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The Korowai of Irian Jaya

their language in its cultural context

Gerrit J. van Enk and Lourens de Vries

THE KOROWAI OF IRIAN JAYA

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PREFACE

This book is a first step in the study of the fascinating language and culture of the Korowai, a Papuan community of treehouse dwellers in the magnificent rainforest of southern Irian Jaya, Indonesia, in the area between the upper Becking and Eilanden rivers (see map 2, Korowai area). The Korowai came into contact with outsiders only recently, in the beginning of the 1980s. Yaniruma, a village with a mixed Kombai and Korowai population, was opened in 1980 by the first missionary in this area, Johannes Veldhuizen, who built an airstrip there. Other Korowai villages are Manggél (1986), Yafufla (1987), and Mabül (1989).

Gert van Enk lived in Yaniruma as a missionary of the ZGK (Mission of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) and was involved in the ministry of GGRI (the Reformed Churches of Indonesia) between February 1987 and September 1990. Lourens de Vries worked as a linguist with ZGK in the Wambon, Kombai, and Korowai area from 1982 to 1991. He lived in Yaniruma from February 1984 to July 1985 and from June 1990 to March 1991. Furthermore, he paid numerous short visits to the Korowai area as a linguistic consultant for the ZGK missionaries Veldhuizen, Venema, and van Enk. Since all these missionaries studied the Korowai language for shorter or longer periods and shared their data, this book is built on the work of all of them.

It should be pointed out that the (oral) texts collected by Gert van Enk played a central role in writing the sections on morphosyntax, discourse coherence, and cultural patterns.

Since these texts were collected in the framework of van Enk's personal language learning and culture study, most of them were written in the practical Korowai orthography, with graphemes selected from the Indonesian alphabet and without marking stress. Because of this, stress is marked only in chapter 2 and in the Korowai vocabularies at the end of the book. Of course, affixation affects stress placement, and for the lexical category most involved in affixation—verbs—stress placement is extensively discussed in chapter 3.

We thank the Consistory of the Gereformeerde Kerk van Groningen-Noord (the Netherlands), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (the Irian Jaya Studies Programme), the Projects Division of the Department of Languages and Cultures of South-East Asia and Oceania of Leiden University, and the Faculty of the Arts of the University of Amsterdam for granting the time and the funds needed to complete this book.

We thank William Bright, Bernard Comrie, William Foley, Ger Reesink, Paul Taylor, and Bert Voorhoeve for comments and discussion. We are indebted to the Summer Institute

of Linguistics for the Shoebox program, a data management program for the field linguist, which proved very useful for interlinearising, glossary making, and building up databases (Wimbish 1990).

We thank Marianne van Enk-Bos, George Steinmetz, Michel Top, Johannes Veldhuizen, and Rijke de Wolf for permission to use their photographs in this book.

The book has the following organisation. Chapter 1 sketches the physical, cultural, historical, and linguistic background of the Korowai community. Chapter 2 presents Korowai phonology and morphophonemics. Chapter 3 discusses Korowai morphology. Chapter 4 presents some major morphosyntactic patterns of coherence in discourse. Chapter 5 discusses Korowai kinship terminology. Chapter 6 has texts selected to illustrate patterns of grammar, discourse, and culture.

We have decided to present the annotated texts as a chapter of this book and not as an appendix since the annotated texts are more than just illustrations for patterns described in earlier chapters. The texts are important documents in their own right, windows to the world of the Korowai, and, it is hoped, also inspiring sources for future researchers.

Appendix 1 presents a comparative word list with Korowai and Kombai basic lexical items. Appendix 2 has Korowai–English and English–Korowai vocabularies, and appendix 3 lists Korowai loanwords from Indonesian. Appendix 4 lists the Korowai inhabitants registered in the administrative units Yaniruma and Manggél in 1992. Appendix 5 presents a list of references to the Korowai in the mission magazine *Tot aan de einden der aarde*.

With this book, we want to make our data on Korowai easily accessible to the scholarly community. We have tried to bring our readers as close as possible to the fascinating reality of the Korowai language and oral literature. The book is theoretically eclectic, and we have tried to use general terminology as much as possible and to keep references to the linguistic literature to a minimum. Where we used a specific theoretical model (e.g., in the chapter on kinship terms), we did so because we were convinced it served the clear presentation of complex facts.

Little has been written on the area between the Upper Digul and the Eilanden rivers of southeast Irian Jaya (and hardly anything was published; cf. the bibliography on Irian Jaya by van Baal, Galis, and Koentjaraningrat 1984). Most sources are rare and hard to find and are often in Dutch or in Indonesian, many of them reports and articles in mission books and periodicals by Dutch missionaries of the Reformed churches (ZGK) who have been allowed to work in the area since 1956. We have decided to use those few sources and refer to them, since they often contain valuable information, for future research also.

In their overview of the anthropological research of Irian Jaya, van Baal, Galis, and Koentjaraningrat (1984: 80) observe that 'the lowlands are being neglected in spite of overwhelming evidence that the cultural variation of the lowland tribes exceeds that of the highland peoples by far.' Much of this cultural variation will disappear in the near future. In this context, they view the Awyu-speaking tribes to the right of the Digul River as 'the white gaps which are really appalling'.

This book is meant not only as a first step in the study of the Korowai but also as an urgent appeal for anthropologists, linguists, and others to continue with the study of the Korowai and to start with the study of the Ulakhin, the Kopka, the Tsawkwambo, and other isolated and totally unknown groups living just south of the central ranges in southeastern Irian Jaya.

Enumatil G. J. v E.
Leiden L. de V.
October 1996

Contents

Abbreviations and Symbols

Phonetics

Phonetic symbols in this book are taken from the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Kinship

Kinship notational conventions follow Lounsbury (1964: 358–359):

F = father; M = mother; B = brother; S = sister; H = husband; W = wife; s = son; d = daughter; P = parent

♂ = male (ego, kinsman, or linking kinsman); ♀ = female (ego, kinswoman, or linking kinswoman)

Notice also the following usages of dots in the extension rules. Compare the following examples:

. . . ♂Ss = male linking relative's son (where the dots imply that the male sign cannot represent ego, that is, that it cannot be the initial terminus of the genealogical chain);

♂Ss = any male person's sister's son (where the male in question may be either ego or a linking relative standing in the chain between ego and the designated kin type);

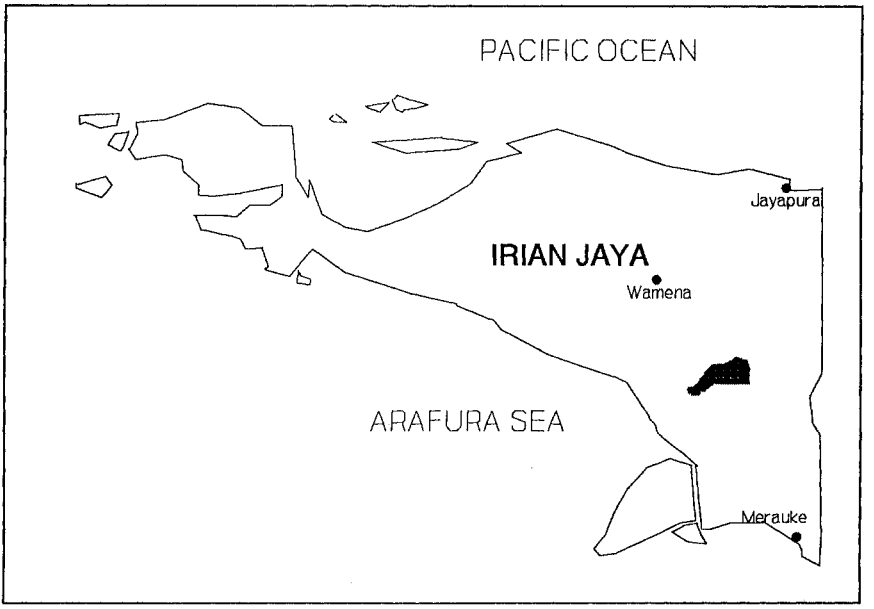
MB . . . = mother's brother's . . . (i.e., mother's brother as a link in the genealogical chain beween ego and a kinsman to be designated);

MB = mother's brother or mother's brother's (i.e, mother's brother either as the designated relative or as a link to some other designated relative traced through him).

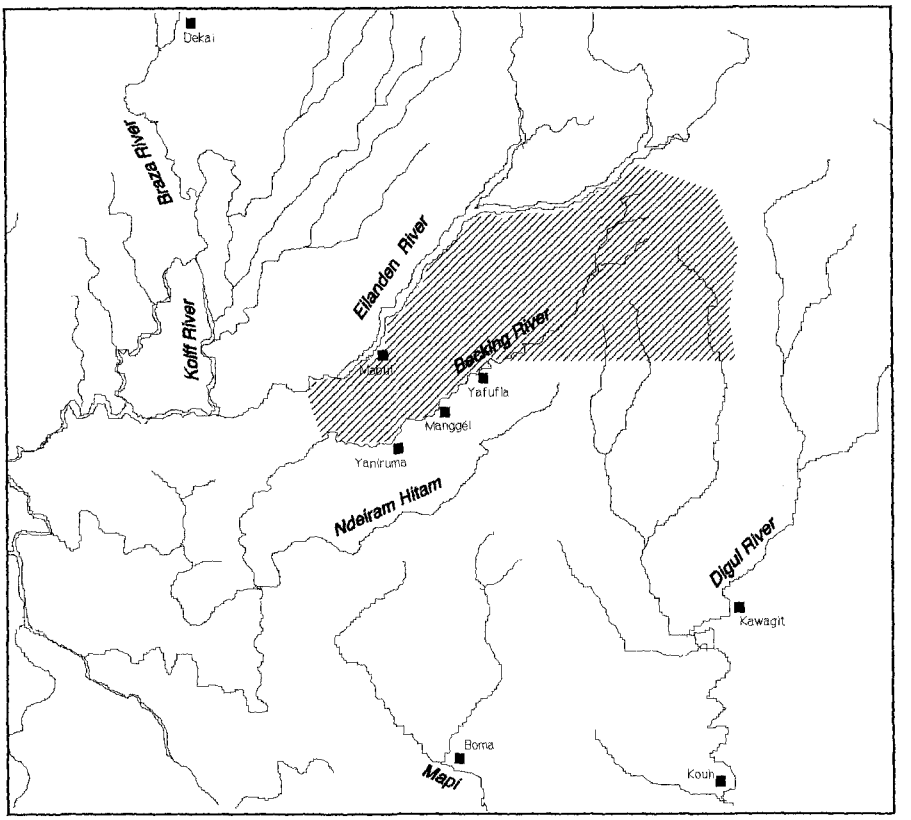
Other Abbreviations

*	unacceptable form
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
NON-1	second and third person
ADDR	addressee
ADH	adhortative mood
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverb
ADVERS	adversative
AFFIRM	affirmative
ATTENT	attention
CAUS	causative
CIRCUM	circumstantial
COMIT	comitative
CONN	connective
DEICT	deictic
DESID	desiderative
DIMIN	diminutive
DISJ	disjunctive
DS	different subject (switch reference)
EFF	effort
EMPH	emphasis
et al.	*et alii*, and others
EXCLM	exclamation
EXP	expectation
FOC	focus
HAB	habitual
h.l.	hoc loco, in this context
HOD	hodiernum
IMM	immediate future or past
IMP	imperative mood
IMPOS	impossibility mood
INDEF	indefinite
INF	infinitive
INGRES	ingressive
INTENT	intentional mood
INTNS	intensifier
INTROG	interrogative
IRR	irrealis mood
ITER	iterative aspect
LOC	locative relation
lit.	literally
MOD	modifier
N	noun
NCLAN	clan name
NEAR	near past or future
NEG	negation
NFAM	family name
NGEOGR	geographic name
NKIN	kinship noun
NORN	ornithological name
NPROP	proper name
NREL	relational noun
NTRIBE	tribe name
NUM	numeral
OBJ	object
ONOMAT	onomatopoeia
PART	particle
PAUSE	pause
PERF	perfect
PERS	personal (pronoun)
PKIN	plural kinship nouns
PL	plural
plos.	plosive
POS	positive
POS.EXP	positive expectation question
POSS	possessive (pronoun)
POSTP	postposition
POTENT	potential mood
prenas.	prenasalised
PROGR	progressive aspect
Q	question-marker
Q-clitic	question clitic
Q-word	question words
QUOTE	quote-marking element

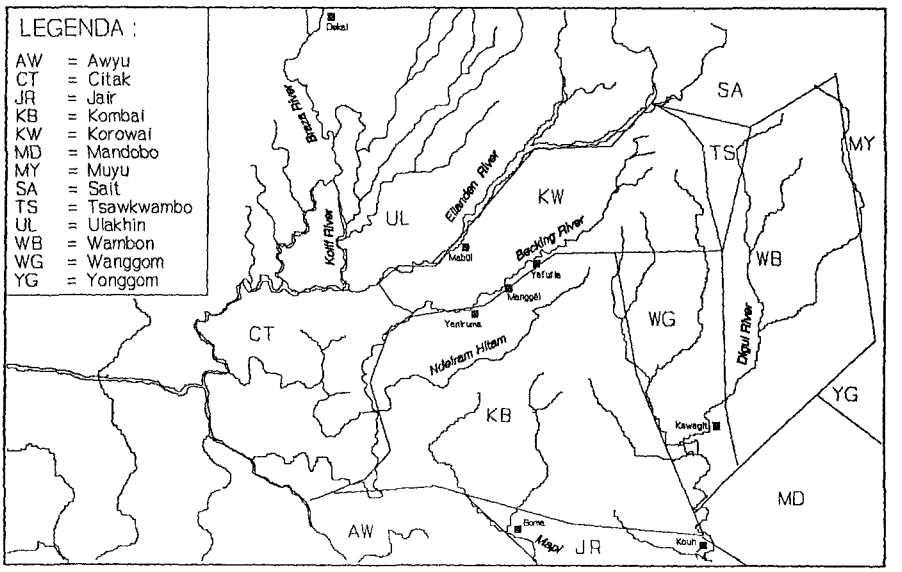
REAL	realis
SG	singular
SR	switch reference
SS	same subject (switch reference)
SUB	subordinator
SUPP	support verb
TOP	topic
TR	transitional sound
TREL	temporal relation
V	vowel
VB	verb
vd.	voiced
vl.	voiceless
VOC	vocative
ZGK	Mission of the Reformed Churches
TADEDA	*Tot aan de einden der aarde* (ZGK mission periodical)



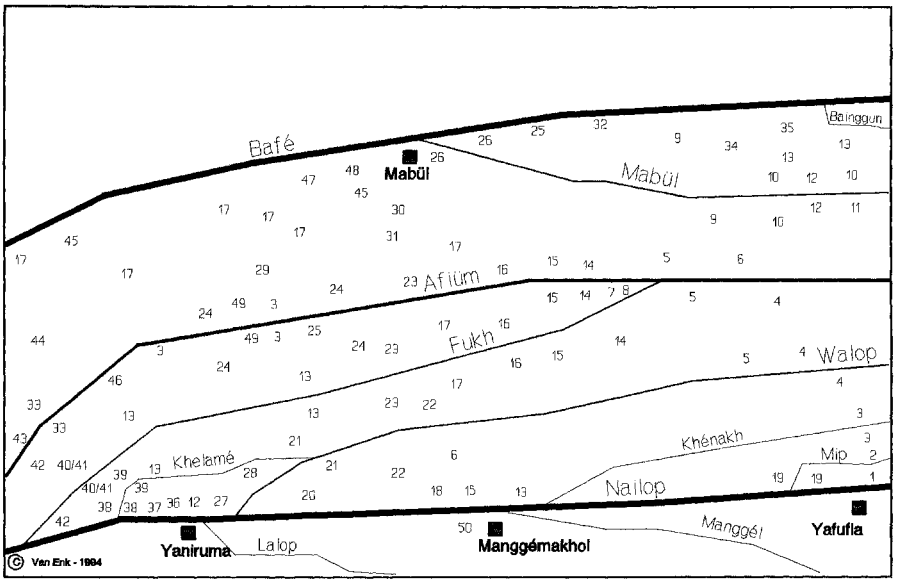
Map 1 Irian Jaya with inset of the Korowai Area



Map 2 Korowai Area



Map 3 Languages of the Korowai Area



Map 4 Korowai clan territories (schematized map, downstream area)

LEGEND:

Bafé = Eilanden River
Lalop = Sokom River
Nailop = Becking River

The numbers on the map refer to the names of the Korowai clans; clan territories listed below (cf. chapter 1 for an alphabetical list).

1. Maliap
2. Marüo
3. Molonggatun
4. Yanikhatun
5. Makhél
6. Dajo
7. Khaul
8. Nandup
9. Lemakha
10. Bumkhei
11. Khalikhatun
12. Sendékh
13. Khenei
14. Khomei Khajakhatun
15. Khomei Walüfekhatun
16. Khomei Walofekhatun
17. Nggokhoni
18. Bolüop
19. Mifanop
20. Faülanop
21. Nambul
22. Manianggatun
23. Khelékhatun
24. Laménggatun
25. Lefilkhei
26. Khawékh Baféyanop
27. Daifuf Khawékh
28. Walifuf Khawékh
29. Sinanggatun
30. Mendé
31. Bafiga
32. Awop
33. Gagoanop
34. Ngguali
35. Lebolanop
36. Milofakhanop*
37. Bilambanén
38. Molonggai
39. Wahüop
40. Nailop
41. Kimbekhom
42. Gifanop
43. Bisom
44. Khendi
45. Layol
46. Yenggél
47. Walofekhatun
48. Walüalüp
49. Khandunanop
50. Aimbon*

The names marked with an asterisk refer to clans of Kombai origin.

THE KOROWAI OF IRIAN JAYA

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1

The Korowai People

The Korowai are a Papuan people living in the Kecamatan (subdistrict) Kouh of the district Merauke of the Indonesian province Irian Jaya, in the area between the upper Becking and Eilanden rivers (see figure 1–1) and east of the headwaters of the Becking River.

The Korowai people call their language *koluf-aup* 'Korowai language'. The noun *aup* means 'voice; word; story; language'. The origin of the name *kolufo* and its Indonesian version, *Korowai*, is not known. There are around 4,000 speakers of the Korowai language.

The term *kolufo-yanop* 'Korowai person; Korowai people' denotes people who share the same language, *koluf-aup*, rather than a unit like a tribe. The clan, not the tribe, is the all-important unit. Since we lived in Yaniruma, a village on the border between the Kombai and Korowai, we had the most intensive contacts with the Korowai clans who live on the western banks of the Becking River in the proximity of Yaniruma, and the dialect of those clans is described.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a background for the patterns of language and discourse and for the corpus of annotated texts presented in this book.

First, we give some historical background, followed by the physical-geographical context and the cultural-geographical context (relations with neighbouring languages and neighbouring societies, settlement patterns, and clan territories). The means of subsistence are discussed, as are some aspects of the way in which the Korowai construct the notions of universe and of humankind. Furthermore, some concepts are mentioned that play a central role in major ideological structures. Finally, we discuss Korowai oral tradition and its genres.

Figure 1–1 The Eilanden River with tributary. George Steinmetz, 1995.

Recent history of contact

We shall now summarise the first period of contacts between the Korowai and outsiders, from 1978 to the early 1990s, paying attention also to the first stage of *kampong* formation.[1] Here we sketch the history of contact from the perspective of the outsiders. The *Khenil-khenil* text in chapter 6 presents a fascinating account of the same period of (first) contacts from the Korowai point of view.[2]

Kampong formation (Indonesian: *pembukaan kampong*) refers to the building of Indonesian-style villages (*kampong*) where people from different clans (and often of different tribes) live together, integrated in the Indonesian administrative system.

For ethnic groups like the Korowai, this change means that they descended from their high treehouses (see figure 1–2; the average height is between 8 and 12 metres) on their own clan territories to live in *kampong* houses on stilts, of a maximum of 2 metres, in neat rows. Since the Korowai are not used to living together with people of different clans (and tribes) and on the soil of other clans, the initial stage of a *kampong* is usually conflict-ridden, and a sharp increase of *khakhua* accusations and *khakhua* trials is connected with *kampong* formation [see below, some central ideological notions, under *khakhua* '(male) witch'].

Connected with *kampong* formation and with living in the *kampong* are the use of iron axes instead of stone axes; the use of Indonesian-style clothing instead of penis gourds and skirts; the institutions of local government, church, clinic, and school; and the money economy. No wonder the Korowai initially experienced the *kampong* as the world turned upside down (see *Khenil-khenil* in chapter 6).

The first systematic efforts to contact the Korowai started in 1978. After eighteen months of survey trips by helicopter and boat and on several occasions accompanied by the Reverend Jaap Groen, Johannes Veldhuizen, a Dutch missionary of the Mission of the Reformed Churches (ZGK), decided to enter the Korowai territories via the south-western route from the Citak area in March 1978. After several trips in dugout canoes, the first meeting with the Korowai people took place on October 4, 1978.

In the first stage, it was the Citak-Kombai man Nggop who played a key role in establishing relationships with people of the Korowai clans Molonggai and Sendékh.[3] On March 30, 1979, Veldhuizen obtained permission from the Kombai man Yanggio Ambüakharun to open a mission station at the mouth of the small stream Yaniruma, along the bank of the Sokom River (Korowai: Lalop), not far from where the Sokom River flows into the Becking River (Korowai: Nailop). On October 18 of that same

Figure 1–2 Exceptionally high treehouse on the Gifanop territory, upriver from Manggél village. George Steinmetz, 1995.

year, two Papuan evangelists settled in Yaniruma—Kepsan Kurufe, a Kombai man, and Kristian Wandenggei, a Wanggom man, both from the Upper Digul area. In the early 1980s, an elementary school that taught in Indonesian and a clinic were opened.

In these first years of the mission station, contacts were initiated and maintained with Korowai from the north bank of the Becking River and Kombai people from the area north of the Ndeiram Hitam River.[4] Soon the Kombai outnumbered the Korowai in Yaniruma, and this domination was strengthened when in 1983 the local government moved the inhabitants of the Kombai–Nombéakha village Firu (Korowai: Filup) to Yaniruma (van Enk 1993: 25, n. 63).[5] Some Korowai people built houses in the Korowai section of Yaniruma, but they used them only from time to time, for example, when they worked for the mission to build the airstrip or to make roads. The goods of the small shop in Yaniruma (iron axes, salt, fishhooks) attracted Korowai people from clans in the vicinity of Yaniruma. In the southwestern border area, some Korowai families of three Gifanop subclans moved to the Citak village Mbasman and others to the small Citak village Mu.

Since 1983, accompanied by fellow missionary Henk Venema, Veldhuizen made trips up the Becking River. In 1985, the first Korowai village was opened: Funbaum, on the Manianggatun clan territory, between the Walop River and the Becking. This village, or *kampong*, was opened by the then old Mukhalé Manianggatun.[6] Later this *kampong* was moved to the Nakhilop location, only one hour's walk from Yaniruma, upriver on the north bank of the Becking River.[7]

Not far from Nakhilop, an Indonesian film crew led by Dea Sudarman did most of the shooting for the anthropological documentary *Korowai* in 1986–1987, focussing on the construction of a treehouse and on a sago grub feast that was held at that time (Sudarman 1987). This film was made for the Indonesian Foundation of Social Sciences, chaired by the Indonesian anthropologist Selo Soemardjan, who also visited the Korowai area in 1986. At the same time the Indonesian Department of Social Affairs set up a community development project in Yaniruma.

In 1986, a new Korowai village was opened, as a result of the initiative of the Kombai man Füneya Aimbon, where the Manggél River flows into the Becking. The new village, named Manggél, or Manggémakhol,[8] three hours' walk upriver from Yaniruma on the south bank of the Becking River, also absorbed some of the inhabitants of Nakhilop, which was abandoned in 1987 after witchcraft-related conflicts. The Kombai evangelist Wandeyop Weremba of Nakhilop also moved to Manggél.[9]

The Reverend van Enk took over the missionary task of Venema in 1987 and started systematically exploring the Korowai territories northeast of Yaniruma, further away from the Becking. Contacts were established with people living on the banks of the Fukh and Afiüm rivers and later also with those living between the Afiüm and the Eilanden River (Korowai: Bafé).

In 1988, the Kombai man Bofo Khomei gave permission to build a *kampong* on his territory.[10] The new village took its name from the river Yafufla, which flows into the Becking close to the village. The evangelist Kepsan Kurufe coordinated the building of Yafufla and moved to the village in 1990.

In the course of 1989, the local government of the Kouh subdistrict organised an expedition, led by the secretary of the subdistrict Dominikus Amutai, to where the Mabül River flows into the Eilanden River. This trip, held in connection with the upcoming National Census of 1990, led to the formation of the *kampong* Mabül.[11]

Tourists and petty traders regularly visited Mabül, coming upriver from Senggo, the head village of the Citak-Mitak subdistrict. The mission placed an evangelist in Mabül in 1992, the Awyu man Albertus Fiokho.

Following a raid in 1990 by Kombai groups on Korowai territories east of Yafufla, in which several people were killed, the police of the Sektor Kouh sent a patrol to Yafufla. This patrol led to contacts with Korowai groups from unpacified areas.[12]

A film crew of the Japanese television production corporation Nexus, cooperating with Dea Sudarman, filmed in September 1990 in the clan territories of the Faülanop and Manianggatun, the (upstream) Dajo, and very far up the Becking River.

The area along the Becking River between Yaniruma and Yafufla having been pacified, tour operators started to organise some trips to real and fake treehouses in that Kombai–Korowai border area where the *kampongs* had become rather stable settlements.

In the 1980s, an oil company (Conoco) and a mineral company (Allied International) searched for oil and alluvial gold in the Korowai area, but their survey explorations did not lead to further activities.

Using his own observations during short visits and interviews with the missionaries Veldhuizen and Venema, Rijke de Wolf wrote a short novel in Dutch, published in 1992 under the title *Sapuru*; this is a work of fiction that portrays the daily life of the Korowai in and around Yaniruma as de Wolf (1992) perceived it.[13]

Also in 1992, van Enk organised a major expedition, together with the evangelist of Manggél, Wandeyop Weremba, that started from Yafufla in a northerly direction to the area close to the mouth of the Bainggun River in the Eilanden Rivier, where Bumkhei people were contacted.[14]

In 1993, an American film crew led by Judy D. Hallett, in cooperation with Paul M. Taylor of the Smithsonian Institution, made an anthropological documentary, mainly in the area of the downstream Dajo clan. One of the issues in that film is the *khakhua*-related eating of human flesh in traditional Korowai culture (see Some central ideological notions below).

In July and August 1995, Johannes Veldhuizen and Gert van Enk, accompanied by the reporter Alexander Smoltczyk and the photographer George Steinmetz, went to the uncontacted Sayakh and Lén-Bainggatum clan territories. This expedition resulted in a number of unique photographs that were published in the German magazine *Geo* and the American magazine *National Geographic* (see Smoltczyk and Steinmetz 1996, Steinmetz 1996).

Summarising the history of contact, we can say that apart from incidental trips by ZGK mission personnel deeper into Korowai land, direct and regular contacts between outsiders and Korowai people have been limited to the pacified parts of the border river areas (Mabül on the Eilanden River and the *kampongs* along the Becking River). Most of the Korowai clans still live in isolation and have not been contacted; in fact, it is not clear today where the northern border runs.

Physical geography

The Korowai are scattered in an area mostly covered with swampy, mixed tropical rainforests (cf. Beversluis 1954: 277, 288ff., and van Steenis 1954: 239f.) between two big rivers, the Eilanden and the Becking, which flow from northeast to west.

The Korowai land is very sparsely populated since interclan conflicts, the *khakhua* complex (see below, Some central ideological notions), and diseases like tropical malaria, tuberculosis, elephantiasis, and severe anemia constantly engender victims. Sometimes vast territories are empty because all the people living there have died.

The area is divided into many dozens of clan territories. The inhabited parts of the territories usually are low but mostly dry soils (*bayom*) or somewhat higher sandy soils (*nenim*) between wide swamps (*waliop*), which contain large acreages of sago trees. High banks of rivers and streams are also often inhabited. The most important rivers, which have concentrations of treehouses on their banks, are the Afiüm, Walop, Mabül, Nèlaf, and Fukh. The Korowai themselves make a distinction between the high grounds in the middle of the two border rivers, the Eilanden (Bafé) and Becking (Nailop), and the low grounds close to the big border rivers.[15] Both the Korowai living on the banks lower on the big rivers and the so-called Stone Korowai (Indonesian: Korowai Batu; Korowai: ilolkolufo),[16] that is, upriver Korowai, know the Ndeiram Hitam (Lemé), a major river in the neighbouring Kombai area.[17]

Although Korowai land is still lowland (the elevation is around 100 metres above sea level), ranges of hills form the transition to the foothills of the central New Guinea mountain range; from these higher points (*fium* 'hill') and from the banks of the very wide Eilanden River the mountains are visible in the north when the weather is clear.[18] Rocky spurs of the central mountains dominate the landscape along the banks of the uppermost parts of the Eilanden and the Becking rivers. The Korowai know the bigger rivers of the trans-Eilanden area.[19]

Along the banks of the Becking, there are areas with sediments of fine-grained clay, whereas in the vicinity of Yaniruma a light loam is found in some places. Between the Afiüm and Fukh rivers the soil is mostly sandy, partly covered with *nibung* palm trees (*Oncosperma filamentosum*; Korowai *betél*), instead of the usual mixed and very diverse rainforest.

The Korowai do not know lakes or other wide surfaces of water, except for the very wide Eilanden River. The Korowai area is too far from the sea to experience the effect of the tides, even in extremely dry periods, and the water of the Becking and the Eilanden is always drinkable (and full of fish).

The climate is a transition between that of the Lower Digul area and that of the trans-Eilanden area. There is no clear transition between east monsoon and west monsoon because the rainfall after the end of the latter often increases toward the end of May (see Braak 1954: 47; cf. map in Petocz 1987: 18–19). The last three months of the year are usually very hot; at the same time, these months contribute much to the annual rainfall of over 5 metres.[20]

Cultural geography

In this section, Korowai language and culture are tentatively placed in the context of surrounding languages and (Irian Jaya south coast) cultures. The local configuration of clan territories and new settlement patterns of recent years are also indicated.

Linguistic relationships

Approximately 1,000 languages are spoken on New Guinea; about 250 of these belong to the Austronesian family. The remainder, about 750 languages, called non-Austronesian or Papuan languages, cannot be said to derive from one ancestral language and are organised in more than sixty language families (Foley 1986; Wurm 1982). One of these Papuan language families is the Awyu-Ndumut family, to which Korowai belongs.[21] The Awyu-Ndumut family of southeast Irian Jaya is spoken between the Eilanden and Digul rivers; it is surrounded by the Asmat, Ok, Marind, and Mek families (Voorhoeve 1975: 27; Silzer and Heikkinen 1991: 23). Other languages of the Awyu family are Wambon (Drabbe 1959; de Vries and Wiersma 1992); Mandobo (Drabbe 1959); Awyu, Aghu, and Jair (Drabbe 1957); Kombai (de Vries 1993b); Tsawkwambo, Sawi, and Pisa (Drabbe 1950); and Sjiagha-Yenimu (Drabbe 1950).

The Korowai language has the following characteristics. Korowai has a seven-vowel system, including a front rounded close vowel /ü/. There are nineteen consonants, including prenasalised stops. Voiced stop consonants have implosive allophones.

Korowai's verb morphology is complex, featuring sentence-medial forms, although these medial forms are not very elaborate. Independent verb forms are extensively used medially in clause chaining, with switch-reference conjunctions linking them to the next clause in the chain. Especially in narratives, the clause chains are connected by tail-head linkage. See Healy (1966) and Longacre (1972) for clause chaining and tail-head linkage in Papuan languages. Korowai employs suffixes in the verb morphology. The category conflation of second and third person in Korowai verb paradigms (both in singular and plural) occurs commonly in Papuan languages, especially in the nonsingular (Haiman 1980: xxxix; Wurm 1982: 83). The clause has a strict S O V pattern.

The nominal morphology is simple. Nouns have no nonsingular forms, with the exception of kinship nouns and a few other nouns. The numerals are based on body parts used as tallies, as in many Papuan languages (Laycock 1975; de Vries 1995a).

With these characteristics, Korowai can be regarded as a fairly typical Papuan language from a typological point of view, although the term 'typical Papuan language' is a dangerous one given the bewildering diversity of Papuan languages.

Korowai has the Awyu language Kombai as its southern neighbour. Korowai and Kombai share a long border, and the Korowai and Kombai people in the border area have marriage alliances. Our Korowai informants have their clan territories not far from the border with the Kombai language. Yet the lexical correspondence between Kombai and Korowai, as reflected in the cognation percentage of basic lexical items, is only 22% (see appendix 1).

To the east, Tsawkwambo is spoken, an Awyu language. The missionary Versteeg (1983: 21) estimated the number of speakers of Tsawkwambo to be around 500, living in and around the village Waliburu. According to the initial survey by Versteeg (22), Korowai and Tsawkwambo have a lexical correspondence between 15% and 19%.

The northern boundary of the Korowai language is not clear. It could be that it borders with the Kopka language, which according to the survey of Kroneman and Peckham (1988) could very well be a Lowland Ok family language. But there could

also be unknown groups living between the Korowai and the Kopka people. At the time of our research, it was not yet possible to enter the area of the northern Korowai clans. Korowai has a cognation percentage of 9% with Kopka in 200 items of the initial survey list of Kroneman and Peckham. The Kopka language is spoken in the foothills of the central ranges in and around the village of Seradela (which has an airstrip), located south of the Una language, a Mek language spoken in the mountain villages Sumtamon, Bomela, and Langda. East of Kopka, the Samboka language is spoken, a member of the Somahai family. The initial survey by Kroneman and Peckham indicates that a small corridor of Lowland Ok languages extends from the border with Papua New Guinea into Irian Jaya, separating the Awyu languages from the Mek and Mountain Ok languages spoken in the southern slopes of the ranges. This Lowland Ok corridor ends where the Somahai family begins.

To the southwest, Citak, of the Asmat-Kamoro family (Voorhoeve 1980), is spoken (see map 3, Languages). We counted only three (possible) cognates in a list of 85 Citak basic vocabulary items given in Kroneman and Peckham (1988), a list of Citak items of the Tiau dialect of Citak collected by the Reverend Kruidhof in 1979. To the northwest, Ulakhin is spoken, a totally unkown language.

The lexical correspondence percentages given above are from initial survey work and should be taken only as very rough indications of the relations of the Korowai language with the languages in its surroundings.

The Korowai people are in the initial stage of a process of integration into the wider Indonesian community. The great majority of the Korowai are monolingual, with only people living in the border river villages having some knowledge of local (pidginised) varieties of Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia). Via this relatively young group of speakers Indonesian loan words are rapidly entering the Korowai lexicon. The loans are adapted in various degrees, both phonologically and semantically, to Korowai patterns. For example the Korowai word *anggaman* 'church service; catechism class' is based on the Indonesian word *agama* 'religion'. Appendix 3 is a list of Indonesian loans. Indonesian verbs are integrated into the Korowai language by a productive morphological derivation with the support-verb *mo* (see Derivation of verbs in chapter 3). This strategy, to integrate Indonesian verbs with *mV-* verbs, is found in all Awyu languages. See, for example, table 1–1.

Cultural relationships

When considering the place of Korowai culture in the context of the surrounding cultures and societies, the scarcity of information the latter is the first thing to observe. For example, hardly anything is known about the ethnic and linguistic groups

Table 1–1 Verb forms

Indonesian		*Korowai*	
beristirahat	'to pause'	isila-mo-	'to pause'
berdoa	'to pray'	berdoa-mo-	'to pray'
kembali	'to return'	kembali-mo-	'to return'
kasih kerja	'to give work'	kasikelaja-mo-	'to set under penal servitude'

in the trans-Eilanden area, although some Korowai clans maintain relationships with those groups in the form of marriage alliances.[22] It is also assumed (cf. Pétrequin and Pétrequin 1993: 50–53, 260ff.) that stone axes from the Langda area, on the south slopes of main ranges in the eastern highlands, where the Una language is spoken, reached the Korowai via exchange relationships with people in the trans-Eilanden area. The treehouses of the Ulakhin, one of the groups in the trans-Eilanden (see map 3), resemble those of the Korowai. Somewhat more is known of the ethnic groups south (Kombai, Wambon, Wanggom), west (Citak, an Asmat group), and east (Tsawkwambo) of the Korowai, although hardly anything is published.

In terms of material culture and technology, the Korowai do not differ significantly from their eastern and southern neighbours. Treehouse and bivouac construction, production of weaponry (shields, bows, arrows, knives, spears), fishing and hunting technology, methods of raising pigs, techniques of sago production, and horticultural techniques are basically the same as in the Kombai (which the Korowai call Aim) and Tsawkwambo areas.

The material culture of the Korowai differs significantly from that of the Citak, their southwestern neigbours, because of differences in ecological and cultural conditions. The Citak (which the Korowai call Banam) live in an area with vast treeless swamps and lakes filled with water plants. They used to be headhunters, raiding surrounding tribes like the Korowai. Accordingly, the Citak have a sophisticated canoe-building culture, with long war canoes in which they stand. Being water people, they have a wide range of fishing techniques and instruments. The Korowai are land people, and their big rivers are shallow, with vast stonebanks, making canoes useless for most of the time.

We shall now survey some more nonmaterial aspects of Korowai culture in the light of what is known from some other southcoast cultures of Irian Jaya.

Decorative motifs

In decorative motifs (*woliol* 'decorative motif; drawing; symbol; picture') carved in wood and bamboo (*woliol aombo* 'he plants *woliol*'), the Korowai themselves point out differences with the Kombai, especially in the variety of decorative motifs for *déponagél* (smoking pipes) and *wakhél* (arrow shafts) (see also figure 1–3). However, the motifs on the *wolumon* (shields) painted in white, red, and black correspond to the Kombai shield motifs.

A type of body decoration by burn scars (*nggawalalun*) seems to be specific for the Korowai. It is not found in immediately surrounding tribes. The scars form regular rows of buds on arms, breast, and belly of males and females (see figure 1–4).

The Korowai know a game in which figures are formed in the air with the help of a string and two or four hands. The motifs created in this game (animals and other natural phenomena) resemble those of the Kaowerawédj of the mid-Mamberamo River area (cf. van Eechoud 1962: plate 26).

Musical tradition

As far as musical culture is concerned, there is a striking contrast between Korowai and Kombai. The Korowai do not have the strong and complex tradition of song,

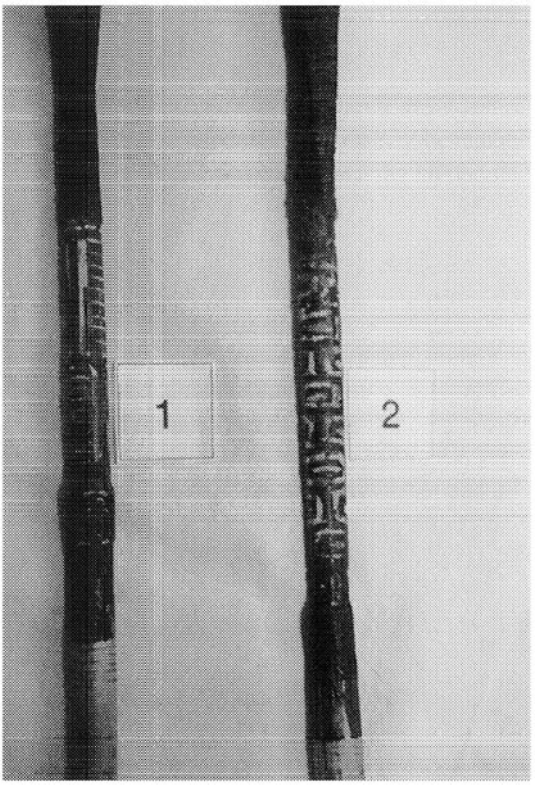

Figure 1–3 *Woliol* arrow shafts: (1) *yenalfayan* type; (2) *yumfayan* type. Marianne van Enk-Bos, 1994.

dance, and instrumental music of the Kombai. The Korowai say that their fellow tribesmen northeast of Yafufla have imitated (= borrowed) the songs and dances of the Kombai. We see the same borrowing tendency in the western Korowai area, where the Korowai have borrowed melodies and themes from the Citak, an Asmat tribe with an exceptionally rich song tradition.[23] The Citak melodies and themes appear in Korowai 'worksongs' (*èponaup*),[24] that is, songs that accompany daily activities like sago pounding, in the melodies produced with the Jew's harp (*kombéof-aup* 'voice/sound of the *kombéop* or Jew's harp'), and in the dances performed during feasts (see also Sago, below).

The bamboo Jew's harp of the Korowai is of the type described by Kunst (1967: ill. 6e and d) and by Bakx (1992: photo 11). It is played by men, and there are melody traditions from fathers to sons. Surrounding groups also know the instrument, generally called *kombéop* in Awyu languages. The drums of the Citak and the bamboo flutes of the Kombai are not used by the Korowai.

Oral tradition

Just like the neighbouring cultures, the Korowai have a rich oral tradition (cf. below, Oral tradition, and chapter 6). When these neighbouring cultures came in contact with outsiders, the new experiences were flexibly and quickly incorporated into the oral

tradition. For example, in Kombai myths one finds references to wristwatches, rice, heaven and hell, the devil, and so on. Since the contacts between outsiders and the Korowai are very recent and involve only a few clans in border areas, the texts of the Korowai oral tradition that we recorded do not show clear signs of such adaptive incorporation and seem to reflect to a great extent the oral tradition of an Awyu community in precontact days.

There are traditional differences among the various ethnic groups concerning openness for contacts with others, and these differences no doubt have their impact on the oral traditions. The Muyu and the Mandobo, for example, have a reputation of being traders (cf. Boelaars 1970; Schoorl 1957) who far more easily cross the boundaries of their clan territories than the Korowai, for whom the clan territory is

Figure 1–4 *Nggawalun* burn scar decoration of Nggènggè Dajo. Johannes Veldhuizen, 1987.

their world. The ancestral lands give them all they need, and they do not like foreigners to cross these lands. The Korowai were traditional victims of the neighbouring Citak, a headhunting Asmat tribe. This has contributed also to the tendency to withdraw to their own territory and to the view of the world outside as threatening and hostile rather than inviting.

Ideological structures and rituals

In key concepts and central rituals, there is a rather sharp dividing line between Asmat groups like the Citak and Awyu groups like the Korowai, Kombai, Wambon, and Mandobo.

The Korowai share with the other Awyu groups the *khakhua* concept, or rather the whole complex of *khakhua*-related concepts (see below, Some central ideological notions). *Khakhua* is the name for the persons (always males) with an inner urge or disposition to perform lethal cannibalistic witchcraft, that is, eating the vital organs of their victims. The Korowai have an obsessive fear of *khakhua* and have a very harsh punishment of men with that criminal disposition: the 'witch' is executed and eaten, after a trial that often involves torture. Perhaps even stronger than the fear of 'witches' is the fear of being accused of lethal witchcraft (cf. Groen 1991: 28, 34 for the corresponding Kombai concept of *kakua*). The consumption of human flesh occurs only in this *khakhua* context in Awyu cultures and is not connected with the punishment of other crimes like theft or with headhunting.

The Korowai do not practise headhunting, which was widespread in southern Irian Jaya before pacification, for example, by the Citak (Baas 1990: 3ff., 8), Yéi-Nan (van Baal 1982: 57), Marind (van Baal 1966: 710ff., 745ff.) and Jaqay (Boelaars 1981: 157–169).

According to Baas, the Citak headhunting raids on the Korowai and the Kombai stopped in 1966, but the fear of them is still very strong among the Kombai along the Ndeiram Hitam River and among the Korowai along the Becking River. Coordinated offensive actions of allied clans against other clans or tribes, as occur in the Kombai area, have not been observed in the Korowai (van Enk 1990a: 16f.).

The Korowai not only share the key concept of *khakhua* with Awyu groups like Kombai and Wambon, a concept central to the way in which the Korowai interpret death, but also the sago grub feast, the central ritual of the continuity of life (see Sago below). The sago grub feasts of the Tsawkwambo (Griffioen and Veldhuizen 1978; Stam 1978: 164–165) and of the Kombai (Venema 1989, in press) are very much the same as that of the Korowai, with a long, ceremonial festival bivouac in the vicinity of a sacred location (*wotop*).

Pig sacrifices are performed by both Korowai (see *The Pig Sacrifice* in chapter 6) and Kombai, but pig festivals as known in the upper Digul area (Mandobo: Boelaars 1970: 173–186, 227; Muyu: Schoorl 1957: 88–92, 98ff.), in the Mappi area (Jaqay: Boelaars 1981: 173–183), and further south (Marind: van Baal 1966: 839–847) are not known to Korowai and Kombai.

Forms of ritualised homosexuality, in the context of headhunting or of initiation, that occur in Marind Anim, Yèi-Nan, and Yaqay societies (van Baal 1966, 1982: 57; Boelaars 1981), do not seem to occur in Korowai society.

The Korowai are familiar with the theme of the destruction by the creator-spirit with fire and water of a primordial, rejected creation. This theme occurs, for example, in the origin myth *Ginol Silamtena* (see chapter 6) and is found in several other tribes in southern Irian Jaya, for example, Kombai and Jair (Griffioen 1983: 11; Kamma 1978: 2).

The idea of reincarnation of the 'soul' is found in Kombai, Wanggom, and Wambon thinking but is most articulate in Korowai thinking about the afterlife (see Mankind below). In other aspects, Korowai views on the afterlife are significantly different from the 'two-roads' views of Kombai and Mandobo. The Korowai dead travel one road to the one land of the dead (*bolüplefupé*) 'at the edge of the clan territories', but the Kombai and Mandobo dead face the option of two roads that lead to two different places, one good and one bad. These views are embedded in the Romalü tradition of the Kombai (de Vries 1993b: 112) and the Tomalüp tradition of the Mandobo (Boelaars 1970: 203).[25]

The change of humans into animals (and back) by applying magic (*khomi-/khomé* 'to transform') is a theme in Korowai folktales and totem stories (see, e.g., *A Folktale about the Fofumonalin Brothers* in chapter 6); however, the Korowai say that they no longer know how to perform this magic, adding that the tribes along the Digul River do know this magic, which was confirmed by informants from that area.[26]

Social and political organisation; kinship

In social and political organisation, the Korowai can be compared with Kombai, Wambon, Mandobo, and other Awyu groups. The patriclan is the central unit of social, economic, and political organisation. The emotional ties to the clan territory, the inalienable soil of the clan, are very strong. Marriage is exogamous and polygynous and forms an essential cohesion device among Korowai clans and also between Korowai clans and neighbouring Citak and Kombai clans.

Physically, mentally, and verbally strong males called *letél-abül* (lit. strongman) or *khén-mengg(a)-abül* ('man with aggression/fierceness') dominate the clan, but their leadership is never institutionalised and is not hereditary.[27] In the absence of organised raids against other groups, found in societies that practise headhunting, like the neighbouring Citak, institutionalised forms of war leadership did not emerge. Strong patriclans dominate weaker clans in their environment, but again, this does not lead to institutionalised forms of authority of one clan over another. The *Mukhalé* text in chapter 6 reflects this tendency in the political organization: there is a total absence of central authority, and aggressive leaders in some clans (like Mukhalé) may temporarily acquire regional political power that is tied to their person.

The kinship terminology of the Korowai follows the same Omaha pattern found in Kombai (de Vries 1987) and Mandobo (Boelaars 1970). The central opposition between cross and parallel relationships is morphologically expressed in the morpheme *sa-* (e.g., *lal* 'parallel female child' versus *sa-lal* 'cross female child').

There are also clear parallels with neighbouring Awyu groups in kinship behaviour. Perhaps the strongest parallel is kinship behaviour related to the avunculate, an institution found in many New Guinea societies. Van Baal (1981: 83) describes the avunculate as follows:

> The marriage of a girl into another group establishes an alliance between the groups concerned. The factuality of this alliance is reflected in the widely spread custom known as the avunculate, the institutionalized relationship between a mother's brother and his sister's children which obliges the uncle to act as the children's protector, helper or mentor, all as the case may be.

In Korowai society, the avunculate certainly is relevant. When one of his sister's children is in danger, '*mom* (MB) and his *sabül* (Ss) or *salal* (Sd) sleep in one place until the danger is over', to quote one of the informants. When *mom* (MB) dies, his *sabül* demands compensation payment from *mom's* people, usually a pig. *Mom* (MB) often coarranges the marriage of his sister's children. These patterns of avuncular behaviour have also been found in the Kombai society (de Vries 1987).

The Omaha I skewing rule (see chapter 5) by which *mom* 'uncle' is extended from MB to MBs, MBss, and so on functions in this institutional context of the avunculate to define the class of potential legal and social successors of the mother's brother.

The avunculate has been found to be reflected in marriage arrangements in Korowai, Kombai, and Mandobo. In the fierce competition to get a wife, a young man invokes the help of his protector, the MB, who gives him one of his (classificatory) daughters. This preferred MBd cross-cousin marriage of the Mandobo (Boelaars 1970: 76–79) and Wambon (Drabbe 1959) has an interesting variant in the Korowai and Kombai societies. There the preference is to marry MMBd, called *makh* 'grandmother' in Korowai (see Grandparents' generation in chapter 5), who address their wife with the word 'grandmother' if she is a MMBd. The Kombai once explained the preference for MMBd, in contrast with the MBd, as follows: 'The MBd is too close, we like to jump one'.

Another recurrent pattern of kinship behaviour is connected with the institution of the levirate. When the bridal payments (see figure 1–5) for a woman have been completed, the brothers of her husband have rights over her and her children when her husband dies; they either marry her to another or one of them marries her. The Korowai terms *khaimon* (HB) and *khamokh* (♂BW) (see chapter 5) function in this context to express the fact that a man is the legal successor of his brother as husband of his BW.

A third pattern of kinship behaviour that is also found with other (Awyu) groups in the area is affinal avoidance, especially between a man and his wife's mother. They cannot eat from one fireplace or use the same utensils. They should not see each other. A man is not allowed to use the name of his WM, not even in reference. If a man does not respect these restrictions, he does not respect his bride-givers. Violations of the WM taboos cause sickness in the children of the man who violates them. In the affinal kinship terminology, there is a general term for WP (*ban)* with a very broad range of reference, in contrast to a specific term that singles out WM(S) (*bandakhol*).

Counting system

The number systems of the languages of the Awyu family can be subdivided into two groups (cf. de Vries 1995a): body-part tally systems (fingers-arm-head systems) and counting on hands and feet.

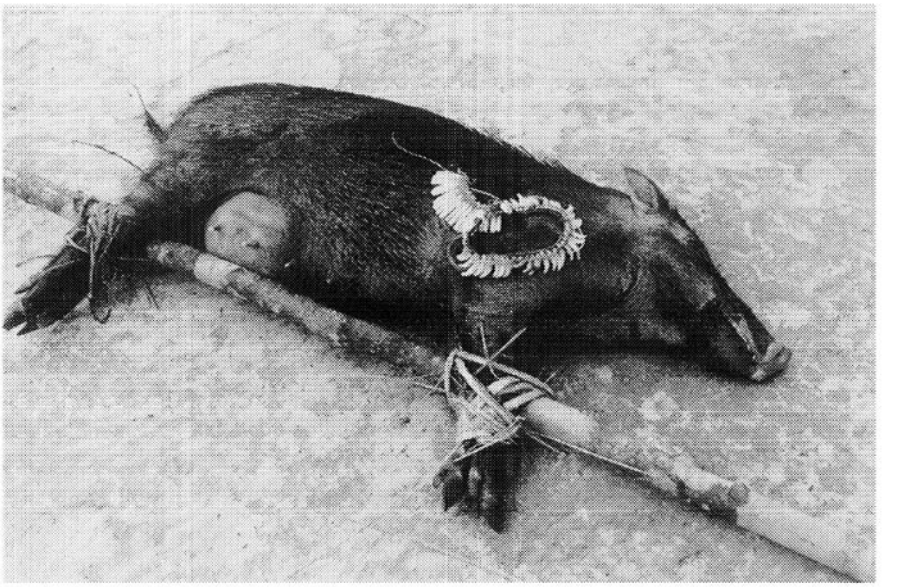

Figure 1–5 Part of bridal payment. Johannes Veldhuizen, 1984.

Kombai, Korowai, Wambon, and Mandobo have body-part tally systems. In these systems, counting starts on the little finger of the left hand until the thumb is reached and then goes up the arm to the highest point on the head, the turning point, after which counting goes down again via the other arm until the little finger of the right hand is reached, the end point. Crucial for these systems is that the nouns denoting the body parts are also used as numerals. For example, the noun meaning 'wrist' also means 'six' because the wrist is the first counting point on the arm after the first five points on the hand (the fingers).

This method of counting by the Wambon, Kombai, Korowai, and Mandobo contrasts with the counting on hands and feet practised by the Citak, described by Kruidhof (n.d.), the western Asmat family neighbour of Kombai and Korowai. Notwithstanding the contacts between the Citak and the Kombai and Korowai clans, the northern Awyu languages spoken in the foothills of the central mountain range seem to link up with the mountain tribes in the counting system (up and down the arms), whereas the Awyu groups in the south (Sjiagha-Yenimu and Aghu) and southwest (Pisa) seem to link up with the Asmat family in which counting on hands and feet is the norm. Korowai counting (*lamo* 'to count') is described in Numerals, in chapter 3 (cf. de Vries 1995a for numeral systems of Awyu languages).

Territories and treehouses of Korowai clans

In this section, we present an outline of the traditional housing and settlement patterns of Korowai clans. The Korowai live in treehouses (*khaim*) on ancestral territories (*bolüp*) that belong to patriclans (*gun; yanogun*).

Territories

Not much is known about how the boundaries of the territories are established and maintained and about land rights. There are indications that there is a distinction between land-using and landholding rights. The Korowai say that the territorial divisions are based on decrees of the ancestors (*mbolombolop*). Some etiological fragments in the folktale traditions (*wakhatum*) and in totem stories (*laibolekha mahüon*) that we recorded (see below, Oral tradition, for genres) serve as a foundation for the geographical position of certain groups.

Throughout the Korowai area, there are stretches of land not specifically claimed by clans. Sometimes these are called *laléo-bolüp* 'territories of the spirits' (see below, Some central ideological notions, for the *laléo* concept). There are sacred parts or sacred places (*wotop*) on most territories, connected with the spirits of the ancestors (*mbolombolop*).[28] Sago grub festivals and pig sacrifices take place close to the sacral area of the territory.

The territory or ancestral land is the *Lebensraum*, the living space of the clan in the full sense of the word. This idea of living space comes to the fore when uninvited or unwanted outsiders enter the territory. This is felt to be a threat to and a violation of the living space, a threat to life itself, and the reaction can be to kill the intruder(s). The arrival of outsiders with clothing (called *laléo* 'spirit') on Korowai clan territories was experienced as the end of the world (*lamotelokhai* 'the world is coming to its end'). Notice that the Korowai noun *lamol* means 'clan territory' but also 'world, universe' (see *laléo en lamol/wola* concept in Some central ideological notions, below).

Some clans have subclans, like the Khomei,[29] who are subdivided into three groups, the Khomei Khayakhatun, the Khomei Walofekhatun, and the Khomei Walüfekhatun.[30] These subclans have their own territories, which (partly) border on one another. Other clans with such subdivisions are the Gifanop and the Khawékh.

Some clans have the same name and a distant kinship relation, but the distance between them, both in geographical position and kinship relatedness, is greater than in the case of the subclans. The geographical position may then be used to distinguish them, often in terms of (position on) rivers and streams; for example, see table 1–2. We have observed that people of these geographically separate clans of the same name

Table 1–2 Terms of geographical position

Afiüm Lemakha	'Afiüm River Lemakha'
Bafé Lemakha	'Eilanden River Lemakha'
Nèlaf Lefilkhei	'Nèlaf River Lefilkhei'
Walüpta Lefilkhei	'Halfway-Lefilkhei'
Khosübolekha Dajo	'Downstream Dajo'
Khülolekha Dajo	'Upstream Dajo'
Khabülop Nggokhoni	'Offspring Nggokhoni'
Khosübol Nggokhoni	'Downstream Nggokhoni'
Khülolkha Nggokhoni	'Upstream Nggokhoni'
Makhol Nggokhoni	'(River) Mouth Nggokhoni'
Sendékh Baféyanop	'Sendékh Eilanden River people'
Sendékh Nailofanop	'Sendékh Becking River people'

address one another with (classificatorily applied) sibling terms. The same phenomenon occurs between people of clans with names that have some sound correspondences, like the Wafüop and the Wahüop people.

It is possible that two clans with different names share one territory. When this is the case, the names of the clans can be combined:

Aremél-Dondon

Dajo-Lemakha

Khenei-Sakhén

Khaul-Nandup

Yawol-Sayakh

We have not enough data to interpret such combinations, for example, in terms of moietylike structures. There are indications that some clans traditionally exchange women, such as the Khomei Khajakhatun and the Lefilkhei Nélafanop.

In the course of the years 1987 through 1992, a beginning was made in the registration of Korowai clans and their geographical distribution. An alphabetical list with fifty clans and their location is presented in table 1–3.

Table 1–3 Location of clans

Clan name	*Clan territory no.*	*Clan name*	*Clan territory no.*
Aimbon	(50)*	Laménggatun	(24)
Awop	(32)	Layol	(45)
Bafiga	(31)	Lebolanop	(35)
Bilambanén	(37)	Lefilkhei	(25)
Bisom	(43)	Lemakha	(9)
Bolüop	(18)	Makhél	(5)
Bumkhei	(10)	Maliap	(1)
Daifuf Khawékh	(27)	Manianggatun	(22)
Dajo	(6)	Marüo	(2)
Faülanop	(20)	Mendé	(30)
Gagoanop	(33)	Mifanop	(19)
Gifanop	(42)	Milofakhanop	(36)*
Nggokhoni	(17)	Molonggai	(38)
Ngguali	(34)	Molonggatun	(3)
Khalikhatun	(11)	Nailop	(40)
Khandunanop	(49)	Nambul	(21)
Khaul	(7)	Nandup	(8)
Khawékh Baféyanop	(26)	Sendékh	(12)
Khelékhatun	(23)	Sinanggatun	(29)
Khendi	(44)	Wahüop	(39)
Khenei	(13)	Walifuf Khawékh	(28)
Khomei Khajakhatun	(14)	Walofekhatun	(47)
Khomei Walofekhatun	(16)	Walüalüp	(48)
Khomei Walüfekhatun	(15)	Yanikhatun	(4)
Kimbekhom	(41)	Yenggél	(46)

The numbers following the clan names refer to the numbers on the schematic map of Korowai clan territories (see map 4). The asterisk-marked names indicate Kombai clans living on enclave Kombai territories.