CHAPTER II

The 'female' contribution to life Ema Kame rituals

Occurrence and main functions

The Ema Kame (literally 'bones house') ceremony was of universal occurrence throughout the Mimika district and its details are still very well known, although at present only parts of it are celebrated.¹ In East Mimika it is known by a different name, Kiewa, the literal meaning of which is unknown. According to Zegwaard, the Nafuaripi or Sirao people living far inland and upstream from Akimuka River to at least Lorentz River, who are linguistically and culturally related to the Sempan Kamoro of the far eastern part of Mimika, also celebrate it. Not much is known of them. They live largely in isolation. Relations with other peoples are infrequent and hostile. The Asmat used to raid them. Zegwaard encountered Nafuaripi slaves in Asmat villages.

Upstream Asmat also celebrate Ema Kame, known as Emak Cem, but systematic information is limited. According to Zegwaard (1953-56, Kewa:1), downstream Asmat borrowed it from upstream villages, and some typical coastal Asmat villages like Ewer, Shuru and Ayam do not celebrate it at all. Data are sketchy.

Although the Ema Kame ceremony occurs throughout Mimika, it is ideologically related to the inland (*kapao*). In contrast, Kaware is not only ideologically associated with the coast or downstream (*imuu*), but is also in fact not celebrated in upstream Kamoro villages from the upper Kamora River to the far eastern part of Mimika.

Ema Kame's main functions are the commemoration of the dead, the promotion of new life, fertility, and reproduction, and the expression of gender antagonism; it has strong erotic features. These functions are clearly evident in

¹ For descriptions in this chapter I use the present tense, even though the data derive from an earlier time, in order to indicate that knowledge of the ceremony has not completely disappeared.

its rituals, ceremonies and general atmosphere. Its name, 'bones house', derives from the final ritual, when the excavated bones of the dead of recent years are thrown into the ceremonial house, after which it is abandoned. Its importance in promoting fertility was explicit in the complaints of older male inhabitants of various settlements at Etna Bay during my visit on 16 November 1952: 'We have been prevented from celebrating Ema Kame by the Protestant Mission and the Administration for years, hence the scarcity of children and adults. If our children and adolescents could celebrate it, they would be strong and healthy.'² Some informants attributed the lack of offspring to the prohibition on producing and drinking palm wine. At the time of my visit the settlements were indeed small. There were not many children; there was a high mortality rate and a feeling of malaise and mental depression.

Ema Kame is famous throughout the district for its many plays (*kakuru*) and the splendour and spectacular variety of its carvings. A key informant in Umar, West Mimika, even called it 'the mother of all ceremonies'.

The structure of the ceremonial house

We are fortunate in being able to compare information gathered by Gerard Zegwaard, Julianus Coenen and myself, none of whom witnessed the construction of the ceremonial house, with a brief description of it by members of the British Wollaston expedition of 1910-1913 who did, though they were not aware of its name (Figure 1).³ There is a surprisingly good fit:

The length of the house [in Timika or Nimae, a coastal settlement east of Kaokonao] from front to back was about 100 feet, the width about 25 feet, and it rested on poles which were about 8 feet in front, rising up to about 14 feet at the back. The sidewalls and the back were of 'atap' as was also the roof, which sloped from a long ridgepole running the whole length of the house (A). The ridgepole was remarkable as being made from a single tree trunk (Casuarine) shaved down very smoothly to a uniform thickness of about 10 inches; the ends of it, which projected about 8 feet both at the front and back of the house, were carved in very life-like representations of the head of a crocodile and were painted red. The weight of the beam must have been enormous and one wondered how it had been hoisted into position. Between the ridge of the roof and the eaves there projected both in front and at the back six other smaller poles (a-f) grotesquely carved to represent fish and reptiles and hideous human heads. The front of the house was open.

² Etna Bay has never belonged to the administrative district of Mimika; it was not the Roman Catholic but the Protestant Mission which operated there and prohibited 'heathen' ceremonies.

³ See Wollaston 1912:143-4, cited by Kooijman 1984:36-7.

Figure 1. Kamoro ceremonial house. From Kooijman 1984:36.

The length and width of the house as described here correspond with my estimates based on information from informants in West and East Mimika. They also confirm that the roof sloped from front to back. Zegwaard observed such a sloping roof on an Emak Cem house in Erema, Asmat, on the Northwest River (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:7). The Ema Kame ceremonial house differs from all other Kamoro ceremonial houses in that it has a small front, a double-edged roof, and is situated not parallel to the riverbank but at an angle. Other houses have a broad front with many openings and a single-sided roof. The higher rear (*mipi*, 'tail') of the house faces the river, and the lower front (*upao*, 'head') faces the land. The front has one entrance in the centre, or two entrances one on each side, according to some West Mimika informants. The entrance, at some distance from the bottom, is divided into an upper and a lower half by a threshold, a special horizontal ceremonial board (*puru kani*) decorated with carvings. Uninitiated men enter through the lower part, and initiated ones through the upper part (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:6).

There is a small entrance on the riverbank for those who go fishing or want

to relieve themselves. The house stands on the ground. Its full length from front to back is occupied by two platforms on short poles, divided by a corridor. The platforms are used for sitting, squatting and lying. The ridgepole rests on three sets of crossbeams supported by three pairs of poles, left and right of the platforms. In the centre of the house a second ceremonial board is attached between the two central crossbeams,⁴ the first one serving as a threshold for initiated men at the entrance.

In front of the ceremonial house, left and right of the central entrance, two spirit poles about two metres high, smaller than the *mbitoro* spirit poles and of a particular type called *irane*, dominate the scene. In the Sempan villages in the far eastern part of Mimika, only one pole was erected, called *irahe*.⁵ These poles depict ancestral mothers. The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden is the only museum to have a number of these statues, collected by A.J. Gooszen, commander of the South New Guinea section of the Military Exploration Team in 1913. They have not existed in Mimika for many years now.

Outside, left and right of the centre of the house and connected to it by a path marked and covered by leaves, are two huts serving as a private place for male participants while they work, eat or sing.⁶

Prelude: the python ceremony

Ema Kame is famous for its many plays or dramatizations (*kakuru*). The python play is one of these. It is optional. In fact, according to many informants, it belongs to the 'male' Kaware complex. The python (*miroko*, Sempan: *meneuwe*) itself is associated with the inland, the 'female', and is

Statue of pregnant ancestress, placed in front of Kiewa (Ema Kame) ritual house, Otokwa. Collected by Military Exploration Team, 1913. RMV: 3600-7537. See Kooijman 1984:25-31, Fig. 22; Smidt 2003:123, Fig. 85.

⁴ For an illustration, see Kooijman 1984:75.

⁵ For illustrations, see Kooijman 1984:26-31.

⁶ Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:7; confirmed by my informants.

of central mythological importance for Mimika as a whole. He, or rather she, is represented as lord of the land or *tapar amako* (Coenen 1963:79). In the eastern version of the central Ema Kame myth, all groups of humans, including foreigners, canoes and Western commodities, emerged from the bones and flesh of a python.⁷ In the western and more general version the name of the ancestral mother of all groups of men is Miroko, and her culture hero son is called Mirokoatayao, literally 'the son of Miroko'. He killed the monster monitor lizard that devoured all the inhabitants of a primeval settlement except the pregnant Miroko, who gave birth to him. All human groups emerged from the flesh and bones of the monster (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:121-7). It is small wonder, then, that the python may not be consumed (except by the Sempan; Coenen 1963:79). The climax of the play is a head-on collision between the 'pythons' of the right party and of the left party of the group concerned. The 'pythons' are embodied in two trunks that are pushed over the ground in opposite directions. After a few turns the 'pythons' and the parties change sides, like in a soccer match. I attended the play in Mioko, upstream Kamoro River, on 12 September 1952. (I also attended one in Jeraja, West Mimika, on 2 October 1952.)

A description of the play in Mioko is as follows. The two village halves, formerly living in separate settlements, are called Iwekae (right) and Matiae (left). Each half consists of three *taparu*, each of these having a female ancestor of their own.⁸ Early in the morning at about seven o'clock the left party sets out on a canoe trip to their own territory on the right side of the river, the right party going to the left side. There are about ten men in each canoe. Women are taboo. Some older men select a tree, while the male adolescents, who have not been initiated into the secret, stay behind in the canoe. All initiated adult men clear the ground around the tree and hide it from sight by a camouflage of leaves. The trunk is of a soft variety also used for making canoes. The three men entitled to cut the tree (*otemako*, 'owners of the secret') squat near the tree, adorned with bird of paradise feathers, with lime on their faces and a green leaf through their pierced noses. The decoration is applied by their *kaokapayti*, or bride-receivers, more specifically their sisters' and daughters' husbands, as part of their duties to assist their bride-givers. The bride-receivers are then ordered to leave. The three dignitaries squat in a row close together, their backs turned to the tree, near one of its buttress roots, with their lime-lined axes in their hands. After ample deliberations, the exact spot on the trunk where it will be cut is indicated by a lime-powder ring. Lime is a ceremonial marker. The adults start a song (*tao*) in high-pitched voices appropriate to

⁷ For the full story, see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:127-9.

⁸ For more details, see Pouwer 1955a:283.

the ceremonial occasion, accompanied by drumming. Then the uninitiated adolescents, with lime on their faces, singing and drumming and beating a gong, rush to the camouflage and remove it after a sign from the adults. The three dignitaries are revealed, their heads slanting and their tongues protruding. After a sign from the main singer-drummer, the trio performs a squatting dance, their arms spread like the wings of a bird. They are in fact imitating birds. The leader of the trio, who relates to the other two as *mapere* to *ipere* (root to surface), suddenly turns to the tree and swings his axe with the utmost force into the trunk on the line marked with lime, while shouting the name of his mother's *taparu*. The other two men follow suit. Then the bride-receivers take over and do the real job. An old man starts weeping: the uninitiated adolescents are now in the know and are adults; it is an emotional moment. The tree sways and is pulled down with rattan canes. The trio start removing the branches; the work is taken over by the bride-receivers: the trio merely mark the occasion. The work is left to their bride-receivers. Shouts of 'Wuu-wuu' punctuate the fall. The second man of the trio throws lime over the trunk. The leader then slips the first roller of wood under the trunk. All the others follow and the trunk is rolled and dragged to the riverside. It is said that formerly the men painted their faces with sago mixed with the red sap of a tree and made a reddish track in order to give women the impression that a python had attacked and swallowed people. Before dragging the trunk to the shore, its bark is removed. Headed by the chief drummer and the leader of the trio, the trunk is escorted to the riverside by the yelling crowd and thrown into the river. One branch is not removed; this will function as the tail of the python. Another canoe arrives and the trunk is hidden behind the two canoes. Suddenly a canoe carrying women happens to appear on the opposite shore, causing consternation. The leader shouts to the women not only in his own language, but also in authoritarian Malay, to make themselves scarce. The trunk is hidden even better. Then the canoe with the second trunk of the right party arrives on the scene. The trunks are transported to the village between the canoes. All the men have covered themselves with lime. Near every turn in the river there is shouting and drumming and gonging in order to chase off and impress the women. At about 12:30 p.m. the group arrive at the village. The trunks are transported to an open site in front of the two rows of houses, corresponding with the right and the left village halves. Fishing nets and leaves conceal the site and the trunks facing each other. In the afternoon the woodcarving specialist belonging to the right half starts carving out a face and a neck; the eyes correspond to the sun symbol often found on canoes. The neck, a groove in the wood, is marked by charcoal and white lime dots, which also adorn the body. He takes turns with a younger brother. After him the carver of the left half works on the left trunk. Older men watch them closely and make critical remarks. Adolescents scour the trunks carefully with leaves.

When the 'pythons' are ready there is a competition. The initiated participants, instructed by the leaders of the right and the left, take hold of the trunks and move these forcefully over rollers in opposite directions. At the very moment that the heads of the 'pythons' are about to collide, the leaders heading the two rows insert leaves between the heads, after which there is a head-on collision. Immediately behind the leaders are their sons and sisters' sons. The participants imitate the hissing of snakes. Then the uninitiated adolescents are invited. They remove the nets and rush to the scene; their bodies are decorated with lime and they throw clouds of lime powder. They remove the leaves between the pythons' heads, unveiling the secret. Then they join the others in fastening the 'snakes' and having them collide with much force and hullabaloo. After the collision all participants fall on the 'python' and perform the ritual bird dance (Kata Ndi). Tongues are poked out. After a number of collisions the position of the parties is reversed. The play goes on and on until older dignitaries tell the parties to stop. The three leading dignitaries on both sides then initiate the splitting of the trunks with axes and wedges. The adolescents finish the job and split the trunks into pieces. All the remaining pieces and rolls are thrown into the river or the woods, lest women find out about them. The ceremonial house should be built on the very spot of the python ritual. In my opinion this game can be considered a ritualized mock battle between two autonomous settlements or village halves, which each have their own ancestry and territory.

Erecting the ceremonial house

The framework

The preparations are announced and are preceded by passing around a pole which is to be erected, while those attending are singing and dancing. Men dance in the inner circle, women in the outer one, accompanied by the guild of drummers. This goes on from sunset till dawn. The next day men from the right and men from the left depart for their own territory to cut the timber for the right and left platforms (*mbeamo*). Pegs are inserted; the platforms, consisting of sticks and trunks cut in half, are placed on the pegs. Large pieces of bark, which will cover the platform at a later stage, are landed ceremonially by the two parties and put on the ground with a loud bang to impress the women. These activities take a couple of days. Then the right and left parties of men leave again to cut the three pairs of poles and crossbeams. The poles are erected in holes with rhythmic ceremonial movements accompanied by singing and drumming. The poles are named after important, recently deceased men and women. These have been cut by their relatives, with

assistance from their bride-receivers. The heavy ridgepole (*mbu*) (sometimes two ridgepoles are used), which is also named after an important deceased man or woman, is then hoisted and installed. This is a crucial and highly emotional moment, punctuated by singing, drumming, dancing, and a lot of noise. Two ceremonial announcers (*imakatiri*), a right one and a left one, line up in front of the ridgepole and formally announce the event. Some informants in Timare (upper Kamoro River) told me that women are driven off on the pretext that the village is going to be attacked. On their return they show (or feign) excitement and amazement at the male achievement of putting the heavy ridgepole into position.

According to different informants, the carved front end projecting about two metres represents a king parrot, *mopoko* (Inawka, Sempan, upstream); in Kawkapu, Wania River, upstream, a spoonbill, *kaymo*; in Timuka, a coastal village, a crocodile, *timako*; in Mikiwia, a coastal village, a hornbill, *komay*. Apparently the animals depicted vary, some being associated with the coast (crocodile, spoonbill), and some with the inland (king parrot, hornbill). The king parrot in particular is associated with the secret (*otepe*) of sago and of pigs (Coenen 1963:78). Zegwaard (1953-56, Kewa:7) suggests that the name for ridgepole, *mbu*, meaning 'turtle' in Asmat, is because of its curved line. Informants confirm Alexander Wollaston's statement that the carvings on the ends of the crossbeams depict various kinds of fish, reptiles and human heads. The crossbeams are also named after deceased persons. The carvers (*maramo amako*) are paid mainly with prepared food, presented in large quantities by relatives of the deceased persons being honoured.

Finally, the framework of the sidewalls and of the back wall, consisting of crossed sticks and branches, is installed.

The rattan ceremony

Rattan has not only practical functions but also ceremonial ones. There is a right and a left rattan dignitary (*keme amako*). Informants in Timare (upper Kamoro River) give the following description. In the early morning the two dignitaries secretly enter the woods. While walking, they hit trees and roots. They remove rattan vines from the trees – a demanding job usually done by male adolescents – and carve out at one end the head and protruding tongue of a land snake, *miroko*, identical with the python of the python ritual; they make a right one and a left one. They take these snakes and the rattan canes to the rear of the ceremonial house. Women are not allowed to be present, and pretend not to know what is going on. Men rub their bodies with a mixture of lime and red sap from trees to give the impression that they have been attacked by a snake or are snakes themselves. Again, this is reminiscent of

the primeval lords of the land. At night men frighten women and children by hitting the roofs of the huts and behaving like spirits (*mbi*). In Kawkapu I was told that a rattan dignitary steps forwards and backwards, zigzagging over the rattan snake, which is decorated with flowers. He dances and sings and ends by yelling *Ieyeva, I ya ihuyo*. I asked him: Is this sound the equivalent of Kiewa (the eastern name for Ema Kame)? He nodded, but I am not sure whether to interpret this as a confirmation of my suggestion.

In Umar, West Mimika, it is male adolescents who collect rattan canes, adorn them with rattan fruit and leaves, sing the rattan song, and take the canes to the back of the house. The next day they put the rattan in rolls in front of the ceremonial house. Three groups of three rattan dignitaries stand to the side of the right and the left roll, in front, in the middle and at the back (the position of these groups is similar to that in the python ceremony described earlier). They sing the Keme Tao, the rattan song. The bride-givers of the adolescents and the adults who cut the rattan are then presented with lots of food by way of a return gift (*aopao*) for their hard labour. There is singing and dancing from dusk to dawn. The next morning the rattan is split up to use for binding. The rattan dignitaries start splitting; the work is taken over by their bride-receivers (compare this with the python ceremony). In Umar it was said that the model of a crocodile with a wide-open mouth is made out of scraps of rattan and is placed in a tree near the river. My impression is that in the coastal settlements the crocodile takes the place of the python of the upstream settlements as the lord of the land. According to some informants in Mikiwia (a village of the Kaokonao agglomeration), the crocodile is secretly destroyed by men in order to give women the impression that the crocodile has gone away.

Ceremonial shield representing a deceased member of the community. From Cape Steenboom, near the mouth of the Mukumuga River, Mimika. Collected by W. de Jong, 1903. RMV: 1416-9 zw-w. See Kooijman 1984:xv; Smidt 2003:76, Fig. 7.

Ceremonial shield representing a deceased member of the community, Mimika. Collected by Ch.L.J. Palmer van den Broek during visits to Mimika, before 1908. RMV: 1670-60 zw-w. See Kooijman 1984:xv, 61, Fig. 54.

In Umar and Potoway (in the far western part of Mimika) part of the rattan is used to make rings, each one named after a deceased person. Their relatives cast the rings round a stick in the ground while solemnly pronouncing the name of the deceased. After the ceremony the rings are laid down in the houses of those who collected the rattan. I wonder whether this ceremony has replaced the making and naming of individual ceremonial shields (*yamate*). Most of the ceremonial shields in museum collections were collected in Central and East Mimika. During my visits to villages in West Mimika, ceremonial shields were not often mentioned spontaneously when I inquired about Ema Kame. Is there a link with a strong exposure of the far western part of Mimika to commercial trading and to eastern Indonesian and Western power and influences radiating from Etna Bay? The quality of carving also tends to be inferior to that of Central and East Mimika. In the latter areas the open and elaborate style of carving abounds, while in West Mimika the closed, less elaborate style dominates (see also Kooijman 1984:63).

Ore and Tama ceremonies

Ore is the Kamoro term for what is called *atap* in some Indonesian communities. Collecting the *atap* (sago leaves) for covering roofs and walls is a male job. Women provide the elastic strips for stitching the leaves together; these are made out of pandanus fibre. Work and play and gender antagonism again go together at this stage of activities. Men and women depart separately for their territories; they are not supposed to see each other. There is a story about an older and a younger brother, called Omo and Tere, who spied on naked women collecting pandanus strips (*tama*). The story has it that the enraged women killed the men. In the course of the Tama song chanted by women

returning from collecting pandanus strips, this event is narrated as a warning to men to stay away from women's secrets. The men arrive at the Ema Kame site in canoes lined up in battle array, dancing and singing with the sago leaves swaying in their hands. They sing the Ore song. They put down the sago leaves with a loud noise and a display of power near the framework of the house. Meanwhile the women are at work in the woods. They lie down naked near the pandanus trees with the strips in their hands and sing the Tama song. This is their secret (Coenen 1963:45). By lying down near the pandanus trees they identify with them, just as the male snake dignitaries do when cutting down trees. A similar action by three dignitaries takes place while cutting the tree for making a drum (Coenen 1963:44). This is reminiscent of the three rattan dignitaries standing beside the rattan canes. In all these cases one senior dignitary relates to the other two as *mapere* to *ipere*. Coenen's informants explicitly called this identification *ipu enakoa*, meaning 'of one soul'. In this way cross-links are laid between a great variety of animals, plants, objects, natural phenomena, and rituals. These links constitute the very basis of Kamoro cosmological classification. Coenen assembled a great quantity of crucial and detailed information about this (Coenen 1963:35-9, 43-8). In this particular way the women's *tama* secret is associated with the Ema Kame bat ritual (Coenen 1963:45). The bat ritual (see below) is so crucial for Ema Kame that people who celebrate Ema Kame are called bat people (Coenen 1963:37).

The women carry the pandanus strips to the back of their houses. Meanwhile – at least in West Mimika; this is not a custom in Central and East Mimika – men suspend a coconut from a cord in front of the ceremonial house. Some of the women cut the coconut in half with much ado and eat its contents: by doing so they declare war on the men. In Potoway I wrote down the following description of the start of this mock war: Women and men standing or sitting in their canoes line up opposite each other, on either side of the river. Women wear male clothing and attributes. They dance and sing, holding plates of prepared sago and fish in their hands. They cross the river and offer the food to the men, who have gone ashore. However, when the women arrive the men withdraw in their canoes and eat the food separately. Roles are then reversed: men (in female clothing) now offer food to the women (in male dress). This mutual gift giving between men and women is meant as ceremonial mockery, a reversal of gender roles. Then – and this applies to all areas of Mimika – the women attack the men with their pandanus strips, functioning as spears (*potako paata*, literally 'mock spears'). They rush at the men brandishing bows, arrows, axes and machetes. The men make no attempt to defend themselves, and take to their heels. Zegwaard witnessed this part of Ema Kame performed separately in Atuka, Timuka, and the Koperapoka villages (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:8). He observes that the women launch the attack as soon as the men start singing the Kuru song.

Figure 2. Sago grub (actual length of grub is 4.5 cm). From Pickell 2002:138.

In this song a small kind of bat, called *maora*, warns 'wild' women (*wamoko kaoka*), women of the hinterland, women depicted as animals of the woods, that a man from the coast is about. The sex-driven women are anxious to meet him. In the myth, universally known in Mimika and strongly associated with Ema Kame, these women replace the culture hero women (*amoko kaoka*) who have left their husbands who cheated them. These powerful superwomen waged war with men and killed many of them. The losers, left to their own resources, engaged randomly in homosexual relations with male adolescents who played the part of women. However, when they found out about the bushwomen, they took them as their wives. The latter, being less powerful and less perfect, gave birth to the present race, which no longer has the attributes and power of the culture hero women.⁹ The mock battle between women and men thus alludes to a well-known myth. However, the relation between the myth and the ritual is not one-to-one. The mock battle has erotic and aggressive features. Zegwaard's informants, while attending the mock battle, told him on the spot that in the early days men and women performed a joint dance after the battle, in which their legs were entwined in an erotic way. The end of the battle is marked by a dance around the post in which everybody, young and old, participates. During the dance men offer women young sago-palm shoots; women offer men sago and sago grubs (*ko*). These larvae of the capricorn beetle (see Figure 2) are considered a delicacy with

⁹ For the full story and details, see Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:8, and Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:22.

erotic overtones. In Wanihiripao I was told that sisters snatch the sago shoots from their brothers. The gender relationships here indeed seem ambivalent.

The delivery of the sago leaves is also marked by a ceremony. The men from the right, followed by the men from the left, walk towards the ceremonial house in a long line, sago-palm branches in their hands. Walking in a circle, they first pretend to lay the branches against the frame of the house, but then walk on and deliver them suddenly with a loud bang. The women simply deposit the pandanus strips on the ground in front of the house.

The next day the sago leaves are stitched together and fastened to the framework of the roof and the wall. The right men cover the right half of the roof, the left men the left half. The tempo is high and the work strenuous, the more so since progress on both sides is kept strictly even: no opening near the ridgepole is allowed lest people fall ill or even die. The workforce is lavishly rewarded with food prepared by their bride-receivers.

Carved attributes: ceremonial shields

In Otakwa I witnessed the making of a ceremonial shield or *yamate*, called *yamahe* in the local dialect. It was in the local clubhouse for men, which is lacking elsewhere in Mimika but is present in the adjacent Asmat area. There was a strong feeling of togetherness. Two woodcarvers were sitting in the centre of a group of men and boys who were standing, sitting or lying down. An oval-shaped board, already roughly cut with an axe and a chisel (*maramo*), was situated between the two men. With fine-grained chisels the two carvers worked at the same time, one on the right and one on the left side of the board. They worked together so closely that the vertical and horizontal patterns they simultaneously carved fitted perfectly. The carvers represented the right and the left halves of the village. The main vertical pattern represented a particular kind of fish (*irako*). The men's chisels almost touched each other in the middle. The space between the central pattern and the edges of the shield was filled with a grid of notches that looked like footprints of birds or crabs. One of the carvers, while working carefully, was joking, and made several funny remarks about Father Zegwaard and the Keiese village teacher. There were roars of laughter from the onlookers. Meanwhile, young and old spectators watched the progress of the carving critically. Two older carvers offered unsolicited advice on their younger colleagues' carving. Meanwhile, a number of adolescent boys mixed red sap from the *mangi-mangi* trees in the swamps with charcoal and lime. The two carvers, assisted by an older man, applied white lime dots, each to his own side of the board. They took turns dipping their finger into a shell-container of lime. The boys joined them in applying white, red and black dots according to a pattern pointed out by three older

men. Everybody was in high spirits. More refined and special work, such as painting the edges of the shield and smoothing the back, was left to the carvers. The board, shaped like a shield, but not intended for actual use, had no handle. It was to be fastened horizontally to one of the walls inside the Kiawa house. At that time there was no ceremonial house in the village.

The carving method of ceremonial shields is of two types, an openwork type and a bas-relief type. Outstandingly ornamented shields of the openwork type are sometimes used as screens to close off the front entrance, one at the top and one at the bottom. Boards (*baka*), distinct from ceremonial shields and only depicting human figures that presumably represent the ancestress (and her husband) of a village half, are also sometimes used to close off the entrance. I saw such boards in Naygeripi in the far eastern part of Mimika. A striking feature of all ceremonial shields is a navel-shaped motif called *mopere*; this motif is repeated all over the surface of the shield. The grid of notches starts from there. *Mopere*, meaning navel or vagina, is regarded as the essence of life and is present in all types of carving. In addition, one often finds representations of hornbills or cassowaries. In Wanihiripao, ceremonial shields serving as screens depicted a combination of these two birds. When Zegwaard held up a copy of a ceremonial shield from Iwaka and Kawkapu (Wania River) that was used as a screen, in the shape of a hornbill, his informants identified fourteen body parts depicted in the carving (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:6). Other motifs found on shields are lizards, eggs of a bush hen, scissors of a crab, bones of birds, and sawfish. Pythons are represented as zigzag lines. All these animals are associated with Ema Kame ceremonies.

Carved attributes: sacred oval boards

In 2003, when comparing and combining my field data from three villages in East Mimika (Waoneripi, Naygeripi and Inawka) with information from Wollaston (1912), Zegwaard (1953-56), and Coenen (1963), it dawned on me what these mysterious carved oval boards mean: they are considered as sacred objects. This is in line with Zegwaard's statement that these attributes are called the 'sacred two', literally *puru* (sacred, taboo) *mane* (two). Coenen supplies us with the crucial information that the two sacred oval boards represent the (putative) ancestress of a neighbourhood or parish and her husband (Coenen 1963:94-5). The neighbourhood consists of one or more localized descent groups, which in their turn comprise a number of putatively related subgroups called *peraeke*, literally 'vagina share one'. Each *peraeke* subgroup consists of the traceable matrilineal or matrilineal descendants of

Female part of two sacred shield-like boards representing the ancestress and her husband, suspended between two central poles in the Ema Kame ceremonial house; the 'male' board serves as threshold at the entrance. Collected by Sacred Heart missionaries in the 1950s or earlier. Collection of the Volkenkundig Museum, Tilburg, The Netherlands: ET 53.7.12; at present Volkenkundige Collectie, Department of Anthropology, Radboud University: ET 53.7.12. Photograph by Thijn van de Ven. See also Kooijman 1984:75, Fig. 70.

one grandmother or great-grandmother.¹⁰ According to Zegwaard, one of the two boards is placed horizontally in the middle of the central entrance, and one between the central poles inside the house (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:6, 10). Coenen (1963:95), however, writes that the two boards are suspended above the double entrance of the ceremonial house. Zegwaard's information, according to which one of the boards is attached between the central poles inside, seems to be borne out by a photograph of a ceremonial board in Kooijman (1984:75, Fig. 70). This board, part of the collection of the former Tilburg MSC museum, was erroneously ascribed to the Asmat, but is clearly a Kamoro carving. Unlike a ceremonial shield, it has two pointed horizontal ends that apparently are meant to be inserted into holes in the two central poles. Its centrally placed abstract motif seems to represent the ancestress, in the middle of which a vagina shows up very clearly. Left and right of the *mopere*-like vagina, two other *mopere* are situated in the centre of bent elbows and knees: the essence of life. It is this board that, according to my field data, functions as the centre of the ancestress ritual, as described below. Zegwaard's and my information are confirmed by Wollaston's description of the interior

¹⁰ For 'neighbourhood' and *peraeko*, see Coenen 1963:90-5 and Pouwer 1955a:76, 78, 86-7.

of the ceremonial house, quoted earlier:

and exactly in the middle of the hall, fixed to the floor were two posts about 3 feet apart and tied between them, at about half the height of a man, was an elaborately carved and painted board about 12 inches wide. In the middle of this board was carved the eye, which is a familiar feature of the ornamental carving on the canoes and drums, and it appeared that this eye is the centre of the ceremonies which take place in the house.¹¹

The second board, functioning as the threshold for initiated men, who enter the house through the middle of the front entrance, is thus likely to represent the husband of the founding ancestress. It is decorated with representations of pigs and the eggs of a bush hen (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:6).

Coenen points out a pertinent connection between these two sacred boards and the sacred rattles or bullroarers (*wayiri*) used throughout the Mimika area in the course of all sorts of ceremonies, including Ema Kame (Coenen 1963:93-4). Their whirring noise when swung around fastened to a string represents in the Ema Kame context respectively the voices of the ancestress, her husband, and her 'children', the *peraeko*. The three rattles correspond to three particular ceremonial shields, present in the ceremonial house. The latter vary in size from large to small, depicting the ancestress, her husband, and her *peraeko* children. They are stuck in the ground.¹² So there is a clear analogy between the boards, the rattles, and the special ancestral ceremonial shields. The three ancestral representations are *kata puru*, sacred/taboo secrets (*kata*).

The ancestress ritual

This ceremony was described to me in Naygeripi, East Mimika on 7 October 1952. I did not observe it myself. Neither did Zegwaard and Coenen, who do not mention it at all. It is performed after the completion of the ceremonial house. Women do not attend. One of the older men of the village, called Aneti, who was still alive during my visit, lies down on the sacred board between the poles while reciting the name of his mother. Then bystanders assist him in coming down. His (classificatory) sisters' sons (*fatako*) and his own and his classificatory sons (*kamarima*), literally his 'anus children' and his 'penis children', in that order, follow his example; the anus corresponds with female parts. After this, another senior man lies down on the board, followed by his (classificatory) sisters' sons, his sons and his (classificatory) brothers' sons.

¹¹ Wollaston 1912:142, cited in Eyde 1967:128.

¹² For more details, see Coenen 1963:94.

Boys of school age also participate. Bearing in mind Coenen's information about sacred rattles and boards, what is happening here seems clear: the senior and the junior members of the various *peraeko* groups present themselves to the community. They are acting out their birth from the vagina (*pera*) of the neighbourhood's founding ancestress and from the various mothers (and mothers' mothers) of the *peraeko*; the vagina is carved out on the very board they are lying on. It is interesting that alongside maternal relatives, paternal relatives also participate.

My field notes correspond strikingly well with a description by Wollaston (1912:144) of a ceremony he observed in Timuka in what apparently was an Ema Kame house, though he was not aware of the fact: 'The people who participated in them [the ceremonies] dance slowly upwards from the front of the house, and each one in turn touches the eye [central *mopere* in the central area], while all the people shout together.' These people were probably acting out the tie with their real and putative ancestress. Ceremonially touching a person or an object in various contexts demonstrates the emotional tie with that person or object. In Inawka (Sempan, East Mimika) I was told that adolescent boys climb onto a ceremonial shield standing upright near the central poles, assisted by their bride-receivers. They perch on top of the ceremonial shield for a few moments and then jump down, again assisted by their bride-receivers. They repeat the climbing, alternatively facing and not facing the central entrance. They all call out the names of their mothers while jumping down.

This crucial ritual was described to me only in the East Mimika villages referred to, not elsewhere. However, Wollaston's description of the events in Timuka (Central Mimika) makes it seem likely that this ritual was performed in both Central and East Mimika. *Peraeko* are demonstrably present in the East Mimika settlements, which are larger than the villages in the other parts of Mimika. In West and Central Mimika taparu and their constituents are more numerous and less clearly localized, and thus more mixed up.

The Kamoro term *puru mane* for the two sacred shield-like boards representing the ancestress and her husband apparently corresponds to Asmat *wuramun* or *uramun* (spirit canoe). For a description of the latter and a comparison with the former, see Chapter VII. There are similarities but also striking differences.

Unveiling ceremonial shields and ceremonial boards

Two men, one of the 'right' and one of the 'left', face each other on opposite ends of the settlement. They draw closer, shouting and abusing each other under the pretext that one has given inferior food, and so on. They launch a mock attack, each of them supported by men of his own party. Women and

children flock together from all sides to see what is going on. In this way men divert attention from the ceremonial house. At that moment other men hiding in the ceremonial house come forward singing, dancing and drumming. They remove the nets and leaves covering the ceremonial shields and boards mounted in front of the house, and turn the carved side of the objects to the centre of the settlement. They also remove the boards closing off the entrance. Women, adolescents, and children rush to the scene and admire the carvings, outside and inside the house, yet keeping their distance. Men point to the carvings on the ceremonial shields and boards while enumerating the names of the deceased, who are honoured and remembered separately by each ceremonial shield or board: 'Look, this is your brother [or sister, and so on, the name being stated]'. There is loud weeping, mourning, and admiring the work of the carvers, who are lavishly rewarded with prepared food. In Naygeripi two female dignitaries, one from the right and one from the left, enter the house dancing and singing. They offer shellfish of the *umu* variety, prepared and wrapped in leaves, to their sisters' and daughters' husbands (their bride-receivers). Everywhere I was told that carved or uncarved boards, used to close off the entrance and differing from the 'sacred two' (*puru mane*, *puru kani*), are taken to the woods after the unveiling and left near their fishing and sago grounds. These are set up and shot at with arrows by men while calling out the names of their mothers and of their taparu. This act is meant as a way of communicating with the dead. By doing this they hope that the spirits of the dead will promote the growth of sago and the catch of fish.

Secluding initiates: move and counter-move in gender antagonism

Informants in Umar, West Mimika, described the seclusion of the young male initiates (*tapena we*, 'armband people'), corresponding by and large with descriptions in other villages and with Zegwaard's data, as follows. At dusk, when darkness sets in, the *imakatiri* draws people's attention by flinging smouldering pieces of wood; this announces the ceremony. Lime-covered and lime-dotted mock spirits (*mbi pata*) rush out and beat on the roofs of the temporary shelters of women and children. Behind the shelters they round up the initiates and drag them to the ceremonial house, holding the sago balls they had been given. When it is pitch dark, the offenders pinch and sting the initiates and eat their sago balls. Mothers and other women watch near the entrance, crying and weeping. The initiates flee in terror to the rear of the ceremonial house. They have to spend the night there and are told to keep their mouths shut and not to cry. This horseplay, called *umuria*, also includes threatening women with muffled shouting and funny noises, and slinging around two types of rattles, a small penis-like board attached

to a string, and a folded pandanus leaf. Other instruments used to produce frightening noises are bamboo flutes and bottles that are blown on (the *anaipo* game, Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:8-9, 14-5). Behaviour intended to frighten the women and initiates goes on for hours. At dawn the women take food they have prepared to the initiates. They are told that the initiates are not allowed to leave the ceremonial house, but in actual fact the initiates do secretly leave through the rear entrance to go fishing and have fun.

A counter-move by the women by way of revenge (*aopao*) is bound to come. It is called Miminaro (in Atuka) or Niniwaro (in Tipuka) and was briefly witnessed and described by Zegwaard (1953-56, Kewa:10) in Atuka as follows. Miminaro is a small bat with broad wings. Female dignitaries play, according to very confidential information from the mother of one of them, the role of an *apoko* snake. They imitate its high-pitched *mbrrrr* noise that can be heard at night. These women represent particular groups or wards of the settlement. They are decorated with lime, red earth, soot, and cassowary or bird of paradise feathers. They are the dignified counter-actors (*aopao*) of the men with their horseplay. One of them enters the ceremonial house doing a bird dance in a bent-over pose. She carries a burning torch, which she presses against the vagina motif on the sacred board attached to poles in the centre of the ceremonial house. The torch may also be pressed against the private parts of a carved hornbill. She and other women threaten the men with torches, shouting 'U, u'. Men flee to all corners of the house. The performance is repeated by other women carrying a torch. According to Coenen (1963:39), this ceremony is named *apoko*, after the snake that they imitate. The hornbill stands for love, erotica and reproduction. Zegwaard reports that the women in Mioko do not use a torch but a stick, with which they touch the shoulders of terrified men. This act clearly connotes the Kamupu Kame myth and ritual referred to above, concerning a woman who died while delivering a baby. As a punishment for neglecting her, men were transformed into women who have to put up with having a baby. Everywhere men sing the Kuru song while being threatened, a clear reminder of the rebellion of the *amoko* superwomen of the myth that is acted out in the Tama ritual.

What is the purpose of the torch ceremony, apart from terrifying men? My assumption is that by doing so the ancestral mother whose vagina is touched is symbolically brought to life. It demonstrates the unique reproductive power of the ancestress and of all women. It is common practice that a woman fainting in labour is revived by touching her body with a smouldering piece of wood. In the Kaware myth and ritual (see Chapter III) the drowned culture hero Mamirima was also brought back to life by numerous birds touching his body with smouldering sticks. The torch ceremony seems to be women's powerful ritual answer to men's act of dramatizing descent from the ancestress by lying on and jumping down from the sacred board, which represents (the

vagina of) the ancestress. Moreover, the female dignitaries represent water-snake (*upako*) women.

A final comment can be added. Naming the torch ceremony after a small bat may refer to the Tako ritual, which is dealt with next. *Tako*, however, is a larger variety of bat. A smaller kind of bat serves as a messenger for the bush-women who replace the superwomen according to the myth associated with the bat ritual.

The bat ritual

As noted, the people who celebrate and attend Ema Kame are called *tako we*, or bat people. Another indication of the crucial importance of the bat ritual is Coenen's information (1963:37) that in the Sempan village of Omawka, in East Mimika, where Ema Kame is called Kiewa, the very start of Ema Kame is announced by men secretly cutting down a tree of the *onati* or *enata* variety. It is precisely this tree that is classified with, and is of one soul with (*ipu enakoa*), the *tako* bat (Indonesian: *kalong*) and the bat ritual. Not only is this tree placed on the platform where the bat ritual is performed, but splinters of its trunk are also distributed among all participants as a sort of *pars pro toto* at the very beginning of the Ema Kame rituals. This is said to promote fertility.

We owe a description of the first part of this ritual exclusively to Coenen. Zegwaard does not mention it, and I did not see or hear about it. It is called Meamo, which is the name for both the type of wood and the platform built from it. I quote Coenen (1963:45):

In Iweka-Temare (upper Kamora River, Central Mimika) it concerns – at least as far as I could trace it – the secret [*kata*] of two actors [the *ènata wé*] sitting on the platform opposite each other, feet touching, while two other actors perform the king parrot (*mopoko*) dance. Close to the actors are situated the following kinds of timber: *otenaputajoro*, an *otepe* [magical means] to catch pigs, *poroto*, to catch much fish, *ewakoto*, to catch *ewako*, a thorny fish. In front of them are two small trunks of the *ènata* tree [splinters of which were distributed at the beginning of the ritual]. The *ènata wé* and the *mopoko wé* are of one soul. In Mware there are bird of paradise (*jawmako*) actors instead of the king parrot ones. This ritual corresponds with the Emakasja of the Sempan villages and is still performed in most of the Mimika villages after the initiation ceremony of adolescents [the *tawri* or apron ceremony]. Another name for this *ènata* ceremony is *kiewa kasja*. For a long time it was known as a not very significant initiation ceremony. In fact, it may be performed separately from Kiewa because this ritual is no longer carried out in its entirety. It functioned as the introduction to the real *meamo* ceremony, during which two actors, a man and a woman, performed the *takò* dance, the dance of the bats, hanging on a platform and acting out copulation. After this there was general promiscuity. This was concluded by formally pronouncing the prohibition of incest. A bat-actor was

then sitting on the platform. People do not wish to perform this [coitus] ritual any longer, but it is still known.

During this Meamo ritual, men's noses are marked with a horizontal line of lime, a generally recognized sign meaning that a man wishes to have intercourse with a woman (Coenen 1963:70).

The king parrot and the bird of paradise are 'of one soul with' the forest of sago palms they feed on; therefore these two birds are associated with growth and fertility. It is not a coincidence that the initiation of boys and the initiation of adolescents take place on the top of a platform built of numerous containers of raw sago. The sago here clearly symbolizes growth and fertility. Coenen's remark that the Meamo ceremony is insignificant contradicts his own statement that it is still a standard part of the ceremonies initiating boys and adolescents, and may be due to the fact that Kiewa is not performed in its entirety. The abandonment of the bat ritual because of its elements of copulation and promiscuity seems more likely to be connected with the arrival of colonial rule and the Mission.

The rituals at the Meamo platform are clearly meant to promote growth, fertility, and reproduction of humans, animals and vegetation. Coenen does not describe the exact nature of the promiscuity. A boundless happy-go-lucky sexual orgy seems unlikely. My assumption is that it is a manifestation of lovers' (*marakoma*) relations. These are the informal counterparts of the formal exchange of sisters by males as the preferred type of marriage. Sister exchange often goes against individual preferences. (There may be a correspondence or similarity with the Asmat *papish* practice, a case of regulated ritual promiscuity in situations of crisis and danger.)

The announcement of the prohibition of incest with close, probably stipulated, kin is a perfect counterpart of the ritual show of eroticism and intercourse. Further, it is not a coincidence that, according to Coenen, after the acts of (presumably regulated) promiscuity and the announcement of a prohibition of incest, a kind of public confession of adultery and other trespasses takes place as a catharsis of human relations:

In Atuka the ritual is called *Ireku nao*, that is the name of the culture hero who is called Mirokotejao elsewhere. In Atuka confessions take place while people dance. Older men begin. Cases of theft of goods and of pounding sago in forbidden areas, which resulted in serious quarrels, are confessed. Confessions of indulging in sexual acts with *marakoma* are met with roars of laughter. The confessing offender takes care not to be in the vicinity of the offended party. Afterwards no problems with offended parties emerge. In Atuka people were very liberal in confessing. However, serious crimes such as adultery with married women, considered as theft, or black magic causing death, are not confessed. In Waonaripi people who confess sit on a ladder; this keeps a tighter rein on their sincerity [probably because

sitting on a platform turns the confession into a more formal public act]. (Coenen 1963:101.)

One may conclude from this description that the promiscuity involves lovers rather than married women. Zegwaard alludes to public confessions under the heading of *Iraku* as part of his description of *Ema Kame*: 'The elders assemble all the people in the *Keawa* house. Everybody, while dancing and turning around, gets an opportunity to tell those present that he stole sago or fish or so-and-so [allusion to lovemaking; adultery]. There is much laughter.' (Zegwaard 1953-56, *Kewa*:9.)

The second part of the bat ritual follows after the display of fertility and eroticism. From the ridgepole a large number of bats, personified by male adolescents, are suspended, analogous to the way bats hang on trees upstream, very close together and in huge numbers. I read somewhere that young bats hang in huge clusters on particular branches, functioning as delivery rooms. The initiates imitate the screams of bats; there is a hell of a noise. The ceremony takes place late at night. Accompanied by their bride-receivers, the initiates climb the ladders to the ridgepole and hang on to it with hands and feet. The bat dignitary on top of the roof chants to them: 'What are you doing there? You are finishing up the fruit [an enumeration of kinds of fruit follows].' He hits the roof with a stick to chase the 'bats' away. They fall down and are intercepted by their bride-receivers, who take care that the initiates do not come to any harm. The initiates lie down on the floor. The play is repeated a number of times. Meanwhile, the singers and drummers recite a derisive song about bats with their lean and crooked behinds.¹³ In everyday life, bats are a subject of mockery and jokes (Zegwaard 1953a:1-2), and this is true as well for the male adolescents who imitate bats in this ritual.

There are sometimes two dignitaries on the roof, one from the right and one from the left. At the end the initiates lie down on the floor, and talking and laughing are prohibited. The older men stay with them throughout the night. At dawn women, mothers and sisters line up in front of the house. Accompanied by the guild of singers and drummers, the right 'bats', followed by the left 'bats', leave the house in a procession. They are welcomed and embraced by their weeping, shouting, and highly emotional mothers and sisters. Beforehand the bride-receivers secretly remove the ladders and push them into the river, lest the women notice that the initiates have used ladders to climb up to the ridgepole.

¹³ Zegwaard 1953-56, *Kewa*:11, and my own field notes.

The glorious return of the initiates: the hornbill ceremony

The spectacular return of the initiates, appearing this time not as bats but as hornbills, requires a good deal of time-consuming preparation: elaborate hair care, decorating the body, building a footbridge, and collecting lots of food.

Close male relatives, but not affines, plait the hair of the initiates, since hair and hair care are a most private affair. In secluded locations, so as not to reveal the plaiting patterns before the 'show', strings of hair are tightly pulled and plaited in pathways on the head. Plaiting specialists are found and lavishly rewarded. The main pattern of the pathways is a left half and a right half, called *tomoro*, separated in the middle of the head by a central ridge, *wayku* (middle), another example of bipartition. After a couple of weeks or even months, the plaits are loosened and soaked in a red oily sap, *wane*, a fluid extracted from the *kuku* tree. This is believed to promote hair growth, an explicit symbol of fertility.

(In 1953 I attended a ceremony, called Imini, in Kaokonao demarcating the end of a mourning period, during which the plaited hair of twelve married women, carefully tended for months and kept hidden by a head shawl, was unveiled by removing the shawl. This imposing show of patterns of new plaited hair symbolized the renewal of life. Tradition has it that this ceremony was performed some time before celebrating Ema Kame.)¹⁴

When the loosened hair has reached considerable length, tufts of hair are arranged in a sort of cock's comb on the top of the head. This offers a spectacular sight which makes the mothers cry. Some of them even say that they find it difficult to recognize their sons with such a display. Further, *uu tawri*, literally 'head fibres' of the sago palm, functioning as hair extensions, are attached to the plaits of hair. Many women also have tufts of hair shaped into a cock's comb. Some important female dignitaries have their hair extended like men do, while the hair of other women is cut by men around their heads. The men's custom of creating hair extensions in everyday life, as found in the Asmat territory, went out of use long before the 1950s.

A wide range of arm, leg and waist bands for the initiates and for participating men and women are plaited (by men and women). Various attributes for head and body decorations, such as plumes and feathers of birds of paradise and of king parrots, and the plaited young leaves of sago and coconut palms, *tawri*, are prepared. In Umar I was told that items of attire are secretly hidden in the house above the heads of the initiates at night, to be discovered as a surprise early the next morning.

Head ornaments made of wood or bark, in the form of stylized birds of

¹⁴ See also Chapter V; for more details, see Pouwer 1954:47-54.

Head ornament representing hornbill, worn by initiates during final stage of Ema Kame, Mimika. Collected by Ch.L.J. van den Broek, before 1908. RMV: 3600-6615. See Kooijman 1984:33, Fig. 26; Smidt 2003:105, Fig. 63.

Head ornament representing highly stylized hornbill, worn by initiates during final stage of Kiawa (Ema Kame). From Cape Steenboom, mouth of Mukumuga River, collected by W. de Jong, 1903. RMV: 1416-32. See Kooijman 1984:xv, 35, Fig. 31; Smidt 2003:68, Fig. 65.

paradise and king parrots and adapted to the form of the head, form the spectacular masterpiece of decoration.¹⁵ These are placed on and attached to the cock's comb of the initiates and of some participating women.

The highlight of the final ceremony is a procession in a right and a left line of the initiates, now called bird people (*paturu we*), each headed by a male hornbill dignitary, all fully dressed up and with the bird's head ornaments fastened to the cock's combs. The procession solemnly comes down from the house, along the footway decorated with young sago leaves. The bride-receivers and sisters of the initiates slowly pull the initiates down by means of strings attached to the wooden birds on their heads. The enthusiasm of fully dressed women, their bodies covered with white and red stripes, amounts to frenzy. Some women even roll on the ground. They beat the air shouting

¹⁵ For magnificent examples, see Kooijman 1984:33, 35 (Figs 28-31), and Smidt 2003:106-7.

'Wayna waota, honour to our sons and young brothers!' The bride-receivers then take the initiates on their shoulders and turn round and round, dancing and singing. The ceremony ends with a dance around the dancing post, in which everybody, young and old, participates. Finally, the bodily attire, the bands, the *tawri* and the spectacular head ornaments are placed in trees around the creeks, so that the dead may share in the joy of the living.

In Potoway, in the far western part of Mimika, initiates carry carved mock shields while being attacked by women who hack and stab at the shields. This act probably refers to the Ema Kame myth about the monstrous monitor lizard or crocodile who swallowed the people and whose flesh, fat and bones were transformed into ethnic groups. However, this interpretation is an exception to the explicit universal rule throughout Mimika that the hornbill procession refers to the widely known myth of male adolescents who transform themselves into hornbills. The myth is as follows. A number of badly behaved boys play scandalous tricks on an elderly couple. The boys flee from the enraged couple by climbing a hollow tree, which the offended party proceeds to cut down. The tree carrying the offenders drifts downstream into the sea to the far western part of Mimika and beyond, off Mimika, into the underworld. There they meet up with a colony of women who make love with the now adult adolescents. The story ends with these adolescents shamefully transforming themselves into hornbills and departing from their desolate wives after enraging them by accidentally dropping coconuts. They do not heed the laments of their wives, who desperately try to stop the exodus.¹⁶ The ritual, a dramatized myth, clearly has erotic overtones and is overtly connected with the promiscuity of the Meamo ritual.

In an Asmat story, a hornbill carved by a male adolescent comes to life and then functions as a literal *postillon d'amour* by carrying the beloved woman on his wings to his master.¹⁷ Zegwaard, who collected this story, sees a connection between the regurgitating motions of the hornbill feeding its young and the movements of the man's penis in ejaculating semen. He also suggests a correspondence of the bird's spectacular beak chiselling its way into a tree with the human male chiselling and shaping the foetus with his penis and repeatedly feeding it with semen. The term *maramo* indeed has the meanings of hornbill's beak, chisel, and human chiseller. A male's contribution to the formation of a foetus in the female's womb compares with the hornbill beak's function: it chisels, shapes and feeds (Zegwaard 1995:317-8).

The hornbill ceremony marks the formal end of Ema Kame. At night the bride-receivers of the deceased proceed to collect the buried bones of the

¹⁶ For the full story, see Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:21.

¹⁷ For the full story, see Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:20.

dead and the skulls stored in the houses (or buried) and throw these remains unceremoniously into and under the already wrecked Ema Kame house. The women, however, are under the impression that the remains are fully respected. They even provide the dead with food, which the men secretly consume. The house as well as the bones are left to decay, after two ceremonial staffs (*pokay*) covered with white feathers have been removed. In addition to *pokay*, these staffs are sometimes called *ya mate*, according to Coenen's informant in Kawkapu (1963:94). They are yet another representation of the ancestral mother and her husband. The feast is over and, after lavishly rewarding the dignitaries and the bride-receivers for their work, the hosts and guests return to their settlements downstream. It is ironical that, while the Ema Kame rituals clearly denote and connote life, the literal meaning of the name of the ceremonial house, which also denotes the ritual, derives from death: the bones that are left there to decay.

Postlude

The celebration of Ema Kame may be concluded with one or several plays (*kamania* or *kakuru*) that are mainly but not exclusively meant for entertainment. I will describe two of them. These may be combined with other ceremonies and rituals, or may be performed separately. The first play tests the dexterity and stamina of initiates; the second tests the dexterity and stamina of male adults and is another demonstration of gender antagonism.

The first one is called Ayu Kata or Opo Kata, 'upperworld secret'. I attended its separate celebration in Mioko, upper Kamora River, on 12 September 1952. Men of the right half and men of the left half make a ladder, one for each half. The left and the right rattan dignitaries together remove a strong rattan cane of about 25 metres in length from a tree in the forest and drag it to the village. A man of the right half climbs his ladder, placed against the local teacher's high breadfruit tree (usually a casuarina tree is selected). He wears an apron made of cassowary quills. Dancing and singing, he pushes the rattan over a branch high in the tree and then lowers the rattan so that it touches the ground. The right and the left sides of the rattan are then stretched, and fastened solidly to two constructions on the ground. The climber stays in the tree on a makeshift platform. The announcer of the play, who summoned men to fasten the rattan cane, lies down on the ground with a stern face, because the others do not really listen and seemingly have made a mess of the job. Then an old man, a rattan dignitary of the right half, is dressed up by his bride-receivers. Over his shirt he wears a white garment, and over this garment a blue coat with a stiff collar: he puts on all the clothes he has. He circles the tree and solemnly climbs the right ladder. One of his bride-receivers follows him, while trying to remove

big red ants that have crept up and into the very layers of garments of the poor actor and are biting him, but the victim keeps his dignity. Male spectators roll on the ground in spasms of laughter (it is just one step from the sacred to the profane). Standing on the platform, he recites the names of varieties of fish that were taboo during Ema Kame, and warns people to resume eating these kinds of fish slowly and carefully, lest they fall ill. While reciting the names, he scratches his body vigorously and tries to remove the attacking ants, assisted by his bride-receivers. This elicits roars of laughter. Then male adolescents, initiates assisted by their bride-receivers, climb the right and the left ladders and descend along the rattan canes suspended on arms and legs, capering and shouting. Their bride-receivers watch them closely and even ascend the rattan in order to help the boys reach the ground safely. The play goes on for about an hour; a few of the initiates repeat the exercise. Meanwhile, the old man on the platform swings a lime-covered machete and threatens to cut the cane. By the end of the performance he descends in a dignified manner and touches the shoulders of his bride-taker assistants as a sign of appreciation for helping him reach the ground safely. The garments and the attire are removed in an equally dignified manner. Women watch the scene, keeping their distance. At night, while sitting round the fireplace in front of their houses, fathers and brothers of the initiates praise them for having reached maturity.

Impressed by this play, in 1954 I suggested inviting the Mioko people to give a performance in the administrative centre, Kaokonao, on the occasion of the Dutch Queen's anniversary. Initially the village elders turned down the request: 'It is not proper to mix your foreign celebrations with ours; we could fall ill and die.' But then the male adolescents insisted on displaying the agility they were proud of. The elders gave in. The play was performed, but only after the formal end of the Dutch celebrations. It went off well and was received with praise by hundreds of Kamoro spectators, although the Mioko elders were not quite comfortable with it (Pouwer 1955a:259-60). The upperworld secret play probably evokes the highly secret sun myth. The culture hero Murupiuta-on-earth, who is the namesake of the sun hero in the upper world, visits the upper world. He makes the sun, hidden in a hut or factory, rotate around the earth to the benefit of mankind, and returns to earth by means of a long rattan cane. While making his way through the upper world from east to west, he lowers the cane at each village below. The villagers touch the cane, after which the culture hero lifts it and continues his journey. He finally descends in the settlement of Wakatimi, or Mimika proper, in Central Mimika. This village is the *yao amako*, the owner of the sun secret.¹⁸ The gesture of the dignitary of the play in touching the shoulders of his bride-receivers while descending the cane could

¹⁸ For the story, see Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:1-3; see also Coenen 1963:45-6.

well connote the villagers' touching of the mythical sun cane.

The second play, Tura Kata, the fire play, is not specifically related to Ema Kame and is performed everywhere in Mimika on a variety of occasions. It belongs to the category of *imu*, a special form of *akapa* (laughing), a farce in which women playfully attack men as a part of joking relationships between the sexes and between bride-givers and bride-receivers (for more details, see Pouwer 1964). At dusk all the men, except the old ones, enter a space enclosed by a temporary fence of leaves and branches, which they are not supposed to leave during the play. Women encircle the fence laughing and shouting, while throwing smouldering pieces of wood or blazing palm leaves at the men. Sparks of fire rain down on the men, fended off by their bride-receivers who cannot, however, prevent their in-laws from being hit. The play goes on and on with violent ferocity, till a village elder orders the women to stop. The women enjoy themselves, since the men have to stay put lest they become a laughing stock.

It is interesting to note that in Potoway, close to the trade centre of Etna Bay, I was told that the fence was formerly shaped like a Chinese trading schooner, with an imitation mast in the centre and decorated all over with young palm leaves. The play was then called Tena Ku, or Chinese canoe.

By the end of the play three male dignitaries take their positions in front, in the centre, and at the back of the imitation schooner (similar to the positions in the python ceremony and the Tama ritual). The dignitary in front, who relates as 'bottom' or 'root' to the other two as 'surface', as the owner-in-the-know to the secondary owners of the secret, summons the spirits of the massoi bark while clinging to the top of the mast. The medicinal bark is highly sought after by Chinese. The spirits of the bark, represented by dignitaries hidden in the woods, answer the call '*uu uu*'. The dignitary on the mast hits it with a piece of massoi bark. He has got the message: there is an abundance of bark. Collecting the bark of the massoi trees, growing upstream in or near the mountains, is a demanding job and moreover the tree is not easily found. The fire play in this form is a striking example of ritual innovation. Just like the climbing play, it shows that the boundary between social entertainment and ritual acts is indeed a thin one.¹⁹

¹⁹ For more details, see Pouwer 1955a:255-6.