

A configurational analysis comparing Kamoro and Asmat

This study, based on a lifelong involvement with New Guinea, compares the culture of the Kamoro (18,000 people) with that of their eastern neighbours, the Asmat(40,000), both living on the south coast of West Papua, Indonesia. The comparison, showing substantial differences as well as striking similarities, contributes to a deeper understanding of both cultures

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Part I looks at Kamoro society and culture through the window of its ritual cycle, framed by gender. Part II widens the view, offering in a comparative fashion a more

detailed analysis of the socio-political and cosmo-mythological setting of the

Kamoro and the Asmat rituals. These are closely linked with their social

formations: matrilineally oriented for the Kamoro, patrilineally for the Asmat.

Next is a systematic comparison of the rituals. Kamoro culture revolves around

cosmological connections, ritual and play, whereas the Asmat central focus is on

warfare and headhunting. Because of this difference in cultural orientation, similar,

even identical, ritual acts and myths differ in meaning. The comparison includes a

cross-cultural, structural analysis of relevant myths.

This publication is of interest to scholars and students in Oceanic studies and

those drawn to the comparative study of cultures.

Jan Pouwer (1924) started his career as a government anthropologist in West New Guinea in the 1950s and 1960s, with periods of intensive fieldwork, in particular among the Kamoro. He obtained a PhD at Leiden University in 1955. He was Professor at the Department of Anthropology of Amsterdam University (1962-1966), Head of the Department of Anthropology of Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand (1966-1976), and a Reader at the Department of Anthropology of Nijmegen University (1976-1986).

[sample chapter](#)  
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