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REPORT OF WORKSHOP ON CHANTED TALES FROM THE HIGHLANDS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

UNIVERSITY OF GOROKA
M.J. SOLON AUDITORIUM
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LIST OF INSTITUTIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

UNIVERSITY OF GOROKA	Joseph Kata, Jerry Semos, Gairo Onagi, Michael Mel, John Ga'a, Janet Muaup, Gabriella Ova
UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA	Joseph Ketan, Greg Murphy
INSTITUTE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA STUDIES	Don Niles
MELANESIAN INSTITUTE	Phillip Gibbs, Hermann Spingler
SUMMER INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS	Yasuko Nagai, Rambai Keruwa
J. K. McCARTHY MUSEUM	Vincent Pou, Anthony Parak, Wilfred Oltomo, Theodore Mawe, Rex Yagi, Andrew Sepega
INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH	Deb Chapman
WESTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCIAL GOV'MENT	William Wandaki
STORY-TELLERS (SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS)	Ken Kendoli, Teya Hiyawi
STORY-TELLERS (WESTERN HIGHLANDS)	Paul Pepa, Paulus Konts
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	Alan Rumsey, Nicole Haley, Kirsty Gillespie, Regina Knapp
UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND	Lawrence Goldman
NATIONAL PERFORMING ARTS TROUPE	Tracy Pari
GOROKA SECONDARY SCHOOL	Anna Mel

THE WORKSHOP

SESSIONS (SATURDAY, 14 FEBRUARY)

OPENING

THE WORKSHOP ON CHANTED TALES opened on Saturday, February 14, with opening remarks by Dr. Gairo Onagi, Dean of Humanities, and Dr. Jerry Semos, Coordinator for the Melanesian Studies Centre. Both speakers appreciated the workshop in relation to its significance to the heritage of Papua New Guinea. In the face of numerous changes and challenges, the retention of many of the cultural practices by people was quite quickly becoming a difficult proposition. The role of institutions, through researchers and teachers, in taking responsibility - and beginning to collect, reflect, and discuss and do further work with and on heritage collections was a major step in the right direction. Both speakers highlighted the fact that most of the popular media, especially the local television channel, provided very few opportunities for heritage material to be broadcast and shared with Papua New Guineans. Popular music derived from Western influence and entertainment packages imported from parent television companies in Australia and programs from the United States of America provided the bulk of its programming. There is a great need for the media (print and electronic) in Papua New Guinea to advocate and actually make available information and activities that relate to the historical and heritage context of the country. Challenges were placed at various levels (individuals, families, communities, institutions, organizations and legislators) to take up opportunities to introduce and advocate activities and ideas that are from the Papua New Guinean context. Story-telling, poetry, singing and chanting were a range of activities prominent in many small communities in the past. The emergence of Chanted Tales as a research topic and as a subject with a wealth of material that could eventually be accessible to the public (both within and outside of the country) was important for Papua New Guinea. Both speakers thanked the organizers and supporters of the workshop for giving the University of Goroka the privilege of hosting the workshop and welcomed all the participants to the university and especially to its new auditorium where the workshop was to be held.

PERFORMANCES OF *KANG ROM*, *TOM YAYA KANGE* AND *PIKONO* TALES

Following the welcome by the University, appropriately the workshop was appropriately opened with performances of *tom yaya kange* (by Paulus Konts), *kang rom* (by Paul Pepa) and *pikono* tales (by Teya Hiyawi with translations by Ken Kendoli). The participants heard parts of stories accounted for by the story-tellers. The stories from the *Ku Waru* and *Melpa* areas would usually take 30-40 minutes and be chanted in language spoken faster than normal speech. In the *Duna* area the *pikono* tales are chanted in the pace of normal speech, but almost non-stop for some 7-10 hours. For the purposes of the workshop only parts of stories were selected by the story-tellers and chanted or sung in the *Ku Waru*, *Melpa*, and *Duna* languages. The story-tellers captured the attention of the on-lookers with images of heroes, heroines, journeys, places and deeds. Masters of oral imagery, they beguiled and bedeviled the on-lookers as they juggled and juxtaposed words that were chanted in a seamless rhythmic pattern – an art form which was new to many and refreshing, yet deeply rooted in the Papua New Guinean context.

Discussions after the performances were facilitated by Joseph Ketan, Ken Kendoli and Nicole Haley. Participants were provided with a brief account of the stories that were recounted because only parts of the stories were told, as mentioned above. The stories, images and related discussions

were conducted using the local languages with translations into *Tok Pisin* (New Guinea Pidgin English) and English for the benefit of all participants. This was a major feature of the workshop. The use of various languages from the rich, multilingual landscape in Papua New Guinea in the context of a formal workshop gave public recognition to and acceptance of all these languages as important vehicles for communication, knowledge, history and culture. The brief background of the performers, the contexts in which the stories are told, the processes of acquiring the skills and craft to perform them, and related matters of interest became part of the discussions. One of a number of features that appeared to be clear with the discussions for the participants was that the art form of chanted tales formed a vital part of peoples' lives in entertainment, history and knowledge in their communities. However, the story tellers present were among the very few people left who were maintaining the art in their respective communities, as education, church, government processes and economic shifts and changes have been influential in changing peoples' ways of life.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANTED TALES IN THE PAST AND PRESENT-DAY LIVES (KEN KENDOLI, JOSEPH KETAN, MICHAEL MEL)

Discussants recollected experiences of listening to stories as they grew up in their village communities. Often the tales were told in the evenings and indoors. In the *pikono* tales according to Ken Kendoli, the stories would be told by the lone story-teller over many hours. This was an interesting difference between the stories from the *Melpa/Ku Waru* areas because these latter stories, while also told mostly at night in homes, lasted between 30-40 minutes. Notably the pace of the language in the two regions that was used to tell the stories was also quite different. In *pikono* tales, the pace was slower, more akin to normal speech, which partly accounted for the time it took for the stories. As it was to appear in the later discussions, the stories that were told ranged from love stories of a boy meeting a girl and of conflicts between people and cannibals, ogres or giants structured around the universal themes of good and evil. In contrast the pace of the *Melpa/Ku Waru* language used by the story-teller was quite rapid. In both areas there was an inherent rhythmic pattern and repeating melodic structure to the language used in telling the stories. The stories provided entertainment as well as being a record of history, a pictorial or image map of the home lands and folklore with stock characters that served to educate the members of the communities on the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of their societies and other important knowledge and values that bonded them.

PLOTS, CHARACTERS, THEMES AND PERFORMANCE PRACTISES OF MELPA/KU WARU AND DUNA CHANTED TALES BY ALAN RUMSEY, NICOLE HALEY AND LAURENCE GOLDMAN

In Alan Rumsey's presentation he discussed some of the specific features of chanted tales in the *Ku Waru* area and looked at the rhythmic pattern of the language used by the story-teller.

A recorded chanted tale by Paulus Konts was played for participants, exemplifying the 'metrical' style used by him and Paul Pepa. In this style there is a repeating rhythmic pattern with five evenly spaced beats per line, and a repeating melodic cycle with eight or twelve lines per cycle, using the first six notes of the major scale. Aiming to produce a continuous flow of sound, the performer pauses only as necessary in order to breathe. In the recorded performance by Paulus Konts which was played and discussed by Alan, these pauses for breath always come at the end of the first and fifth lines of the melodic cycle, contributing to the clear and precise pattern of the chant. Casting his tale entirely within this melodic and rhythmic structure, the performer makes use of beautiful imagery and a regular set of plots involving courtship, travel, and obstacles met and overcome along the way.

Nicole Haley and Laurence Goldman related that the art form of chanted tales covered areas that included the *Duna*, *Huli* and *Hewa* peoples of the Southern Highlands Province. Some of the features that were noted included the following:

- Specific vocabulary sets. In the stories told by the story-tellers there would often be special vocabulary sets used in telling the stories. Objects and places would be referred to using those special words or vocabulary sets. For example, “cloud” in everyday language would be different to the word used for “cloud” in the story. Over time the story-tellers and listeners would learn the special words because they would have been used by the story-tellers consistently in telling many stories and also other story-tellers would use this special vocabulary. Included in the vocabulary sets were also names of places or significant geographical features of the land. A mountain, a river or particular location would be woven into the stories and these would be important features for the listeners as they connected with their own landscape through the story.
- The characters often included ogres (which can be either male or female) and a trickster. The trickster was usually depicted in the stories as a character that often worked for the people (to help them or save them from imminent danger) against the evils represented by the ogres. Some of the stories were built on events and deeds that involved people from their areas in the past. The creation of special characters included people from the area, especially those ancestors who were notable in their deeds, while others were imaginative creatures who had superhuman qualities and used them in the stories.
- The themes of the stories were built around the idea of good against evil. Also there were stories that concerned a boy meeting a girl or love stories. These were often quite popular stories especially in the bachelor cultures that were prominent in the areas.
- Nicole Haley also showed videos of *Duna* women story-tellers performing or telling their stories to groups of women. This was an interesting feature especially when compared to the *Melpa* and *Ku Waru* areas where story-tellers were predominantly male. However, some of the stories in the *Melpa* and *Ku Waru* areas do include female characters.

SESSIONS (SUNDAY, 15 FEBRUARY)

MUSICAL ASPECTS TO CHANTED TALES BY KIRSTY GILLESPIE AND DON NILES

The exploration of the musical aspects of chanted tales was a relatively new area of focus although chanted tales are an art form that has been referred to and mentioned by various authors who have researched and studied in the Highlands region including Western Highlands, Southern Highlands and Enga Provinces (as was to emerge later in the workshop with the participation of Philip Gibbs). Kirsty Gillespie is working on this subject as part of her post graduate studies and some of her initial explorations and perceptions were shared with the participants.

Don Niles provided an interesting comparison between the melodic structure of the *kang rom*, while Kirsty Gillespie also presented exploratory impressions and comments on the tonal qualities

relating to the *Huli bi te* style and *pikono* tales as told by the women of the *Duna* area. Both presenters then discussed problems in the use of the word “chant” to describe the performance of these stories. Based on research undertaken to date, the performance style of such tales seems to have a direct relation to the musical system used for types of song.

CHANTED TALES FROM THE ENGA PROVINCE BY PHILLIP GIBBS

Philip Gibbs from the Melanesian Institute in Goroka has worked as a priest/researcher in the Enga Province and was able to share some of his insights into the existence of the process of telling stories through chant in the province. He shared with the participants a *tindi pii* (Enga chanted tale) from a men's house in the Kandep District, and an intoned story by a woman within a church setting. He noted that in Enga traditional chanted forms are often included in Catholic church ceremonies at Easter time. In Enga, besides chanted tales as such, there is also a chanted form of praise poem called *titi pingi*. This has been part of the initiation rites (*sandalu/sanga*) and the various forms of the poem tell the story of the journey of the sacred *lepe* plant, a symbol of life and well-being.

Similar to the *Melpa/Ku Waru* and *pikono* tales, Enga *tindi pii* and *titi pingi* are sung by a single performer using poetic language that is both creative and symbolic.

OPEN DISCUSSION ON CHANTED TALES IN THE HIGHLANDS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA LED BY JERRY SEMOS

The open discussion session was to facilitate interactions between participants during the workshop. It was also an avenue for discussions to look at and establish some clear ideas surrounding chanted tales and their relationship in the current context of cultural shifts and changes, educational reforms and how it might be worthwhile considering areas like the chanted tales as a heritage project for the future of Papua New Guinea. Below is a brief summary of the various issues and ideas that were raised during the discussions.

- Chanted Tales as a heritage project is an important task in the context of the rapid cultural changes that have occurred in the country. Changes in language, costumes, songs, dances, rituals, ceremonies, food, technology and many other areas have affected the way Papua New Guineans live. In such a context, heritage projects are important in documenting, recording and maintaining aspects of our history for future generations.
- In terms of heritage there appear to be two broad areas of concern that were raised in the context of the discussions. These were to do with heritage material that was considered as either ‘tangible’ or ‘non-tangible’. Often with tangible material visual objects were collected, details catalogued, and displayed for public interest. However, non-tangible material relates to material that cannot necessarily be translated into physical objects, but are important all the same and need to be recorded or collected, detailed and made available for public interest. Non-tangible ‘objects’ provided the greater risk of loss and therefore there is the need to make efforts to record and maintain them. The chanted tales heritage project is an important process in recording, researching, documenting and discussing these important activities from the region.
- Intellectual Property Rights were talked about briefly in the discussions. This was especially important with artists such as the story-tellers who appeared to be the only custodians of these unique cultural practices. They need to be given due recognition and acknowledgement of their right of ownership of the stories. Material benefits that might

be obtained from Chanted Tales as stories, the craft of telling the stories through chant, recordings of the chanted tales and so on need to be accredited to these story-tellers and if there was any gain (material or otherwise) the story-tellers would need to be given due recognition and some acknowledgement.

- The role of researching and maintaining heritage material can be done at an individual level as well as with institutions. With institutions the material could be kept centrally and also made available to others who may be interested in such material. In this case the workshop taken on by the University of Goroka with other partner institutions locally and overseas was an important step in the right direction for a heritage project. This kind of work needs to develop with other institutions and project activities.
- There was discussion of a possible site where a Heritage Centre could be located. There was some indication that Mt. Hagen could well serve the Highlands region to keep track of the collections of the many and varied traditions that will need to be documented and kept through such heritage projects - Chanted Tales Project being one of them. This matter was discussed at length and it was agreed that the University and other centers need to work in partnership rather than singly.

THE FUTURE – CSF SPONSORED PAPUA NEW GUINEA CHANTED TALES HERITAGE PROJECT AND THE AUSTRALIA RESEARCH COUNCIL SPONSORED CHANTED TALES RESEARCH PROJECT

The discussants agreed that the various institutions and participants and their interests in both research and documentation of chanted tales in the region were important to the future of chanted tales. Therefore the funding of activities by both organizations (CSF and ARC) was important as the project itself, either as research or heritage documentation and eventual dissemination. Continuation and further development depended on funding and the discussants hoped that both organizations in their own way, by virtue of their interests will continue to fund researchers in institutions to continue this important task.

Some of the immediate activities that needed to be considered and undertaken included:

- Publicity on the workshop, the outcomes established and further developments through both print and electronic media.
- The video documentary of the workshop to be made available to all participants and the funding agents of the workshop.
- Creation of a sampler of chanted tales on compact disc and cassette to be made available to participants and the public.
- Communication with all participants and others regularly on the progress of the work, materials that may be available, and other things of interest.
- Creation of a Website for Chanted Tales at the University of Goroka

The workshop ended with a further *pikono* performance by Teya Hiyawi and the playing of two *kang rom* recordings by Paul Pepa, recorded 22 years apart, one in 1981 and one in 2003, followed by closing remarks by Michael Mel and the other conference coordinators.

SUMMARY

The Workshop on Chanted Tales from the Highlands of Papua New Guinea brought together storytellers, anthropologists, linguists, ethnomusicologists, government representatives, and other interested individuals to focus on a fascinating, but little-known and little-studied aspect of cultural expression in Papua New Guinea. For the first time, such a gathering considered these extraordinary forms of artistic creativity which are presented as forms of entertainment, but are saturated with cultural meaning. It is hoped that this workshop will be but the first step in the exploration, documentation, preservation, and maintenance of these traditions.