CHAPTER IX

Male to female

Social opposition versus communal solidarity

The myths

This chapter takes us to the 'male' socio-ritual sphere. Two out of the three Kaware myths (M1, M2) summarized in Chapter III are strikingly similar to, yet different from, their Asmat counterparts.¹ In Kamoro M1 and its Asmat counterpart the two heroes of each set, though named differently – Kamoro Muanuru and Asmat Yenip – are also namesakes, one from the world-in-between of humans, the other from the underworld. In this respect they are similar to the Kamoro heroes of the sun and the moon related to the upper world. Likewise, antisocial behaviour, namely brother-sister incest on the initiative of the brother (unlike Ema Kame) in the case of the Kaware and Yew Mbu myths, adultery with an older brother's wife (Kamoro sun myth), and theft by a neglected orphan (Kamoro moon myth), drives the hero out of his world and into the world beyond. In Kamoro M2 and its Asmat counterpart the terrestrial hero, Kamirima and Fumuripic respectively (similar names, different language), arrives at the underworld after drowning in a dubious accident after having intercourse with his mate's mistress.

Also in line with the upperworld narratives, the earthly hero of M1 and his Asmat counterpart get the better of their underworld namesake. The plot is identical. They use a trick to pilfer their namesakes' 'fried' mussels or sago grubs (Asmat). In addition, the Asmat earthly hero appears to be superior to his namesake in being physically complete. The underworld hero's eye sockets and anus are stuffed. His earthly namesake opens them up with a bamboo knife. In spite of this benevolent service, the Asmat hero from below, like his Kamoro counterpart, punishes the earthly visitor for stealing his sago grubs (or mussels) by tricking him into the arms of a human mbish in the central pillar or – as in Mimika – a separate spirit pole. The victim gets stuck and is in the process of being tortured to death when his earthly relatives and affines arrive

¹ For the full texts, see respectively Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:108-11, 98-102, 102-8, 93-8.

just in time to chop off the head of the underworld malefactor. The earthlings get off with the booty. There is a difference, though. The Asmat loot includes almost every item of material culture: the blueprint of the men's house and other ceremonial houses, war shields, eating bowls, various kinds of bags, a variety of tools, drums, and all kinds of ceremonial outfits and carvings. With canoes brimming to capacity, the men return to the village in triumph: 'That is why we now have men's houses, why we wage war and hold festivals. Thanks to Yenip, life has become worthwhile. [...] Some people learned to drum and sing; others learned to work wood. Each family was assigned a task.'² Before the exploits of Yenip, 'when people had not been living in this country for long, there were no *yew* [yew]. [...] Each family lived and took care of itself. Their lives consisted of nothing but collecting food, eating and sleeping. There was no entertainment (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:102).' In short, the Asmat ascribe their cultural heritage to the exploits of Yenip. This also includes the prescribed way in which the body of a victim of headhunting is dealt with. Yenip's sister cuts off the head of his underworld namesake after he has been killed. The rest of the body is butchered and cut up as they used to do with pigs of the forest. So Yenip-from-below rates as the first victim of headhunting.³ This 'total' ascription of society and culture to the exploits of Yenip seems to reflect and validate the central position of the yew and the men's house in Asmat society and culture. The Kamoro, however, restrict their narrative ascription of cultural items to the blueprint and paraphernalia of the Kaware house and ritual, but do include all the sacred songs of all their rituals, taught to them by a *noma* watersnake in the vicinity of the ceremonial house. This specific Kamoro addition seems to highlight the dominant position of males in oral communication with the sacred (*puri*) world of the dead and the spirits. In the Asmat story the watersnake teaches Ton Yenip the proper yew songs; he was singing the wrong ones. The Kamoro also owe to the culture hero Muanuru all foreign garden produce, such as coconuts, white pumpkin, papaya, breadfruit, taro and sweet potatoes; these are not mentioned in the Asmat version. This may equally reflect the important though not exclusive say of males in the ownership of garden produce, especially of the arboreal kind (Pouwer 1955a:151-6).

Kamoro M2 and its corresponding Asmat narrative initially revolve around the theme of life and death. An anthropomorphic sea eagle resurrects the dead body of the culture hero, washed up on an island, by spreading medicine on its vital parts with a smouldering stick (Asmat). In the Kamoro version the body is revived by a variety of scratching birds and stinging ants and wasps.

² Zegwaard in Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:108.

³ For details of the apportionment, see Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:107.

This reflects what happens when, for instance, a woman in labour faints: the *ipu* (Kamoro), the spiritual life force that is supposed to have briefly left the body, is recalled by means of applying a smouldering stick to vital body parts. When the Asmat hero is brought back to life, he says that he did not even know he had been dead (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:95).

After this common start, the Asmat and Kamoro versions, both widely known throughout the area, diverge. The Asmat hero, returning to the mainland and feeling lonely, builds himself a yew house and carves out men and women on small poles, and they come to life through his drumming and singing (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:96). I presume that these 'small poles' are believed to constitute the foundation piles of the first men's house from which humans originate (Eyde 1967:335). Eyde makes the important observation that

[e]laborately carved poles resembling foundation pilings [though bigger] are carved during the spirit mask ceremonial cycle [Yipae] among the Keenok [inland Northwest Asmat], but not, to my knowledge, among the Kawenak [lowland Central Asmat around Flamingo Bay]. Even among the Kawenak, however, the pilings of men's houses which perform the Jipaj ceremonial cycle are crudely carved into human form. (Eyde 1967:335.)

While travelling west immediately after his creative act, Fumuripic repeats the exercise, thus bringing to life the people of other Asmat yew, of the neighbouring Kamoro settlements, and of other Papuan locations as far as Kaimana in the far western part of Mimika. He also creates the Surabaya people (white men), and arranges for the present location of Kaokonao, where he builds a big men's house and supplies the local people with iron axes. He then returns to Asmat, to the Fai River, where two of his sons supplied with guns were already living (probably a reflection of a police station in this area). He leaves for Kaokonao a second time, calls in there for a big feast, but then discovers that the people have stolen his axes. He shoots them all, but for one man and one woman from each river (who then multiplied). He then proclaims himself to be the District Officer, and arranges for his children to join him: they become the Chinese traders (who had a store in Kaokonao) and look after his supplies.

So the Asmat story accounts for their neighbours and for the foreigner, his wealth and power. By far the greater part of the myth deals with foreigners. The section on the District Officer was added by men from Ewer who happened to attend the telling of the story by men from Shuru (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:97). This second part of the Fumuripic narrative, rather than being on a par with the second part of the Kamoro Mamirima story, resembles the Mirokoatayao story of Ema Kame. The two heroes have in common that they carve out the social groups of their kin, though in different ways: one

from the flesh of the monitor lizard, the other from piles of the men's house. In this way the previously unknown is appropriated, 'kamoroized' and 'asma-tized' respectively. The killing of the monstrous monitor lizard in the ceremonial houses constructed by the Kamoro hero is located on a beach on the far western border of the Kamoro area. The site of the men's house built by the Asmat hero is also located far to the west: on the shore of the mainland opposite the island where he was brought back to life. This site is said to be near the mouth of the Owap River on the far western border of the Asmat area. He himself originates from the Sirec River to the east in Central Asmat. (The site is not too far removed from the Kamoro island of Puriri in Pisang Bay, where Fumuripic's Kamoro namesake Mamirima is said to have been revived.) The Fumuripic narrative, like the Mirokoatayao narrative, is sung but not acted out during the Yew Mbu and Ema Kame rituals. This is another parallel, which might have a bearing on the 'foreign' subject matter.

The second part of the Kamoro Mamirima myth, instead of dealing with the articulation of social groups, foreign commodities and power, exemplifies Kaware ritual. Mamirima not only constructs its ceremonial house on the model seen in the underworld – like Fumuripic who builds the first men's house, the ritual centre of most Asmat ceremonies – but also initiates the ritual of male adolescents, who lie down at the central supports of the house as if dead, without a fire or loincloth, entirely naked, and with drawn faces like the dead. Evidently this is an enactment of the hero's death, followed by an enactment of his subsequent return to life (see Chapter III). The story also tells of his invention of the drum, in which he is assisted by a fish, which hollows out a block of wood. The drum serves to accompany the sacred songs acquired in M1. The story continues with the hero carving out a mbitoro and making the *nokoro kao* boards for the symbolic canoe of the culture hero Nokoro, two crucial Kaware ritual attributes. A malevolent earth spirit is annoyed by the drum, tramples it to pieces and kills the hero, who is hidden in the drum. His parents, meanwhile, arrive on the scene, mourn their son, and avenge his death by beating the evil spirit to death. They then thrust their lances into the sand of the shore: they wage a battle against the evil comrades of the killed spirit. This battle is acted out on the beach as a spectacular show: it marks the ritual end of the Kaware ceremony. Finally, in the story as well as in the ritual, Kaware is concluded by a social ceremony: a massive distribution of pile-worms and mussels among the guests 'from the east and the west', as the story has it (Offenberg and Pouwer 2002:102). All these enactments (except the distribution of food) are absent in the Asmat ritual.

So, the Kamoro differ from the Asmat in that there is a close correspondence between the myth and the ritual. In Tipuka, which rates as the Kamoro main centre of Kaware, the initiates are even confronted with the hero's dead body, while the Sempanoweof Inawka, who do not celebrate Kaware, never-

theless re-enact his resurrection by birds (Chapter III).

The virtual absence of correspondence between the Asmat Fumuripic myth and the ritual of Yew Mbu/Tow Mbu on the one hand, and on the other hand the similarities to myths accounting for the genesis of ethnic groups, including the ethnic groups of foreigners and their wealth, give credence to Eyde's (1967:335) suggestion that Fumuripic's creation of humans from foundation piles of the original men's house is associated with Yipae, rather than with Yew Mbu and Tow Mbu. In addition, foundation piles of men's houses, where their occupants perform the Yipae ceremonial cycle or the related Firao Wu cycle, are carved into a human form, whereas piles of houses, where the men perform different cycles, are not (Eyde 1967:96). The sacred songs about Fumuripic (see Chapter VI) are performed together with songs of the Yipae heroes Kurap and Sarawap in the course of the Yipae ritual. Since Yipae originates from inland Northwest Asmat and this region is adjacent to inland Nafuaripi to whom the Sempanowe are related, the very fact that the Sempanowe of Inawka (who do not practise Kaware, yet re-enact the resurrection of the hero) seems to point to an original connection between Fumuripic and Yipae. Yipae relates to the Mbish ritual and to Emak Cem as the 'female' component of social reproduction of Asmat society. Its 'male' counterpart, Yew Mbu, is associated with political power and communication with the underworld and the upper world.

The Kamoro Kaware myth M3, which has no Asmat mythical parallel (although it does have a ritual one, as we shall see), is partially a 'male' inversion of the 'female' Asmat Emak Cem myth of Ufiripic and his daughters (Chapter VII, M1). In Kamoro M3, the widower, Kinako or Nokoro, is cheated by his daughters. He deserts them by leaving for the underworld in a short and heavy ironwood canoe of his own making. He leaves behind a longer model of it for them. This is the mythical predecessor of the traditional river-going dugout canoe. In the course of the story the daughters turn into tidal trees subject to submersion, ever since then tormented and shaken by their father as a punishment for shaming him. In the Ufiripic story it is the other way round: the father cheats his daughters into marrying him. When they find out and drown him, he turns into a turtle, ever since then considered to be the sacred local lord of the land. Not he but his daughters leave for the underworld with a prototype of a canoe of their father's making, his invention left for them. He orders them to go west. In line with the 'female' Ema Kame/Emak Cem orientation, these women are instrumental in the making and acquisition of earlier Western wealth by their male companion on the far western border of Mimika. It is interesting to note that Nokoro, as well as being acted out in the 'male' Kaware ritual, also turns up as a Kaware counterpart of 'female' Ema Kame by the acquisition of contemporary Western wealth in East Mimika. This has materialized since the arrival in the 1960s and 1970s of the huge Freeport Indonesia mining enterprise, which

excavates copper and gold and attracts Kamoro labourers from west to east. It so happens that Freeport's Portsite complex, including a facility for drying copper concentrate and for loading it onto ships, situated at the mouth of the Tipuka River, is adjacent to an island called Nao Nokoro by the Tipukans, or Karaka (lobster) island by outsiders. This island is part of the territory of Tipuka, the main location of Kaware celebrations. Its name means 'Nokoro in the shadow (or invisible)' (Drabbe 1937:86). At high tide it is submerged, and therefore invisible. Hence the belief that Nokoro has resided beneath the island ever since he left his daughters.⁴ An Atuka group of men moved to this island in the early 1970s to work for Freeport at the Portsite Amamapere. They did not compensate Tipuka for the use of their island, for '[t]hey [the Tipukans] never come out here to challenge us because they are afraid of a giant whale that according to their stories lives just on the other side of this island' (Harple 2000:201). It seems likely that this whale impersonates Nokoro, who rocks his daughters, alias the tidal trees, with huge waves. Tidal waves are indeed heavy in this area, due to the shallow sea. It is also interesting, as Harple rightly notes, that the Tipuka mythical fear of Nokoro is resorted to by the Atuka mining personnel to justify their occupation of the island without compensation. There may be even more to it. Harple refers to a solemn prediction (*imakatiri*) in which an elderly man, Natalis Nokoryao, from his hospital bed in 1960, 'claimed that he had prepared roads for cars at Timika [the inland main site of Freeport] in order to receive goods that would arrive on large boats. He went on to say that the goods and the boats were already present, but not always visible' (Harple 2000:184). He 'held that at some point the goods would become visible and very quickly be spread throughout Mimika'.⁵ Numerous Kamoro came to his bedside (Harple 2000:185). His cargo-cult-like prediction was made in an atmosphere of high expectations raised by the activities of the Dutch colonial government and initial explorations by a Dutch company, a predecessor of Freeport. The prediction came true. That same year a company expedition reached the Ertsberg, thus confirming Nokoryao's prediction, although political circumstances delayed its actual realization (Harple 2000:196). Unfortunately, we do not know whether the name Nokoryao, meaning son of Nokoro, is merely coincidental, or whether it was given or claimed on purpose as a reminder of the culture hero.

⁴ For this literal meaning, see Harple 2000:201.

⁵ Harple 2000:185, citing Mampioer 1961:11.

The rituals

Eyde (1967:334-5) notes that there is a tendency for Asmat ceremonial cycles to be arranged in pairs: another manifestation of dual organization. The inauguration of a men's house and the sago grub ritual is such a pair. Although the cultivation and consumption of sago grubs are part of almost every Asmat ceremonial, the connection between the inauguration of a men's house and the sago grub ritual is intrinsic and strong (Zegwaard 1953b). The sago grub ritual is also part and parcel of Kamoro Kaware, but is explicitly associated with Nokoro (see Chapter III). This is not so among the Asmat, at least not explicitly. Zegwaard's report is based on observations by David Yakafa, a Sempan assistant teacher from Otakwa, who attended the ceremonies in Kapi, Northwest Asmat, celebrated from 7 January to 29 March 1953. His findings tally by and large with Zegwaard's own experience observing these ceremonies in Shuru, in December 1954.

The Kapi recently lived together with the Ao-Marpac, but a war in the region and brawls with Ao-Marpac occasioned a retreat. Its 300-350 inhabitants were organized in two sets of paired *yew mopan*, hence two times two, Amnes-Taray and Kaponon-Kapi. The four men's houses or quarters were situated in that order on one side of the river, from upstream to downstream. Amnes was the host of the ceremony, assisted by Taray; Kamtar, a fairly young man from Amnes, was the leader. On 7 January all the men of the village went to a particular site in order to inspect the number and quality of mature sago trees to be selected for the cultivation of a large number of grubs, a sort of stocktaking by the feast givers meant to show their generosity to the guests, namely the two other *yew*. At night there was *yi muc* singing in the village: songs (*muc*) about *yi*, the sacred 'in the beginning', by professional singers and drummers. The next day temporary shelters were made on the site. Kamtar invited volunteers for felling the first sago trees. After some [merely theatrical?] hesitation, a man of the host *yew* volunteered, assisted by two others. He was presented with an axe by Kamtar; its acceptance committed him and his helpers to providing the singers with plenty of food during the ceremony. Four men representing the other *yew* also offered their services. The seven volunteers selected four adjacent mature sago trees, one for each *yew*. While felling these, they saw to it that the trees crashed down simultaneously with one impressive thud. These acts were accompanied by songs sung by the official singers about cutting the tail (*epe*) of a tree kangaroo and the juicy top (*wu*, 'palmito, millionaire's cabbage') of the sago tree. The two extremities (*epe*) apparently have their vital energy in common [compare this with Kamoro *ipu enakoa*]. Also, four axils of palm leaves were cut for making four bowls, one for each *yew*. Finally, four cylindrical blocks of about 80 by 35 centimetres were cut out of four trees [or one tree, according to informants from elsewhere].

These, representing the four yew, would serve as ceremonial containers for the heap of sago grubs at the ceremony.

These acts ceremonially announced the start of massive felling of trees, in which many personally owned square holes were made, serving as cultivation beds for the sago grubs, which take about eight weeks to mature. During this period the sacred songs about Ton Yenip and Aman Yenip of M1 were performed at night and repeated many times by professional singers. The singing rose to a climax at sunrise, and, similar to its Kamoro counterpart, was attended by every adult and young man.

New canoes were made in this period. However, hewing canoes is not restricted to one ceremony but also occurs during rituals such as Emak Cem and Yipae. Songs in honour of deceased persons carved out in a sitting position at the bow of the canoe are also performed repeatedly.

If the bark of the blocks of wood is so dry that it makes a 'krr' noise when it is scratched, the sago grubs have matured. On 2 March the grubs were ready for consumption. The next day men left for the woods to collect materials for building a new men's house. The bachelors in particular were assiduous. Women and children were not allowed on the premises. After three days of keen work, the materials were ready. The construction of a men's house is described in detail by Eyde (1967:90-7). Here I merely note some distinguishing features. The men of Kapi cleared the vegetation from a rectangle of about 54 metres on each side. Around this clearing, piles stripped of bark, 5 to 6 feet long, cut with points at one end, notched on the other end, and spaced about a metre apart, were pushed into the ground by groups of men. They climbed on them or embraced them, giving a loud 'vuh' with each heave that forced the pile into the ground. Zegwaard notes that heaped trunks reinforce the muddy ground of the rectangular clearing. The construction has to be solid to accommodate hundreds of people, including many guests, and must stand up to massive dancing and stamping. On this foundation a floor of rounded hard outer layers of sago trunks, face upwards, is laid on and tied to underlying joists with the piles as their support. The piles are lashed together with poles running the length of the house. Two horizontal lines of poles join long vertical wall-poles over the full length of the house. Walls are braced with split ribs of sago fronds. A line of very long posts (*yipic oc*), extending 5 to 6 feet above the walls down the length of the centre of the house, supports the roofbeam. These alternate with shorter posts (*mis os*), each with an arm sticking out and upwards (an aerial root stood on its head) that support in their crooks the poles on which the rafters rest; the rafters in turn support a thatched roof. Provisions are also made for a covered porch at the front of the house.

In Kapi the shorter posts were not carved. Usually crude carvings represent deceased relatives of a household, the members of which sit and lie underneath and between these posts around their fireplace. A square about 3 by 3

feet formed by four poles surround the fireplace; a rack above the fireplace serves to store firewood, fish, meat, weapons and other personal possessions. In the new men's house in Kapu there were seventeen fireplaces, each corresponding to a door opening: eight upstream, eight downstream for each moiety of the Amnes [or for each yew of the pair; the description is not quite clear on this point], and a common fireplace in the middle. The space at the rear running the length of the house near the central beam was reserved for living quarters. Its width of about two metres was considerably less than the adjacent open space on the front of about three metres over the full length of the house for public use, walking, dancing, sitting and lying. This division was reflected in the roof: its rear side was shorter and steeper than its front side (Zegwaard n.y.e:3). The front wall or parts of it are often left uncovered as a reminder of unavenged relatives (Zegwaard n.y.e:3).

The construction of the men's house was completed in one day. The neighbouring villages of Kapi, Yeni and Atat were then invited to attend the inauguration of the house.

This began with a festive testing of its strength. Men and boys trampled the floor over its full length while beating shields with daggers. Bachelors' houses upstream the Utumbuwe and Sirec Rivers are inaugurated by women dancing in it for a full night and morning (Zegwaard n.y.e:3). Sometimes men of other yew, with the approval of the builders, playfully attempt to ruin the new house by forceful dancing and stomping.

On 8 March men and women left together for the sago grub sites to collect the grubs and in particular to fill the four ceremonial bowls made earlier. These bowls are named after living or deceased of the four yew, particularly murdered male or female members. Their bride-receivers are the stewards of these bowls and it is their duty to fill them; for instance, one bowl, named after a living man called Kakay, was administered and filled by his daughter's husband. Meanwhile, a number of men in the village prepared a long cylindrical tube about 3 metres long, made of pandanus leaves with the sides of the leaves sewn together. It is called *samu mini*, meaning spirit of a decapitated member of one's own yew. It was placed in the centre of the new house. The tube was named after the host's main wife, who was deceased. A special platform was built above it. The trays stuffed with grubs were provisionally stored in the vacated men's house and decorated with paint, feathers, and young sago fronds. Large quantities of grubs were stored in family houses. At night the trays and the four cylindrical blocks were taken to the new house. The blocks were placed in a square around the bottom of the tube, thus constituting a container sharing its name with the tube. The women danced wildly, and the drumming was highly excited. The grubs were placed carefully into the tube by women [and men?], who emptied and refilled the trays. The quantity of grubs was so huge that a surplus was deposited on the platform. A Taray dig-

nitary, a young man, was the master of ceremonies. He inherited the function from his father, a renowned storyteller. He sang: 'We, as numerous as parrots, will eat today the sago grubs of ...', and then enumerated three sites. The people distinguished between grubs consumed during the drumming sessions and grubs consumed in honour of the new men's house. Bride-receivers of the host slowly unbound the upper sides of the tube, seeing to it that no grubs came out until the moment the lower sides were opened up. Then the grubs tumbled out in large quantities and spilled over the enclosure. The adolescents fled in all directions. The grubs were then distributed, first to the men of Yeni and Atat, then to the men of Kapom and Kapi, and finally to the men of the hosting yew of Amnes and Taray. The massive consumption and distribution of sago grubs, promoting a sense of community, probably has connotations of fertility. Sowada insists that it was at this time that new *papish* partners were selected and that communal wife-swapping was celebrated. At the conclusion of this phase in Ac there was mass wife-swapping (Trenkenschuh 1970c:37).

On 10 March the guests returned home and the people of the village went fishing. On 11 March some men worked on their new canoes, while others took it easy. On 12 March festivities resumed. Now it was women's day, their turn to celebrate. Fully dressed up, they danced on the premises of the men's house. Kamtar's bride-receivers made a new tube, with a different name (*acir*), made of different material: sheaths of the sago palm decorated with big leaves of a passion flower which are used in mock battles; hence the name *nao* (killing) in a headhunting party. The tube was named after a festive leader's young daughter who had died when the ceremonies began. The same young man acted as ceremonial leader. The tube was opened in three stages by bride-receivers, during which there were three bouts of ceremonial praising of headhunting achievements in three locations. Again the young men fled when the sago grubs tumbled down. A number of older men took this opportunity to collect and hide a good number of grubs for their own secret consumption. By so doing they acted out what the culture hero Yenip-from-above did when he deceived Yenip-from-below. Zegwaard notes that during the ceremony in Ayam older men even made a double bottom in the tube to secure their secret share of the catch. It is this observation of the Asmat ceremony which makes intelligible a similar act by Kamoro older men during the Kaware ritual: secret consumption of grubs (see Chapter III). Women have priority in the distribution of sago grubs. There was drumming, singing and dancing until dawn. In Amborep (November 1952) and Shuru (December 1954) women danced in the men's house.

After a fortnight's rest there was a spirits' (*nat*) play by women on 25 March. The men left the village in their canoes in a semicircular war formation. The young men went fishing while the older men stayed in temporary huts. In the

village a number of older women, impersonating spirits wearing mock battle-dress made of big leaves as mentioned earlier, chased the younger ones with fronds of sago leaves; this mock battle went on for hours. At dusk all the men returned, blowing on bamboo horns as if returning from a headhunting party. The young men meanwhile shared their catch of fish with the older ones. As soon as the women heard the horns, they stopped the game. A communal fish meal concluded the day.

After a few days of collecting sago, the festivities continued at dawn on 27 March, by acting out how Yenip-from-above evaded his namesake while pilfering his sago grubs by moving round the row of burning firewood over the full length of the men's house, in a direction opposite to the direction his namesake was moving in. A row of burning firewood was placed over the full length of the men's house. Young men from upstream Amnes and Taray lined up on the upstream side of the men's house, and young men from downstream Kapom and Kapi lined up downstream. While singers performed 'in the beginning' songs, the two parties shifted their position: from upstream to downstream and the other way round. This game of running youngsters was repeated many times, for about two hours. Then people were free to take a nap, but everybody was on deck again for the final sunrise singing and dancing (as in Mimika).

The ceremony ended with another massive exchange of sago grubs. On 28 March everyone except the singers and drummers collected large quantities of sago grubs at the cultivation sites. At dawn part of the harvest was tacked on sticks and taken to the men's house. First of all, the singers received their share from everybody. Then a ceremonial exchange was performed between the paired upstream yew on one hand and the paired downstream yew on the other. The upstream ones took their grubs to the centre of the house and offered these to the downstream yew, then the latter moved to the centre and reciprocated. The grubs were consumed at the individual fireplaces. Singing and dancing continued till sunrise. After this collective exchange there was also an individual exchange. All social and individual relations were expressed and confirmed by these exchanges. On later occasions these exchanges were sometimes recalled as *ibu ipic*: 'the man (*ipic*) with whom I exchanged'. On the same night four large parcels of about 125 x 15 centimetres stuffed with large quantities of grubs were made, roasted and stored in racks. The next day these parcels were exchanged among the four yew and ceremonially carried to the canoes. They were taken to the temporary shelters for consumption. Men of note and the singers stayed there and enjoyed eating the grubs, while the others went fishing. After some days of rest or working on canoes, the last of the grubs were eaten. It was now time to move seawards and enjoy fishing.

The container for sago grubs in the ceremonial house of Kaimo village being prepared for the *basu suangkus* ritual. Kaimo, Asmat, 1982. From: Konrad, Konrad and Sowada 2002:153.

In a comment on an illustration of a container for sago grubs used at the initiation of a new men's house in Yao-Sokor, in 1978, after 20 years of prohibition, Schneebaum (1985:105) opines that this container, known as *basu suangkus*, is unique for some Keenakap-speaking villages of upstream Sirec River and surroundings. Zegwaard (1988b) disagrees; according to him the *basu suangkus* is merely a local variant of the *samu mini* container as described above. It differs only in that the Yao-Sokor

four cylindrical pieces, cut out of one trunk, are interconnected by a mat serving as a bottom of the container. The two horizontal sections also have carved human figures at each end. This container constitutes to my mind the fascinating 'missing link' with the Kamoro Kaware container for sago grubs, also provided with a mat serving as a bottom. This container represents *nokoro kao*, the outer form or cover shell (*kao*) of the short sinkable (ironwood) canoe of the culture hero Nokoro, by means of which he travels underwater to the underworld (see Chapter III). The tube is missing in the Kamoro ritual, but 'right' and 'left' men do throw large quantities of sago grubs into the canoe container; the dancing Nokoro impersonator standing in his canoe container is surrounded on his left and right by large heaps of sago grubs that are then distributed, as in the Asmat case. It seems likely that the Asmat containers are also at least reminiscent of canoes. Hence the human figures representing deceased persons of note, carved on the imaginary bows of the Yao-Sokor container. These persons are explicitly sung about in the ritual song *Ci Bi So*, literally the (canoe's) bow song, performed during the period of maturation of sago grubs and on the day the tube is opened for women, a tube that explicitly connotes war and headhunting parties. Although, at least as far as we know, Nokoro is missing in the Asmat myth and men's house ritual, the ceremonies and massive ceremonial distribution of sago grubs of Kamoro and Asmat are similar in their evocation of threat and war by men in canoes. There is a difference, though. In the Kamoro case Nokoro standing in his canoe exhorts the women to take good care of 'us men'. His call is yet another demonstration of gender opposition. The men board canoes for a

risky and demanding trip inland to cut timber for new canoes; they run the risk of falling victim to an attack. The Asmat case evokes its very counterpart: not the victims but the initiators of an attack, men boarding canoes for a war party. The emphasis is on gender solidarity in the face of war. Both men and women act out a mock war, each in their own way. Kamoro and Asmat final ceremonies have in common a massive distribution of the powerful delicacy of mussels or sago grubs.

Conclusions

The intricate web of connections between myths, rites and social reality, and a comparison of the Asmat and Kamoro rituals, may be summarized as follows.

Both the Asmat and the Kamoro associate two myths, respectively about Yenip (Asmat) or Muanuru (Kamoro), and Fumuripic (Asmat) or Kamirima (Kamoro), with the ritual concerned, though in varying narrative versions. The Kamoro myth about Nokoro is, as far as is known, not shared by the Asmat. However, the Asmat and Kamoro do have the subject matter of this myth, namely the sago grub ceremony, in common in the rituals under discussion.

Nevertheless, there are marked differences in orientation and focus between Kamoro Kaware on the one hand and Asmat Yew Mbu and Tow Mbu on the other.

The main concern of the Asmat ritual initiation of a new men's house, the sago grub ritual, is the celebration and promotion of communal strength and solidarity, explicitly including relations between men and women. Its principal culture hero is Yenip-from-above, Ton Yenip. He is credited with the transformation of society from small, dispersed, rather isolated, self-sufficient bands that scarcely made a living, into a large, powerful community enjoying access to abundant natural resources, and the pleasures of a rich social and cultural life, including warfare and headhunting as highlights. In short, Ton Yenip rates as the primeval founder of Asmat society and culture. His exploits playing tricks on his namesake-from-below are re-enacted in the ritual. The massive ritual collection and distribution of sago grubs expressing and promoting cross-gender social strength, solidarity and exchange, is accompanied by a mock enactment of warfare by males and females separately. In the course of the ritual, females praise and encourage males in their martial exploits, which are proudly spelled out by the war leaders. In the past, the ritual was either preceded or followed by a headhunting party.

The exploits of Fumuripic, the culture hero of resurrection and of the creation and demarcation of neighbouring and foreign social groups and

their wealth, are not enacted in the ritual but are sung about. His exploits are associated with the more inland-oriented Yipae. It is reported, though, that the choreography of dances performed while reciting the Fumuripic myth on the occasion of consecrating a new men's house in settlements at the Sirec River mimics limbs that come to life and slowly begin to move to the rhythm of drumming.⁶

For the Kamoro, on the other hand, the Kaware ritual marks not the solidarity but rather the opposition between males and females. Kaware is primarily a male affair. It is men's prerogative to communicate with the dead. The transition from death to life is a male secret. Not the myth of Muanuru, but the myth of Kamirima's resurrection is acted out. The male initiates play dead and stagger back to life. Kamirima himself is regarded as Kaware's initiator. The effigies in the mbitoro spirit poles, representing recent dead, are also ritually brought back to life by men. Nokoro of the underworld is impersonated as well. He acts as the males' representative in demanding and receiving large quantities of sago grubs and he exhorts the women to take good care of the men. Last but not least, it is the men who act out the revenge of Mamirima's violent death by waging war and thrusting their lances into the sand: they are crushing the evil spirits who killed the hero and who threaten human life. Kaware also offers a proud demonstration of male skills: men construct canoes, sago bowls, sago pounders, paddles, masks and spirit poles in the course of the ceremonies and they are ceremonially rewarded for their services by women. In sum, in terms of gender relations, Kaware is a demonstration of male impression management, male secrets, and male skills and tricks, such as snatching prepared food from the women.

The myth of Muanuru only shows up in the Kaware ritual in the prohibition on consuming garden products that originated from the ceremonial house in the underworld.

Admittedly, Kaware also resembles the Asmat Yew Mbu and Tow Mbu rituals in its massive exchange and distribution of pile-worms and sago grubs, but its emphasis is on highlighting the contribution of males to life, in contrast to the Asmat demonstration and promotion of a sense of community among both men and women. For the Kamoro there is no 'women's day'. Kaware is a male stronghold.

⁶ Van der Zee 2005:405, referring to Van Renselaar 1956 without supplying page numbers.