



In the Star Mountains in 1959

ABOUT J. POWER AND HIS PERSONAL ARCHIVE

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1. History of the compiler of the archive

Jan Pouwer was born on the 21st of September 1924 in Dordrecht. He grew up nearby Delft, in the village of Schipluiden, where his father was the headmaster of the Reformed primary school from 1925 to 1952. In those days, the question whether the snake had spoken in paradise played an important role in the scripture-sensitive Reformed Church. The issue was whether the Biblical language should be assessed as literal, as perceived by the orthodox, or as metaphorical, the way it was interpreted by the moderates. Jan Pouwer experienced life in the scripture-divided Schipluiden as extremely constrained and as a teenager he already yearned for a broader horizon. He remained interested though in the Creation narrative at the beginning of the book Genesis throughout his life. He started to see this Creation as an ‘articulation’, a process of separation and junction. In the reasoning he developed, this concept – extracted from the studies of signs and linguistics (semiology) of Ferdinand de Saussure – features conspicuously. In 1938, he graduated from the three-year MULO (advanced elementary education) in Delft, and in 1941, he passed his HBS-A examination (Dutch High School) in Rotterdam. During a considerable part of the German occupation, about two years, he lived underground in the countryside in Friesland and the Northeast Polder in order to escape from forced labour in Germany. In the winter of starvation, he lived with his parents again in Schipluiden and helped them to endure this difficult period of food- and fuel shortage.

Between 1945 and 1950, he studied Indology and ethnology at the State University of Leiden. He joined the ethnological debating society W.D.O. (although the letters did not have an official meaning, they stand for something like ‘where dreamers awake’), whose honorary president was his

master, Prof J.P.B de Josselin de Jong; his fellow students Alex C. van der Leeden and Albert A. Trouwborst were members too. Ethnology in Leiden took the shape of a Dutch variant of structuralism, later going by the name of 'The Leiden School'. Before his graduation, Jan Pouwer wrote his undergraduate dissertation named: *The study of the individual in culture*; mainly treating methods and techniques of what the Dutch also call *fieldwork*. Due to the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949, the possibilities for Indologists and ethnologists who studied in Leiden to work in the Dutch East Indies lapsed, they had to find work elsewhere. Jan Pouwer, after his graduation, became research assistant of Prof H.T. Fischer at the Institute of Ethnology of the State University of Utrecht. This was in 1951. The moment he took office, he knew that this position was temporary as a request was in the making for personnel in the Netherlands' remaining colony in 'The East': Dutch New Guinea.

From 1951 to 1962, Jan Pouwer served at the Register's Office of the Colonial Administration of Dutch New Guinea with its main office in Hollandia, present Jayapura, under the direction of Jan van Baal and Jean Victor de Bruijn. From 1951 to 1960, he was the Colonial Administration's ethnologist, from 1960 to 1961 acting counsellor and, thereafter, in 1962, counsellor. From 1952 to 1954, he stayed for a total of twenty-four months in the region of the Mimika in South-West Dutch New Guinea for fieldwork, with an intermission of a six-month leave in 1953 which he spent in Merauke. The Mimika, also called the Kamoro, belong to the Papuans, the native inhabitants of New Guinea. During his fieldwork, Jan Pouwer undertook surveys and case-studies with an emphasis on social organisation, environmental planning, cultural change, myth, ritual, interpretation of foreigners and native history, especially in central and western Mimika. It was during this period that he met father Gerard Zegwaard, missionary of the MSC (Missionnaires du Sacré-Coeur), working with the Mimika and the Asmat. Just like the Mimika, the Asmat belong to the Papuans and live in a region at some distance to the east of the Mimika. During a period of study leave of fifteen months in 1954 and 1955, Jan Pouwer obtained his doctoral degree with the thesis: *Some aspects of the Mimika culture (Dutch South-West New Guinea)* at the State University of Leiden. In this work, he left behind the prevailing (African) models of kinship of the first and second degree and developed his own vision on the social structure among the Mimika. He then returned to Dutch New Guinea, where he taught at the College for Administrative Studies in Hollandia from 1955 to 1958 and, with short intervals, undertook more fieldwork between 1955 and 1962. In 1956, during a period of six months, he thus investigated the influence of movies on the lives of Papuans living in the city. Also in 1956, during a period of two months, he investigated social organisation, prestige economy (*kain timoer* or ceremonial exchange of cloths), landownership, migration, myth and cultural change of the inhabitants near the Ayamaru lakes, in the Central part of the Bird's Head Peninsula. During a period of four months in 1957, he investigated tribes that lived an isolated life near the Anggi lakes and in the Arfak Mountains of the North-Eastern part of the Bird's Head Peninsula. He then participated in an eight-month multidisciplinary expedition of the KNAG (Royal Dutch Geographical Society) to the Star Mountains and the Iwur region, in the department South Dutch New Guinea in 1959. During this expedition, he dedicated attention to social organisation, migration, myths, rituals and cultural change of the populations he encountered. As this part of the world had never before been the object of scientific research, he could meet the local population with an open mind. This signifies that he could register the social interconnections between kinship of the first and second degree of these populations as empirically as possible, without represented models from other continents. His findings partly found their expression in the article 'A social system in the Star Mountains; Towards a reorientation of the study of social systems' that was published in 1964 in the *American Anthropologist*. It was exactly due to the absence of a clear theoretical framework that the writing of this article took so much time. In 1961, in the months May and June, Jan Pouwer was involved in the shooting of the film *Stone Age*

to *Atom Age* from Roger Blais, about the development of the Papuans from material vehicles of culture to political sovereign citizens. Among others, shots were taken from the Emakamè celebration in Mimika; at that time it was thought, erroneously, that this was celebrated for the last time – and just for the movie. The photographer, Kal Muller, showed with his shots from 2006 that the celebration was still very much alive then in Mimika. In the compilation of this film that can still be traced on the Internet, these shots are missing. Finally, in 1962, an investigation into the mode of living and the perspective of the mixed migrant society of the Tugu in Hollandia followed. This society, whose members were mostly employed by the Dutch colonial regime, had migrated in 1950 from the village of Tugu, nearby Jakarta, to Hollandia, due to the transfer of sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies to Indonesia. In 1962, this society faced a similar situation due to the seemingly inevitable transfer of sovereignty of Dutch New Guinea to Indonesia. This time, Suriname was considered as new destination. The transfer of sovereignty finally took place in 1963. This was done largely under diplomatic and military pressure from the United States who wanted to be of service to Indonesia in order to gain an alliance for the confinement of communism in South-east Asia.

From 1962 to 1966, Jan Pouwer was Professor Cultural Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. The title of his oration, held in 1962, was *The individual in society and culture: Some methodological considerations*. During his time in Amsterdam, he became engaged in a polemic with his colleague, Prof André Köbben, about the nature and correct scientific approach of social reality. Jan Pouwer was an advocate of a structural approach, as shaped under the influence of, not only, Claude Lévi-Strauss in France, but also of J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong in Leiden and Louis Onvlee in Amsterdam. André Köbben preferred a stricter approach with rigorous criteria for the verification of hypotheses. In the *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 122-1 from 1966, their different views appear comfortably together. After four years of working in the, for his mind, increasingly restrictive Holland, Jan Pouwer yearned for the Pacific where he had always been able to, and even had to, follow his own course. He applied for a post in New Zealand at the Victoria University of Wellington and was engaged, after Marie Reay, one of the innovative and leading anthropologists in the Pacific, had withdrawn as a candidate. His valedictory lecture at the University of Amsterdam was titled: ‘Cultural Anthropology in a Transforming World’.

From 1966 to 1976, he was Professor and Director of the Department of Social Anthropology and Maori Studies, to be shaped by him, at the Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. At the beginning of this period, in 1966, he further developed his structural approach into a configurational approach which he summarised in the article ‘Towards a configurational approach to society and culture in New Guinea’, that appeared in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*. During and after this theoretical activity, his time was taken up by the new department. This cost him, and his small team of staff members, a lot of time and effort. He thoroughly enjoyed the contact with students – just like in Amsterdam before, and afterwards in Nijmegen – who were ardent followers of his vision on the nature of social reality and anthropology. In this context, some even spoke of “a movement”. The title of his oration, published in 1968, is: *Translation at sight: The job of a social anthropologist*. From 1971 to 1972, he stayed in the Netherlands on leave in order to recover. In 1974, after two more diligent years, he took stock of the course the department had developed under his guidance in a lecture ‘The aims and scope of the courses in Anthropology offered by the Department of Social Anthropology and Maori Studies at Victoria University: A general and personal view’. Among his students, we find among others: William Geddes, Patricia Kinloch Laing, Catherine Wylie and Bruce Reyburn. Unfortunately, due to the huge onrush of students – while the number of staff remained unchanged – the workload at the department even increased and the relations with a number of staff members became strained. His increasing deafness – in a country with a foreign language – together

with the deteriorating psychological complaints of his wife, made that Jan Pouwer could no longer cope well with his working situation. In 1976, he decided to resign his executive office and to return to, hopefully, smoother waters in the Netherlands.

From 1976 to 1987, with a short interval, he was senior lecturer at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, that was directed by Prof Albert Trouwborst and Prof Anton Blok. From 1976 to 1977, he substituted Alex van der Leeden at the institute who went to Jakarta temporarily as a representative of the Royal Institute for Linguistics, Geography and Ethnology. In 1978, when Alex van der Leeden emigrated to Indonesia, he obtained a permanent position at the institute. Again, he became involved in a polemic with a colleague, this time with Anton Blok. His recently published introduction in anthropology and, again, structuralism, constituted the issue. Jan Pouwer described his viewpoint in 'Beckoning "anthropological perspectives?" Blok's lure' that appeared in 1987 in the student magazine of the institute. During his years in Nijmegen, he worked together with the cultural philosopher and anthropologist Ton Lemaire. Together, they gave lectures on Epistemology of the Anthropology, making use of Marxist insights among others. The concepts 'ideology' and 'social dialectics' played an important role therein. Paul van der Grijp, Paul Haenen, Toon van Meijl and Ton Otto belonged to his students in Nijmegen. In 1987, he bid farewell to the institute with a lecture titled: 'Pan! Pan! ... Sur les Tartares: Barbarism and ideology among us'. In 1987, Paul van der Grijp, Ton Lemaire and Albert Trouwborst published the compilation *Traces in anthropology; Liber amicorum Jan Pouwer* in his honour.

From 1987 to 2010, the year of his death, Jan Pouwer continued to take an interest in Anthropology and in the Papuans. This, among others, resulted in two projects that both lead to a book. The first project concerned the myths that were collected by father Gerard Zegwaard and others in both the Mimika- and Asmat regions. The second was based on his own fieldwork notes from the Mimika region.

The first project lasted from 1996 to 2002 and resulted in *Amoko - In the beginning: Myths and legends of the Asmat and Mimika Papuans*, collected by father Gerard Zegwaard and others, edited by Gertrudis Offenberg and Jan Pouwer and published by Crawford House Australia. The *Amoko*-project took years to finish. Especially the funding of the translations, the quality of the digitalised photos and the difficult access to the publisher caused delay.

The second project lasted from 2003 to 2010 and resulted in *Gender, ritual and social formation in West Papua: A configurational analysis comparing Kamoro and Asmat*, written by Jan Pouwer and Published by KITLV Press. Jan Pouwer dedicated this book to the memory of his deceased wife, Ingrid. This second project started when he wrote a contribution for the book *Kamoro art: Tradition and innovation in a New Guinea culture*, edited by Dirk Smidt that was published in 2003 by KIT Publishers and was connected to an exhibition in the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. While writing this contribution, 'Kamoro life and ritual', he perceived that he could not nearly include all the material that he had on the rituals of the Kamoro. He decided to fulfil an old dream from the time he was writing his dissertation in which he, due to a lack of time, could only describe some aspects of the culture of the Kamoro: writing an autonomous study about the rituals of the Kamoro, especially the ritual celebrations. Two reading experiences, a recent one and a less recent one, supplied him with the necessary inspiration. The material for the recent reading experience existed of the texts on myths of Kamoro and Asmat that he had prepared for publication in *Amoko*. He discovered then that the Kamoro and Asmat resembled each other in an intriguing way, and differed in their living conditions and way of living, their habitat and their culture. The material for the less recent reading experience

existed of a comparative study which appeared in 1993; *South coast New Guinea cultures: History, comparison, dialectic* from Bruce M. Knauft. Therein, Jan Pouwer encountered a mode of analysis that came close to his own ideas about configuration and social dialectics. Besides, as the collection of compared cultures by Knauft included the Asmat, but not the Kamoro, there was room for a complement. Jan Pouwer's two reading experiences together resulted in his decision to transform his study on ritual celebrations among the Kamoro into a study comparing these celebrations with those of the Asmat. Through the help of, among others, the anthropologist Todd Harple and the photographer Kal Muller, who both worked in Timika at the Freeport mine in the Mimika region for a long time, he could complement his own notes from the past with current information. His thinking about the connection between his own material and the insights of Knauft, the collection of new material and, the finalisation of the text in good English, took years and, even almost until the end of his life. This final result itself is definitely not a scientific final point. It hopes to be a first big step on the way to understanding the similarities and differences in development that exist between the culture of the Kamoro and that of the Asmat. The central question thereby is: why the Kamoro and Asmat, who in the past lived in a comparable environment with comparable equipment, devoted their surplus energy so differently afterwards. In the Kamoro's case, this surplus went principally to the development of secret rituals, while the Asmat mainly invested it in the organisation of headhunting raids. Jan Pouwer has probably answered this question insofar that he identified the relevant or otherwise varying relata of the configurations in which these rituals and raids developed. The specific nature and the path of these developments themselves are not yet clear. What only has been 'seen', but not yet elaborated, is the dialectic character of these developments.

In 2010, on April 21, Jan Pouwer died in Zwolle. His health had already been very bad for some time. Half March, he already had to cancel the officially planned presentation of *Gender, ritual and social formation in West Papua* at the house of his old colleague, near the Register's Office, Anton Ploeg, due to a serious poor condition related with a failing heart. Some days before his death he ceased to take his medication. He did this because his hearing and condition had decreased so much that the ability to converse with people, the spiritual heart of his life, had practically disappeared. During the funeral service, his children spoke about their family life with their father. They described him as a self-willed, but sweet man. Also Toon van Meijl and Ton Lemaire, who came over from France, spoke of him appreciatively, especially of Jan Pouwer as a source of inspiration in the often somewhat detached academic world.

2. Justification of the inventory

Jan Pouwer's personal archive falls within the ambit of a special agreement between the Katholiek Documentatie Centrum (KDC), Erasmuslaan 36, Nijmegen, and the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies (CPAS), Thomas van Aquinostraat 4, Nijmegen. According to this agreement, personal archives of researches associated with CPAS are stored in the space available to KDC after their death. Access to the archives has to be granted by Toon van Meijl, secretary of CPAS. The documents are examined at KDC.

In 1993, Jan Pouwer made a material inventory of his personal archive, consisting of 26 pages. This document is located in the key file and in file 1 of the personal archive itself. The material inventory is organised according to 18 lists of files containing documents. All of these documents were either written or received by Jan Pouwer during his life as anthropological researcher under instruction or employed by, successively, the State University of Leiden (1945-1950), the Register's Office in

Hollandia (1951-1962), the Municipal University of Amsterdam (1962-1966), the Victoria University Wellington (1966-1976), the Catholic University Nijmegen (1976-1987), and himself (1987-2010).

On delivery at CPAS in October 2010, six months after the death of Jan Pouwer in April 2010, the archive consisted of three cabin trunks, ten magazine cases and two boxes. Cabin trunk A contained the material of lists 9-13. List 14 is a list of publications by Jan Pouwer himself that were no more in his possession. Three of the ten magazine cases contained the material of list 15. The other seven magazine cases contained the material of list 17. One of the boxes contained the material of list 18. In the material inventory, list 18 has no number but just a name, but it is the list mentioned after list 17 in the document. The other box contained audio-, visual- and audio-visual material of which no list existed.

The organisation of the material in the files as described on Jan Pouwer's material inventory has been adopted in the organisation in the files and box files at the KDC. In total, 22 box files were necessary: twenty for the textual material (total of 2.5 meters), one for photographic material, and one for audio- (audio cassettes) and audio-visual (video cassettes) material.

Not all the material that was delivered is included in the box files at KDC. First of all, all duplicates were removed. When more than one copy of a document was present, only one copy was included in the box files, unless the copies differed in any way; for example by different wording, by corrections or by marginal notes. Secondly, of the published articles and books, only the versions of the manuscript are filed. Reprints, magazine versions, books and other prints from the hand of Jan Pouwer are removed, unless they concerned publications difficult to trace in the Netherlands, like publications from the so-called grey circuit. Also reprints, magazine issues, books and other prints that were not of Jan Pouwer's hand were removed.

The designation of the content of the files by Jan Pouwer was not always adequate or, in other words, did not always correspond with the content. In a number of cases, the designation existed of an enumeration of part of the documents on file. In other cases, items were located in files that did not fall under the common denominator of the file. An interested visitor of the archive would then only find a relevant document just by coincidence. To solve this problem of inadequate denomination, the following solution was chosen. For each file of the new inventory, not only a content-in-name was formulated, but also a content-in-documents. The first giving the common denominator of the content of all documents in the file, the second, the enumeration of the names of all documents in the file. The first category is called 'content', and the second 'documents'.

The triage has in some cases resulted in a decrease of the volume of content of the files in the box files, compared to the files of the archive on delivery. In some cases, files have even lapsed.

We also need to mention that the archive, the way it was delivered, did not contain all documents that were listed on the old material inventory. This is possibly due to the fact that, between 1993 and 2010, Jan Pouwer was still intensively using the documents from the archive and did not return all consulted papers to their location in the archive. For example, in file Star 8, 'Chapter 5. Cultural affinity with the Telefolmin' of the published ethnography was missing, as well as the 'Article of Kooijman, Michel, Reijnders and Verstappen' from file Star 11. The files Star 9 and 10 were even missing in their entirety.

Certain material of Jan Pouwer is also located elsewhere in the country. Originals of the reports and memoranda that he wrote between 1951 and 1961 for the Register's office are stored in the Reports Archive of the Register's Office in the National Archive in The Hague, see <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/>. For *The inventory of the archive of the Register's office in Dutch New Guinea: Reports Archive, (1852) 1951-1962*, compiled by P. Nienhuis, see http://www.gahetna.nl/archievenoverzicht/pdf/NL-HaNA_2.10.25.ead.pdf. The photographs that he made between 1951 and 1954 in Mimika can be found in the archive of the Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, see <http://volkenkunde.nl/en>. Copies of a selection of both collections are located at the KDC.