

SAMPARI, MANARMAKERI, and the WEST PAPUANS' MORNING STAR FLAG



Sampari the Morning Star, also known as Venus, is a prominent character on the West Papuan flag that was first raised on 1 December 1961. The celebrated celestial had been accruing mytho-historical status with Biak Islanders since giving Manarmakeri, an old man from the north-coast island, the key to salvation and eternal life.

Manarmakeri had two deeply transformative encounters with the supernatural, one with Sampari, and the other in Yaneibu (Land of the Souls). The stories of these encounters, and the rejection of Manarmakeri by his kin, form the core of the Biak Islanders foundation story.

The West Papuans' Morning Star flag In the 1950s, alongside major advances in education and health, and efforts to develop an export economy

that dovetailed subsistence economies, the Netherlands Administering Power of the UN Non-Self-Governing Territory began building the institutions of a modern state. This included Papuan-majority advisory councils and elected councils (Biak-Numfor—1948, Mimika—1953, Hollandia, Schouten Islands, Manokwari, Japen, Sorong—1955, Fakfak—1958) that were tasked with implementing and enforcing ordinances, administering local affairs, levelling tax. By 1960 the Netherlands was investing Fl 91M per year (up from Fl 15M in 1950) with plans to ‘papuanise’ the civil service (to 90-95%) over ten years with administrators, teachers, nurses and police, including top positions requiring tertiary qualifications (CLM Penders 2002).

On 5 April 1961 the New Guinea Council (RAAD) opened “officiating as a Parliament, with all its power” (Governor Platteel). 22 Papuans had been elected to the 28-seat council including a woman, Ms Tokoro-Hanasby. Members shared legislating power with the governor and department heads, including responsibility for framing the budget; and they had parliamentary immunity, and rights of petition, interpellation and amendment. The RAAD, tasked to make its wishes known on self-determination within twelve months, opened in front of hundreds of representatives from every region in West Papua, an array of international media, 135 officials from the South Pacific Commission, and the governments of Britain, New Zealand, and Australia—whose delegation included Paul Hasluck (Minister for Territories), Alistair McMullin (President of the Senate), Brigadier Cleland (Administrator of Papua-New Guinea) and the Papua-New Guinea

Legislative that opened five days later. On 1 December 1961, the RAAD and the Netherlands Government raised the Morning Star flag throughout the nascent state of Papua Barat.

WHO WAS MANARMAKERI?

Manarmakeri was born in Sopen village in Biak Island and named YAWI NUSHADO after his father. His mother INGGIMIOS was the daughter of MANSERNANEM, a twin whose own mother IN-SERENBENYAR was the [unmarried] sister of KUMENSE MANDOF, the legendary Biak war hero.

YAWI's lineage bequeathed him a supernatural origin and power, as well as a right—should he prove himself worthy—to great-grandfather Mandof's titles, power, and authority. He was a gifted wood-carver and a poet, talents that required inherited knowledge and authority. He has a special place in West Papuan history, philosophy, mythology, politics and religion because of his personal and transformative encounters with the supernatural.

MANARMAKERI'S PROPHETIC EXPERIENCE IN YENAIBU (Land of the Souls)

One day Manarmakeri speared a pig who was destroying his garden. The wounded pig bounded away but left human footprints, which Yawi followed, and found himself at the entrance of a blood-smearred cave. He followed a path into the cave, passing the spear with which he had wounded the pig (but which now had no trace of the pig's blood) until he was overwhelmed by the sound of laughter and rejoicing. He saw a multitude of young people (including many of his kin) singing and dancing in a beautiful village, where the roofs of the houses were joined one to the other. But a voice said "Take your spear and go back, but walk backwards." Yawi, filled with joy, did not want to leave. The voice—Snon Soroka—then said "Your time has not yet come, you are still in the husk, still subject to sleep and hunger ... this is the place of those who are free of that." So Yawi obeyed and left. But he did not pick up his spear because it was lying too close to a snake, and he did not walk backwards because he did not know the way.

After his visit to Yenaibu, Yawi's kin mocked him and the story he told, and destroyed his garden except for one pumpkin. He was sad, his heart further weighted because of his mistakes. He neglected himself, got a skin disease, and people started calling him MANARMAKERI (old man, scabies). So he left his village and moved to a mountain he named YAMNAIBORI.

MANARMAKERI'S PROPHETIC ENCOUNTER WITH SAMPARI (The Morning Star)

One morning, Manarmakeri climbed his coconut tree and discovered that his bamboo vessel was empty. In other words, the sap that he used to make palm-wine had been stolen. The next morning it was empty again, and so too the next morning. So Manarmakeri built a bamboo platform,

and sat on it, watching all night, waiting to catch the thief. The next morning the vessel was empty again, so he moved his platform to the top of the tree to observe and catch the thief.

The next morning, just before the sun came up, Manarmakeri saw a light descend from the sky, and lo and behold Sampari, the Morning Star, landed on top of the tree. Manarmakeri seized the star, and accused him of stealing his sap. Sampari begged for freedom, because he could see the sun was ready to rise and he needed to be in the right place. “Let me go” he cried “for the dangerous one is coming”. But Manarmakeri refused. Sampari tried to negotiate, but failed, and finally asked the old man “What then do you want?” Manarmakeri said “I want KORERI SHEBEN” the secret of salvation and eternal life. Sampari replied “Make a fire with an ironwood tree, leap into the fire, and you will become as I am. Then take two fruits of the Mares tree [calophyllum lanigerum], cast a spell, throw them at the girl you desire, and she will give birth to a son called Manarbew“ (bringer of peace). Armed with the knowledge of salvation and eternal life, Manarmakeri released Sampari who quickly rose to his proper place in the morning sky.

Manarmakeri did what Sampari told him to, and lo and behold a young girl, Insoraki, had a son, but without knowing how, and called him Manarbew without knowing who the father was. Manarbew, however, recognized his father, whereupon Manarmakeri’s horrified kin ‘destroyed their island and scattered’.

Manarmakeri—with his son, his wife and her brother—travelled to all the Biak-speaking communities, to all those ‘living in the dark’, and begged them to change their ways and begin listening to their quiet spiritualists more than their maritime warriors. “But they rejected me, yes, they rejected, what shall I do now, what must I do?” (Song of Manarmakeri). Even his wife’s parents on Yembekaki Island (in the Raja Ampat) rejected him. So the small family set sail towards the setting sun, promising to return in eight generations when the people were united in peace.

*Assembled by Louise Byrne for FRWP Women’s Office in Docklands
Primary source: F Kamma Koreri, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1972
[English translation by MJ van de Vathorst-Smit].
Additional notes from Jacob Rumbiak*