PART ONE

Gender and the ritual cycle in Mimika

Map 1. Kamoro Coast in 2001. From Pickell 2002: Appendix.

Map 2. Mimika in the 1960s. From Pouwer 1955a: Appendix.

CHAPTER I

Prologue

The culture of the Kamoro – previously known as the Mimika people – is to be found on the northwestern border of the non-Austronesian linguistic and cultural areas that extend along the south coast of New Guinea from Etna Bay in West Papua to Orokolo in the Gulf District of Papua New Guinea (maps 1 and 2). This huge coastal area is the subject of a comparative study by Bruce Knauft (1993), which is penetrating as well as theoretically and methodologically innovative. However, while the Kamoros' eastern neighbours, the Asmat, are reasonably well covered in Knauft's study (although limited by the paucity of ethnographic data), the Kamoro are dealt with only in passing. For example, there is no mention of ritual homosexuality, the complementarity of female and male cult life, sister exchange marriage, or early trading through rajas in West Mimika. This is despite the availability of systematic ethnographic descriptions.¹ In addition, extensive fieldwork reports from the 1950s on such subjects as the social and ritual commemoration of death and the participants' view of history are available, although not in print. Among these sources Knauft refers only to Pouwer 1956, 1975 and 1991. This omission may be partly due to lack of a reading knowledge of Dutch. For example, my doctoral dissertation (Pouwer 1955a), which deals mainly – in a configurative fashion – with socio-economic structure, reciprocity as a total social fact, history and social change, was written in Dutch. In Part Two of the present publication I attempt to make up for Knauft's omission by comparing the Kamoro with the Asmat along the lines that he sets out.

Recent years have seen a welcome accumulation of data and interpretations on the Kamoro that is internationally accessible. This includes information about the massive changes that have occurred since the late 1960s. To put this in perspective, the 1961 census of the entire Mimika district showed that the Kamoro (9,300) then constituted 96.5% of the total population, with Chinese and other Indonesians representing 3%, and Europeans 0.5% (*Kamoro baseline study* 1998:36). In 1998, however, this position was almost reversed: the

¹ Kooijman 1984; Pouwer 1955a, 1955b, 1956, 1964, 1968b, 1975, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1991.

Mangrove, inland from Paripi, Mimika, 1997. Growing in regularly flooded soil, the *Bruguiera* tree has 'knees' so that its roots will have access to air. From Pickell 2002:30. Photograph by Kal Muller.

Kamoro were then estimated to represent only 15% of the total population, a minority in their own country (*Kamoro baseline study* 1998:5). The main cause of this change was the immigration of very large numbers of Indonesians from various parts of Indonesia after the former Netherlands New Guinea was handed over to Indonesia in 1963. The majority of these immigrants settled in the eastern part of the district, attracted by the arrival of the Freeport Indonesia Mining Company (abbreviated as Freeport Mine) in 1967. Moreover, in this process the Indonesian transmigration department also targeted the township of Timika and its surroundings. By 1985 at least nine transmigration settlements had been established in this area (*Kamoro baseline study* 1998:36). In 1955 the coastal village of Timika or Timuka had about 578 inhabitants (Pouwer 1955a:283). Its present namesake and modern successor, located inland on a different site, has about 40,000 inhabitants, including about 7,500 Kamoro, roughly half of the total Kamoro population of the entire district (Harple 2000:196). This new Timika has become an icon of inequity, human rights abuse, and environmental destruction, as Harple (2000:190) asserts. The total population of the Freeport Contract of Work (COW) area, ranging over 90 kilometres from the coast to the mountains, is estimated at more than 120,000. This includes government-sponsored transmigrants, mine employees and their families, members of Kamoro and Highland Amungme or related tribal groups from outside the COW area, and spontaneous migrants from other parts of West Papua and Indonesia (Ballard and Banks 2007:21).

Yet in spite of drastic political change, modernization, and mass immigration, the Australian National University PhD thesis by the American Todd Harple, based on 20 months of fieldwork between 1996 and 1998 and taking my 1955 thesis as a baseline, bears ample testimony to cultural and social continuity (Harple 2000). His ethno-historical analysis of social engagement gives further striking evidence, already documented in my thesis and in other publications, of an incorporation by the Kamoro of foreign elements and their reformulation in terms of the exploits of suprahistorical culture heroes to whom the origin of major social institutions and critical features of the environment are ascribed. The Kamoro clearly interpret their history as being propelled by the ageless and dynamic principle of reciprocity, rather than by 'progress' (see for instance Pouwer 1975). The negation by foreigners of *kata* – the Kamoro term for ritual secrets and individual characteristics and, by extension, modern wealth and abilities – emerges as a dominant theme in Kamoro narratives. It is interpreted as theft, ultimately establishing relationships of negative reciprocity between the Kamoro and powerful outsiders (see Harple 2000:vii).

In the light of this remarkable continuity it is a happy coincidence that in 2002 an anthology of 22 Asmat and 23 Kamoro narratives was published, with emphasis on the Kamoro (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002). The majority of the stories in this anthology were collected by the late Father Gerard Zegwaard,

A couple and their temporary shelter near a fishing weir in a mangrove creek, Ipiri, Mimika, 1954. RMV: 10809-54-78. Photograph by Jan Pouwer.

MSC (1919-1996), a missionary to both Kamoro and Asmat. The anthology in his honour was supplemented by narratives assembled by the late Father Julianus Coenen, OFM (1924-1984) and myself. Sjel Coenen, who was largely based in the eastern Kamoro villages from 1953 to 1963, spent more time among the Kamoro than any other Kamoro ethnographer. His lengthy essay (Coenen 1963), written as a complement to my doctoral thesis (Pouwer 1955a), was unfortunately never published. It is a principal source of knowledge of and insight into Kamoro cosmology and worldview. It takes the work of Zegwaard and myself as a baseline in a critical, highly informed way.

The most recent contribution to Kamoro ethnography was provided on the occasion of a comprehensive exhibition of Kamoro art staged by Dirk Smidt at the National Museum of Ethnology, in Leiden, from February to August 2003. At a certain point Kamoro woodcarvers even enlivened the exhibition. The museum holds a unique collection of about 1,300 objects, the largest Kamoro collection in the world, assembled from as early as 1828 up to the present time. The latest acquisitions date from the 2002 Kamoro Arts Festival organized by Freeport Mine official Kal Muller (Jacobs 2003b). The lavishly illustrated catalogue (Smidt 2003) includes a lengthy essay on Kamoro rituals (Pouwer 2003). Part One of the present book is a revised and expanded version of this essay. Harple, as well as contributing to this catalogue in conjunction with the Kamoro author Mamapuku (Mamapuku and Harple 2003), also wrote a case study about the outward appearance and deeper reality of the first Kamoro Arts Festival in 1998, as a prologue to Offenbergh and Pouwer (2002:xxii-xxvi).

The structure of this book

This book consists of two parts. Part One is a revised version of an essay published in Dirk Smidt's *Kamoro art; Tradition and innovation in a New Guinea culture* (Pouwer 2003:24-57). It looks at Kamoro culture through the window of its ritual cycle, the material culture is clearly dependent on the ritual. The socio-economic, political and mytho-cosmological setting of the ritual cycle is referred to only briefly in this part. Part Two takes the spectator to the terrace at the top of the cultural edifice. This offers a wider, more extensive view of the setting, while continuing to concentrate on the rituals. Moreover, it does so from a cross-cultural perspective, by means of a configurational-comparative analysis of Kamoro with the adjacent Asmat culture.² By 'configuration' I mean a process that turns elements into components arranged and imbued with

² For the general context of this research, the following works were useful: Trenkenschuh 1970-1981; Van Kessel 1961; Konrad 1976; Pouwer 1970; Sowada 1995b; Van Arsdale 1993.

Fishing weir in tidal creek, downstream Ipiri River, February 1954. RMV: NG-54-75.
Photograph by Jan Pouwer.

meaning by a central orientation. Similar or even identical elements in different configurations may have different meanings or functions. Both configuration and orientation are conceived of as always being on the move, never closed, always open to change, ambivalence and contradiction. A configurational approach assumes a central orientation that permeates a particular society and culture. Put differently, an arrangement is more than the sum of its parts. Hence, similar or even identical phenomena occurring in differently oriented configurations may have different meanings. Configuration is conceived of as a process, and this is why it is always open to alteration. It does not exclude variations and contradictions. The two cultures are sufficiently similar to justify a comparison, and at the same time they are sufficiently different to make

a comparison useful for a deeper understanding of the cultures concerned.

Part One is written in the ethnographic present of 1951-1955, when I was in the field for about two years. The inhabitants of the area were then known by the exonym Mimikans, named after the Mimika River in the central district, where the Dutch colonial government opened its first station in 1926. After Netherlands New Guinea was transferred to Indonesia in the early 1960s, the exonym Kamoro, introduced by the linguist Father Petrus Drabbe, MSC to indicate their language (Drabbe 1953), was extended to denote its speakers as well. 'Kamoro' actually means 'living person' as opposed to 'spirit'. The exonyms were used because there was no native term for the entire population of the district. As *we nata*, 'real human beings', they contrasted themselves with *we awayte* (literally: further people, 'not-really human persons'), such as the Asmat and the Kapauko (meaning 'inland people').

Oral traditions trace the origins of the Kamoro to four groups in the lowlands, east of the Otakwa River, which constitutes the boundary between the Kamoro and their eastern neighbours, the Asmat. It is likely that a historical exodus, caused in part by a conflict over rich sago groves in the far eastern part of the island, triggered a chain reaction, reaching at least as far as Etna Bay, the boundary of Mimika to the west.

Early contacts with Indonesian and Chinese traders and Dutch explorers date back to about 1600. In the first half of the twentieth century there was another rush from east to west, this time for ironware, textiles, earrings, betel nuts, and beads. These products were exchanged for resin, birds of paradise, crocodile skins, and slaves. The initial trading centre was Etna Bay. Dignitaries from areas west of Etna Bay, who represented trading interests of the Sultans of Ceram, Ternate and Tidore, in their turn appointed rajas in West Mimika as far as the Mimika River. There was some superficial Islamization.

From about 1926 the Roman Catholic Mission and the colonial government established central and sub-district stations. Attitudes towards these various sorts of foreigners, including Chinese traders, passed through a number of stages, from enmity, to cautious rapprochement, to strong enthusiasm inspired by a fervent desire for commodities, to disappointment and passive acceptance of their power and their permanent presence. After the Dutch were forced to leave in the 1960s, the establishment of the American-Indonesian Freeport copper and goldmine, excavating in the central highlands west of the Carstensz glaciers, meant a new invasion, this time of industrial civilization. It led to large shifts of residence and a move of Kamoro from west to east. Also, it turned the Kamoro into a minority.

The swampy lowlands where the Kamoro live are bounded on the north by the highlands, the mountain range of which descends towards Etna Bay in the southwest. From there an ever-widening coastal plain extends to the northeast, to the upper reaches of Otakwa River, some 90 kilometres from

Man spearing, women scooping fish near fishing weir, downstream Ipiri River, February 1954. RMV: NG-54-82. Photograph by Jan Pouwer.

the sea. This geographical southwest-northeast orientation is expressed in the important Kamoro distinction *imuu-kapao* (coast, downstream vs inland, upstream). Some 60 swamp and mountain rivers and tributaries and countless creeks traverse the lowlands. Behind a rather small sandy beach confined to West and Central Mimika are tidal woods and, further inland, dense swamp forests. Everyday life consisted, and still consists, of moving up and down between the sago forests upstream and the main fishing grounds downstream and in the estuaries. Hence transport is by river-going shallow dugouts (*ku*) and seagoing canoes with high sharp bows (*torepa*). The latter were introduced from an area west of Etna Bay. The two types of canoe and their associated songs are sharply distinguished in Kamoro culture.

Food production is traditionally part of a cycle of festivities and rituals. Labour derives its incentive from the performance of ceremonies. This traditional rhythm of life and work was interrupted by the advent of trade, the Mission, the colonial government, and modern money-oriented work. Leadership traditionally is informal and diffuse; it depends on a combination of age and personal qualities. In times of strife, *we ayku*, literally 'big men', acted as leaders for the occasion.

Localized descent groups (*taparu*) claim a territory (*tapare*) of their own. A descent group consists of putatively linked, exogamous units comprising three generations. Although matrilineally oriented, these groups and units stress horizontal rather than vertical ties. Inter-marriage between members of these units does occur, if the persons concerned are not considered closely related kin. Hence a *taparu* consisting of a relatively large number of constituent units may be non-exogamous, whereas a *taparu* with a small number of units tends to be exogamous.

There are also complementary grounds for kinship and descent that tend to blur the matriline. The numerous individual entitlements to rituals are inherited mainly along patriline. The preferred matrilocal or uxori-local type of marriage is one of exchange of real or putative sisters. In actual practice, however, alongside 'right' marriages there are many 'left' marriages that involve payment of a brideprice.

There are about 50 ethnic units consisting of a variable number of *taparu*, which claim and inhabit particular territories along the main rivers. They used to live in and move between more permanent longhouses and temporary settlements near the fishing and sago grounds. Since the coming of the Mission and colonial rule, these ethnic units have lived in villages, usually two or more ethnic groups to a village. The number of inhabitants of a village ranges from 100 to 600. Due to the greater abundance of sago in the eastern regions, the larger villages are found there. Their eastern neighbours, the Asmat, still outnumber the Kamoro. The Asmat live in settlements ranging from 800 to 2,000 and have control over large sago and fishing grounds. They are more powerful; in pre-colonial times the Kamoro feared attacks by them and cannibalism, which was not practised by the Kamoro. Some communities in the far eastern part of Mimika were indeed subject to attacks by Asmat.

Duality and reciprocity: two core concepts of Kamoro culture

Duality permeates Kamoro society, culture and cosmology. There is a dual counting system. Dual distinctions abound in kinship and affinity. Marriages are either 'right' (superior) or 'left' (inferior). There is a clear terminological and behavioural distinction between superior bride-givers and inferior bride-

Children sleeping on the beach, Yapakopa, Ayndua, Mimika, 1997. From Pickell 2002:176. Photograph by Kal Muller.

receivers, expressed in work, social obligations, joking relationships, and ceremonial roles. Settlements have a spatially expressed dual division of two or more taparu descent groups. All rituals, ceremonies, acts of singing, drumming and recited narratives proceed along alternating lines of duality. Cosmology distinguishes between an upper and a lower world; the world of humans lies between these, it forms the middle way. The participants' conception of history is one of ongoing reciprocity, not of unilinear or multilateral 'progress'. Consequently, Kamoro do not distinguish a zero point of development and evolution. The upper and lower worlds and the human sphere in between are eternally coexistent and co-active. There is coexisting surface (*ipere*, 'top') and deep reality (*mapere*, 'bottom, root'). Basic reality is progressively revealed and unveiled in surface reality. For instance, the canoes of the culture heroes were propelled by frogs, and the present ones by outboard motors, which pre-existed but were not yet visible. The latter were unveiled by Europeans, originating from Kamoro ancestresses. As a consequence of this basic concept, myths are very flexible and innovative (whereas rituals are fixed, relatively speaking). Culture heroes did not create human ancestors; these pre-existed. What the culture heroes did do was to generate groups of people by way of division or articulation. Apart from this, oral history has it that the dispersal of Kamoro ethnic groups from east to west was set in motion by an attack led by two hero 'brothers', the older brother Aoweyao, literally 'son of a human mother', and the younger brother Mbiminareyao, literally 'son of an underworld spirit woman'. They rose to the status of fearsome warlords as revenge (*aopao*) for being humiliated by their kin and affines who refused to pierce their noses as a sign of reaching maturity – a major affront.³

The human body is conceived as a doubly dual entity. It consists of a superior female right half and an inferior male left half. Its surface, apparent reality, skin (*kao*), withers after death but its inner reality (*ndata*, 'real') goes upstream after death and joins the spirits (*ipu*). Spirits are substantial: they do walk, but humans can only see them on exceptional occasions.

The human world in between was 'furnished' by earth-based culture heroes who laid their hands on the 'furnishings' acquired from the upper and lower worlds, mainly by deceit and by violating the rule of reciprocity. Examples of this 'furnishing' are sun and moon, rain, thunderstorms, mosquitoes, sago palms, dogs, traditional tools and Western commodities, illness, death, and the major rituals. The dynamic force, the lynchpin of the multiple forms of duality and the propeller of history, is the golden principle of reciprocity, *aopao*, which stands for counter-service, counter-action, counter-gift, exchange or barter, response, revenge and retaliation.

³ For the full story, see Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:29.

Squeezing and washing sago pith, a woman's job. Near east levee of Aikwa River at Nawaripi, Mimika, 1997. From Pickell 2002:135.

Photograph by Kal Muller.

General rituals and ceremonies of the individual life cycle

Duality also has a bearing on the division of rituals. There are two major general rituals, Ema Kame and Kaware, which relate to each other as female/right to male/left. The former promotes life, fertility, procreation, growth, multiplication and abundance. The latter concerns communication with the underworld and the upper world, including dealing with death, mainly the prerogative of males. It highlights the contribution of males to material culture: the making of canoes, tools and weapons. In addition it accounts for the underworldly origin of (exogenic) cultivars, mainly grown by males. The female-male distinction does not imply that 'female' rituals are exclusively performed by women and 'male' rituals by men, although women do play an important part in the former and men in the latter. The distinction is primarily a classificatory device (like the distinction of feminine and masculine nouns in French grammar). It also refers to the complementary contribution of females and males to economic, social, political and religious aspects of society. Although males are believed to contribute to procreation by shaping and feeding the foetus through repeated intercourse, the undeniable and socially stressed fact is that it is women who give birth. Moreover, women play a dominant and socially recognized role in the production of food; they are responsible for the cultivation and collection of sago, fish, clams, mussels, and, to some extent, garden produce. Men's contribution to curing a large variety of illnesses as well as their communication with the spirits of the dead, the ancestors, and the personalized forces which control natural phenomena, safety, the growth and abundance of sago, fish, cultivars and of human life, are recognized and expressed by their performance of rituals.

Alongside these general female and male rituals are the rituals and ceremonies of the life cycle. Again, there is a dual division. The initiation of boys, called Tawri Kame, literally 'apron house', and the initiation of male adolescents, called Mirimu Kame, literally 'nose house', together indicated by the term Karapao, on the one hand, and a series of separately named rituals on the other marking a gradual farewell to the dead, are opposed as female to male.

Also in the 'female' sphere of fertility and multiplication is the pig ritual, Oo Kame, literally 'pig house', which in fact is an essential part of Karapao. Just as much in the female sphere is the breadfruit ceremony or play, Opako Kata. This ceremony is performed exclusively in upstream settlements, since it is only there that the breadfruit tree grows. The purpose of the first ritual is to lure an abundance of wild pigs to a location where sago bait has been placed so that they can be stabbed on the occasion of a celebration. The second ritual aims at an abundant harvest of breadfruit.

In addition, there are two rituals in the 'male' sphere, Te Kata and Tiri Kata, literally 'mud play' and 'sand play'. In the first one male adolescents are

Hollowing out the canoe, near the Paripi sago groves. Mimika, 1997. From Pickell 2002:202. Photograph by Kal Muller.

initiated into secrets of the underworld by showing them (dramatized) spirits emerging from a grove of trees. I attended this celebration in Mioko, on the Kamora River. In the second ritual the opposite occurs: male adolescents are initiated in driving an impersonation of the culture hero Mapurupiu into a grove of trees and watching him being stabbed by a spirit. His transgression of the rule of reciprocity is 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.⁴ For more on the breadfruit, mud, and sand rituals, see Chapter XIII.

Finally, there is a separate ritual, Kamupu Kame, which is associated with the female sphere of Ema Kame. The purpose of Kamupu Kame is to neutralize the danger of men being turned into women carrying babies as a punishment for not properly looking after the well-being of a particular woman who died in labour with her baby. This was still considered a real threat in the 1950s, and the ritual was performed accordingly. Zegwaard observed it in Koperapoka, East Mimika, in the early 1950s.⁵

⁴ See Coenen 1963:101; confirmed by my own field observations in upstream villages along the Kamora River. For the myth see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:162-8.

⁵ Gerard Zegwaard, personal communication, 1953. For details of the relevant myth and ritual see Coenen 1963:47; Pouwer 1987:36-8; Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:148-50.