CHAPTER VII

Ema Kame and Emak Cem

Ema Kame/Emak Cem and myth

The Kamoro, the inland Nafuaripi (related to the Kamoro Sempanowe), and the inland Asmat all celebrate Ema Kame, called Emak Cem or Embakter (Yamas) by the Asmat and Imake by the Nafuaripi. From inland Northwest Asmat the ceremony spread to downstream settlements, but coastal settlements, such as Ewer, Shuru and Ayam, do not celebrate it. Nafuaripi information is almost lacking and Asmat information is sketchy. Yet documented similarities and differences are so explicit that it makes comparison with the Kamoro worthwhile. To what extent is Asmat Emak Cem just as much a 'female' contribution to life as Kamoro Ema Kame? What stands out about Kamoro Ema Kame is the promotion of fertility of man and his habitat (see Part One). Is this also the case with Asmat Emak Cem?

Fertility clearly has to do with reproduction and social reproduction. It is significant that Kamoro and Asmat narratives explicitly associated with Ema Kame/Emak Cem, whether in the text or by informants, irrespective of their diversity, have in common that they clearly address an almost universal logical paradox inherent to (social) reproduction, as succinctly formulated by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968:217): how can *one* be born from *two*? In other words, how is it possible to bridge the gap between being born out of one yet born from two, which comes down to the gap between kinship and marriage? I have already discussed this paradox in a comparison of eastern Bird's Head narratives (Pouwer 1999:467-86). Here I tackle it again in the Kamoro-Asmat setting, by comparing summaries of relevant passages of Kamoro and Asmat myths, all but one of which are explicitly related to Ema Kame/Emak Cem. The stories are arranged from northeast to southwest (and back again), in accordance with the dominant direction of movements in Kamoro and Asmat narratives, in addition to the upstream/downstream movement.

M1 *Ufiripic and his daughters*.¹ Informant Yufentias Biakai, museum cura-

¹ See Offenberger and Pouwer 2002:236-41, 259-62, notes 61-5.

tor, from Yamas, post-1962. This version is the most elaborate of all versions documented by Zegwaard and Voorhoeve prior to 1963.

On the upper reaches of the Ayip River, in the far eastern part of Mimika, are two spirit women, who live in the aerial roots of a big waringin tree and can take on the form of a body whenever they choose. A human man, Ufiripic (king-parrot man), lives by himself in the same area. Going off one day to shoot birds, he discovers two red parakeets at the top of a sago palm. He wants their beautiful feathers, but does not know that the two birds are embodiments of the spirit women. He creeps up stealthily, but the parakeets hear him coming and fly away to the waringin tree. On passing this tree Ufiripic is attacked by the birds. They peck him on the right forearm [or on both arms, in another version]. The arm(s) start(s) to swell. In a dream the two spirit women then tell him that they have penetrated his arm(s); they tell him their names and instruct him to cut open his swollen arm(s). He does so the next morning with a mussel shell: Omarawoc and Dafarawoc are born. The girls grow up quickly, as culture heroes usually do, and turn into beautiful women. The father-parrot-man feels a growing desire inside his belly to have sex with them, but he realizes his daughters would not want it. So he resorts to a trick. Secretly he makes a *bes*, a shortcut by land connecting the upstream and downstream parts of the winding river. At the end of the shortcut he builds a house, near the junction of the Ayip and Bec Rivers (see Map 3). He returns to his daughters and then feigns illness and pretends to be dying. He instructs his tearful daughters to wrap his body in an old mat after his death (but not too tightly), to place it on a platform (but not too high), to remove everything from the house, and walk downstream along the river bank, where they will notice a house, said to be the dwelling of his younger brother who is his spitting image. So it happens. Meanwhile their father, after playing dead, rushes to the house via the shortcut and meets his daughters as their 'father's younger brother'. After lamenting and observing a period of mourning, the 'younger brother' tries to win the favour of his 'elder brother's daughters' by hunting pigs and by so doing to cajole them into marriage. He talks his 'brother's elder daughter' into hunting with him and then has sex with her. She persuades her younger sister to follow her example, but the latter, though seemingly giving in, remains suspicious. The sisters beget two boys, Kurap and Sarawap (*ap* is a diminutive). One day, when the father is looking after the babies while his wives are pounding sago in the forest, the younger sister, returning to replace the broken head of her sago pounder, overhears the father lulling her baby boy to sleep saying: 'I begat you, I took care of you, you are my son and grandson.' Now she knows the truth, tells her sister in anger, and has a row with her. The two are so ashamed that they decide to

trick their father – as he tricked them – into a fishing basket, which he dives right into when bathing in the river. He manages to surface but to no avail: they refuse to rescue him. Before sinking back into the water and turning into a big *mbu*, or river turtle, he says to the women: ‘Because you have done this to me, you must leave, go westwards tomorrow. You must row close to the coast and the river mouths. I will make you a canoe from the bark of a sago palm.’ So it happens. The Asmat *-o-we* (people) have called him *mbu cesar* ever since, the sacred turtle, or *cesar pok*, the sacred animal resting on the bottom of the river, near the confluence of the Ayip and the Bec. Today Ufiripic is still the master and guardian of the spot. [Shuru has a similar guardian turtle.]

There is a partial similarity between – and an inversion of – this myth and the Kamoro narrative about the widower Nokoro and his two daughters (see Chapter III, myth 3) dramatized in Kaware. Nokoro is considered the ‘father’ of river-going canoes and of carvings. A model of his canoe is produced during the Kaware ritual, while a model of the two sisters’ canoe takes pride of place in the Asmat Emak Cem ritual. Kurap and Sarawap and their mothers are generally acknowledged by the Asmat to be the founders and initiators of Emak Cem (see M7 below).

M2 *Cic and the first woman*. (This myth is not explicitly connected with Emak Cem, but there is an implicit link; see below.) Told to G. Zegwaard by the war leader Warsekome in Shuru, Asmat, 23 September 1953. Shuru does not celebrate Emak Cem.²

Deep in the interior, deep in the forest, lives Tewaterawoc [this name is identical to the name of the younger sister Dafarawoc in M1, in a different dialect]. She lives completely alone among the roots of a waringin tree. [This indicates she is a spirit woman.] She is pregnant, gives birth to a boy, and calls him Cic [rippling water, connoting the sea]. The baby grows fast and keeps on crawling indoors, downstream, upstream, and the other way round. One day when his mother goes to the forest to collect food, he repeats the crawling circle but then outside. Cic continues to grow rapidly [which marks him as a culture hero]. He keeps on asking: ‘Is there only land? Is there no water, is there no river? Are there no people?’ His alarmed mother flatly denies it: ‘I am a tree-trunk woman, and you are a tree-trunk boy.’ Next time when he is alone, he puts on all sorts of decorations, climbs the waringin tree to its top, and then discovers to his utmost astonishment, downstream behind the forest, a large expanse of water, a very wide river [the sea]. His mother

² For the full text, see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:117-21.

hides her terror, but gives in: she digs a little channel and gives him a small canoe to play with. He performs magic on the tree so that it grows into the sky, enabling him to have a grand view, which confirms his discovery. Although his mother holds back, she can no longer resist him. She catches a python, chops off its head, and places it in the small channel, instructing the creature to turn the channel into a river. A heavy storm breaks out, the river is created, and the toy canoe becomes a real one. Not listening to his mother's grumblings, the boy names the river Ewec [compare the Asewec River of Shuru], puts on all his ornaments, and gets into the canoe with his mother. In utter joy he reaches the sea. He then keeps on killing one crocodile after the other [instead of the fish that his mother asks for]. His mother, realizing that her son has grown up but that there are no women to provide him with a wife, makes a big bag of pandanus root fibres [a typical female attribute, for carrying wood or a baby on her back], adds an apron and an oar to it, puts the bag in a rain mat, slides it under the floor mat, and orders the bag: 'You must become a human woman, put on the apron, and keep the oar within easy reach. For the time being you must hide yourself from Cic.' That night Cic goes off to catch perch and pike [instead of crocodiles] but does not have any luck. Turning his canoe to go home, he is startled, perceiving a beautiful woman coming his way. Cic asks: 'Are you a tree-spirit woman?' The reply of the bag-turned-woman is: 'No, I am a *kawenak*, a human woman.' Cic gets excited, proposes going home, but on the way home he can't wait any longer and tries to have sex with her. However, he does not manage to pierce her hymen. His penis hurts, swells and cracks, like the bark of pandanus roots. A puddle of water, semen and blood forms on the ground. Cic then orders the pandanus: 'Stand in the water with a cracked and lumpy bark as a permanent reminder of my failure.' His wise mother intervenes and tells him that the hymen has to be opened first. While mother and son are asleep, the woman pierces her hymen, creeps up and says: 'I am so cold. Now I am ready for you.' Cic tries again, but his penis has not yet recovered. The woman says: 'Let us wait until the wounds are healed.' And so it happens. [In the Kamoro myth about the rebelling superwomen, associated with Ema Kame, they provide a man with the red sap of a tree in order to have satisfactory intercourse.]

M3 *Totepere*. Recorded by G. Zegwaard and presented by him in summary form. The informant Mepe, of Koperapoka (in the far eastern part of Mimika), insists that this is the original and genuine Kiawa (Ema Kame) myth instead of the universally known Kamoro myth of Mirokoatayao (M4).³

³ For the full text see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:129-31.

Totepere, the wife of Naakawe, has an affair with her husband's younger brother. One of her children is a silent witness to this. When he and his brothers and sisters secretly eat up the tasty sago grubs his mother has ordered them to take to their father, the boy realizes that his secret will be found out. In order to avoid punishment, the young man tells his father about his mother's affair. His father orders him to keep silent. At night when the whole village is asleep, including his wife, he chops off her arms and legs [her name Totepere literally means shoulder stumps], carries her to a canoe previously made ready by him and provided with fire-making tools and sago, casts the canoe loose, and lets it drift downstream. When Totepere, pregnant by her lover, arrives downstream, on the other side of the world [underworld], she manages to give birth to a son and calls him Totepere-yao, 'son of Totepere'. He grows up rapidly, and in the sand he draws iron equipment, such as a machete, an axe, a fishing spear, a lance, a frying pan, a spoon, and a house with a zinc roof. He goes to sleep, and when he awakes the house and the equipment have emerged from the drawings. He goes further west, discovers a coconut palm [in the underworld], and climbs it. Its owner, an old man with a swollen belly, notices the stranger and also climbs the tree, but then upside down. His anus is blocked up. Totepereyao sees him coming, and pierces his anus. The fat man moans and groans and the contents of his intestines spray out. Grateful for this operation, he offers his benefactor one of his two wives. [In other versions, collected by Drabbe in Mapar, West Mimika, he is credited with the manufacture of iron tools and is apparently in possession of textile and metal ornaments. He and the young man are namesakes, like the culture heroes of the sun and the moon (Drabbe 1947-50:165-9). Totepereyao leaves with the newly acquired woman, but when out of sight he stabs her to death, chops off her arms and legs, wraps them in a mat, goes home, hides the mat, and feeds his mother [who can't feed herself]. At night he wakes her up and – surprise, surprise – attaches the new arms and legs to his mother's stumps. His mother is overjoyed, stirs up the fire, cooks sago, pulls her son towards her, and states solemnly (*imakatiri*): 'From now on I am no longer your mother but your wife.' Next, she gives him clear instructions on how to have sex with her. [Apparently he does not know.] She gives him tobacco [an erotic gift] and praises his penis [a common compliment].

[The young man in Drabbe's stories, who is said to have a mother without feet and anus, finds a red parrot in one of the boxes of the old blacksmith whose anus was pierced. He cuts the bird into pieces, which turn into a multitude of men. Compare Asmat Ufiripic, the king parrot of M1.]

In a strikingly similar Asmat version of this myth, recorded by Baudhuin in Ewer in 1996 (Baudhuin, Firkoman and Capu 1996:144-52), the son replaces the body parts of his maimed mother with those of a huge lizard [the monstrous monitor lizard of M4?]. However, the transformation from incest to

marriage is lacking in this version, or possibly it was suppressed by the storyteller. Instead, in a typical Asmat vein, the son takes revenge by killing off the people of his father's village except for one woman, whom he marries.

M4 *Mirokoatayao and the crocodile (or monitor lizard)*. Recorded by Zegwaard in 1950-1952, and by Pouwer in 1952-1954 in numerous local versions throughout West and Central Mimika (Pouwer 1954). The present elaborate, lyrical and consistent version was recorded by Zegwaard in Mikiwia, Central Mimika.⁴ The story is referred to in Chapter II. The name of the hero varies. Monitor lizards (*yok*) do occur in this area.

A crocodile born from an egg hatched by children in a settlement near the shore of Pura (west of Potoway, in the far western part of Mimika, close to Etna Bay, where the mountains descend into the sea) matures at an incredible rate. It gobbles up the children, the old, and the infirm, who had remained behind while the adults went upstream to pound sago. In an ambush it attacks the people when they return in their canoes. It swallows everybody except a pregnant woman, Mirokoata (*miroko* means python), who narrowly escapes. The crocodile is carried downstream and sleeps on Pura beach. His body is swollen from all the people he has eaten. He lets out a tremendous fart: *pu-pu* (the sound of a ship's horn). At a good distance from the shore and the crocodile, the woman builds a birth hut and gives birth to a boy she calls Mirokoata-yao, 'son of Mirokoata'. The boy, a culture hero, grows up rapidly. He goes hunting for all sorts of birds and animals. His mother teaches him the names and what animals are good to eat or should not be eaten (such as the tree lizard, related to the crocodile, or monitor lizard). The son [like Cic in M2] yearns for the sea, in spite of his mother's warnings. He heads for the forbidden area and brings home fish, turtle eggs, and some sand and leaves. His mother, hearing the sound of the crocodile, is very angry with him but finally agrees to move to the shore. Terrified by the noise of the monster, she tells her son what happened. He is not alarmed and draws the outline of a house in the sand. A moment later the house is standing there, fully furnished. Without telling his mother, he thinks up a plan to kill the monster: he draws in the sand the outlines of an Ema Kame house, a pig house, a nose-piercing house, a Kaware house, an apron house, a semi-permanent house, and a temporary hut. He ends up with another Ema Kame building. The houses immediately materialize, in one row, in the order indicated and at right angles to the sea. A large quantity of iron tools and weapons hang from the ceilings, all positioned to fall and hit someone easily. Then he makes a big fire producing a lot of smoke,

⁴ For the full text, see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:121-7.

which penetrates the nostrils of the crocodile. Provoked by the smoke and the songs corresponding with the various types of ceremonial houses, the enraged crocodile enters one house after another. The weapons fall down and hit him. Exhausted, he enters the last house; this is the second Ema Kame house, which is extra strongly reinforced, with even heavier weapons. At the end of its tether, the crocodile is stabbed to death by the hero and his mother. Mirokoatayao starts to cut up the animal into pieces, sorting these by colour. The bones and skulls of the people swallowed are carefully removed and kept separate. It is a heavy job. The son therefore asks his mother for some tobacco, but, unfortunately, it has been eaten by the crocodile. The mother begins to flatter her son in an erotic way and invites him to have sex with her. The son says: 'We can't. You brought me into the world.' He scolds her: 'You with your red sex [vagina],' but finally he gives in with his face averted. Shortly after, the mother starts to bear successively: leaves to roll cigars in, strips of fibre used to bind the cigars, tobacco seeds, and finally tobacco leaves themselves. She makes three packages [apparently including one for her future husband]. The astonished son finally understands, approves of the tobacco, and rolls a cigar. Then the mother makes a solemn prediction (*imakatiri*): 'From now on, the sons and brothers will feed the children in the wombs of their mothers and sisters. That is, they will feed their semen into the womb before birth so that the foetus grows, just as the mother gives her baby the breast after birth.'⁵

The pieces of meat turn into groups of people, the varieties of mankind, increasingly specified in subsequent versions of the narrative. The hero takes two beautiful women for himself and a perfect husband for his mother.

The story clearly denotes and connotes the transformation from kinship into sexual intercourse and marriage, and the part played by female and male partners in the conception of a child. Compare this with the incestuous intercourse of M3, which also includes the gift of tobacco.

M5 *The python and Mirokoatayao*. Recorded by Zegwaard, 1952. Informant Kapitan Tay, village chief of Keawkwa, Central Mimika, a noted and intelligent expert on traditions.⁶ According to the informant, this story comes from the ancestors of the Kamoro, who during the great trek moved from Minar in the Asmat region to Mimika. He considers this the eastern version of the Mirokoatayao story (M4). Keawkwa has close links with eastern Kamoro settlements.

⁵ See Zegwaard in Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:126, 186, note 22, although he switches from sons and brothers to husbands, without explaining himself.

⁶ For the full text, see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:127-9.

A group of sisters, the Muyaropo-ayti (sisters), living in the east, go to beat sago. They take the son of the eldest sister with them, a young lad called Muyaruru. After selecting, chopping down, and stripping a good sago palm, each sister is allocated a piece of the trunk in order of seniority, the eldest one getting the lowest and thickest part. While at work they hear a rustling sound like the sound of the wind, travelling eastwards, getting closer and closer. The eldest sister sends her son to see what is going on. He climbs a tree. From there he reports that a big python (*miroko*) is approaching through the air. He thinks to himself that the monster might eat up his mother (or mothers). But he is struck dumb and so his mother and her sisters are taken completely by surprise: the monster indeed swallows them (in order of seniority) and then goes to sleep. The lad ventures to climb down, and steps on the python, which addresses him by saying: 'Sit on my back.' At first the boy is frightened, but in the end he does what is asked. The python says: 'Show me the way to your home.' They arrive at the entrance of the settlement. The python solemnly states: 'Son, from now on I am your mother and your [new] name is Mirokoatayao. Now you must kill me, but stab me in the right side [the part of the human body ascribed to the mother]. When I am dead, you must cut my body into pieces from the right side and the left [father's] side, and lay the pieces from the right side and the left side in separate piles. Keep the stomach and the liver for yourself.' The young man kills the python with a lance and cuts it up, and places the pieces in as many piles as there are villages, eight in all, and in geographical sequence according to the position of the various villages [unfortunately the informant did not specify them]. He hangs up two fatty pieces of the stomach and the liver in the house. During the night the bones and meat come to life [as in M4]. New people are created: men, women, young men, boys, and girls. One of the pieces of fat becomes a white woman. Some of the bones become canoes: the long slender ones become river-going ones, the stumpy bones seagoing ones. The stomach and liver change into (Western) commodities.

The similarities with and differences from M4 are obvious. The python is evidently a transformation of the pregnant woman Mirokoata of M4, and the young lad a transformation of Mirokoata's son. The striking difference is that in M5 the pregnant woman and the monster of M4 are one character. The son kills his mother instead of having intercourse with her, an act that might be conceived as symbolic incest. From her body parts the various groups of humans emerge. There are five Kamoro groups, each group carrying the same name as its village, plus a group of white people, descendants of a white woman. In addition, the two different local types of canoes, as well as Western commodities, emerge from the python, features that are missing in M4.

There is another parallel to an Asmat myth (*i atakam*, dealing with culture heroes as distinct from *tarai atakam*, stories about ancestors) from Yamas, an important Emak Cem site (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:176-8), which may be summarized as follows. Yokor, a man from the upper Sirec River, is swallowed by a python (*pit*) travelling from the inland, who discovers him while his three wives, daughters, younger sister, and nieces are pounding sago. His head sticks out of the python's mouth. The terrified women enlist the support of the villagers, but Yokor in his curious position dismisses them, except his friend Yimin and his sister Kane. He orders the two to follow the python on his way, moving from tree to tree in the direction of the coast. Each time the python slides to another tree, Yokor's protruding head hits the next tree. [The story names and specifies these trees, which grow between the inland and the coast.] The trip goes on for many days. Every night Yokor instructs his friend and sister to erect a shelter for passing the night, while the python rests in a tree. Yokor admonishes his friend repeatedly not only to prepare a sago meal but also to have intercourse with his sister. On the ninth day the party come in sight of the sea. That night Yokor tells them to prepare a solid shelter, because there will be a downpour of rain. The heavy rain induces the python to slide down. Its head, and consequently also Yokor's head, is now above the shelter and within reach of the heavily armed Yimin. Secretly instructed by Yokor, the latter shoots an arrow into the tail of the python, who then falls down and is cautiously cut open by him. Yokor is removed from the python's body. After drying in the sun, Yokor explicitly insists on Yimin having intercourse with his sister. [Thus far, in spite of his request, this had not happened.] Yokor witnesses the intercourse. He then inspects and approves of the land. He builds a permanent house. Kane's son moves to another site and so do his sons and daughters, and so on. In this way Kane became the mother of all Asmat people.

Note the active role of the male founder Yokor, in line with the patri-oriented descent of the Asmat. Further, in spite of explicitly initiated and ordered intercourse, there is neither incest nor 'incestuous' killing in this myth. The descendants do not originate from an incestuous relationship. The passage from kinship to marriage is mediated by friendship.

M6 *The journey of Ufiripic's daughters and sons to the far west*. Final part of M1. Except in Yamas and a related settlement, where this journey is presented as a punishment of the two daughters for drowning their father, the narrative stands on its own elsewhere.⁷

⁷ See Offenberg and Pouwer 2002: pp. 261-2, note 65.

As evening is falling there is a tremendous storm that lasts several hours with a heavy downpour, thunder and lightning. At daybreak the women find the canoe near the Ayip River as Ufiripic has promised, formed from the stump of a sago palm from which they have beaten the pith. [Compare this with the Kinako story at the end of M1.] They put their mats, nets, and digging sticks into the canoe, leaving nothing behind. They also take bamboo plants with them, put the boys Kurap and Sawarap in the canoe, and leave for the unknown far western part of Mimika, closely following the coast, passing one river mouth after another. At every spot where they take a break to spend the night or collect food, they make hollows for drinking water and plant bamboo cuttings.

At some point during the journey Omarawoc, the older sister, is enchanted and impregnated by a spirit who tells her to call her newborn son Seos. He [being a culture hero] develops very quickly and can already talk in the womb. Soon after birth he takes command: 'You must treat me as your oldest son.' He says to his cousins (half-brothers): 'You must all listen and take orders from me.' He stands in the middle of the canoe, which is the place of the oldest person who gives instructions. Whenever his mother and cousins want to go in a certain direction or wish to camp somewhere, he rejects the suggestion. Seos takes the decisions. Every time they camp, the boys practise Emak Cem songs, but Seos does not participate and stays in the canoe. A man in the forest called Yisbermerat hears the boys drumming and singing. He is a watersnake (*yis*) parakeet (*bermer*). In the early morning he goes to the coast and meets the two brothers: 'I know you are the sons of Ufiripic [who is an inland parakeet, whereas he is a seaside parakeet]. Your father and I are old friends; we are from the same place. Your songs are incomplete. I shall tell you the proper ones out of friendship for your father.' He teaches them the proper songs and, before returning to the forest, gives the boys a bag of secret magical objects to help them to learn and remember the songs.

After many days they reach the place Seos had wanted to bring them to. One side is called Upuye, and the other side (opposite the rivermouth) Esamu [Safan, or underworld]. The next day the two sisters immediately want to go fishing. They catch a whale (*ndamim*). Seos takes possession of the catch. He gets Kurap and Sawarap to skin it and cut the backbone out. He then starts his magic: the skin becomes the roof of the Emak Cem ceremonial house, the backbones the pillars. The two brothers collect the rest of the building material. They finish the construction of the ceremonial house. During the night one of them sings and drums, and the other blows on a bamboo horn, two blasts each time, a high and a low one. When they wake up, they discover to their surprise that the ceremonial house has collapsed. Seos recalls that in the night he saw a big monitor lizard swimming towards the house. They

rebuild it, but it collapses again the next night. They rebuild it a second time. This time Seos stays on guard and kills the monster. Seos keeps on living in the house. He never needs to eat and drink. When he eventually dies, his bones remain in the ceremonial house and become pieces of iron. The two women and their children still live on Upuye, opposite Safan.

In the separate Kurap and Sawarap stories these heroes are associated with Ufiripic's older brother Bayndosopic, living in the far western part of Mimika. He and the two heroes are the lords of iron instead of their spirit cousin Seos.⁸ Compare this with the lords and manufacturers of iron tools in M3.

In a version of a narrative about the origin of Emak Cem (see M7) collected in Atat by Zegwaard (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:77), Kurap and Sawarap and their mothers are said to travel from west to east, inland; the two sisters are watersnake (Asmat: *yus*, Kamoro: *utako*) women with a scaly skin. Their human or superhuman sons, noticing that there are no rivers, ask their mothers to make rivers. They make them from the mountains to the sea, from Ewerif to Bec (see Map 3).

Apparently there is some confusion between this story and the travel and exploits of the Kamoro sun hero (see Chapter VI under Cosmology).

A version of the same myth collected by Zegwaard (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:79) has it that the two sisters travelling from inland to coast meet up with two women from the coast. The latter have real canoes, instead of the miniature ones the two sisters have, made from the stump of a sago palm. The sisters steal the real canoes after drugging the coastal women, and depart for the west. This theme recurs in a local West Mimika story: Two sisters cause a flood to punish their misbehaving offspring, and steal a canoe from two women coming from the east, loaded with Western commodities. They make for the far western part of Mimika, where they transform themselves into Jesus the son of Mary, and Wilhelmina, a former Dutch queen (Pouwer 1975).

It seems obvious that M6 is an Asmat interpretation of Kamoro M4, ascribing this narrative to their own culture heroes Kurap and Sawarap and their mothers. While the older sister is born by the intervention of a spirit woman from the upper world, she herself gives birth to a son, Seos, by the intervention of a spirit man from the underworld. The foreigners and their commodities originate from the underworld, located in the far western part of Mimika or near the Asmat Casuarinen Coast, southeast, called Safan according to both the Kamoro and the Asmat. The two ethnic groups missed out on the acquisition of (Western) wealth by mistakes, misbehaviour, and transgression of the rule of reciprocity. Compare this with the repeated request of the rotating hero of the sun to inhabitants of Central and West Mimika to chop his head off.

⁸ See Offenberger and Pouwer 2002: 261, note 65.

Unfortunately they turned down the request, except for the people of Opa in the far west of Mimika (where the sun sets). These knocked his head off, and the head then turned into commodities, rifles, knives and tools. That is why the Kamoro missed out on wealth (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:70-2).

Seos seems to me an ambivalent culture hero that embodies the foreigner. On the one hand he considers himself superior to the others, takes command, does not mix, does not participate in learning the Emak Cem songs, stays aloof and apart in the canoe, does not eat or share food. His bones turn into iron, which is reminiscent of Kamoro leaving the bones of their dead behind in the ceremonial house at the end of Ema Kame. On the other hand, he shows similarities to the Kamoro culture hero Mirokoatayao in killing the monitor lizard who destroys the ceremonial house. There is a striking difference, though: in the Asmat version the monster is not cut up into pieces that are transformed into the varieties of mankind. Instead, the bones of Seos turn into pieces of iron. Iron tools were fascinating to the Asmat when they first encountered foreigners. The Asmat version seems to confirm my views expressed earlier in this book, that the motif of a monster that transformed into varieties of mankind originates from an area in the far western part of Mimika, in spite of its explicitly recognized link with Ema Kame. The ritual seems to originate from the far eastern part of Mimika and inland (see M7). The myth of the monster, sung about but not acted out in Kamoro Ema Kame ritual, is absent in Asmat Emak Cem songs and ritual.

We are now in a position to address the universal contradiction or paradox of genesis: how can one be born from two – if born from Adam what about the origin of Eve, or vice versa – in a specific ethnographic-narrative context by means of conditional logic.

It is noteworthy that all the stories summarized above begin with one, though in different impersonations: a lone male hunter, a lone upperworld spirit-woman, a lone abandoned wife, lone survivors, namely a woman and a boy, of a disastrous monstrous attack, another abandoned wife (the co-wife, her younger sister, is of no further significance in the story).

The 'mechanism' of shifting from one to two is predominantly pregnancy and ensuing birth, though by different causes, and the symbolic emergence of a mother-son relationship (M4). The modes of pregnancy are: impregnation of a man by two upperworld spirit-women; pre-existing, unspecified pregnancy of an upperworld female; pre-existing pregnancy of a female by adultery; pre-existing pregnancy by intercourse with a husband killed in a disaster; female pregnancy by enchantment by a male underworld spirit. Note the contrast between a man impregnated by two upperworld women and a woman enchanted by an underworld male. The impregnation of a man is presumably in line with patri-oriented Asmat descent. The symbolic, explicitly stated

mother-son relationship emerges from the replacement of killed real and classificatory mothers by their python-killer, who adopts their son. The killer in her turn is killed – at her command – by her adoptive son: a sort of self-willed, ‘incestuous’ matricide.

In all cases pregnancy or its symbolic counterpart results in the birth of culture heroes: a male in five cases, two females and their two sons in M1. These culture heroes are the ones who perform generative acts: the two mothers and their two sons are the initiators of the Asmat Emak Cem ritual (see M7). The culture hero of M2 is credited with the discovery of and the migration to the lowlands and the sea. The culture hero of M3 is credited with the discovery or manufacture of iron equipment, textiles, a house with a zinc roof, and the coconut palm. The culture hero of M4 generates humankind by dividing up a slain monster (compare this manifestation of *la pensée sauvage* with the generation of language and meaning by means of division into phonemes, words and sentences). The culture hero of M5 generates local ethnic groups, the ancestress of the white race, and the two varieties of local canoes, all by means of division. The aloof culture hero and foreigner of M6 magically generates a ‘modern’ *emak cem* (in the far western part of Mimika) from a whale whose bones turn into iron.

What about the function and meaning of having sex in its relation to the paradox of one yet two? It takes two to tango. Yet it does not seem accidental that the second party in the narratives is off-stage or not identified, or takes on a disguise. In M1 the second party is disguised as a pecking upperworld parakeet; in M2 the party is not identified; in M3 there is off-stage adultery; in M4 the second party is no longer there because of a disaster; in M6 the second party is a mysterious underworld enchanter. So the second party is blurred in various ways: one seemingly takes the stage.

In five out of six cases there is incest, or something like it: in M1 father-daughter incest takes on the disguise of pseudo-levirate, in which a dead man’s brother marries his widow; in M2 there is a transformation from mother to wife by means of her manufacture of a women’s bag: another disguise but then of mother-son incest; in M3 a deserted and maimed mother turns into the wife of her culture hero son on her initiative, after he has replaced the mother’s maimed parts in the underworld; in M4 there is another plain case of mother-son incest on the mother’s initiative. In M5 there is ‘incestuous’ matricide on the mother’s initiative, another disguise.

In all these cases the birth of culture heroes is not the result of unambiguous incest. The birth of the two culture heroes in M2 from ‘real’ incest of father with daughters is disguised as a birth from socially allowed pseudo-levirate marriage.

Why then the predominant connection of these stories with incest? What is its function and meaning? The initiating mothers implicitly or explicitly state

it. In M2 the mother teaches her son, unsuccessful in initiating intercourse, that first of all the wife's hymen has to be penetrated; the performer of this penetration is not the husband but the wife herself. Only then is intercourse successful. In M3 the mother explicitly teaches her son how to have intercourse. She gives him tobacco, an erotic gift, and praises his penis, a common marital compliment. Note that no child is born from this incestuous union. In M4 a 'child' is born from incestuous intercourse, but not a human child; it is tobacco, the usual erotic gift. Also, the mother explicitly formulates the general rule that the semen produced in intercourse serves to feed the foetus (as the mother's milk feeds the baby after birth).

We may conclude that mythical incest serves to highlight the erotic and physiological functions of women as initiators of sexual intercourse and as producers of offspring. Women are the ones who usually take the initiative in lovemaking, especially in Mimika. The male role highlighted by these narratives is that they are the creators of the human race, cultural institutions, and artefacts, by means of division. It is men who have power over supernatural forces by means of magic and ritual. The narratives thus legitimate the functions and meanings of Kamoro conventional gender roles. It is obvious that gender overrides sex by far.

Ema Kame/Emak Cem and ritual

M7 The narrative of the ritual

M7 is a compilation of four versions of the narrative as told by three men from three inland settlements at the Momac River, Northwest Asmat, namely Ao, Kapi and Atat (Zegwaard 1953-56, Kewa:73-9). The stories are restricted to a description of the ritual, primarily ascribed to the two mythical sisters of M1, M2 and M6. Most likely this description also reflects the men's own memories of performances of the ritual they attended. Such performances ended in the 1950s, but parts of the ritual were resumed in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Two sisters Mberen and Mbuper and their sons Kur and Sawar live upstream on the Asewec River (in Central Asmat). The two sisters build an Emak Cem ceremonial house. [Its construction as briefly indicated by the stories is similar to Ema Kame.] The central beam (*yeer*), cut in the woods by their sons according to their mothers' instructions, is transported on their shoulders to the skeleton of the ceremonial house, not carried to the river and surrounded by canoes. The inland initiators of Emak Cem did not have the use of canoes. [Transport over the river is said to be a later development when the ritual spread downstream. This detail is meant to stress the inland origins of the ritual.]

During the cutting and transportation of the central beam, two male dignitaries, Pipiripic and Mumuripic, originating not from the upper world but from the underworld, blow on bamboo horns while the two mothers sing ritual songs. The *yeer*, at one end of which the head of a crocodile is carved out, is pushed over the crossbeams – *yeere* denotes the cries of terror of the young initiates – which rest on a double row of poles (*cuuk*). Two parallel beams (*mbe*) are placed likewise right and left of the central beam. The beams lean sharply towards the narrow end of the porch. The walls and roof are constructed. No opening or crack is left uncovered. Inside it is pitch dark. The two sons are locked up in the house.

The two mothers then cut a *tow* tree for making a spirit canoe. They shape it into what looks like a bottomless canoe. They carve a turtle (*mbu*) in its centre, flanked by two evil sea monsters (*okom*); on the bow and the stern there are female spirits depicting white mole-like creatures of the tidal forest associated with death (*ambirak*); in the canoe are a number of frogs (*eco*) representing the dead; all the creatures are depicted with their heads down.

Now the real ceremony begins. The spirit canoe is placed halfway on a platform at the front entrance, from where steps connect the ceremonial house with the ground. The spirit canoe is supported on either side by a pole called a snake, *amer*. [These represent the two mothers, said to be scaly watersnakes who travelled from west to east in the Atat version.] An oval, fish-shaped wooden object called *sawar* [also the name of one of the two culture hero sons] hangs in the opening of the entrance. The two boys, Kurap and Sawar, scared by their mothers' performance, cry for them. Ordered to move from the interior of the ceremonial house to its entrance, they first touch the *sawar* with their heads, then the turtle with their feet. They step over the spirit canoe and finally lie down on their backs on the turtle, one after the other. There the mothers apply scarifications to their shoulders and thighs with shells. Finally the initiates jump down and stand to attention for a moment while their mothers yell.

The mothers then construct a platform between two sets of scaffolding at a short distance from the ceremonial house. They lie down between the scaffolds and cover themselves with leaves. By so doing they behave like spirits and scare the two initiates. [This is exactly what happened during the mud ceremony (Te Kata) I attended in inland villages along the Kamora River, Central Mimika, which is said sometimes to precede the Ema Kame ritual; see Chapter I.] The boys flee in terror. The two mothers then enter the ceremonial house, cover their bodies with lime and reddish clay, and hide under mats. When the boys enter the house, one of the women comes out. Again the initiates panic and run around in the ceremonial house until their mothers say: 'Don't be afraid. It's only us.'

The boys are then adorned with arm, calf, and ankle bands and hair exten-

sions (*yunum*, Kamoro, *uu*, Asmat). The mothers dress up likewise. One of the mothers climbs the central beam, starts a ceremonial song, hoists one of the boys head-down to the central beam, tears *atap* from the roof, walks to the front end of the beam, and throws him out. The frightened boy screams, but his fall is intercepted by the second mother on the ground outside the house. She is beating a drum while the mother on the beam proudly keeps on singing a ceremonial song. The boy who stayed behind in the ceremonial house is then dragged to the entrance, where the mother on the ground applies additional scarifications, this time to his kneecap and breastbone. Afterwards he jumps to attention. The second boy is treated likewise. The following day the mothers hit their sons' buttocks with a banana stalk [in order to promote their growth; bananas are quick growers]. This ends the ceremony.

The version of this story, as told in Kapi, is clearly meant to provide the descendants of the two mothers with a model for the ceremonial house and its ritual: it highlights the significance of the original female culture heroes. However, it is remarkable that other versions present their sons Kur and Sawar as the initiators of Emak Cem, although they learn the art from their mothers. They (in their turn) lock up their sons and nephews. No fire is allowed inside. The initiates are instructed to behave like flying foxes (*tar*). Kur and Sawar scare and thrash them in the house with rattan canes and make them flee in all directions.

During a stay of a few days towards the end of March 1955 in the very settlements where these narratives were told, Zegwaard attended the first sequences of the ritual (Zegwaard n.y.d:34-40). Older men cut a *fir-fir* tree about three metres in height. They decorated it with lime, ochre, leaves and fruit of sago palms and then placed it near the settlement where the Emak Cem ceremonial house was being built. The men assembled in front of the men's house. While they were singing the Emak Cem songs, they were attacked and chased by women acting as a group and throwing smouldering sticks: the *imu* game (a term identical with the Kamoro term).

The next day the men assembled *atap* and chunks of young sago, and then used them to construct the roof and walls of the ceremonial house. Carvers from Atat, As and Nakay carved out a crocodile on the front end of the central beam. At dusk their bride-receivers took the young initiates to the ceremonial house. They imitated the movements and noise of flying foxes, while the men scared them by hitting the walls with fists and sticks. There was drumming and singing throughout the night.

The following day the women collected sago, which the men took in raw portions into the house [to be prepared and consumed secretly outside the house by the initiates at a later stage and without the women's knowledge].

At dusk the women in their turn hit the walls. [At this stage Zegwaard left the village.]

Zegwaard also gives the names of the male dignitaries of the various yew who were entitled to climb the central beam, like the mythical mothers did, in order to perform the songs and to throw an initiate out by his feet.

In June 1976, John Fleischhacker, OSC, the art collector Tobias Schneebaum, and Yufentias Biakai from Yamas, attached to the Asmat Museum for Culture and Progress in Agats, visited Biakai's village, downstream on the Pomac River southeast of Kapi and also an Emak Cem site of repute, to collect two spirit canoes that had been made for the museum. On this occasion the initiation of boys was reintroduced, and Amandos Amonus and Leo Bini gave the visitors a generalized description of the ritual (Fleischhacker and Schneebaum 1977:94-9). Amonus was the chief carver of one of the two spirit canoes, named after his deceased father. The second canoe was named after a deceased brother of the chief carver, Darius Faya. Each of the assistant carvers made his own carved human figure to commemorate a dead relative.

All the men of the village assist in cutting down an *os eyok* tree, which is put into the ground roots-up and decorated with the *senap* and other forest fruits in front of the site of the ceremonial house, facing the porch. They also cut down and assemble the material for the Emak Cem ceremonial house, which is built in one day. The central beam, carved at one end with the head of a crocodile (and at the other end with the long beak of a bird, Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1987:483-509), is put into position. Beyond its nose hang decorations of sago leaves. At the narrow end of the house the wall is installed, giving onto a porch with the carved head of the crocodile positioned over it.

The boys, the initiates, live in the ceremonial house for a couple of months. On the morning after they enter the house, the men of the village cut holes in sago trees for sago grubs to grow. The boys go fishing, and go hunting pigs. The mothers and fathers bring them food. Boys who fall ill go to the men's house and the living quarters, preceded by men who twirl bullroarers (*bian*), so the women will run and hide. When the sago grubs mature (after four to six weeks), the carvers of the spirit canoe get to work in the secluded back part of the men's house, on the side away from the river. The carvers receive plenty of food from relatives of the dead represented in the spirit canoe. At night they cover the carvings with sago leaves.

When the spirit canoe is ready, painted and decorated with young sago leaves and cassowary feathers, it is covered with sago leaves tied up with ratan. All the doors and openings of the men's house are closed with *atap*. There is more collecting of sago and sago grubs, feasting and drumming. The food is distributed but the initiates, still locked up in the ceremonial house, are not allowed to share in it. After an official praising of the carvers, the men untie

Polikarpus, a ritual dignitary, seizes a boy initiate by his feet and carries him head-down to the tip of the central beam of the Emak Cem ceremonial house. Yeni, Asmat, 1982. From Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:254.

the rattan around the sago leaves that cover the spirit canoe. Two women [impersonating the two mythical mothers], with white cockatoo feathers in their hair, their faces red with red earth, wearing their bags with white feathers, remove the sago leaves from the spirit canoe. Two men [impersonating the two characters from the underworld] blow their horns, one after the other. The singers and drummers announce that they will carry the spirit canoe from the men's house to the ceremonial house. Women remove the *atap* from the doors and openings of the men's house. The men push the prow of the spirit canoe through the door opening, but pull it back quickly twice as a show-off [as is done with newly made mbish poles]. The spirit canoe faces downstream in order to show the dead in the spirit canoe the route to the underworld, the abode of the dead. The third time, it is carried down to the Emak Cem ceremonial house and put on the floor of the porch.

An old man climbs the central beam. He lifts up an initiate, officially denoted as *batu pumter* ('child who leaps down', Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:255), by his ankles and moves to the front end of the beam. While being carried in this way, the boy opens up the roof by removing *atap*. He shouts: 'Come, my mother! Come, my father!' [Note that mother comes first.] Men

outside the ceremonial house pretend to shoot him and jab at him with their bows, arrows and spears.

Then the chief drummer enters the porch, presses his right foot on the sea monster of the spirit canoe, and rubs it with his calf [and genitals]. Then he slides his other foot over it.

The two women [mythical mothers] on either side of the door lift the spirit canoe while a hissing sound is heard from the *kasah*, a snake spirit [Yisbermerat, the mythical teacher of the proper songs], impersonated by a man dressed up with a headband of cuscus and with many feathers and rattan bands. Two initiates draw near, holding on in terror to the bottom of the drum of the official drummer. Like the drummer, they slide over the sea monster of the canoe. They are then lifted up and placed flat on the floor of the porch [not on the spirit canoe in this version] with their heads towards the spirit canoe. They are decorated with white, red and black colours. The snake spirit quickly cuts an *ofa*, a wavy scarification, into the boys' shoulders, backs and buttocks, using a mussel shell. This happens so swiftly that the boys only learn of it later.

What happens to the 'roof crashing' boy lifted by his ankles is not told in the report. When all the boys but two have come out and received their scarifications, women enter the ceremonial house. They ask: 'Have all the boys come out?' and get hold of them for scarification. This signals the formal end of the ritual.

The next morning at dawn, men and women put their sleeping mats one after the other in a row in front of the Emak Cem ceremonial house. The initiates and their sisters lie down one beside the other – initiate, younger sister, initiate, younger sister – in a long row. A man comes along with a sharpened shell and cuts scars on the chests of the boys and the girls. One boy after another stands to attention and is then struck suddenly from behind with a banana stalk: twice on the upper part of his shoulders to make his body grow and twice on his buttocks to make his penis grow and twice on the back of his knees [to strengthen his walk, perhaps]. The younger sisters also receive these blows, in order to promote their fertility and an abundant production of mother's milk. This is the end of the initiation ceremony; the boys join their families at their fireplaces, eat and sleep.

In 1995 Gunter and Ursula Konrad and Yufentias Biakai published a revised and expanded version of an earlier paper (Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1987) on Emak Cem myth and ritual after attending a celebration in the Yurat group of settlements of Northwest Asmat, including villages such as Kapi, Yamas and Shuru (Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995). The exact location of the celebration is not disclosed. From their detailed and valuable description the following information is culled, to which I add some comments.

1. Biakai ventures the suggestion that the spirit canoe of the ritual represents the mythical bark canoe fashioned by Ufiripic; his father did not tell him (p. 231).
2. The majority of the initiates are six to eight years old (p. 232).
3. The term *fir-fir* denoting the tree erected at the site of the ceremonial house has a number of further meanings: the ancestors, the dead during the period of celebration, reverent term of address for the dead (p. 232).
4. The names of the recent dead are mournfully enumerated while lime powder is flung at the tree before felling it. This also happens when felling the tree for the central beam (pp. 232, 234).
5. The beam is identified with the deceased after whom it is named. This is the reason why the tree is handled with care, must be carried on the shoulders of men and not flung into the river (p. 234).
6. The drum-shaped frontmost end of the central beam, called *wucaï*, adjoining the jaw of the crocodile, represents the top of a sago tree and might be a symbol of fertility (p. 234).
7. In view of the central significance of the Northwest Asmat spirit canoe we may now understand why the narrator of the Totepere myth (M3), a member of the Koperapoka people of the far eastern part of Mimika, maintained that this is the true myth of origin of Ema Kame. The canoe of this story is also associated with the dead and also travels to the underworld in the far western part of Mimika. This story seems to fit in with Asmat Emak Cem and in this respect constitutes a transition to Ema Kame as celebrated by the Kamoro, in a ritual in which the spirit canoe does not occur.
8. The ceremonial house seen and photographed by the Konrads (p. 234) is apparently only a model. It measures four by four metres, whereas the real thing in Mimika, according to Wollaston's (1912) observations, is much bigger (see Chapter II). The Asmat example was erected in a few hours. Presumably this was due to the Indonesian government's prohibition of Asmat ceremonies for several years and their tacit reintroduction in a quite different situation. The actual ceremonies that the Konrads and Biakai attended lasted only four days.
9. It is fascinating to learn from their report that about a metre above the fireplace of the model ceremonial house a board is attached between two posts, representing a *yirai* fish (p. 235). This board, together with the oval fish-shaped object hanging at the entrance and representing the *sawar* fish after which it is named (p. 239), apparently corresponds with the two *puru mane* boards of the Kamoro Ema Kame ceremonial house, centrepieces of their ritual. Their position in the house is exactly the same. Unfortunately, the precise symbolic meaning of the two Asmat fish is not given. However, it is said that touching the *yirai* fish board infuses

initiates with a sense of responsibility for and identification with the community (p. 239), while touching the *sawar* board is said to transmit to the initiates its spiritual abilities. Kamoro initiates similarly identify with the sacred boards by touching them. These boards represent their communal ancestors. Opposite the Asmat *yirai* fish board in the centre and attached to the wall posts, one finds a large statue (*tem as*) made of rattan, representing a spirit who guards the interior of the Emak Cem ceremonial house and bestows masculinity on the initiates (pp. 235, 239; photo p. 236). So a link between the Asmat boards and the ancestors seems plausible.

10. The official entrance to the house is closed off with a pandanus mat, and stays so until the initiation begins (p. 235). It is named after a deceased person (p. 253). Meanwhile, a small unofficial opening at the rear gives access to the house.
11. In the afternoon of the first day the initiates are taken into the ceremonial house through the back entrance. An official narrator of myths (*atakam ipic*) solemnly asks if all boys to be initiated are present. The assembled men loudly confirm that 'the children inside are our children' (p. 235). This is apparently a ritual statement of fact – similar to what the Kamoro do – meant in this particular case to inform the spirits that the initiates belong to the in-group.
12. At dusk the women hit the walls with their stone axes, producing a rattling noise meant, in my opinion, to frighten the initiates rather than to chase away evil spirits (p. 235). The initiates then imitate with vibrating voices the sound of flying foxes (p. 235), as the Kamoro initiates do also. The men, by way of ritual confirmation, respond by asserting again to the attending spirits that the initiates are their children.
13. The women then go home, while the men sing, drum and dance throughout the night. The initiates are instructed to be absolutely quiet, even when they are suddenly confronted inside by a hidden masked figure covered with mats (p. 236); compare this with the two hidden masked mythical mothers founding the Asmat/Kamoro ritual, who scared the boys with their sudden appearance.
14. The next day the men assemble in front of the men's house at dusk. An old man standing at the entrance to the ceremonial house solemnly inquires about the presence and the name of a particular initiate [who is presumably informed beforehand]. Then he asks whether the mother of that boy is at hand, and she confirms this: 'Yes, I am here, but please don't take the liver and heart out of my son's body.' Two men then enter the house, snatch the boy by his shoulders and legs, and put him on the *yirai* fish board. They pull and push his body forwards and backwards over the board. The boy cries: 'They are tearing the heart and liver out

A male figure representing a spirit guardian oversees the Emak Cem initiates.
Yeni, Asmat, 1982. From Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:236.

of my body.' The attending initiates are instructed to likewise cry and shout at full strength. These actions are repeated for every initiate (p. 236). [Apparently this is meant to scare the mothers outside.] The comparable Kamoro actions on the central board suspended in the middle of

the ceremonial house have a different meaning: these simulate birth from the ancestral mother. However, in spite of these differences in meaning, ancestral life force is believed to be transmitted from the central board to both the Kamoro and Asmat initiates by being suspended on it. Note the Asmat aggressive frightening demeanour, which is lacking in the Kamoro actions.

15. Later that same night, the men see to it that the women and children are shut up in their houses. Then, accompanied by the completely blackened initiates, they roam around going from house to house, while the initiates make a deafening noise by blowing on bamboo flutes. This is to scare women and children into believing that the spirits have arrived to cut the heart and liver out of the boys' bodies. The next day the women avenge themselves by waging a mock war [*imu*] against the men (p. 236). This reciprocal expression of gender antagonism, not noted as such by the authors, is in line with Kamoro behaviour at Ema Kame, though this happens at a different stage (see Chapter II).
16. After secluding the initiates, the men leave the settlement to build a large wooden fish weir (*cir*) near the river at some distance from the village (see photograph, p. 237). Both Asmat and Kamoro normally use such a construction to fence off a tidal creek for fishing. In this ceremonial context, however, it represents for the initiates the way Ufiripic was caught and drowned by his daughters. The fence is decorated with *fof manamok*, literally 'eyes of butterflies', that is, the eyes of the spirits, represented by squares of plaited rattan on poles (p. 237).
17. For the cultivation of sago grubs, the various families fell sago trees, then cut and mark square holes in them, so that the grubs will grow and multiply. As many as 1,200 trees may be felled for this purpose.
18. Then the spirit canoe, *wuramun* or *uramun*, is made and carved. *Wur* is said to mean thunder, *amon* or *amun* 'to call' (p. 238). Thunder is indeed interpreted by the Kamoro as a call for the 'soul' to leave the body (see Chapter V). The corresponding Kamoro term *puru mane*, denoting, however, not the spirit canoe but the two sacred boards representing the ancestors, literally means 'sacred two'. The spirit canoe in this particular case has a length of 8 to 10 metres. In one way or another, it depicts 22 recent dead (p. 263). Recognized carvers do most of the carving. However, individual male relatives are obliged to carve out the last details. They do so a few hours before the ceremony begins (pp. 239-40). Only then do the carvings come to life, that is, the spirits of the dead draw near. The attitude of the living towards the dead is ambivalent. They honour yet fear them. So the spirits should not be present too early and should leave in time. That at least is my interpretation of the reason for waiting until the last minute to finish the carvings.

The spirit canoe is carried from the men's house to the Emak Cem ceremonial house.
Yeni, Asmat, 1982. From Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:244.

19. In the late afternoon the master of ceremonies leads two women fully dressed up and adorned, representing the two mythical sisters, to the spirit canoe in the men's house. They take up positions one at the front and one at the back of the canoe, while the master of ceremonies exclaims in excitement: 'We wonder if the two of you recognize the children' (that is, the dead persons being commemorated). The two women, assisted by men, cover the carvings of the spirits with sago leaves. The men then take the spirit canoe on their shoulders and stride carefully to the entrance. The procession is preceded by an older man who holds in his hands a wooden staff, painted black, red and white, about 1.20 metres in length, representing the primeval snake (*amer nak*, 'black snake, the true one') who gave birth to the first human being and took him from the upper Sirec River to the present downstream location (p. 243). The bow of the spirit canoe is dragged repeatedly outside and inside the entrance, amid clouds of lime powder, bows and arrows, shouting and drumming. A young man, representing the initiates inside the Emak Cem ceremonial house, dances on the central beam above the porch.
20. The procession then moves slowly to the riverside, while the spirit canoe seemingly looks around. It is thrust three times towards the opposite side

Drummers silently cross the ritual secret house accommodating the spirits of the dead attending the Emak Cem ritual. Yeni, Asmat, 1982. From Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:249.

of the river downstream, in the direction of *safan*, the abode of the dead in the underworld. All of a sudden the hectic noise of voices, drums, bamboo flutes, and bullroarers stops. A long line of men on the riverside leaning against the walls of the men's house then start to weep passionately, their heads buried in their arms: after the joy of reunion follows the sadness of separation, the farewell to the beloved dead who are returning to the underworld (p. 244).

21. The procession then continues to the entrance of the Emak Cem ceremonial house, where the spirit canoe is placed on the porch. Singing and exaltation reach a crescendo. Axes, spears, paddles, and digging sticks are tucked in among the figures in the spirit canoe.
22. Early in the morning of the second day, the men and the totally blackened initiates board the canoes and paddle in a showy semicircle to a location on the shore some kilometres upstream on the village side. The men go ashore, remove the vegetation at some distance from the shore, and build a leafy temporary hut on poles with an open roof (p. 248), while the initiates paddle across the river in a sprint race, remove the black paint from their bodies, and collect edibles in the forest by way of testing their abilities. The temporary hut is called *kasha cem* (Kamoro: *kata kame*), liter-

Hidden under the entrance stairs of the Emak Cem ceremonial house, a dignitary makes small incisions in the back of the knee. Yeni, Asmat. 1982. From Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:259.

ally 'ritual secret house', not 'house of spirits' as the Konrads and Biakai suggest. The house accommodates the spirits of the dead, called up by chanting men. To them are offered the edibles from the forest collected by the initiates – and tobacco in case no edibles were found – after the men have told the initiates to return. Accompanied by the men, the initiates ascend the steps of the temporary hut on one side, quickly cross the room without anyone looking sideways, without anyone drumming, in absolute silence, descend the steps on the other side, directly board the canoes, and return to the village. Two small, stripped trunks covered with leaves are stealthily taken aboard to be hidden under the Emak Cem ceremonial house (pp. 248-9).

23. The next day the initiates are fully dressed up and adorned by their mothers' brothers and other relatives in the men's house, and their bodies are covered with red paint. Outside, the two trunks are processed for the secret fashioning of a ladder connecting the porch of the Emak Cem ceremonial house with the ground. The ladder is covered with leaves and made invisible.
24. In the early afternoon the initiates enter the ceremonial house through the back entrance. The two women representing the mythical sisters, their faces painted red and a ceremonial headhunting net draped around their breasts (it was mythical ancestresses who initiated headhunting and then handed it over to men, a mythical inversion) unwrap the carvings of the spirit canoe and take up their positions, one on each side of the mat that closes off the entrance.
25. The young man who represents the initiates and who is called *cuuk*, a name identical with the name of the piles supporting the central beam, again dances on the front part of the central beam. Some men remove the *atap* adjacent to the central beam. A dignitary, an older man, climbs it from the inside. The *cuuk* comes down and hands the first initiate, known as *batu pumter*, through the opened roof over to the man on the central beam. As described earlier, the initiate, head down, is flung outside the ceremonial house, where assembled men threaten him with spears, bows and arrows. The *batu pumter* is the first initiate to receive scarifications [not mentioned in the earlier version]. Furthermore, contrary to earlier versions he is not placed on the spirit canoe but on the ladder covered with leaves, face down. While men hold him tight, the dignitary, said to represent a spirit [the mythical Yisbermeyat?] hidden beneath the ladder and the leaves, carves a gash in the back of the initiate's knees. Sago flour is applied to his forehead. From now on, he belongs to the adult men and may dance with them (p. 256).
26. The two mythical sisters are then summoned by men to lift the mat closing off the entrance. They pretend to be surprised to see inside so many

Male initiates and their real or classificatory sisters lying on top of each other in front of the Emak Cem ceremonial house are hit with a banana stalk, to promote their growth. Yeni, Asmat, 1982. From: Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:261.

children who have arrived from the world of the souls and spirits, and invite them to draw near. A hesitant and frightened initiate comes along, touches the *sawar* board at the entrance with his forehead, and tries to set his teeth into a dangling lump of sago containing fried sago grubs, crosses the spirit canoe while touching the *okom* carving, symbol of masculinity and strength, with his genitals, and is then scarified on the ladder as described. All other initiates follow suit, including the last one, who is seemingly 'discovered' by men checking whether 'all our children' have come forward (p. 260).

27. On the last day, a long row of mats is laid out in front of the ceremonial house. Pairs of 'brothers' and 'sisters' and also previously selected future spouses, all of them of marriageable age, are placed on top of each other, girls on top of the backs of the boys [in earlier descriptions side by side]. I presume this symbolizes both brother-sister exchange and marriage itself. Then scarification of all of them in the back of the knee is performed, and they are hit with a banana stalk, as described earlier. The ceremony ends by applying sago flour to the forehead and chest (pp. 260-1).

Comparison

A comparison of the striking similarities and differences between the ceremonies of Ema Kame (Kamoro) and Emak Cem (Asmat) as described above may shed more light on the variegated history of the ethnic groups and on their different cultural orientations. To begin with, one may wonder why the Northwest Asmat Emak Cem tradition, apparently focused on the spirit canoe, the *wuramun*, has an explicitly stated mythical origin, whereas the far more elaborate Kamoro Ema Kame tradition, focused on the two sacred boards, the *puru mane*, places no emphasis on a mythical origin. The mythical origin is taken for granted, in contrast to an explicitly stated mythological origin of its structural counterpart, the Kaware ceremony. In the Kamoro central myth M4, explicitly associated with Ema Kame, the origin of the ceremony is not accounted for. Instead, the narrative emphasizes the function of the Ema Kame ceremonial house, as part of a row of ceremonial houses erected in order to kill the monster: it is erected twice. The monster receives the final blow in the second house from the end of the row. The Asmat whalebone ceremonial house (M7) seems to be a secondary 'modern' interpretation of this.

One also wonders why the use of a similar name for the two material foci goes along with an apparent difference in kind and meaning, the more so since the two ceremonial boards corresponding to Kamoro *puru mane* are present in similar positions in the Asmat ceremonial house, but named and signified differently.

The Asmat and the Kamoro admittedly concur in their narrative location of Ema Kame/Emak Cem's origin: the hinterland, characterized by the initial absence of canoes (M1, M2, M6). The canoe and its conditioning waterways are believed to have been introduced subsequently by creative acts or by theft (Asmat M2, inland Kamoro M5, and Asmat M6). The discovery of the sea and the coast rates both among the Kamoro and the Asmat as an exploit of the initially inland-based culture heroes of the ritual, travelling to the coast.

It seems likely that the powerful Asmat, whose ancestors in long-ago history originate from a more easterly situated inland area and who migrated to the coast, adopted the ritual from the pre-existent Nafuaripi residing inland, midstream. A brief police report (Algemene Politie 1961) provides some details about an Imake ceremonial house. The protruding front part of the central beam was said to depict the open beak of a fish [crocodile?]. Underneath was a spirit canoe and in its vicinity a *firi-firi*, a small spirit pole. The central beam, also called *imake*, represented specific dead persons. Subsequently, in more recent history, the invaders attacked and hunted them, like the Koperapoka Kamoro did. The devastated Nafuaripi retreated further inland to the upper reaches of the rivers in the hinterland of the far eastern part of Mimika and of Northwest and Central Asmat. Inland Northwest Asmat possibly modified the Emak Cem ceremony, as compared with its presumed predecessors; it then apparently spread in more recent times to several coastal Asmat settlements, though not to all of them. This is a process which was still going on during Zegwaard's stay in the 1950s.

What is the relation of the Kamoro and the Sempan (adjoining the Asmat) to the Nafuaripi? The Nafuaripi and Sempan languages have been shown to be closely related, if not identical. It is quite likely that culturally they are at least similar. I would even venture to suggest that not only the early, inland-oriented ancestors of the Sempan but also the ancestors of the Kamoro merged with or might even initially have been part of the Nafuaripi in long-ago history. Therefore, to their presumably not so numerous descendants, their inland location and the Ema Kame ceremony might have been self-evident.

Then the participants in more recent waves of migrations of powerful, more numerous coastal and Kaware-oriented Kamoro communities from far eastern to Central and West Mimika, set in motion by attacks and migrations of peoples bordering on or living in the present Asmat territory, might in their turn have adopted the Ema Kame ceremony from the pre-existing, smaller Kamoro-Nafuaripi, inland-oriented communities with whom they merged. The narratives of their migrations do include encounters with persons and small communities who already lived there, mainly upstream (Pouwer 1953b). To these presumably dominant coastal immigrants of relatively recent history, the inland origin of the Ema Kame ceremony was not self-evident. This might explain the ideologically inland orientation of Ema

Kame in Mimika, in spite of its universal occurrence. For the midstream and downstream-oriented Asmat, however, who did not merge, the ceremony is both factually and ideologically inland, although more recently it also spread to coastal communities.

It is all the more striking, then, that right across the intricate vagaries of history and migrations, across differences in cultural focus, across the narrative and ritual variants, all of the myths of Ema Kame and Emak Cem address the paradox of the genesis of humans: born out of one, yet born from two. One aspect they have in common, though in different ways, is that the role of the second party is either not identified or is disguised. Also, although in the majority of cases incest does play a part in the transition from kinship (mother-son, father-daughter) to marriage (husband-wife), incest among the Kamoro highlights the procreative erotic and physiologically nurturing functions of women in copulation and in the process of conception. Men had to learn the art of lovemaking from women. It is telling, though, that in the narratives no human child is born directly and unambiguously from these incestuous unions. The female contribution to society, both for the Kamoro and the Asmat, is that women, not men, are the procreators of human life. Note that Kamoro myths proclaim in name (M4) or in fact (M5) the land snake, the python, as the mother of mankind. The two primeval mothers of the Asmat culture heroes Kur and Sawar are also depicted as anthropomorphic snakes. In the Kamoro Ema Kame ceremony it is a female dignitary impersonating a watersnake who brings the effigy of the ancestral mother to life with a burning torch. In the Asmat Emak Cem ceremony its centrepiece, the spirit canoe, is preceded by the male carrier of a wooden staff, which represents the black snake said to be the primeval mother of mankind. The Kamoro, in their matri-oriented setting, even ascribe the origin of lovemaking to women. An incestuous union of mother and son produces tobacco as a gift that initiates betrothal and marriage. In Kamoro daily life it is mainly women who take the initiative in courting. Moreover, the mythical incestuous union explicitly produces the ingredients for the growth of the foetus.

Whereas in narratives women are credited with the physical genesis and multiplication of humans, their social genesis is ascribed mainly to men. It is male Kamoro culture heroes who, by cutting up a monster, achieve the social articulation of the Kamoro, and of other Papuan and foreign categories of the human race. This concept of the cutting up of a monster as an articulating symbol probably derives from the far western part of Mimika. In a similar yet different vein, it is the Asmat male culture hero Fumuripic, the initiator of the Asmat counterpart of the Kamoro Kaware ceremony, who articulates non-Asmat categories of the human race, including groups of foreigners, by

carving statues and bringing them to life by drumming.⁹

It is also the role of males, highlighted in numerous Kamoro and Asmat narratives, to create cultural institutions. It is true, though, that in an important version of the Asmat myth it is two mothers who initiate the Emak Cem house, the spirit canoe, and the ceremony, but, as the other versions make clear, they mainly serve as teachers of the males (as the Kamoro mother does with respect to lovemaking and copulation). It is their sons who, as culture heroes, then take the stage and perform the ceremony, either by imitation or on their own initiative. Males are also considered the main instigators of various other Asmat institutions. It is telling for their patri-oriented tradition that an Asmat male culture hero cum ancestor produces culture hero sons from his arms; however, note that these sons are generated by spirit women. The matri-oriented Kamoro oral tradition knows only of ancestresses producing culture hero offspring.

It is important to note that the external, differentiating foreign historical impetus still depends for its signification on a common internal motivation. It is telling that the final sequences of both the Ema Kame and Emak Cem myths, each in their own way, concur in attributing the creation of Western commodities, wealth and tools to the geographical-mythical, far western part of Mimika, the underworld.

The ceremony, both Kamoro and Asmat, clearly has its mythical roots in the female physiological genesis of man, versus his male social genesis. Ema Kame/Emak Cem signals the transition from childhood to adolescence. It is a rite of passage. In accordance with the myths, the ceremony is classified as 'female', not only by the Kamoro, but also by the Asmat.¹⁰ It is also telling that the Emak Cem ceremonial house and the location of the events of the ceremony, like its Kamoro counterpart, stand apart, whereas all the other Asmat rituals dealing with social genesis are directed from and performed in the men's house.

The Emak Cem centrepiece, the spirit canoe, both as object and as ritual, constitutes a perfect socio-cultural symbol of the life cycle: the honoured dead depicted in the canoe are invited to depart for their abode in the underworld, while the 'new arrivals', the newly born, the young males, are literally marked as their successors, stretched out on or in the vicinity of the spirit canoe. The marking takes place on the turtle, that is, the mythical lord of the land, the land of 'our children'.¹¹ The marriageable boys are marked again, but then

⁹ See Zegwaard in Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:96.

¹⁰ Gerard Zegwaard, personal communication, 5-6-1996.

¹¹ For an example of the turtle as lord of the land, see Zegwaard in Offenbergh and Pouwer 2002:213.

together with younger sisters outside the ceremonial house: the basic pair for social exchange between groups by means of marriage. So, filiation, descent and marriage, the basic mechanisms of social continuity, the business of males, are carved out in both a literal and a figurative sense during a 'female' ritual.

There is a striking functional similarity between the Asmat ritual centre-piece, *uramun* or *wuramun*, the spirit canoe, and its Kamoro counterpart *puru mane*, the two sacred boards. How do the two relate? Let us take the *puru mane* as the starting point for our comparison. As described in Chapter II, the board placed in the centre represents the putative matrilineal or matri-oriented ancestress of a neighbourhood, whereas the other board, serving as a threshold for the initiated who go over it and the uninitiated who go underneath it, represents the husband of the ancestress. The ritual simulates the birth from the ancestress. The sacred boards are part of an elaborate matricentric fertility complex displayed in the Ema Kame ceremony. It includes the famous statues of pregnant females, representing the ancestresses standing in front of the ceremonial house, examples of which were seen and collected as early as 1913 among the Sempan living inland on the Otakwa River. The location of these statues is by no means accidental: it points to the Nafuaripi/Sempan origin of the Kiawa and Ema Kame ceremonies. Also part of the complex are three sacred ceremonial shields varying in size, which depict the ancestress, her husband, and the *peraeko* subdivisions of a taparu kin group, together with their voices, the sacred rattles. A further part of the matricentric fertility complex is the Meamo platform, with its manifold vegetative paraphernalia promoting growth and fertility, and its staged bat dance of sexual intercourse. Add to this the female dignitary who brings the effigy of the ancestress to life with a torch. Last but not least, there is the dramatization of the mythical uprising of the *amoko kaoka*, the superwomen who wage war with men, and the glorious return of the initiates, who act out the narrative of the young men who deserted their wives by turning into hornbills. It is true that there may not be a myth which specifically accounts for Ema Kame, but this does not detract from the fact that the ritual is replete with denotations and connotations of central Kamoro myths and sacred songs. They include the (imported?) narrative and song of the monster from whose body mankind was socially articulated. The monster (and its explicit connection with the underworld cum world of the foreigners and their wealth) had such an appeal all over Mimika that it rates as the quintessential Ema Kame myth. Ema Kame is mythologically associated with the coast of Mimika's far western part immediately adjoining the hinterland, in spite of its real, historical inland provenance in the far eastern part of Mimika.

This elaborate complex emphasizing the female and matri-oriented orientation of Kamoro society and culture is simply missing from (or at least unreported for) the Asmat Emak Cem ceremony. The very elaborateness of the

Kamoro ceremony, contrasting with the far simpler Ema Cem ceremony of the Asmat, points in my view to Ema Kame as an age-old institution capturing the main orientation of former Nafuaripi-Kamoro, originally an inland-oriented culture and society, which was subsequently 'flooded' by migrations of much more numerous coastal communities for whom the 'male' Kaware ceremony was a major ceremony shared with the coastal Asmat.

Admittedly, a major element of the Kamoro complex, even the sacred centrepiece of Ema Kame, the set of *puru mane*, is present in the two Ema Cem boards (they are even positioned similarly), but it is not the element itself which matters; it is the relation of the element to the other elements of the complex, in other words it is the element as complement, as relatum, that counts. The Asmat boards, named after certain kinds of fish, the meaning of which is unfortunately unknown to me, are not likely to represent an Asmat ancestress and her husband. The Kamoro rite of acting out a matrilineal or matricentric emanation from the vagina of the ancestress carved out in the central board is absent in the Asmat ritual. On the relevant Asmat board the *mopere*, a pervasive motif in Kamoro carvings, does not occur. The special and sacred ceremonial shields, representing the ancestress, her husband, and her matrilineal offspring, are likewise absent in the Asmat ceremonial house. Instead, the two Asmat boards, apart from their general, non-specific identification with the spirits of the group, are used to scare the initiates and their mothers. The link of the initiates with specified dead persons of their yew is expressed and acted out in the spirit canoe. So there is a substantial shift in central signification from Kamoro *puru mane* to Asmat *wuramun*, in spite of some similarity in name. The spirit canoe belongs to the Asmat male-centred complex of warfare, to which also belong the multiple military and ritual war shields. The latter are part of *eco pok*, that is, the act of revenge and the multiple objects named after the persons killed in battle which constantly and compellingly remind the living in everyday life to take revenge. These objects include canoes and parts of canoes, houses and their components, spears, paddles, bags, dogs' teeth used for decoration, even dogs themselves and pigs. A bundle of firewood may be called after a person killed and then presented to people with the intention to urge them to take revenge.¹² The objects offer a vivid illustration of Shakespeare's 'The very dogs bark at me'. The elaborate complex of traits of warfare clearly demonstrates the main orientation or focus of Asmat culture. It is this central orientation which has reinterpreted the elements and complements of the Ema Kame ceremony borrowed from the inland Nafuaripi. It is paradoxical that the Asmat shields, which are so explicitly present in their society and culture, have nevertheless not been converted

¹² On this topic and for examples, see Zegwaard 1959.

into ceremonial shields (*yamate*) in Emak Cem, in contrast to the Kamoro Ema Kame in which ceremonial shields signifying the dead are a paramount feature. The Asmat war shields, including ceremonial ones, are evidently too much part and parcel of a different culture complex. Their manufacture is even the subject of a separate ceremony.¹³

Another example of a similarity in name which disguises a substantial difference in meaning and function is the use, by the Sempan and their Asmat neighbours, of a similar name, namely Kiewa *kasha* (ritual secret) and *kasha cem* (ritual secret house), for two quite different secret and sacred rituals, each deemed of major importance by its participants: the Kamoro Meamo ritual, staging fertility and sexual intercourse followed by regulated promiscuity, and the Asmat offering of gifts to and identifying with the spirits.¹⁴

One even wonders whether the ultimate Asmat ascription of Emak Cem to the myth of Ufiripic, who tried to convert his daughters into wives (M1), partially enacted in Emak Cem but absent in Ema Kame, is not in fact the result of an Asmat afterthought. A pre-existing theme, namely the paradoxical relationship of kinship to marriage, common to a number of Kamoro and Asmat narratives, may have been resorted to, irrespective of their specific ascription of Emak Cem to the mythical sisters and their sons (M7).

In spite of the differences arising from a dialectical interaction of Ema Kame and Emak Cem components with differing cultural orientations, the rituals do agree in the sense that both are a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence. As is usual with such rites of passage, the initiates are secluded and taught adult male secrets; they are confronted with spirits, laughed at, intimidated and frightened. In both rituals they are addressed as and ordered to behave like flying foxes (Kamoro: *tako*, Asmat: *tar*). In Kamoro daily life, flying foxes are a laughing stock.¹⁵

These creatures are associated with women. A small type of bat functions as a messenger in the central Kamoro narrative about the rebellion and trek of superwomen alluded to in the mock war of women with men in the course of the Ema Kame ceremony. In an Asmat narrative told in Ewer (Flamingo Bay), a set of aprons left behind in a bag suspended from the central pole of the men's house by the mythical woman Tewaterawoc and her equally well-known husband Biwirpic, appears to have been transformed into women when the husband returns to pick up the bag. He pities their fate in being left behind,

¹³ Yokapem, cited in Konrad, Konrad and Schneebaum 1981:44.

¹⁴ See Coenen 1963:70. See also the discussion of the bat ritual in Chapter II of the present book, and Konrad, Konrad and Biakai 1995:248-9.

¹⁵ Sowada 1980a; Zegwaard n.y.b; see also Zegwaard's comment on an Asmat myth collected and published by Sowada 1979, in Zegwaard n.y.a.

whereupon the women turn into flying foxes.¹⁶ One wonders whether there is a remote link between this Asmat story accounting for the female origin of flying foxes and the fact that in the Kamoro ritual the initiates behave like flying foxes when suspended from the central beam of the ceremonial house. The wings of flying foxes when hanging on the branches of a tree apparently evoke a comparison with women's aprons.

So, for men, initiates are a laughing stock associated with women, women who nursed them and from whom they will be separated when reaching adulthood. The Asmat scene of the roof-crashing boy symbolically shot at by men signifies the end of seclusion, but evidently also functions to frighten women.

Another common feature is that both the Ema Kame and Emak Cem ceremonies are explicitly meant to promote fertility. At the conclusion of the Emak Cem ceremony both the male initiates and their sisters receive blows to promote their growth and fertility. However, the Ema Kame ceremony is far more explicit and elaborate. The association of Ema Kame with female sex, gender, fertility and reproduction is far more explicit, variegated and sophisticated than its Asmat counterpart. This and other Mimika rituals excel in mimicry, theatrical effect, and sophistication. The explicit Kamoro Ema Kame association of female-male complementary opposition with central narratives and myths is striking. Ema Kame also includes vividly portrayed scenes and ceremonies, which are absent in Asmat Emak Cem: the rattan ceremony, the Tama ritual of women's secrets, the elaborate display of magnificently carved *yamate*, and last but not least, the glorious return of the initiates adorned with spectacular head ornaments of stylized hornbills. Finally, the Kamoro carvings decorating the beams are much more elaborate.

Admittedly, the spectacular carvings of the spirit canoe offer a magnificent display of craftsmanship, but on the whole the Asmat ceremony is far less sophisticated and elaborate than the Kamoro one. Also, there is a ceremonial inauguration of freshly made and magnificently carved war and ceremonial shields (*yamesh*), named after and representing selected males who have recently died. The mainly abstract carving pattern is clearly anthropomorphic. These shields are displayed in the men's house, not in the *emak cem*, and this ceremony belongs to the male sphere. For more details see Yokapem (1981) and Zegwaard (n.y.g.).

A third common feature, which physically marks the transition to maturity, is constituted by scarifications. Coenen noticed in the 1960s a scarification on the left buttocks of Kamoro men and women above the age of 45, a sign of their having fully participated in the last complete Kiawa/Ema Kame rituals

¹⁶ Baudhuin, Firkoman and Capu 1996:183-6, as cited by Van der Zee 2005:281.

35 years earlier, celebrated in the 1920s or 1930s. There were not many such persons left. The scars were oval-shaped, resembling a *mopere*, a navel with a cross inside (Coenen 1963:70). It is likely that these were applied outside the ceremonial house, as during Emak Cem. Wollaston, when he observed a ceremony around the sacred board in the centre of the house, would no doubt have noticed scarification if it had been performed at that time, but he makes no mention of it. Scarifications did exist at that time (1910). Wollaston's team member Cecil Rawlings reports that all men in the settlements of Wakatimi and Parimau, downstream and upstream the Mimika River respectively, had a 'tribal mark' on their buttocks in the shape of a diamond with three lines radiating from the corners (Rawlings 1913:60). He noticed the same 'tribal mark' in the settlement of Ibo, upstream on the Kamora River. Women did not have such marks (Rawlings 1913:145).

One may visualize the historically mediated relationship between Ema Kame and Emak Cem rites of passage by means of a triangle. The top corner represents a 'female' matri-oriented elaborate fertility complex. The left corner of the base stands for an extension to an articulation of mankind and of wealth, conditioned by an interaction between the western coastal part of Mimika as the main locus of historical commercial intrusion by various categories of foreigners and their wealth on one hand, and on the other the participants' association of the western coast with the underworld. The right corner of the base represents a meeting, merging, reinterpretation, and even partial replacement of the complex in confrontation with another society, namely the intruding Northwest Asmat, conditioned by a male and patri-oriented cultural orientation of warfare and headhunting.