

Conclusion: Eternally *Amoko*

In the Introduction to this thesis, I outlined several factors contributing to contemporary misapprehension, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of the Kamoro and their history by outsiders. As I outlined then and throughout the thesis, the three most prominent obstacles in this regard are underlying differences in concepts of historical consciousness, wide gaps in knowledge of the well-documented Kamoro past, and the inaccessibility of the languages of its documentation (e.g. Dutch and Indonesian). I hope that the cultural and historical information that I have provided in this thesis will help bridge these gaps and that it will encourage a more informed and productive engagement with the Kamoro. The underlying goal of course is to help to restore to the Kamoro agency in their own terms.

I have maintained throughout this thesis that it is not sufficient to examine only Kamoro history and ethnography, but that one must also understand the historical forces and agencies with whom the Kamoro interact(ed). I tentatively labelled this approach *multi-sighted* ethnography. It incorporates ideas of multi-sited ethnography (cf. Marcus) by tracing the interactions that impact Kamoro communities across geographic spaces. To this, my approach adds another dimension by extending the multi-sited metaphor across time to include historical moments and communities that have figured in Kamoro engagement with the wider world. In this way, multi-sited becomes *multi-sighted*. Of course there are trade-offs in the kinds of knowledge one can gain from any particular style of inquiry, and I do not propose that my style of inquiry should supplant more “traditional” forms of ethnographic inquiry. In this idea I see a parallel with Marcus’ conception of multi-sited ethnographic inquiry as a “second project” predicated upon an initial more “traditional” ethnographic project (1998:240). One specific example he gives is that typically the first book (or thesis) of a younger anthropologist is a work which “provides magisterial discussions of very

old tropes and discourse” while at the same time allowing for at least some influences of contemporary cultural critique (ibid:236). While I don’t fully subscribe to Marcus’ idea that contemporary cultural critique represents only stylistic fashion rather than truly meaningful and more permanent contributions to ethnographic inquiry, I do agree with his general notion that a multi-sited project is predicated upon earlier work, in his terms a “first project”. While Marcus generally conceives of the two “projects” as authored by the same person, I believe that one can utilize someone else’s ethnographic thesis as a foundation or first project. While contemporary socio-political circumstances precluded me from conducting “traditional” village-based ethnographic research, I was quite fortunate to have had a “first project” in the form of Jan Pouwer’s thesis, even if it was written over forty years prior to my own fieldwork. His work formed the backbone of a considerable body of literature that enabled my project. Because of their work, I was able to meaningfully juxtapose Kamoro ethnohistory against the broader social, political, and historical environments within which they were relayed. This juxtaposition revealed consistencies in Kamoro practice that would have been overlooked in an a-historical ethnographic project.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that *amoko-kwere* play a significant role in Kamoro interpretation of lived experience. Viewing them synchronically, many observers, in particular contemporary ones, have consistently trivialised the incorporation of foreign themes in *amoko-kwere*. Some interpretations along these lines tend to down-play the significance of *amoko-kwere* as mere “myths” or “folk-tales” which intimate naive indigenous cargo-istic style explanations of the economic disparity between the Kamoro and foreigners.¹ Other observers, grounded in foreign notions of historical consciousness and representational schemes, interpret *amoko-kwere* as ancestral

¹ Here I point explicitly toward various government documents, beginning with those mentioned in Chapter Five, which investigated indigenous formulations of the foreign and ultimately denounced their validity. Freeport explicitly downplays indigenous perceptions along these lines by relegating them to irrational “cargo cult” behaviour. Amungme perceptions of the company are, according to the company, “complicated” by “the phenomenon of ‘cargo cults’ widespread in Melanesia. In these ‘cults,’ traditional cultures, unable to comprehend the source of the very desirable material goods brought by outsiders, ascribe spiritual intervention to the production and distribution of these items” (Mealey 1996:299).

stories, relegating their utility to the “appreciation” and maintenance of western conceptions of “cultural heritage,” implying that they are like unchanging documents stored in museums and archives. In both cases “modernisms,” inclusions of elements from contemporary environments, have been viewed as inauthentic additions to “original” narratives; they fall outside of *popular* understandings of culture and tradition.² However, as this thesis demonstrates, viewed over the course of the entire twentieth century, inclusions in *amoko-kwere* offer unique insights into a more complex and consistent system of understanding.

Employing a *multi-sighted* approach, I have endeavoured to present a richer understanding of the history of Mimika and more importantly of Kamoro engagements and with it. By presenting *amoko-kwere* within contemporary social, political, and economic environments, this thesis has explicitly demonstrated the consistencies of *amoko-kwere* both in general narrative format and as indigenous reflections and reformulations of socio-political circumstances. Here I briefly reflect on *amoko-kwere* and Kamoro sociality in light of indigenous schemes of conceptualisation which hold that all things “living” including *amoko-kwere*, ritual, people, ideas, and objects are composed of a visible outer part (e.g. *kao* or *epere*) and an invisible inner part (e.g. *ipu*, *mbii*, *mopere*). As I understand it, these parts may also be classified as things that are revealed and hidden strategically, a point to which I return later in this chapter.

DISSECTING AN AMOKO-KWERE: THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MATTER

My Kamoro informants consistently explained that, like most living things (e.g. plants, animals, and people), rituals and narratives are most generally composed of two parts: *mopere* and *epere*. The *mopere* of a narrative, that is the essential part, the underlying theme, the names of cultural heroes themselves and their

² Here I emphasise *popular* understandings for two reasons. First, anthropologists since Wagner’s *Invention of Culture* 1981 [1975] have engaged the notion that “tradition” and “culture” are constantly reformulated. For the Kamoro, non-anthropological (*popular*) understandings that

general activities, remains consistent throughout all of the *amoko-kwere*. In the narratives, the single most prominent unifying theme is *aopao* (cf. Weiner 1995). It is the driving force behind all *amoko-kwere* and forms the most essential, the innermost part, of the *mopere*. This does not preclude transformation of the “outer parts” the *epere*, in light of contemporary sociopolitical circumstances (e.g. the example of Mapurupiu becoming God and Miamero becoming the Virgin Mary in Chapter Five or Mapurupiu “planting” the gold in the mountain in Chapter Seven). Conspicuous incorporation of “foreign” elements then can be conceived of as *epere*, outer parts, which usually help to relate the *mopere* at particular moments in time. *Epere* function as contemporaneous *representations* of the *mopere* which they contain or conceal, in the same fashion that an *mbii-kao*, a spirit mask, *represents* its contents, a spirit or spiritual energy, in the context of a dance or ritual. Similarly, foreign elements incorporated into *amoko-kwere* not only represent and adorn the *mopere* of the narrative, but also contain and conceal them.

Hidden things and ideas represent a focal point and indeed a preoccupation of all aspects of Kamoro culture. I see this reflected not only in *amoko-kwere*, but also in Kamoro conceptions of everyday life. For instance, Natalis Nokoryao’s *imakatiri* (Chapters Five and Six) explained that the people and goods of “influence” were already present, but not yet visible or revealed. The historical circumstances addressed in Chapters Three through Six suggest that clothing, papers, and other things conspicuously foreign appear to have been integral in allowing the Kamoro access to items of foreign wealth. Seen another way, these items are not only representations of an invisible power, but serve to harness that power in the same fashion that a possessor of a particular *otepe* harnesses invisible spiritual power (See Chapter One). A contemporary example can be found in Kamoro understandings of the *yayasan*, the Indonesian equivalent of a foundation, which in some cases can also be interpreted as a Non-Governmental

define traditions and culture as relatively static or backward play a stronger role in the representation of the Kamoro by Freeport and the Indonesian Government.

Organisation.³ When Freeport announced that it was going to give a portion of its proceeds directly to local community through the so-called “One Percent Fund,” along with the government stipulated the mechanism that the money could only be accessed through a foundation. To establish a foundation required funds, know-how, and a trip to Jayapura for official registration. For the Kamoro, these organisations were interpreted much like *otepe* in that they hold the key to revealing (accessing) the funds. Initial “Kamoro” foundations were established not by Kamoro, but by outsiders who already had this ability. This of course plays into a complex socio-political scene in which outsiders, including other island Indonesians, police, military, and private contractors, have developed relationships with Kamoro based on their ability to access the wealth. When the amount of money feeding these foundations is literally millions of US dollars, it is not hard to imagine exploitative intentions. Accordingly the initial foundations established to “represent” the Kamoro were run by Kei Islanders and other outsiders. This is not to say that the Kamoro naively stood by or were unaware of this exploitation, nor is it to say that “outsiders” were completely removed from the mechanism altogether. Instead, individual Kamoro communities strategically allied with particular outsiders formed their own foundations to access the funds. The Nawaripi communities explicitly voiced their understanding of foundations as the key to accessing the funds when they argued against third party NGO facilitation and implementation of their land-rights agreement. They explicitly stated that they had their own foundation and did not want another foundation accessing their money.

Each of these understandings is grounded in the notion that everything consists of both visible and invisible parts. Frequently, the visible is temporary and disposable; it conceals, and contains, more important, essential and eternal inner parts. The life forces, contained in each of the body’s organs, as outlined in Chapter One, are perfect examples of this. These forces animate the organs, and the body, but are transformed and depart at death, leaving the unessential

³ The more direct equivalent of a Non Governmental Organisation is a *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat*, which translates as “Institution supporting Community Self-sufficiency.” It is often abbreviated as LSM.

corporeal body behind. Aspects of everyday and ritual life among the Kamoro seem to be quests to access the innermost parts, to reveal the concealed and to harness its power. Their attempts to do so, however, are constantly foiled.

In ritual, explicit attempts to control or isolate these hidden forces take a number of different forms. A spirit mask, a *mbii-kao*, literally described in Indonesian as a *sarung topeng*, literally a “container mask” is used to harnesses the converted *ipu*, if momentarily, for a dance.⁴ The literal translation of *mbii-kao* marks the distinction between the two parts: it is the container, shell or skin (*kao*) which conceals, harnesses and represents the power of a spirit (*mbii*). Before the end of each dance, the dancer usually appears to cast off the mask. My informants explained to me that, more correctly, the *mbii*, too powerful for the dancer, pulls the mask off and escapes. In narratives of the Utakae War, to overcome the Utakae tribes the raiding party uses an *mbii-kao*. In the ritual raising of a *mbitoro*, a spirit (*mbii*) is called to enter into the pole. When it enters, the pole jumps up and down violently; again, my informants explain that *mbitoro* moves independently of its carriers because of the power of the invisible *mbii*, which it harnesses. The most prominent motif in all Kamoro carvings, the *mopere*, is found at all moving joints and represents loci of hidden invisible spiritual power (see Chapter One). Indeed, even the artists who make these objects are the possessors of unseen secrets, (K) *kata*, that allow them to fabricate objects suitable for at least temporarily harnessing these spiritual energies. Further, as I have outlined elsewhere in the thesis, *kata* are not only ritual secrets, intangible possessions, but also tangible objects. Invoking both meanings, theft of *kata* emerges as a prominent theme in *amoko-kwere*.

Descriptions of experiences in this thesis suggest that the Kamoro interpret foreigners’ knowledge (of languages and indeed of how to create particular trade goods) through *amoko-kwere* and in daily life as *kata*. The understanding that spirit masks and spirit poles function as containers for invisible spiritual power that can be at least temporally harnessed, poses some particularly intriguing ideas

⁴ The choice of the Indonesian word *sarung* was certainly interpreted by my Kamoro as the equivalent for the Kamoro *kao* as evidenced by its definition as a case, container, sheath, or wrapper (Echols and Shadily 1994:483)

about the functions of language, clothing and paper, discussed in earlier chapters, and parallels to Kamoro interpretations of foundations described above. Similar to the mask and the spirit pole, the importance of language, clothing, and paper lay not in the objects themselves, but in what they concealed (or contained). I note here that in each interaction, the Kamoro were observed to have used these objects—language, paper, and clothing—only sparingly, and only to effect contact with foreigners. Both accounts make explicit that clothing was removed after contact was made, much as a spirit mask is cast away after contact with the spirit is effected. Language was only of use to others who understood it (e.g. the foreigners), and therefore was only used on the “ritual” occasion of interaction with outsiders; the language in which the *amoko-kwere* are told among Kamoro themselves has been described to me in Indonesian as “*bahasa sejarah*” or language for history or stories. My younger informants say that the language of the *amoko-kwere* is difficult for them to understand (recall missionaries identifying the special language of *amoko-kwere* in Chapter Five). Indeed, the storytellers quite probably use this language to conceal even more potent inner meanings.

On many occasions I have watched the Kamoro perform “ritual” acts (dances, aspects of initiation feasts, etc.) which involve the explicit incorporation of symbols of the Indonesian State and other things non-Kamoro. The explicit incorporation of foreign items, I would argue, are not properly conspicuous signs of wealth but traces (*kao*) of the invisible powers they are presumed to harness. They allude to the wearer’s or creator’s understanding of the *kata* involved in the creation of the objects and in the temporal harnessing of the underlying invisible powers. Through their incorporation in *amoko-kwere*, the foreigners and their *kata* are transformed into Kamoro and Kamoro *kata*. Even more specifically, foreigners and their *kata* are transformed into regionally-owned *amoko-kwere*. As a result, the Kamoro who “own” the *amoko-kwere* then lay claim to the incorporated *kata* (e.g. In Chapter Four Tamatu from Porauka becomes the owner of iron; In Chapters Five and Six, people of the Wania river incorporate the Dutch administration and the Catholic Church via the activities of Mupurupiu).

In my discussion of contemporary engagements with Freeport in Chapter Seven, I exposed differences in the manner in which some Kamoro communities formulated their relationships to the company. Kamoro who originate from areas peripheral to the Freeport Project Area or from outside of it tended to formulate the company in terms of *amoko-kwere*; for them *amoko-kwere* cast the mine and its products as results of Kamoro agency. The *amoko-kwere* imply that the company has stolen something (e.g. *kata*) from its rightful Kamoro owners.

The contrasting example from the Kamoro community directly impacted by Freeport's mining operations suggests that for them, the relationship is one analogous to kinship obligations and direct exchange. The contrast in the two formulations of the company suggest that *amoko-kwere* are perhaps an initial stage of Kamoro engagement with foreigners and are used to account for things, ideas, and persons which are relatively unknown. The Nawaripi analogy of the company as *kaokapaiti*, as having explicit exchange obligations, suggests that in Kamoro interpretive schemes there are re-evaluations that take place as outside things, ideas and persons are transformed from unknown to known. The common theme that unites both of these strategies of engagement with foreigners is reciprocal inequity, which results in Kamoro perceptions of being exploited, having what is rightfully theirs stolen or uncompensated.

Material in this thesis also demonstrates the explicit use of *amoko-kwere* as socio-political devices to rationalise ownership or to legitimate rights of access to areas within the Freeport Project Area as well as to the mine's products. In the cases presented in Chapter Six for example, one Kamoro group's *amoko-kwere* was opportunistically exploited by another Kamoro group as a means to rationalise the occupation of land.

In many of his writings, Pouwer comments about how the essential aspects of *amoko-kwere* remain unchanged; this thought is deceptively insightful. He of course is referring to the *mopere* of the *amoko-kwere*. In keeping with this notion, I offer an account of some events that took place at the first *Kamoro Kakuru Ndaitita*, the Festival of Kamoro Lifeways, held in April 1998 at Hiripao village. For me the festival was a microcosm of some of the major forces that inform the complex realities on the ground in Papua today, in particular those in Timika. The

event was particularly intriguing because it highlighted Kamoro culture in some unexpected ways. I start with an explanation of the observable events that transpired at the festival, the *epere*. My account ends with an *amoko-kwere* and a revelation, a fleeting view of the *mopere* of the festival and more broadly Kamoro perceptions of their contemporary socio-political situation.

EPERE

A brazen personal assault on the village teacher's wife and son interrupted the preliminary days of the festival. Though both the woman and her child sought refuge in their house, they could not entirely evade the hail of rocks that rained down on them. The attack ignited a full-scale riot that threatened to cut short the arts festival before any of the key events, an art auction, a dance competition, and canoe races had been completed.

The following morning the festival's organising committee gathered all of the *Kepala Suku Adat*, the "cultural chiefs," together for a meeting in the village school to determine whether or not the festival should be cancelled to avoid further violence. As I was technically a committee member, I too took my place in the back of the crowded schoolroom and listened as a freelance consultant hired by executive level Freeport management to serve as "adviser" to the Arts Festival Committee chaired the meeting.

The instigator of the riot was conspicuous in his absence. Interestingly, the man who stepped forward to apologise on his behalf was neither from the same village nor was he a direct relative. Although to my knowledge, he held no formal government position that would establish at least his administrative right to represent the instigator, the man claimed to be the *Kepala Suku Umum Mimika Barat*, the "Overall Tribal Chief of West Mimika". Before the assembled committee members and *Kepala Suku Adat(s)*, the adviser to the committee accepted an apology from the "Overall Tribal Chief of West Mimika," tacitly endorsing his self-proclamation. Although the offended teacher accepted his apology and financial reparations for damages paid by Freeport on the offender's

behalf, there was a definite reluctance in his comportment and his face showed no trace of satisfaction.

The silent sub-text of the meeting stood out to all of us who remained in the room as more powerful than the words that had just been spoken. Though the festival was ostensibly to promote pride in Kamoro culture, it was first and foremost a Freeport Public Relations event. With Executive Management due to arrive the following day, the Freeport adviser to the committee had hastened a resolution to avoid embarrassment. That the festival would go on, was a foregone conclusion; the “Overall Tribal Chief of West Mimika” was the most convenient vehicle through which to reach this conclusion. The very cultural practices that the festival was meant to celebrate, which should have been employed to resolve the problem, were superseded by the needs of the company. This act was significant on at least two grounds.

In the first place, the *Kepala Suku Umum Mimika Barat* was well known to myself and to most of the others in the room as the man who had recently signed away 90,000 hectares of land on behalf of other Kamoro in West Mimika for logging and transmigration.⁵ In fact, it may have been in light of this “donation” that he acquired his title. To others of us, he was known to be one of four Kamoro who had signed the infamous Act of Free Choice.⁶ The fact that this man apologised on behalf of the offending party seemed particularly unpalatable to many of the Kamoro present at the meeting.

After the meeting, several people remained behind in the cramped schoolroom in the silence. The Freeport organiser and the “Overall Tribal Chief” were quick to make public announcements that a resolution had been reached. As

⁵ An article in the Jakarta Post describes how, along with other “chiefs”, these men “...gave up their land because they want to see more resettlers in their areas. They believe they can boost development activities in their region with the help of resettlers.” The article also quotes the head of the Provincial transmigration office as saying that “the Komoro tribe in the regency of West Mimika appeared pleased with the progress enjoyed by their brothers in East Mimika following the resettlement program there” (Jakarta Post 28 January 1997).

⁶ From a brief interview that I conducted with the so-called *Kepala Suku Umum* in Kokonao nearly two years earlier, I was aware that his economic situation appeared far better than most of the other Kamoro. His house was larger and appeared to contain more material possessions than other Kamoro houses. The Indonesian crest displayed prominently in his front sitting room gave it the feel of a government office.

their proclamations of a “successful” resolution echoed on the loudspeaker in the background, I approached the teacher. When he looked up at me I commented “The look on your face tells me that you aren’t satisfied.” He replied, “My wife and my child were attacked. I couldn’t respond directly. There’s no balance. *Nawarapoka apokona.*” The teacher’s explicit usage of *nawarapoka* reflects his formulation of the events in terms of social and economic reciprocity. *Nawara(poka)* is considered to be a kind of *aopao*, social reciprocity, which deals explicitly with the revenge, retaliation and economic sanction.

Though the financial reparation paid by the company on behalf of the offender was adequate, it denied and superseded Kamoro agency in the resolution of the problem on their terms, leaving the village teacher feeling eviscerated. Indeed, it was a typical development effort among the Kamoro. In a sense, the offending party, with Freeport and the *Kepala Suku Umum* as his accomplices, had absconded with the more important substance of social reciprocity that would form the foundation of a true settlement. In many respects, the story of the first Kamoro Arts Festival bore the hallmarks of an *amoko-kwere*, an idea to which I will return at the end of this paper.

Other Side(s) of the Arts Festival

A small group of committee members and I had just returned from the *Bupati*’s (the Regent/District Head) house where we were mending an apparent breach in etiquette on behalf of the arts festival committee, our own style of *aopao*.⁷ Rounding the last turn just north of Hiripao around four o’clock in the afternoon, we were confronted by a policeman standing in the middle of the road. The officer stood in the middle of the street, with his right hand extended toward me,

⁷ The “breach” was only uncovered when several committee members (including myself) went to the assigned place to have lunch. We discovered that our food was given to the police who were working at the festival when we were late to arrive due to the festival work we were doing. When word of this reached the *Bupati* and his wife, they were embarrassed. Apparently provision of foods on such occasions is something that, according to informal Indonesian government protocol, should be arranged by the regency ladies-club headed by the wife of the *Bupati*. She had

his palm turned downward. He motioned as if he were pumping my brake pedal with his hand. Approaching the driver's side of the vehicle, he explained that there had been a riot and that we should turn back.

I was surprised with at ease with which he allowed us to pass once we revealed our festival identity cards. Passing by the roadblock, it was impossible to penetrate within one hundred metres of the festival grounds. People overflowed from either side of the narrow street. Two large troop-transport trucks, which had carried riot police to the festival grounds, leaned awkwardly in the culvert on the right side of the road. I pulled my truck into a friend's front yard where I saw Father Nato, the former Parish Priest of Timika, talking to the police. I asked him what was going on. He explained that he wasn't entirely sure, but a major fight had broken out and that people were scared.⁸

By the time I had walked to the edge of the road of the St. Aloisius village school, the access point to the festival grounds, I was shocked. I saw people running and smoke rising from the roof of the festival building. The festival grounds were strewn with litter; burnt pieces of wood, scraps of paper, children's makeshift playthings made the area look like a dumping ground. Though its construction had been completed just days earlier, it appeared run-down and dilapidated. Rain dripped through holes in its roof where flaming pieces of wood and arrows had been shot through it; bare nails stuck out of the railing where planks had been ripped out. Burn marks charred the floor. Electric lights, property of the *Tiga Raja* Catholic Church, were destroyed in the mayhem, as were other borrowed items. The malaria control clinic built especially for the festival had most of its windows broken out and a gaping hole in the back wall. The taps on the industrial water system set up explicitly to service the large crowds of the festival had been broken off and rendered useless. The place looked like a war zone.

asked us to come to her house to make arrangements for food for the committee for the remainder of the festival.

⁸ Father Nato's involvement in the initial stages of trying to resolve the problem is interesting. Father Nato has been a vocal activist leading demonstrations against Freeport and supporting LEMASA (*Lembaga Musyawarah Adat Suku Amungme*), the Amungme people's foundation.

Over a third of the roughly 2000 people that had arrived for the festival had fled into the jungle adjacent to the Wania River. Some of them ran in such haste that they left their belongings behind in the temporary shelters built for the festival. After a brief meeting with the festival organisers, we had learned about the personal attack on the village teacher's wife and son that I had described earlier. Apparently they were fortunate to escape with minor injury from the hail of rocks that pelted their house, which in turn was also partially ransacked.

The unfolding of the events of the riot proved uniquely parallel to the circumstances of *amoko-kwere*. It began with the attack on the Hiripao teacher's wife and child. Witnesses to the attack from Hiripao village mistakenly counter-attacked (*aopao/naware*) not the attacking party but a different group who were on their way to the village teacher's house when the attack had occurred. This group was in fact seeking peaceful resolution to a separate festival-related problem: they had been given neither the housing nor the food that they had been promised by the committee. Both of these issues fell under the Hiripao teacher's responsibility as chairmen of the "*Konsumsi*" committee; they sought *aopao* from the teacher. As they were arriving, the assault on the Hiripao teacher's family had just occurred. The fighting escalated when East Mimikan villages allied to Hiripao joined the retaliatory attack (*aopao/naware*) against the supposed West Mimikan attackers. It is not difficult to see how this could have erupted into a riot.

As darkness fell, the villagers who had remained behind in the temporary shelters pleaded with the four of us, Yufen, Father Yustinus, Matarani, and me to run the giant generator lights all night for their safety.⁹ Fearing reprisal attacks

Although Father Nato is not an Amungme, he is from the neighbouring highland *Me* ethnic group, many Kamoro perceived that he favoured the concerns of the highlanders over their own.

⁹ I remember at that time that I could not help but reflect on the strange linkages that brought our foursome together which at the same time, linked us deeply into Kamoro history. Father Yustinus was the Parish Priest of the Timika area. His father was one of the cadres of Kei Island teachers brought to Mimika by the Roman Catholic Mission. By blood, Father Yustinus is a Kei Islander, though he himself was born in Mimika. He and his church were regularly called upon to assist in the mediation of local disputes, often caused or exacerbated by Freeport-related projects. Yufen is an Asmat, a traditional enemy of the Kamoro from the east. He is the curator of the Asmat museum in Agats; he is also associated with the Catholic Church, but a different order, the Crosiers, who are based in Minnesota. Yufen's museum had received funding from Freeport, and

from the home village (Hiripao), those Kamoro who remained at the festival site also requested military protection.¹⁰ The tremor in their voices and the looks in their eyes explained that their fear was genuine. During the interim until the lights came on, I offered to walk around with my flashlight, which they gratefully accepted. Together we rationalised that because I was known among many Kamoro and because I am a Westerner, I would not be harmed. Though I saw this to be true in the other major riot that I had experienced almost two years earlier in Timika, where no Westerners were physically harmed despite colossal property damage, I too was worried. As I made my rounds to the temporary shelters on the high bank of the river I was warned on three occasions: “Be careful, there are spirits on the river.” Hearing these words sent chills down my spine. Father Kowatzki had noted precisely the same phrase in 1929 along this same river after a brutal attack on the coastal village of Atuka by the neighbouring Asmat. The parallels were striking: in both cases attacks were aggravated by the increased presence of foreign trade goods, *kata*.

This was just one day in a long history of similar actions and reactions in the lead-up to the festival. There seems to be no true beginning of the events that trigger *aopao* and no end. One could analyse the chain of events at any particular place and find that for the Kamoro, *aopao* was the key to fuelling the activities. For instance, when the *Kepala Desa* (village head) of Hiripao was reluctant to offer land in his village for the festival not only because it meant massive tree clearings but because it was his family’s personal land. Not having time to negotiate with him, the Freeport adviser went straight to the *Bupati*, avoiding

he was invited to sit on the committee of this festival. Matarani, a middle-aged Kamoro man from West Mimika, was an even-tempered man and a particularly good organiser. He had orchestrated a fairly large scale Kamoro cultural festival in Kokonao recently in honour of the 100th anniversary of Father LeCoq d’Armandville’s arrival on the Mimika Coast. Interestingly the Freeport adviser claimed that such a large gathering had never before occurred in Mimika. Indeed, the Dutch Catholics made similar claims during the first baptism feast at Atuka in the 1930s.

¹⁰ They explicitly requested that we contact KOPASSUS, the Special Forces, to protect them. Many Kamoro are in fact members of KOPASSUS.

both Kamoro and government protocol—going around both the *Kepala Desa* and the *Camat* (sub-district head).¹¹

Receiving permission from the *Bupati* to use the festival site, clearing began without the approval of either the *Kepala Desa* or the *Camat*.¹² Of course the *Kepala Desa* reacted to the arrogant violation of his property and the undercutting of his administrative authority by absconding with funds with which he was entrusted to purchase materials for the festival (his own *aopao*), and the story unravels again.¹³ In this case, the subversion of Indonesian administrative procedure was also a subversion of Kamoro practice. Ironically two of the three impacted Indonesian government officials were Kamoro (the *Kepala Desa* and the *Bupati*).

The Freeport committee adviser's goal was first and foremost to make the event happen. At that time, he was not formally linked into other company development or research agendas, so after the festival, he was free to leave the problems behind. For those who lived and worked inside the Freeport Project Area (Freeport employees, church and government officials), the impacts of numerous consultancy activities like this one that were not part of locally driven and more comprehensive development schemes were all-too-familiar.

Like almost all of Freeport's development activities, regardless of how well or poorly planned and executed, the festival was by no means a complete failure. Considering baseline development indicators such as actual financial benefits

¹¹ In my experience both as a Freeport consultant and as a non-Freeport observer this was quite common practice, in particular when the directive was generated from management in Jakarta or New Orleans, rather than locally. Driven either by shareholder pressure for "tangible" development activities or whims of higher management, meeting the short-term time constraints to produce something tangible took precedence over economy and proper procedure.

¹² A Freeport account of the festival stated that "During the past few weeks of preparations, the bupati [sic] had to throw his considerable weight around to cut through Gordian knots too complicated for the organizing committee. This included the land-rent payment to the three families who owned the festival grounds, which kept escalating out of all reasonable proportions, payment for the clearing of the festival grounds which had not been adequately budgeted by Lemasko [sic LEMASKO] (PTFI 1999:17). I note here how the writer's perspective shifts any culpability for both the land and financial issues squarely out of the hands of Freeport.

¹³ Father Nato also assisted a group from Kipia and myself in acquiring materials to replace those that the Hiripao *Kepala Desa* had run off with and transporting them to the festival site at the last minute. Again, he assisted in rectifying Freeport-related problems from behind the scenes.

directly reaching the broadest community base, this project far surpassed any Freeport community project I know of save the most recent “recognition” package for the Nawaripi and Tipuka communities.¹⁴ Other funds, funnelled through various “foundations” (*yayasan*) seem to have been squandered on pet projects and personal purchases of a limited few.

The event was also deemed a success by those expatriate and Indonesian Freeport employees and their families whose jobs have little to do with the community. For the accountants, warehouse managers, caterers, and their families who also live in the area, the Kamoro Arts Festival was a much anticipated opportunity to interact with the Kamoro in what they perceived to be a “safe” environment.¹⁵ At the same time, they viewed this as a chance to “help” the community by purchasing carvings and appreciating their culture. The threat of the festival’s cancellation was a major let down for them. The Kamoro also seemed to sincerely appreciate opportunities to engage with outsiders in a village setting.

But what caused the attack that threatened the festival in the first place? As it turns out, it appears that the underlying factor in the attack was related both to the committee’s composition and the Freeport adviser to the project. I was an observer, and to a lesser degree a participant, in the project from the start. I remember sitting in the Public Arts Building in Timika Indah (a section of urban Timika) when a group of Kamoro made a seemingly strange choice for the Festival’s committee chairman. Almost immediately after the meeting, all of the

¹⁴ The “recognition” package was part of a land-usage agreement whereby Freeport acquired the usage of lands belonging to the Nawaripi and Tipuka Kamoro communities for disposal of the mine’s tailings. The package was “facilitated” by a Jakarta-based Non-Governmental Organisation, the Sejati Foundation (*Yayasan Sejati*). The Freeport community program that literally reaches the largest number of people, Kamoro and otherwise, in the Freeport Project Area (and indeed beyond it) is the Public Health and Malaria Control Program.

¹⁵ For most of the company employees that do not work with the community their only understanding of community relations is from the steady stream of “disturbances” of varying levels aimed at Freeport’s operations. Many of the employees were quite sympathetic to the local communities and sought ways that they could actively engage with them. Unfortunately interactions between Western employees (and their families) with the local communities were extremely limited and only seemed encouraged as part of broader “charity work” rather than getting to know particular communities from extended interaction (something which some employees expressed to me that they wanted).

men who had selected the chairman began to tell me that they did not trust him, and that he had a bad reputation for both drinking and squandering money.¹⁶

Under the circumstances, they may have chosen him for a number of reasons. First, he was a well-known informant and assistant for the Freeport adviser who ultimately controlled the festival's budget. Second, the fact that the Freeport adviser was in attendance may have asserted some feelings of pressure on the assembled group that they ought to choose his informant. They certainly did not choose the man because of his knowledge of Kamoro art and culture; he did not even speak *akwere Kamoro*, the Kamoro language. Nor was he selected for his leadership abilities. He was chosen, then, for his well-known and proven ability to access funds through a particular source, the Freeport adviser. Ultimately it was this man's selection as committee chairperson that was most probably at the heart of the attack on the teacher at Hiripao.

The man who led the attack was a schoolteacher from West Mimika who presently resided in one of the local transmigration settlements. He was also the head of the Social and Cultural section of the foundation meant to serve as a Kamoro representational body, LEMASKO (*Lembaga Musyawarah Adat Suku Kamoro*). Because ostensibly the festival was "sponsored" with money from LEMASKO he should automatically have been offered the position as protocol. Instead, he was passed up for the most prominent position on the festival's committee in favour of the Freeport adviser's informant. In this situation, leadership ability and knowledge in arts and culture were of lesser import than ability to access money.¹⁷

The Hiripao teacher whose family had been attacked remained bitter, and much of his village seemed to share his growing resentment toward the man who

¹⁶ He was also a former member of the government-chosen Regency Assembly (the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, or DPRD) when the area was part of the Fak-Fak Regency.

¹⁷ In a section of his report regarding the future of the festival a Kamoro man from Timika Pantai wrote: "The head of the committee must be a person who works openly and in a cooperative manner with all sides and a person who is not a drunk who squanders the festival's money" (Mamapuku 1998b:6).

led the attack and by extension his home village.¹⁸ People in Hiripao explicitly described the situation to me as “*naware*” or “*aopao apokona*,” literally there was no balance or compensation. Due to the underlying problems of the first festival, Hiripao village refused to host the second festival in 1999. The expensive infrastructure, the massive water tanks and piping system, the clinic and the festival structure itself, stood as hollow reminders (indeed the *kao*) of a development project which had cost tens of thousands of US dollars. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, like most Freeport development projects, *something* good, even if just an understanding of how *not* to do approach a project, often emerges from them.¹⁹ Earlier I described how the festival allowed funds to directly reach Kamoro communities and how it provided an engaging point of interaction for Freeport employees. More importantly, the Festival was a success in promoting aspects of Kamoro culture, though in an unexpected and concealed manner which did not reach the company’s public relations materials. With this final extract from my notes on the first Kamoro Arts Festival I revisit an *amoko-kwere* that sheds light on Kamoro engagement with the contemporary socio-political environment and ultimately reveals the *mopere* of contemporary (and eternal) Kamoro concerns.

MOPERE

Aopao...that is the main lesson Freeport has to learn: you are quite right in emphasising this. (Jan Pouwer in response to my first letter to him, 19 July 1997).

Thanks to my knowledge of the combined resources of Dutch authors and my own fieldwork, among many Kamoro I was perceived by many as being knowledgeable about their history and culture. Because of this perception, I was

¹⁸ By now the community’s bitterness had also shifted to blame Freeport for creating the problem then leaving them behind to resolve it.

¹⁹ A similar project generated from Freeport’s home office in New Orleans which considered establishing a museum and cultural centre in Mimika (that never eventuated) was the vehicle that brought me to the area in 1996.

asked to be a judge for the festival dance competition.²⁰ One of the performances that I particularly admired was an enactment of one of the most widely known *amoko-kwere* in Mimika, the Nani or Mirokoteyao. On the surface, this *amoko-kwere* is central to Kamoro perspectives on the origin of specific feast houses and the origin of the world's populations. It is also among the best-documented Kamoro *amoko-kwere*, with versions collected from informants born as early as 1880 (collected by Drabbe) to contemporary versions that I collected during my own fieldwork.

Here I give one final re-telling of the story based on the version dramatised that night. The story tells of a dragon that devours all of the Kamoro people, except for a single pregnant woman. Thinking that he had eaten all of the people, the dragon swims downstream to the coast where he lives. Eventually, the pregnant woman gives birth to a son, Mirokoteyao, who grows miraculously fast, the sign of a cultural hero and also the sign of an explicit relationship with the spirit world.

Within a week he has established himself as a prolific hunter. All animals living in the interior forests have become part of his bounty. One day, instead of following his mother's instructions and going towards the interior to hunt, he goes in the opposite direction where he discovers the coast and its marine life. When he returns home, his mother is shocked by his outright disobedience. At the same time, Mirokoteyao accuses his mother of deceiving him by concealing the existence of the coast.

The experience prompts an explanation about the dragon that motivates Mirokoteyao to return to the coast to exact revenge (*aopao/naware*) on the beast. After building various feast houses, planting wooden, stone, and iron-tipped weapons inside the successive structures, he lures the dragon with smoke from a fire. This was ingeniously adapted to the dance when a performer dressed in a bark-cloth designed to represent fire danced around a carved (and covered) dragon, which he ultimately lured out of its concealment. During the

²⁰ I was also asked because they wanted a “*bulé*” (western) judge and the other possible one, the Freeport adviser, was not able to remain at the festival site through the night because of prior engagements with Freeport VIP guests in Timika.

performance, the anticipation of wanting to see the concealed dragon heightened its impact when it was ultimately revealed. The performance also made clear Mirokoteyao's explicit connection with the spirit-world; the dancer wore a *mbii-kao*, a spirit mask.

When the dragon ultimately emerges, furious that he hasn't annihilated all of the people, he attacks the buildings. He crushes the house with the wooden weapons, incurring only minor injury. The stone weapons cause deeper wounds. In his final action, the dragon becomes mortally impaled when he attacks the building with the iron-tipped weapons.

Mirokoteyao then partitions the dragon. In the danced version, several Kamoro men assist in the partitioning with long imitation *parangs*. The hero throws a section of flesh toward the interior, which rises up and becomes the highland people. Other parts he throws toward the west, which rise up and become Europeans and Asians. Finally, another part is thrown that becomes the other populations of New Guinea. In this way, the world was populated out of the consumed flesh of the Kamoro.

I watched the initial performance of the dance with pleasure (it was performed again the following day in another "heat" of the dance competition). This performance was at night time and I noted how the on-lookers, all Kamoro with the exception of myself and Yufen the curator of the Asmat museum, seemed to really enjoy the performance. After the competition had ended for the evening, I sat and chatted with Yan Imini, a man from Porauka (also known as Pronggo, West Mimika), the village responsible for the performance of the Mirokoteyao *amoko-kwere*. Although I already knew the answer, as we squatted under his temporary sleeping structure avoiding the rain and enjoying a cup of coffee, I asked him if they were enacting the Mirokoteyao story demonstrating the origin of the world's populations. He responded: "Yes, but there's a more philosophical interpretation. The dragon represents anything that is negative or bad. Thieves (*otomo-we*), Freeport and the government can all be the dragon. Mirokoteyao's attempts to slay the beast is an attempt to gain control or balance (*aopao*) over these forces."

I wonder if Yan could have known how profound his succinct analysis of the story was. In just four sentences, he had captured what a fortune in consultancy fees had failed to. There was no mention of thousands of hectares of land lost to roads, urban sprawl, transmigration, port facilities and mining waste; no dramatic stories of ill-tasting fish or discoloured molluscs collected from poisoned ancestral water sources. Though these are certainly issues that confront Kamoro communities, in particular the Nawaripi and Tipuka communities, and need to be dealt with more seriously, these are at the same time arguments which are privileged more by Non Governmental Organisations and other commentators than by the Kamoro. Though responding to similar physical and environmental problems, the Kamoro are more concerned with protecting themselves, and their *kata* from thefts and ultimately, with the maintenance of *aopao*.

Needless to say, this performance received my vote for best dance performance. In the end, it turned out that many of the Kamoro agreed with my assessment. Out of thirty-nine performances, the one from Pronggo finished second.



Image 25: Harnessing the power of the spirit, depicted here with the usage of an *mbii-kaao*, a spirit mask, Mirokoteyao attempts to effect control or balance over the dragon (photo by author, April 1998 at Hiripao village).