

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this dissertation have been presented in the course of the past chapters. The following is a summary of those conclusions.

1. The Kamoro-Asmat people apply an essentially uniform technology to the exploitation of an environment which is, in most respects, uniform. The major subsistence activities are sago gathering, fishing, and collecting. In general there are more sago palms upstream and more fish downstream.

2. Because the rivers are wide and long in the central regions, where the Asmat proper and the Sempan live, competition for sago and fishing areas between unrelated groups residing up and downstream from one another has resulted in the development of a state of intensive warfare which is not duplicated in the western Kamoro and Casuarine Coast peripheries, where the rivers are short, and groups possess territories comprising both of the two important ecological zones: tidal swamp and fresh water swamp.

3. Increased solidarity of males resulting from cooperation in intensive warfare has led to the development of men's houses or bachelors' houses and, in one area, child-birth houses. These are absent in the peripheral areas among the Kamoro and on the southern Casuarine Coast.

4. Because community solidarity is essentially male solidarity, it is expressed in the men's house of the Kawenak and the bachelors' house of the Keenok. Family houses are essentially female places. Since females have little solidarity, the family houses of the central area include only a few closely related nuclear families. In the peripheral areas, where men's houses are lacking, the family houses are equally male places, and the unity of the community as a whole is expressed in a long house which includes many nuclear families.

5. Feast houses, which appear in the peripheral area, disappear among the Kawenak, who carry out their ceremonial cycles in the men's house.

6. Warfare has as a result pressure to create large communities. The villages are larger in the central area than they are in the peripheral areas. Within the central area, the largest villages appear in the strategic position in mid-course on the rivers, where there is optimum access to fishing and sago areas, and greatest probability of continuous warfare. ✕

7. In the most peripheral area, the western Kamoro area, the basic unit of Kamoro-Asmat social organization, the core conical kindred, is also an independent localized group. Two core conical kindreds merged into an affined conical kindred by sister exchange form a unit which ap-

pears in the same area and further to the east as a localized group. Among the eastern Kamoro, the Sempan, the Keenok, and the Kawenak the typical localized residential unit is the preferentially endogamous group, which constitutes an independent village or a potentially independent village segment.

8. Among the Kamoro, and probably the Keenok, incest prohibitions extend only to first cousins. The preferentially endogamous group therefore need only include four core conical kindreds. The Kawenak, and possibly the Sempan, extend incest prohibitions, in principle, to second cousins. The preferentially endogamous group, the men's house group, therefore must include at least eight core conical kindreds. These are divided into moieties, each of which is equivalent in size and general structure to the preferentially endogamous group among the Kamoro.

9. Leadership above the level of the core conical kindred is everywhere related to the ability to distribute food in ceremonial cycles. This in turn is probably everywhere related to the fact that a leader makes plural marriages. In the peripheral areas, the ability to make plural marriages is probably related primarily to being a hard worker and a good hunter. In the central area it is most closely related to prowess in warfare. *

10. Thus a relatively minor difference in the length and breadth of the rivers of the southwest New Guinea alluvial area has had a profound influence upon the cultures of the peoples inhabiting that area. This variation in the environment can be related directly to a variation in the intensity of warfare. High intensity of warfare in the central area has resulted in a high level of male solidarity, expressed architecturally in men's houses or bachelors' houses. It has also produced large settlements in which large groups are tied together by a wide extension of incest prohibitions. Finally, the importance of warfare is reflected by the fact that prestige and power are primarily dependent on prowess and craft in war.