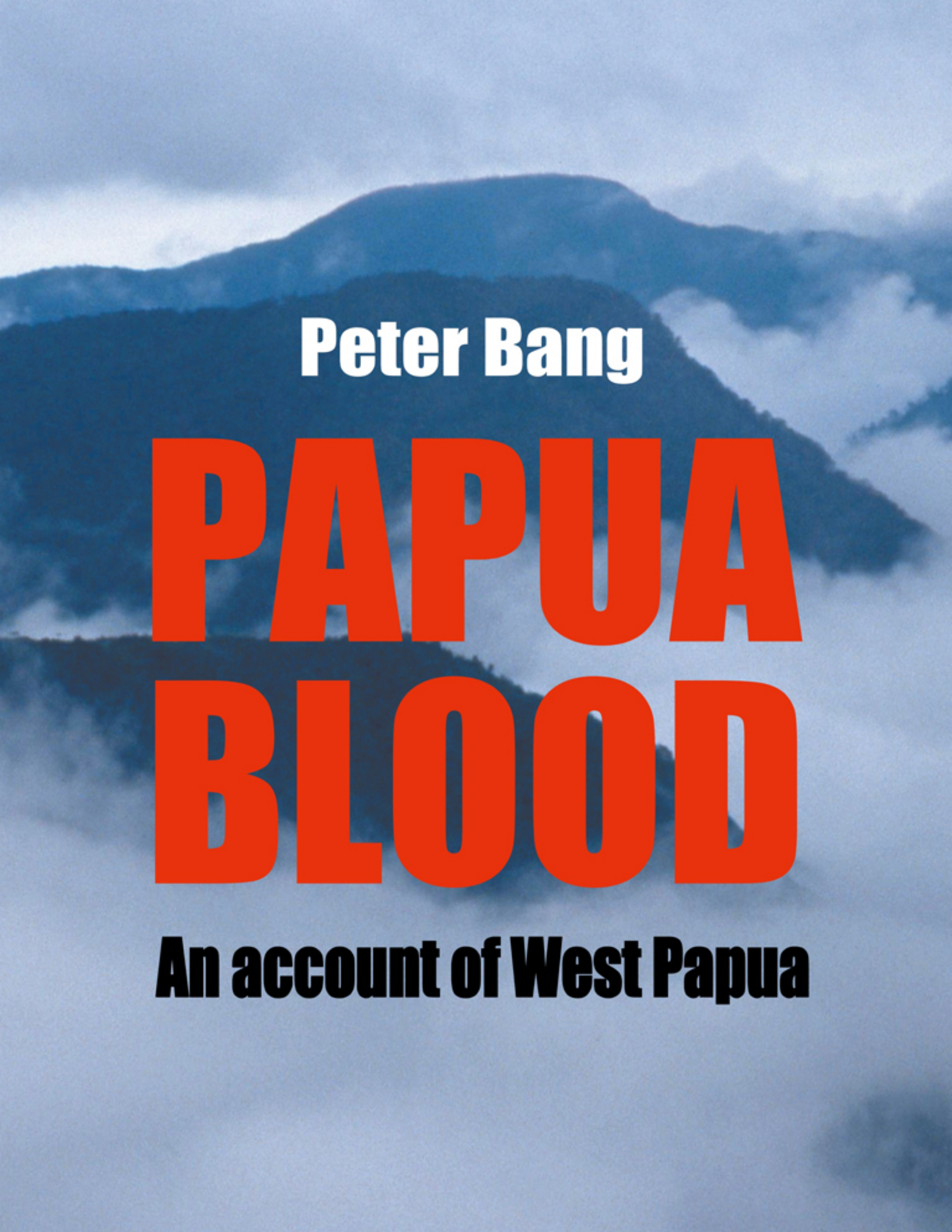

Peter Bang
PAPUA BLOOD
An account of West Papua

To my indigenous friends

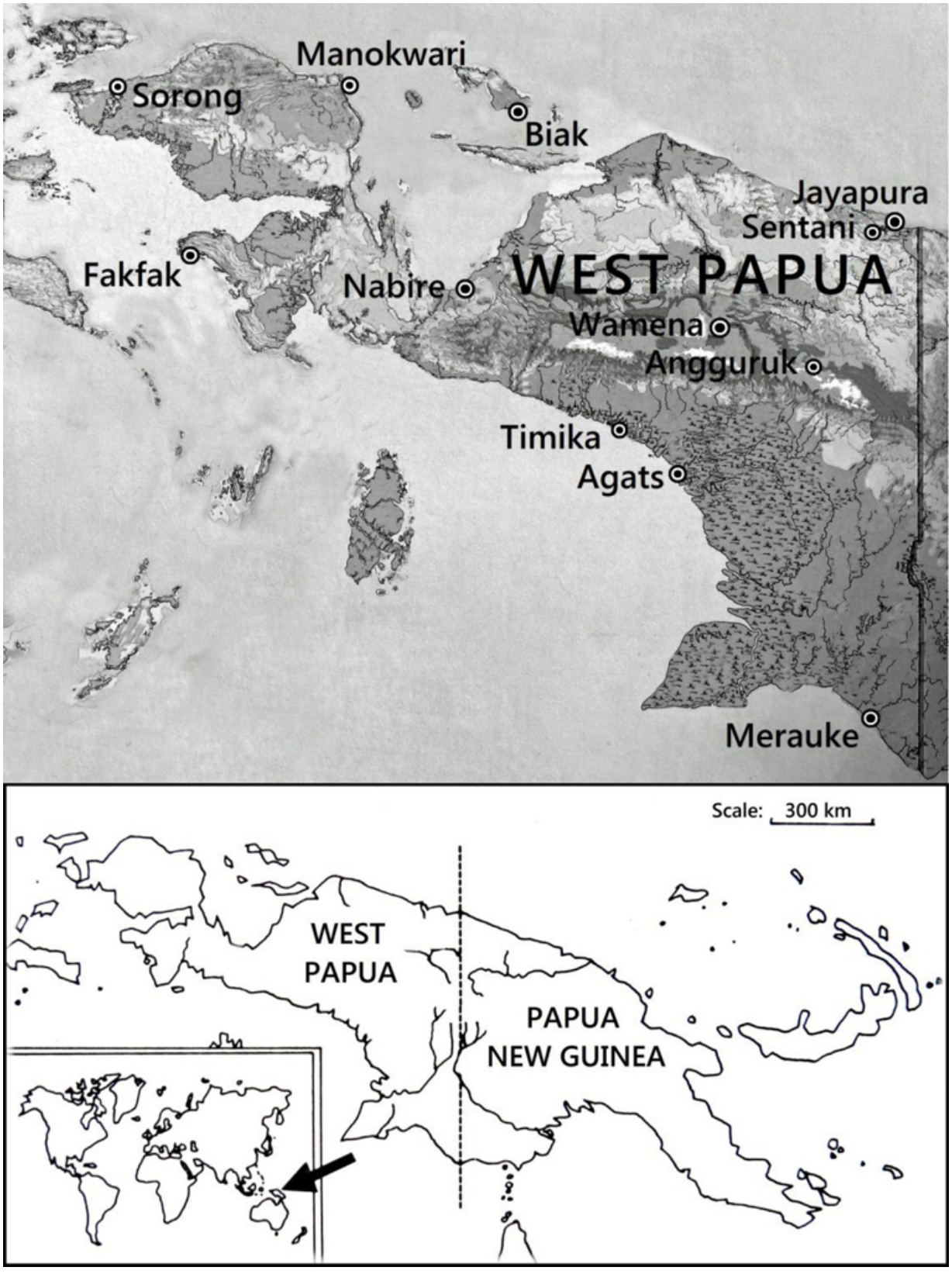
Contents

West Papuans holding placards, calling for UN assitance, after Indonesia's invasion of West Papua in 1962. By 1969 there was widespread resistance to Indonesian rule. The Indonesian military had killed and imprisoned thousands of Papuans in the seven years it had occupied the country – yet it was under these conditions that the people were supposed to exercise their right to self determination. It was agreed that the UN should oversee a plebiscite of the people of West Papua, in which they would be given two choices: to remain part of Indonesia or to become an independent nation. This vote was to be called the 'Act of Free Choice.' But the Act was a sham. Instead of overseeing a free and fair election, the UN stood by while Indonesia rigged the vote. Declaring that the Papuans were too 'primitive' to cope with democracy, the Indonesian military hand-picked just 1,026 'representative' people, out of a population of one million, bribed them and threatened to kill them and their families if they voted the wrong way. So strong was the

intimidation that despite widespread opposition to Indonesian rule, all 1,026 voted to remain a part of Indonesia. Despite protests from the Papuans, a critical report by a UN official and condemnation of the vote in the international media, the UN shamefully sanctioned the result and West Papua has remained under control of the Indonesian state ever since. The Papuans now dub this episode 'the Act of No Choice'.

“My people are still suffering. Hundreds of thousands have been killed, raped and tortured. All we want is to live without fear and for West Papua to become a free and independent country.”

Benny Wenda, independence leader


Manokwari
Sorong
Biak
Jayapura
Sentani
Fakfak
Nabire
WEST PAPUA
Wamena
Angguruk
Timika
Agats
Merauke
Scale: 300 km
WEST PAPUA
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Preface

In 1526–27, the Portuguese explorer Jorge de Menezes accidentally came upon the second largest island in the world and named it Papua, from a Malay word *pepuah*, for the Melanesian curly hair.

West Papua refers to the western half of the island and smaller islands to its west. The region has had the official names of Netherlands New Guinea (1895–1962), West New Guinea (1962–63), West Irian (1963– 73), Irian Jaya (1973–2001), and Papua (2002–2003). In 2003 the Indonesian administration split the island's western half in two provinces: the province of West Papua on the west, and the province of Papua on the east. Indonesian officials and administrators refer to the province when they say "West Papua"; Papuans mean the whole of western New Guinea. In support and respect for the indigenous Papuans right to selfdetermination is West Papua therefore the name that is used in this book.

The journeys described in this book would never have been possible without lots of local help from many patient, hospitable, brave, committed and welcoming Papuans. Thank you to my indigenous friends and adoptive family. It was them who made the voyages behind the mountains possible.

Also I want to say thank you very much to Natalie Smith and my Tasmanian New Guinea wantoks, Mathew Bond and his partner Sarah for editing and rewriting my “Danish English” into Australian English.

Wa wa wa Nagor wa!

Peter Bang

Behind the mountains

The first time I arrived to New Guinea, I stood on the deck of a ship on an early morning and saw the island emerge from the sea in a foggy mist to starboard. Together with my girlfriend at the time I had traveled for six months through Asia, and the goal was now to enter New Guinea's central highlands, where I would try to gather material for a series of articles about some of the world's last indigenous people who still lived a traditional life.

The boat trip went through the Indonesian archipelago on a number of different passenger vessels from Sumatra to Java, past Borneo and on to Sulawesi, the Moluccas and New Guinea. It was a slow way to travel, though a few months earlier I had fallen on a staircase in Singapore and had broken my ankle, so the long sea voyage gave me a chance to rest the leg and make a good recovery.

I stood at the railing and watched the steep jungle covered coastline and the wild mountains that meandered in green folds under heavy, low-hanging clouds. The sea was clear and blue. We found ourselves just south of the Equator and heading for Sorong, which was the next stop on the journey before we continued on to Port Numbay / Jayapura (former Hollandia). During the night we sailed north around Raja Ampat islands off the northwest tip of the Bird's Head, which makes up the large peninsula on the western part of New Guinea. Flying fish in large groups jumped up in front of the bow and hovered low over the waves and splashed down between playful dolphins while mighty whales migrated further out to sea. The sea we sailed was like

earth’s underwater Amazon, and contained the planet's highest marine biodiversity.

My knowledge about the world that existed behind the mountains was limited. The Internet did not exist in 1986, so my information was based solely on articles, films and books, mainly referring to primitive tribes who lived in a stone-age culture.

The previous couple of days we had spent a lot of time talking with an Australian missionary couple who worked at a mission station in the central highlands west of Baliem Valley. All the others on board, about 1,200 people were poor Indonesians from Java on their way to western New Guinea to be resettled in the context of the Indonesian government's so-called "Transmigrassi" program.

The Australian missionaries gave us good advice and contacts to people they knew in the highlands, and also talked a bit about the tense political situation in the area, which at the time I did not know much about. When they heard that we wanted to go into the Yali tribe's territory, they believed that we could not get an entry permit. The Indonesian police authorities were extremely strict about who they allowed to travel in the highlands, because after a series of demonstrations less than two years earlier, thousands of freedom supporters had fled across the border to Papua New Guinea to escape the massacres committed by the Indonesian armed forces.

New Guinea was politically divided in two. The eastern part of the island, Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975 after having belonged to Australia, while the western part was previously under the Dutch colonial rule. But in 1963 Indonesia took over the western part of the island with UN approval - against the local population's wish.

From the very beginning a large number of Indonesian police and military forces were sent to West Papua, which contained vast natural resources including gold, oil and wood from the rainforest, as many places were becoming in

short supply and therefore of great importance to Indonesia's economy. Most Indonesians considered from the beginning the Papuan tribes and their culture as hilarious and worthless. Police soldiers conducted frequent punitive expeditions with reference to violation of "laws" that the indigenous people neither understood or had heard about, partly because of language barriers and the huge cultural difference.

Among the new initiatives the Indonesian government in 1971–1972 launched "Operasi Koteka" ("Operation Penis Gourd") which consisted primarily of trying to encourage the indigenous people to wear shorts and shirts because such clothes were considered more "modern." But the people did not have changing clothes, did not have soap, and were unfamiliar with the care of such clothes so the unwashed clothing caused skin diseases. Some men were also wearing the shorts as hats and some women used the dresses as carrying bags.

The indigenous peoples of West Papua belong to the Melanesian race that is completely different from the Asian. There were examples of Papuans who had been captured, and thrown out alive from helicopters, strangled or drowned after being put into plastic bags. Pregnant women killed by bayonets. Prisoners forced to dig their own graves before they were killed. The Australian missionary couple lent us a book that was published the year before, which they had brought with them hidden in the luggage, as it was illegal to have in Indonesia. In the book "Indonesia's Secret War - The guerilla struggle in Irian Jaya" (published in 1985 by Allen & Unwin Australia Pty. Ltd., Sydney, Australia) documents the journalist Robin Osborne, former press secretary for Papua New Guinea's former prime minister, Sir Julius Chan, that 200,000 Papuan people had been murdered by the Indonesian government since 1963. Indigenous tribes that lived in Stone Age cultures (armed with stone axe’s, bows

and arrows) were crushed by fighter aircrafts armed with machineguns and napalm bombs.

In fact, there had been a civil war in the area since the Indonesian army conducted a secret war against the indigenous population and OPM ("Organisasi Papua Merdeka": Free Papua Movement), especially in the border area near Papua New Guinea where there was a strong military presence - and on the other side of the border, there were refugee camps with thousands of refugees from West Papua. But it was very rarely that any word got out to the world press about all this. When there was turmoil in a region, it was immediately declared closed by the police and nothing got out.

The indigenous people of West Papua regarded their land as a sacred heritage and turned against the Indonesian government's destructive management of their land, particularly the so-called "Transmigrasi"-program, which consisted of a massive population transfer to uncultivated parts of Indonesia, to decrease the overpopulated Java. The total population of West Papua in 1986 was about 1.2 million people, of whom about 220,000 were Indonesian migrants who had been allocated plots of land in the jungle that they could cultivate. This massive migration of Indonesians was not only a disaster for the Papuan people, but also a catastrophe for the rain forest, earth and wildlife.

The Australian missionaries gave us lots of information on the political situation in the area, but did not know much about the conditions in the Yali tribes area, besides that they told us that the American missionary Don Richardson, in the book "Lords of the Earth" (published in 1977, Regal Books, California, USA), had described how two missionaries in 1968 were killed by Yali people in the area.

I was young and very determined to do that I could to visit the Yali tribe. As a freelance travel writer and photographer with a special interest in indigenous peoples, it was my purpose of the trip to document the changes that had

occurred since the first missionaries 25 years earlier had entered the area. I had read an article by the American anthropologist Klaus-Friedrich Koch, and later his book "War and Peace in Jalémó - The Management of Conflict in Highland New Guinea" (published in 1974, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA) that inspired me to try to find out how the Yali tribe had integrated with the outside world since the book had been published. According to Klaus-Friedrich Koch, the Yali tribe was one of the world's most bellicose peoples. Until the first contact with the outside world in 1961, the Yali tribe had lived isolated in the mountains for millennia. The standards for solutions to conflicts were killing and war, verbal solutions were unknown. Hostilities were going on involving tribe against tribe, valley towards valley, village against village, family against family, even family members who lived in the same village could be at war with each other. Cannibalism was common as there was a tradition of eating their enemies' flesh as an extreme demonstration of hatred and revenge, but no one ate the meat of people whose faces were familiar.

When we finally arrived at the coastal town of Jayapura, we waited a few days before we were permitted fly to Wamena, which was a government outpost in the highlands and a very small town. The only hotel was an aluminum barrack by a runway, where stood an army of naked black men with long koteka´s (penis sheath’s) looking seriously at the plane as we landed.

The fact that we managed to proceed from Wamena and into the Yali tribe's territory was entirely due to fortunate circumstances that led us to come into contact with some extremely helpful Papuans with connections to the freedom movement, who after a few days in Wamena, helped us illegally to Angguruk with a small mission aircraft and a couple of influential missionaries blessings. The Indonesian police had previously confiscated our passports and we