52.8	44.8	80.4	202	46.6
HuluAtas	HuluAtas	—	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas	HuluAtas
68.1	69.5	68.1	56	37.6	54.2	62.2	64.7	45.1	28	61.2	136	115
Luban	Luban	Luban	—	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban	Luban
12.4	24.1	56	12.4	18.8	40.5	20.4	89.7	29	28	56	181	62.8
Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme	—	Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme	Murme
31.5	33.9	37.6	18.8	31.5	33.6	27.2	80.8	26.7	11	55	168	78.5
Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	—	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme	Nongme
49	30.1	54.2	36.2	33.6	49	25.5	111	60.3	40.7	88.7	190	72.8
Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban	—	Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban	Omban
25.	7.2	62.2	17.4	27.2	25.5	25.	107	48	38	76.1	195	53.8
Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	—	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh	Senggeh
96.4	113	64.7	90.9	80.8	111	107	96.4	61	71.3	41.6	99.2	150
Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	—	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones	Terpones
35.6	52.8	45.1	30.9	26.7	60.3	48	61	35.6	23.9	28.7	156	89.7
Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu	—	Terablu	Terablu	Terablu
40	44.8	28	26.5	11	40.7	38	71.3	23.9	40	49.7	157	89.3
Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	Ubrub	—	Ubrub	Ubrub
59.6	80.4	61.1	58.8	55	88.7	76.1	41.6	28.7	49.7	59.6	140	112
Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	Sentani	—	Sentani
191	202	136	182	168	190	195	99.2	156	157	140	191	245
Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	Oksibil	—
54	46.6	115	62.3	78.5	72.8	53.8	150	89.7	89.3	112	245	54

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