

Pouwer, Jan. 2010. Gender, Ritual and Social Transformation in West Papua. KITLV Press, Leiden. ISBN 978 90 6718 325 3.

by Dr Kal Muller (20 May 2010).

Ethnographic fieldwork in Papua (Indonesia) today is almost impossible due to the difficulties of obtaining official government permission to do so. With a few notable exceptions, this has been the case since the Indonesian government took control of Papua in 1963. While we are blessed with a continuous plethora of ethnographic books and articles about the independent country of Papua New Guinea, very little is available about Papua.

In the published literature concerning Papua, the Asmat have hogged the attention. This is due to several factors. The Asmat maintained their traditional life-style, with headhunting as a crucial aspect of the culture, until well into the 1950s. Then in 1962, a scion of the famous Rockefeller family, Michael, disappeared after his boat overturned off the Asmat coast. He had been collecting Asmat art. While his death was probably a prosaic drowning (or he could have been killed by sharks or crocodiles), there was a strong current of opinion that he had been killed and eaten by the Asmat. Michael Rockefeller's disappearance led to a worldwide focus on the Asmat. This was re-enforced by the work of the Crosier priests, the Roman Catholic order that initially evangelized the Asmat. Several Crosier priests (including Bishop Al Sowada) with anthropological training wrote about the Asmat culture. They also encouraged most ritual aspects of Asmat culture (barring war and headhunting) and promoted their art.

The Kamoro were not so blessed. This group lives just to the west of the Asmat. The two cultures are quite similar (yet in many ways also distinct) in their art, rituals and language. The Kamoro were brought under the control of the Dutch government and evangelized by the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1920s. Initially, no one was much interested in their traditional art and culture. This only changed after World War II.

Dr. Pouwer's work in the perspective of Kamoro studies

Some anthropological material was gathered on the Kamoro (often referred to as the Mimika) by Wollaston and Rawling, in separate books, during the British Ornithological Union's long and frustrating expedition to reach the island's central glaciers. But anthropology was far from being their main concern.

Jan Pouwer spent over two years studying the Kamoro culture during the early 1950s in the field. His doctoral dissertation was published in 1955 in the Dutch language as *Enkele Aspecten Van De Mimika-Cultuur*. This is an excellent, thorough academic study and the basic reference to those who studied the culture of the Kamoro after him. (As to my never-ending regret, I cannot read Dutch, but I've had several large sections of this work translated for me into English.)

Three of the Roman Catholic fathers who served in the Kamoro area after WWII became the only outsiders really fluent in the language. (Dr. Pouwer had a 'good, working

knowledge' of Kamoro but obtained much of his information in Indonesian.) These three men, Fathers Coenen, Drabbe and Zegwaard recorded a number of Kamoro myths. Most of this material (except for Father Drabbe's legends, in English) was never published or if so, only in Dutch. Father Coenen also wrote a lengthy essay on the Kamoro culture (again, only in Dutch, but I have an Indonesian translation), as a complement to Dr. Pouwer's doctoral dissertation. Many of the legends gathered by the priests were not published until 2002, in a book called *Amoko* (edited by G. Offenbergh and J. Pouwer) that combined and contrasted Kamoro and Asmat legends.

In 1984, Simon Kooijman published a book on Kamoro art, with many black and white photos, the only serious work available on this group until the 21st century.

The early years of our century saw two (unpublished) doctoral dissertations, by Harple (2000) and Jacobs (2003). In 2002 David Pickell wrote the text of a book called *Kamoro, Between the Tides*, combining ethnography and travelogue. Then in 2003, Dirk Smidt published *Kamoro Art*, for the important exhibit on this group at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden.

A major problem with all of the above works is the too short time spent in the field to obtain information. Thus Dr. Jan Pouwer was, and remains, the only ethnographer to have spent the time (two years) living with the Kamoro to give us an authoritative account of the Kamoro traditions and social structure. This is why Dr. Pouwer's recent book on the Kamoro is so welcome. We are grateful that he was able to complete this major and important book in spite of age (84) and failing health. [Note: he passed away while I was writing this review.]

The contents of the book: Part One

Pouwer's most recent publication, reviewed here, has three major divisions. Part One covers the ritual cycle of the Kamoro. Part Two compares the Kamoro and the Asmat rituals. A long epilogue talks about the evolution and present state of the Kamoro traditions.

The book's first chapter covers some of the pre-1920s history of the Kamoro, along with some general information. But the text assumes some knowledge about the local environment and history. This ground is well covered in Dr. Pouwer's dissertation, but I found it insufficiently complete. The information on the social organization, the 'taparu' or localized descent groups, along with the topic of marriage, is somewhat skimpy.

A quick overview of the two main rituals gives us an idea of the contents for the next chapters. These two rituals, the Ema Kame and the Kaware 'relate to each other as the female right and the male left'. The 'female' Ema Kame insures life, fertility and abundance. The 'male' Kaware controls the relations with the deceased and highlights the men's contributions to the material culture, especially to the making of dugout canoes.

Pouwer emphasizes two core Kamoro concepts: duality and reciprocity. The two ritual cycles, as well as much of Kamoro life revolves around a basic duality. The other basic

concept, reciprocity, called 'aopao' has shaped the Kamoro relations with the outside world.

The concept of reciprocity, as many semi-abstract terms, has plenty of room for (mis)interpretation. In the Kamoro mentality, it is a far wider concept than a simple agreed upon exchange of items or services of equal value. Pouwer wrote that one of the Kamoro mythical figures, Mapurupiu, transgressed the rule of reciprocity and he is thus regarded as responsible for the fact that humans die. He is also the one who guards the entrance and access in the underworld to the realm of (Western) wealth. When the mining company Freeport Indonesia compensated the Kamoro landowners for the use of their land, the staff in charge thought that a single remuneration in the way of program(s) would be sufficient. For the Kamoro, the reciprocity principle meant that the company had to keep paying them as long as their land was being still used by the company. (See the Harple dissertation for more details on this)

The Ema Kame ritual

This ritual, known as 'Kiewa' in the eastern Kamoro/Sempan area, is essentially practiced inland, as opposed to the 'coastal' Kaware. Pouwer gives the literal meaning of Ema Kame as 'house of bones' (kame means house, building, or shelter) and calls it 'the mother of all ceremonies'. He defines it as the 'major ritual concluding a series of ceremonies marking death or initiation'. The multi-purpose Ema Kame 'commemorated the dead, celebrated new life, fertility and reproduction...'. The bones of those who had died since the previous ritual were excavated and placed into a ceremonial house that was abandoned at the conclusion of the festivities.

In recent years, and according to my experience, the funerary aspect of this ritual has been completely lost, with Christian burials the norm. Even in Pouwer's time, the early 1950s, the far-western part of the Kamoro area had ceased to celebrate the Ema Kame. Pouwer was told in the Etna Bay area that the Protestant missionaries and the administration had prevented the holding of this ceremony. The Kamoro in that area told Pouwer that abandoning the Ema Kame had resulted in a marked population decrease, the 'scarcity of children and adults'. When I visited the westernmost Kamoro villages in the late 1990s, I was told that they held no rituals whatsoever, nor any traditional dancing or singing. The three westernmost Kamoro villages, located in a different political district, all follow the Protestant faith, while the rest of the Kamoro are (almost) all Roman Catholics.

But even in the Roman Catholic villages of far-western Kamoro sub-district (Distrik Mimika Barat Jauh), rituals are seldom held and the production of carvings has declined. I have visited these villages once a year for the past decade and I have very seldom seen any preparations for any ceremonies. Except for Potowai Buru, where an airstrip has been built (there are semi-regular weekly flights between Timika and Kaimana that stop there), the western Kamoro area is isolated. The only way to reach these villages is by sea, and for much of the year the waves are too strong to travel to or from there in the local dugout canoes.

The Karapao replaces the Ema Kame today?

Traditional rituals are still held in the central and eastern Kamoro villages. These take place on the average of every five or six years, when enough boys have reached the ages of 6 to 12 years for their communal initiation. This initiation ritual is called 'karapao', a word Pouwer defines as literally 'jointing beams and timber; ceremonial house for initiation of boys and adolescents...'. Today, the term 'karapao' applies to both the specially constructed large, elongated temporary structure, purpose-built for the initiation, as well as the series of rituals performed there. I have seen phases of this initiation ritual a number of times over the past decade. Its various phases can last over a year. While the major aspects of the 'karapao' are similar in all the villages, there are many marked differences as well. The various phases are performed only when the male in-laws of the initiates agree and have the time to do so. The initial phase always consists of the erecting of the 'karapao' building, the carving of the totem-pole like 'mbitoro' and the placing of this carving (sometimes two of them) upright in front of the building. The final phase, the actual initiation of the boys, happens at the end of the cycle. The phase of the initiation for adolescent boys, piercing the nasal septum and a demonstration of their adult skills has been completely abandoned since shortly after WW II.

The funerary aspects of the Ema Kame are only retained today in the high, imposing mbitoro. Several men under the direction of a master-carver make this winged totem pole. It is completed out of sight of women and children. After the karapao building has been completed, the mbitoro is taken out of its hiding place and paraded around the village. It is thrown up in the air and the Kamoro say at that time the mbitoro receives the spirits of the recently deceased important men who are represented in the main part of the carving. Pouwer mentions the representation of women as well in the trunk part of the mbitoro, but I have never seen female representation in the trunk. In Iwaka Village, less important men, women and children (all of whom have died) recently are sometimes carved into the wing part of the mbitoro.

Evolution in purpose and meaning in Kamoro art

Pouwer mentions several carvings connected with the Ema Kame. I have never seen any of these pieces used in connection with today's initiation rituals, with the major exception of the mbitoro. However, carvings like those Pouwer mentions are still made today, but essentially for sale. The making of these items has been revived thanks to their possible sale potential. A few years ago I distributed photocopies of the Kooijman book, *Art, Art Objects and Ritual in the Mimika Culture*. A few carvers have imitated some of the pieces illustrated in the book, without knowing or caring about their (former) ritual of symbolic meaning.

In Pouwer's time, there were horizontal ceremonial boards decorated with carvings and displayed as centerpieces during the Ema Kame. He mentions the respectively named the (male) 'puru kani' and the (female) 'puru mane' ('puru' means sacred or taboo). The carved central motif (probably) represented the first male and female ancestor. The female figure had a very obvious oval central motif. This is usually called 'mopere' and represents the maternal navel or vagina, the essence of life. I have occasionally seen this motif on horizontal carvings. A somewhat similar motif, said to represent a frog, is much

more frequent on longer horizontal carvings. In one of the Kamoro myths, a frog helped a human make the first canoe, and then propelled it.

Pouwer writes that ceremonial shields represented named deceased members of the community. Kooijman's book shows both solid and open fretwork shields. We find these today, but they are seldom produced in the two styles in the same village. I have found no reason for this. As I've never seen any of these stylized shields used in any ritual, the assumption is that they are made today exclusively for sale.

The same applies to the spirit poles (mbitoro) of less-than-normal (5 or more meters high) size. Formerly, these mini-spirit poles functioned as amulets against sickness or danger and in rituals promoting growth and fertility. Now they are made exclusively for sale, I was told on several occasions. Both the large and smaller spirit poles had in the past a role in promoting the growth of sago. This purpose is today only remembered. I was told that the large spirit poles, once their ritual function was over in the boys' initiation, were cut up and taken to the sago fields. Today, they are allowed to rot, or occasionally broken up and the pieces distributed to the families of the deceased represented in them. Or they are available for sale, but marketing the large spirit poles remains difficult, due to their size that sometime reaches over 9 meters.

Aside from the mbitoro spirit poles, drums are the only art items still made by the Kamoro for themselves. The drums are always and frequently played today during the boys' initiation ritual and on special occasions. They are played by a specific group of men, both inside and outside the specially constructed ceremonial house. But aside from a few heirloom pieces, any drum, used or new, are available for sale. As in the past, drums are made today with or without handles. The handles show various degrees of elaboration, especially as they are easier to sell those with an ornate handle.

Three-dimensional ancestor figures (called 'wemawe') are often made, but now divorced from their former use against sickness or misfortune as in Pouwer's time. These figures are usually fairly small, as then they are easier to sell, able to fit into a suitcase. A few carvers have begun to make a new-style, imaginative ancestor figures, quite different from the old-style of hollow human representations, with bent elbows on bent knees. In one village, two carvers have made 1.5-meter high, pregnant women, copied from the Kooijman book, but exclusively for sale.

In one village (Iwaka) the men have started making large spirit masks again. The technique of making these masks has been lost in most other villages, as the men who know how to make them have died without transmitting their skills. I have seen the masks used only in two occasions during the many rituals I've attended. But because of the sales of some masks, the men of Iwaka Village have started making them again.

The Kamoro still make various utilitarian objects for daily use: canoes (but seldom today with any prow ornamentation), paddles (with geometric carvings on the blades), and sago beaters. Unlike the highland Papuans, the Kamoro seldom use bows and arrows, with their main hunting weapon the metal-blade tipped spear. Personal decorations are also

made and used, items like bracelets, grass skirts (for men and women) and head pieces of cuscus fur and/or bird feathers. Occasionally, plaited women's clothing can still be seen as well. Sago bowls, formerly used in rituals, are still occasionally produced, but now made mostly for sale only. Stone war club heads have not been made for a long time now, but old ones are occasionally offered for sale in the villages. They are no longer considered heirloom pieces, so the owners sell them.

The Kaware ritual

Pouwer writes that the Kamoro performed two major rituals, the Ema Kame, as described above, and the Kaware. These relate to each other as the female right (Ema Kame) and the male left (the Kaware). The Ema Kame promotes life, fertility, procreation, growth and abundance. The Kaware concerns communications with the underworld, including dealing with death, mainly the prerogative of males. It highlights the contribution of males to the material culture: making of canoes, paddles, tools, and weapons. During this ritual, individual men (or clans) make use of their particular 'otepe', or ritual secrets. These ritual secrets, some 60 in number according to Coenen, control natural phenomenon such as rain and sunshine, as well as particular ritual sequences, the manipulation of spirits or having power over certain aspects of activities such as canoe making.

Pouwer summarizes three of the Kamoro myths associated with the Kaware, one of which involved obtaining the necessary secrets for this ritual by a man named Mamirima who died, then returned to the living after acquiring the necessary knowledge. After drowning, Mamirima was brought back to life by the pecking of birds, led by the sea eagle. Most aspects of this myth are similar to that of the Asmats' Fumuripic.

It was essential to guard the secret knowledge of the Kaware from the women. A major war began prior to government and church presence, due to the accusations of carelessness by one group in keeping this secret. Pouwer also wrote that the Kaware was the first major ritual to be discontinued after the arrival of the government and the Roman Catholic Church, for fear of the secrets being divulged. Nevertheless, Pouwer and Coenen were able to obtain information considered 'secret' thanks to their patience and partial integration into the Kamoro community. Nor did the Kaware stop entirely, as the kaware was performed occasionally, probably out of sight of outsiders.

In fact, David Pickell and I were able to see and record at least a part of the Kaware in Paripi Village only a decade ago. But most aspects of what we saw were performed out of sight of the women of the village. When a masked figure, representing a spirit, made an appearance in the village, all the children, and even some of the women, ran away in a real panic.

The description of the Kaware by Pouwer has several parallels with what we saw, but with some important (?) elements left out of our truncated version. The initial event, the death and resurrection of Mamirima was staged quite spectacularly just off the beach outside the village. Afterwards, we saw the spirit mask both on the beach and in the village, not described by Pouwer. But the men of Paripi did not hold a house-building

ceremony, or a sago grub ritual, as per Pouwer. We did see the making of a quite large ritual canoe in the jungle and its transfer to the village. And we witnessed the grand finale of the Kaware, with many canoes full of men, two spirit masks, all aligned in a dramatic, impressive front on a nearby river. The canoe-borne parade ended up on an isolated section of beach, well away from the village. A spear was buried in the sand, perhaps corresponding to what Pouwer describes as the stabbing of the spirit that killed Mamirima (who, however, according to the legend, died by drowning...). For more details and photographs of the Kaware ritual at Paripi, see Pickell, 2002.

Pouwer wrote about several rituals associated with the kaware that have now been abandoned. These include the bat ritual, probably no longer performed due to the sexual acts that were an integral part of it. The hornbill ceremony, described by Pouwer, has also been abandoned. Thus Pouwer's work gives us a glimpse of a much more complete Kamoro ritual life than what survives today.

Kamoro and Asmat

The second part of Dr. Pouwer's book, 'the Kamoro in relation to the Asmat' covers well over half of the Kamoro-only first section. As far as I know, Pouwer never spent much if any time in the Asmat area, so all his comparative material comes from the large body of literature on that ethno-linguistic group. The first chapter in this section is called 'The theory and comparison of and the context of the rituals'. I found some several sections of this introductory section confusing, with editing badly needed. Even for those who know the Kamoro and Asmat cultures relatively well, the going can be difficult.

He begins this section with a mention of Knauff's comparison of seven south New Guinea cultures, groups that show a degree of similarity due to the resources available in their physical environment. All of these cultures speak Papuan (or non-Austronesian) languages and depend on sago for their starch and fish as the main source of protein. Other common aspects include a degree of horticulture (more in the east, less in the west), similar types of kinship organization, mostly of the dual-type, commemoration of the dead, the potential for large-scale political alliances, highly elaborate artistic representations of mythical or real ancestors, elaborate heterosexual (and sometime homosexual) fertility and rejuvenation rites, headhunting and warfare.

Of all the south coast cultures, the Marind seemed to have been the most elaborately organized, forming the largest-scale political alliances. Their environment allowed the combination of agriculture and the intensive exploitation of both aquatic and terrestrial resources. Their large-scale, long-term headhunting raids across the international border to then-British New Guinea led to the establishment of the Dutch outpost at Merauke, specifically to stop Dutch-administered subjects from lopping off British-administered heads. But the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church in Merauke, as well as the Dutch civil authority, resulted in the demise of the elaborate Marind culture. Fortunately, some priests and two outstanding anthropologists have left us a record of the culture before its demise.

The Asmat follow south coast cultural similarities more closely than the Kamoro in the west, or the Elema in the east: neither of these two cultures practiced headhunting nor ritual homosexuality. The Kamoro also shunned cannibalism. Thus the Kamoro culture had much less highly 'objectionable' (from a European secular or religious points of view) aspects such as headhunting, cannibalism and sanctioned homosexual relations than did the Asmat and other groups to the east. And while many Kamoro myths are similar to those of the Asmat, the western Kamoro myth of the slain monster (dragon, huge snake or lizard), at the origins of the human races, has striking similarities to those of the southeastern Bird's Head.

Some of the similarities between the south coast New Guinea cultures could be attributed to the relatively recent settling of this mostly swampy area. In Pawley's Papuan Pasts we learn that some 6000 years ago the shoreline of the lower Fly River and areas to the west were some three to four meters above the present level, at least partially due to tectonic down-warping. At that time, the sea reached the foothills of the central mountain chain. This very extensive flooding of the southern part of New Guinea prevented human settlement. The western half of the Fly-Digul platform represents the area now inhabited by the Asmat and the Kamoro. This inundated platform slowly re-emerged when it was overlaid by sedimentary deposits from the south-flowing rivers. Thus it is likely that some 3000 to 4000 years ago the south-central coast of New Guinea was first inhabited by the ancestors of today's groups who came from the southern highlands.

To support this possibility, the linguist Bert Voorhoeve shows the (relatively) close similarity between the Mountain Ok languages and Asmat, through lexico-statistical analysis. From another point of view, we have putative similarities between Ok and Asmat shield designs whose origins could (perhaps) be traced to the Sepik area.

Languages, the environment, kinship and political organization

The Kamoro and Asmat languages, along with the small Sempan/Nafaripi group located between them, belong to the same language family. The Asmat are by far the largest group, with perhaps 80,000 speakers, followed by some 18,000 Kamoro and about 2,000 Sempan.

While the general ecology of the Kamoro and Asmat areas are quite similar, there are important variations that have led to distinct social organization. Both groups take advantage of the natural resources of three eco-systems: the near-shore Arafura Sea, the mangroves and the tropical rain forest. However, as one moves from east to west, the rich eco-systems become narrower, with mountains reaching the sea at the western end of the Kamoro lands. In the Asmat area, the wide, flat alluvial plain receives a tidal flux that allows exploitation of both fresh and saltwater swamps from the same residential location. Each day, the tide brings salt water as far as over 100 km. inland, thus creating interpenetrating fresh water and tidal swamps. These tides also allow sago stands to survive to the middle and upper reaches of rivers and streams.

In the Kamoro lands, the tidal fluctuations along the rivers are increasingly limited towards the west as the land gradient behind the coastline increases. This means that

fresh water swamps are increasingly distributed not as interpenetrating fingers but as bands running parallel to the rivers. And Kamoro groups had to be more mobile to exploit these resources. This meant smaller settlement sizes. While Asmat villages reached up to 2,000 inhabitants (with an average of some 500 per village), the Kamoro settlements were considerably smaller. While in the eastern part of the Kamoro area the villages could exceed 200 inhabitants, to the west the settlement sizes rarely if ever reached this figures. (Much of the above information comes from Pawley's Papuan Pasts)

With both the Kamoro and the Asmat, genealogies determining kinship are not very important. What does matter where one has settled, what Pouver terms 'residential override'. Groups or individual originating from elsewhere are easily assimilated. Both groups emphasize only the bonds between siblings as the core of kinship. Among the Kamoro, there is a clear distinction between superior bride-givers and inferior bride-takers, combined with a (former) preference for matrilocal marriages. Kamoro in-laws play a crucial role in the boys' initiation. In the Asmat culture, bride-takers have (had) various obligations, especially in revenge killings.

Pouver compares the residential setups and political affiliations of the two groups, with the considerably larger Asmat settlements showing clearer physical divisions than those of the Kamoro. Bachelors' houses are a prominent feature of the Asmat villages, but they are absent in Kamoro settlements as well as with the Asmat on the south Casuarina Coast. It was perhaps these bachelors' houses that increased male solidarity and led to large-scale cooperation in warfare and headhunting in much the Asmat territory. This led to what Pouver calls 'among the highest killing rate in the world' with many settlements wiped out or dispersed, remnants absorbed into other communities.

Aside from the bachelor's houses, the Asmat villages had long family units called *jew/yew*, each holding a number of families with their own fireplaces. Some large villages mid or down-stream settlements held three to five *jew*, but smaller upstream villages were dotted with up to 14 *jew*. These *jew* held two distinct moieties, each exogamous with, ideally, endogamy with the *jew*'s other moiety.

The Kamoro society's divisions are somewhat different from that of the Asmat. Here Pouver could be somewhat clearer in his description. The basic grouping of that of the 'taparu', defined as a 'localized matri-oriented descent group'. Yet there is also another basic division, one called 'paraeko', that includes the 'descendants of three generations from the same woman'. The relation between these two units is not defined. Pouver also grouped the Kamoro into dualistic river-bound groups that he called 'tribes', with 50 of them spread through the Kamoro area. He wrote that these 'tribes' or 'associations' each formed a 'security circle', not usually named. Confusing, to me at least.

There is more, but this clear enough: the Kamoro villages combined into four 'federations' of more than two settlements, along with 15 paired settlements. The Asmat also have paired settlements such as Sawa-Erma, As-Atat, that can break up and re-form, as warfare sometimes erupted between former allies. Since the pacification of the Asmat

area by the Dutch, there have been no large-scale wars and the various villages, single or paired, have been stable.

Comparing rituals

After his chapter on the 'theory of comparison' Pouver book's second section covers parallel rituals in the Kamoro and Asmat cultures in five chapters. All this Asmat material comes from published myths and ethnographic literature. Reading through this detailed mass, condensed, shortened and interpreted, I felt that often the author pushed the parallels too far to fit his thesis of the similarity of the cultures. Nevertheless, there is much valuable information here. Aside some valuable elements in David Eyde's doctoral dissertation, we have the first comparison of two neighboring cultures. Just how close they are to one another depends on interpretation. And, in all fairness, I must add that Pouver does point out differences as well as similarities.

In the first chapter comparing Kamoro and Asmat rituals, Eme Kame and Emak Cem, Pouver writes a tantalizing glimpse of the possible origin of these two rituals as coming from an ethno-linguistic group living between the Kamoro and the Asmat. This group goes under the name of Sempan, or Nafaripi (spelled in various ways). They number some 1500 to 2,000 souls and live in a relatively small group of villages. The Sempan have never been studied by anthropologists. I have seen only a very few, unpublished texts, by missionaries and government officials about this group.

Pouver traces the origins of the two rituals, the Eme Kame and the Emak Cem to the Sempan, who held a somewhat similar one called Imake. He writes that the Kamoro and the Asmat adopted this ceremony from the pre-existing smaller 'Kamoro-Nawaripi', inland-oriented communities with whom they merged. Elsewhere in the same chapter he writes of the Ema Kame as an age-old institution that captures the main orientation of the Nawaripi Kamoro, originally an inland oriented culture and society that was later flooded by immigrants. But in another section, Pouver states that the Nawaripi were attacked and hunted by the Koperapoka Kamoro (among others), leading the weaker group to flee inland to the upper reaches of rivers in the hinterland of the Far East Mimika and northwest and central Asmat. Confusing, to say the least.

Today, the Sempan live in seven villages, one by the sea and the others a considerable ways inland. The three Sempan villages located to the west follow an initiation ritual quite similar if not the same as the Kamoro. The four others have (or had up to recently) bachelor's houses and their carvings resemble those of the Asmat.

The Kamoro Ema Kame focuses on the promotion of fertility in humans as well as the environment. Both rituals include a phase of ancestor worship as well as the young boys' initiation into puberty. The Kamoro have no specific myths associated with this ritual. The Asmat Emak Cem is only practiced in the northwest area of this group. These Asmat do have a legend specifically connected with their Emak Cem, telling of its first performance.

In the Asmat myth, two sisters, Merne and Bumper and their sons Kuri and Sawar lived upstream on the Askewer River (located in the Central Asmat area). The mothers instructed their sons to build a proper ceremonial house, specifically for this ritual. A fish-shaped object called 'year' was hung over the entrance. The mothers then cut a 'tow' tree for the making of a 'wuramon', the bottomless spirit canoe that represents the central and crucial element of the Emak Cem. The canoe had a turtle in the center and figures with their heads down. The boys had to lie down on this canoe. Their mothers then incised scarifications on their shoulders and thighs with sharpened shells. Later, the boys are hoisted on the central beam of the ceremonial house and held upside down by their legs by one of the mothers. They are thrown down but caught by the other mother. More incisions for scars are then cut on the backs of their knees and breastbones. The boys are then hit with banana stalks, to promote their fast growth, as banana plants grow very quickly. The legend (in Pouwer's rendition) has no mention of what the 'wuramon' is used for afterwards or its connection with the deceased.

Pouwer wrote that the Emak Cem ritual was no longer performed in the late 1950s, but was revived in the 1970s. The ritual is still carried out today, at least in the twin villages of As-Atat. While I did not see the ceremony, during one of my carvings-collecting trips to the area I saw the remains of the ritual house, with a carved crocodile head at the end of the projecting central beam. At that time, I also saw the two 'wuramon' that had been used in each village. One was lying in water under a bachelor's house and the other was on the roof beams of the other bachelor's house. I saw them again during my trip there the following year, with the one lying in the water now also high and dry, resting on the roof beams. On my next trip there, in February 2008, I purchased both of these canoes.

Pouwer summarized information about this ritual that was seen in a shortened version in 1987 by Gunter and Ursula Konrad, along with Yufen Biakai. He also added comments of his own, based on his knowledge of the Kamoro. In the 1987 ritual, the names of the recently deceased were mournfully enumerated while lime was flung at the tree that was later made into the 'wuramon'. Seeing the importance of the soul ship, the 'wuramon', Pouwer recalls a myth of the Koperapoka, a village at the far eastern end of the Kamoro area. The narrator categorically stated that this was the 'true myth of the origins of the Ema Kame. The canoe featured in this tale is also associated with the dead and travels to the underworld, located at the far western end of Kamoro-land. However, in the Kamoro Ema Kame, there is no spirit canoe.

In the Asmat Emak Cem, the spirit canoe serves as a symbol of the life cycle: honoring the dead while inviting them to depart for their new home in the underworld. Meanwhile, the initiates, the new young males are marked out as the successors of the deceased by being stretched out on the spirit canoe. None of this is seen in the Kamoro Ema Kame.

Pouwer attempts to re-enforce the parallel between the two rituals with his analysis of the Kamoro 'puru mane' or sacred boards displayed in the Ema Kame ritual. He calls these boards 'representation of communal ancestors'. According to him, these boards have their counterparts in the Asmat fish figure ('yirai') and the wuramon soul ship featured used in the Emak Cem. Pouwer draws the tenuous conclusion that in spite of differences,

these items transmit an ancestral life force to the initiates. I do not understand how he could have reached this conclusion. I see it more as an attempt to find a parallel where, to me, none exists.

Pouwer stands on slightly firmer ground in his next chapter, 'honoring the dead'. In previous parts of his book he had already discussed the Kamoro mbitoro and Asmat bisj poles, honoring ancestors, along with the wuramon seen above. In this chapter he emphasizes the parallel use of masks in the two cultures to represent the dead, in the form of spirits returning to the world of the living. Yes, valid enough, but masks to represent spirits (of the deceased ancestors and others) are a common phenomenon in many cultures, not restricted to the Kamoro and the Asmat.

The next chapter is called 'Male to female social opposition versus communal solidarity'. Here Pouwer mentions the sago grub ritual as part of their Kaware ceremony. I have never heard any mention of any sago grub rituals among the Kamoro, but perhaps it is a long-forgotten element of their traditional culture. The Asmat sago grub ritual is well known and documented, a massive consumption of sago grubs. It certainly promotes a sense of solidarity.

In Pouwer's view, the sago grub ritual that inaugurates a new men's house celebrates and promotes 'community strength and solidarity, explicitly including relations between men and women'. I have never attended an Asmat sago grub feast, but if it celebrates a new men's house, it certainly marks a division between men and women, and not solidarity. Men's house implies no women allowed. Pouwer compares this ritual to the Kamoro's Kaware. Here, he states that this ritual does not mark solidarity, but rather the opposition between males and females. So the Kaware is placed in contradistinction to the inauguration of an Asmat men's house that Pouwer insists promotes a sense of community among both men and women.

The next two chapters, both covering male initiation, could have been combined into one, except for the mass of material that Pouwer squeezes into them. The author tries to draw a most tenuous parallel between the Kamoro nose-piercing ritual (now long abandoned) and the Asmat commemoration of the dead by the erection of a spirit pole, the bisj. The only valid connection lies in the fact that both rituals can be considered 'secondary initiations'. Younger boys had undergone their initial initiation during the Kamoro Ema Kame and the Asmat Emak Cem. Then they underwent a secondary one, marking the transition between adolescence and adulthood.

The Asmat secondary initiation revolved around headhunting. A man killed an enemy but only after learning his name. He then brought back the head that he gave to an adolescent who was his real or classificatory younger brother or son. The boy was then proclaimed an adult and he assumed the name of the victim. This gave him immunity in the enemy village.

In the concluding chapter, Pouwer admits to the major differences in the rituals he had compared. For the Emak Kame/Emak Cem, the central objects (the puru mane sacred

boards and the spirit canoes) are 'similar yet different in substance and meaning... The rituals differ in orientation'. In the use of masks, he writes of the 'difference in cultural orientation in spite of superficial similarities'. In the male-complex Kamoro Kaware and the Asmat Yew Mbu, the Kaware is a male stronghold rather than the Asmat 'equivalent' that is an 'expression of cross-gender solidarity'. Here again, in spite of similarities, the differences in the main orientation show up. When comparing anthropomorphic carvings, both groups admittedly show a 'predisposition if not preoccupation with a cult of the dead'. Yet the Asmat carvings, mostly of men killed in headhunting raids, are there as a reminder that revenge is necessary for the dead to rest in peace. For the Kamoro, this type of carving is made only to honor the recently dead or more distant ancestors.

My own conclusions about this book revolve around fact that was most useful to learn about the Kamoro culture. Pouwer used much of his own materials, and that of others that had previously been published only in Dutch (except for the myths). He was, and remains, the only anthropologist to have studied the Kamoro culture with the time and effort necessary for a depth of understanding. Pouwer is on much shakier ground when analyzing the Asmat culture. He consulted all the relevant sources, and there are many excellent ones, but he had not spent any time in the Asmat area. While his descriptions are of some value to those who are not familiar with the Asmat, it is better to consult the original materials. Pouwer's attempts at finding similarities (and differences) are valid enough when considering the environment, language and settlement patterns. Both cultures have initiation rituals and ceremonies honoring the deceased. However the differences between them are far more salient than the similarities.

Epilogue. Continuity and discontinuity: the current situation.

This final section of the book considers what is happening in recent times in the Kamoro and Asmat cultures. Unfortunately, Dr. Pouwer's deteriorating health kept him from returning to this area of the south coast of Papua, so his information is perforce second-hand. However, this section has great value in documenting the decline and revival of the two cultures under consideration.

The traditional Kamoro culture started its decline with the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1920s. Pouwer writes of 'intolerant and judgmental Dutch missionaries and Kei Island teachers and catechists'. These outsiders put an end to the major ritual cycles. They forced the Kamoro to settle permanently in villages, and abandon (at least partially) their semi-nomadic existence that allowed them to take advantage of several different eco-systems. The life of the Kamoro had suffered to the point where a Roman Catholic priest wrote in 1970 that the Kamoro area '.... strike a person as a dead area filled with zombies. ... The religion of the past is no longer celebrated and the Christian religion means nothing to the people. The past is gone forever. The future holds no hope.'

Pouwer wrote that his negative assessment was belied by 'the vitality radiating from the vivid, magnificent photographs of the Kamoro culture happenings and every day life made in the 1990s.... the independent, lively, sympathetic and reliable travelogue [published in 2002] illustrated by ... revealing and natural photographs, bears witness to

the open minds and excellent rapport with the people on one hand, and the unmistakable cultural and personal vitality of the Kamoro on the other.’

The roots of this revival go back to the interest that Father Zegwaard and Jan Pouver showed in the Kamoro culture, as well as the Roman Catholic Church’s [1950s] explicit attempt to integrate some ceremonies and carvings into its ecclesiastical practice.

The Asmat culture underwent a very different change under outside influence from that of the Kamoro. First and foremost, the Asmat area was not brought under effective government control until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Up to that time, the traditional way of life that included large-scale headhunting, intra-tribal warfare and a full gamut of spectacular rituals. Between the Dutch government’s firearms and the Roman Catholic Church’s moral persuasion, the Asmat gave up headhunting and warfare. However, right from the beginning of the 1950s contact period, Father Zegwaard, the Dutch linguist-missionary, took a keen interest in Asmat culture. The world’s interest in the art of the Asmat was whetted with the disappearance of Michael Rockefeller who was collecting spectacular carvings.

After the Indonesian take-over of Papua, the new government forbade all rituals, carvings and burned down men’s houses. This was in a misguided policy that assumed that all Asmat culture revolved only around headhunting. The Crosier Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church, led by Bishop Al Sowada, opposed the blanket prohibition. Eventually the Indonesian government relaxed its prohibition policy. Asmat rituals revived in the 1970s.

The outside world’s interest in Asmat art, fostered by a UN program and the Roman Catholic Church, led the Indonesian government to promote the Asmat as THE culture of the entire province. Bishop Sowada opened an Asmat museum in 1973. Since 1981 a yearly Asmat carving festival, focused on the auction of sculptures, has attracted foreigners and high Indonesian officials. Freeport actively supported this festival/auction since the 1990s.

Several Kamoro villages were located in the Freeport project area and the company used some of their lands for its infrastructure. But, initially at least, Freeport showed little interest in the Kamoro culture (and even less so for that of the Amungme who live in the highlands in the Freeport area). In the 1990s, Freeport began a program called ‘beak agnate’ (foster father) that encouraged tourist-type dance performances and purchased some large carvings. The head of the company’s environmental department (Bruce Marsh) built a carvings workshop and encouraged its production. But these efforts were small scale and reached only a few Kamoro.

This situation began to change in the late 1990s. During one of the Asmat auctions, a Freeport consultant (yours truly) asked a senior vice president (Paul Murphy) why the company did not support a similar program for the Kamoro. On the spot, the vice president told the consultant to do so. With full financial and logistical backing from Freeport, the consultant set up a yearly Kamoro festival (Kamoro Kakuru) that began in

1998. It lasted until 2006. The festival showcased Kamoro carvings, plaiting, dancing and canoe racing. Each year, the festival hosted several hundred Kamoro (over 3,000 in 2004), with groups from every village. There never had been any gathering of all the Kamoro villages before. Unfortunately, after the Kamoro took over the administration of the festival (as per Freeport's instructions), the budget went through the roof (the last one cost \$500,000) and the company stopped its sponsorship. That was the end of the Kamoro Kakuru.

Since the demise of the Kamoro festival, I have traveled every year to purchase carving directly from every Kamoro village. I sell these carvings (mostly to expats) in expositions, with Kamoro participation, in Bali and Jakarta. This program is funded by Freeport. The company also has purchased many Kamoro carvings and sponsors dance performances for its guests. We also have one-day cultural programs in Kamoro villages as well as over-night stays in a village that can only be reached by canoe. These programs have helped to find a market for Kamoro carvings, thus encouraging this tradition, as well as giving this group a degree of pride in their own culture. All of this was still on going at the time of this writing (May 2010) and we hope to continue doing so.

Aside from encouraging Kamoro culture, Freeport has also set up a yearly multi-million dollar program (called 'recognisi' in Indonesian) to help the development of the villages whose lands the company partially uses for its infrastructure and mill tailings (the crushed rock left-over after the metals have been extracted from the ore) deposition area. Several other Freeport programs also help the Kamoro in various way too numerous to cover here. All of these programs have removed the tarnish on the company that had been considered 'a thief' for its failure to provide adequate compensation, seen by the Kamoro as reciprocity, for the use of Kamoro lands.

That the Kamoro culture today has become a vibrant, dynamic one is an exaggeration. But many aspects of this culture are still alive and well, as the Kamoro try to integrate into the modern world without losing pride in their traditions.

