

**“Head” And “Tail”:
The Shaping of Oral Traditions Among
the Binandere in Papua New Guinea**

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The main aim of this article is to provide some insight into the basic cultural perceptions and oral processes of the Binandere people, who evolved sophisticated oral art forms to register events, something which then came into contact with the *Kiawa* (European) system of writing in March 1894.¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this article to treat the difficult problem of selecting appropriate historiographical models for dealing with the contact between societies with a system of writing and societies with developed oral cultures as in Papua New Guinea, the detailed discussion of one particular culture in Papua New Guinea can throw some wider light on the nature of oral tradition and how it is conceived and transmitted.

The Binandere community numbers about 5,000 and its members are subsistence farmers; they live on the lower reaches of the Mamba, Gira, and Eia rivers in the Oro Province, Papua New Guinea. My intention is a detailed description and analysis of the method by which poetic oral tradition is passed from one generation to another and the reasons why distortions creep into the body of those traditions within a period of six to eight generations among the Binandere.

There are some conceptual problems associated specifically with tradition-bearers in Papua New Guinean acephalous communities in contrast to the stratified societies elsewhere. In this country, the essence of live oral tradition is, I think, that there is not one carrier above all others. This situation stems from the fact that in this Melanesian society there are no specialists who are set aside as carriers of traditions and made directly responsible to a chief or king, or members of a higher class, or even the state. The result is that the transmission of the forms and contents of oral

¹ The Binandere use the literal phrase *parara embo* for white men but the common term, *Kiawa*, comes from the word for an axe with a fluted blade. The foreigners were the *Kiawa embo*, the “steel axe men.”

tradition is not supervised, guarded, and controlled by someone higher on the social scale than the carriers themselves. This presents a contrast to the way in which formal traditions in the highly structured or graded societies of Polynesia are not necessarily alive but are bent towards the yoke of a ruler, with the result that a specialist is the custodian of the chief's, king's, or state's tradition. What obtains in such milieus is not, then, a living oral tradition because once one ruler succeeds to the throne or chieftainship, his personal order of generations becomes established as the live one. In my view the live spoken word in the non-hierarchical culture of Papua New Guinea is, by contrast, not controlled by any individual, as if there were a single carrier above all others, so that one needs to take a different approach to understanding transmission from a situation in which the tradition is contained in and shaped by a unique vessel, and thus open to corruption, being tied to a leader.

Western concepts of the nature of "history" and the methods devised there to describe and explain oral traditions may be insufficient to penetrate the allusions of very rich oral art forms of non-Western cultures like the Binandere. Again, methods developed to analyze Western music may be inadequate when applied to describing and analyzing music from another culture, as V. Chenoweth explains for the Duna (1968-69:218):

Descriptive linguistics offers useful tools for music analysis. . . [because] the vocabulary of our traditional Western music theory is directed chiefly at teaching or analysing and composing in one particular music, the European system. Western music theory provides little in the way of either terms or procedures for entering another music system, especially one which is unwritten. Descriptive linguistics in working with unwritten languages has developed both methodology and terminology for the analysis and description of diverse systems. These may appropriately be used in the analysis and description of diverse musical systems.

Native speakers, however, working with their own familiar and heretofore unwritten terms, concepts, and images may pose challenges and develop methodology which can provide access to oral traditions in other cultures.² This article therefore starts by outlining Binandere concepts and metaphors associated with oral tradition, as a prelude to a further analysis of their various forms of oral tradition and verbal art.

² I have written my Ph.D. thesis in two languages: *Be mi Ji jimo* (270 pp.) is in the Binandere vernacular which is my mother tongue; and "*Be Jijimo: A History According to the Tradition of the Binandere People of Papua New Guinea*" (478 pp.). Both works were completed at the Pacific and Southeast Asian History Department, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, 1982.

Oral Tradition and Binandere Concepts

Sirawa: Weaving Method

The fundamental Binandere concept of “Head” and “Tail” has to do with an idea of oral traditions “flowing” from the “head” of a *sirawa*, a conical-shaped fish trap, towards the “tail” (see Figure 1). This image appropriately comes from the basic technology of the Binandere themselves: the *sirawa* helps make graphic the sequence of composition, incorporation, and elimination in oral traditions. This process occurs within the limits of six generations between *opipi* (the first ancestor) and *mai* (the youngest descendant) as discussed below.

Now I want to describe the way in which the *sirawa* is made, because an understanding of its frame helps in grasping the basic elements of its application to the discussion of oral traditions. The “mother” *sirawa*, the main conical shape, is a weaving together of fifty to one hundred ribs with bark strings or vines of the mature palm of the sago tree. The beginning of the weaving (*jirari*) looks something like an open venetian blind. The second stage involves tying each rib to a ring of *mambu*, or lawyer cane, which is formed by cutting a piece of about one yard and joining its two ends together. This gives stability in the weaving and its circular form by binding it to the *mambu*. Thus the mouth or the wide end of the cone is formed and the weaving is continued in a spiral, gradually forcing the ribs closer together. The narrow or tail end becomes smaller and smaller until the hole is about six inches across; this section is called *kombera*, or tight binding, and completes the major fish trap.

The minor or inner trap is woven from the ribs of young sago trees shorter than those used to make the longer outer trap. The size of the *mambu* of the small trap is the same as the big body so that one can be fitted onto the other. The weaving of the minor trap is completed by leaving a tiny hole of roughly three inches. This tail end is woven in such a way that the hole is elastic; it pulls and stretches when bigger fish enter the *sirawa*.

Oral narratives are created and they enter the “head” or a mouth. They are pushed through the first aperture for the primary sorting of the material; here the great detail of an event is eliminated. The selected information is then kept “flowing” until it is being forced through another aperture where a secondary refining of oral traditions occurs. This involves a kind of filtering process, so that the material that comes out at the very end, or “tail,” is the essence of the “pure” (residual) element. The “head” is the beginning with the detailed information. This may indicate “early” or “today,” while the “tail” is the ending that is represented by *kiki opipi*, or the receding elements of legends.

“Head” and “Tail”

There are six terms that the Binandere use to designate the sequence of generations. They start with *opipi*, the terminal ancestor, and end with *mai*, the youngest living descendant of the clan. The four words that refer to the generations falling in between *opipi* and *mai* are *etutu*, *ewowo*, *apie*, and *mamo*. The sources that derive from each generation of living people and recent dead may be called *ambo*, the “tail tradition,” but here I want to discuss the *gisi*, the “head traditions,” or those of the long-dead generations. Before I go on, however, let me briefly describe a paradigm in which the process of *gisi edo ambo*, the “head” and “tail,” occurs.

The Binandere use terms that recognize junior and senior generations. In its simplest form this practice is evident in the words used between children and their parents. For example, *gagara/mai* or daughter/son are the terms used by parents to refer to the younger generation, while *aia/mamo* or mother/father are terms used by children to refer to the older generation. When the third generation appears and when the *gagara/mai* grow up and marry, the latter’s children refer to the *aia/mamo* as *apie*, grandparents. And as soon as the fourth generation appears, what was *apie* becomes *ewowo* or great-grandparents. Over time *ewowo* becomes *etutu* with the appearance of a fifth generation, and when the sixth one emerges it refers to the individual known person(s) in a given lineage as *oro be as opipi*, or terminal ancestors.

In a clan history a body of traditions is remembered as from the terminal ancestor; beyond this ancestor, the traditions tend to be forgotten over time. In other words, as each new generation develops, the human memory no longer has the capacity to memorize specific names of individuals and places of the most distant generation, particularly those beyond the terminal ancestor. Therefore the events associated with those people become *kiki opipi* or legends. Then a new set, now ending at the current *opipi*, becomes the known “history” of the community.

I will illustrate this point with the terminal ancestor of my own clan, Ugousopo. My *opipi* was named Danato, who was said to live about six generations ago. I was the first person who put my *opipi* down in writing, having learned it in 1967 from my father. Neither my father nor anyone else in my village or other villages knew Danato’s father or mother. As far as the Ugousopo clan is concerned, our *opipi* was Danato and his son Waroda was my *etutu*. The latter had four children, and we can trace the subsequent generations down to mine. Had it not been for the intervention of European contact, it would be highly likely that my children’s generation would have forgotten Danato and Waroda would have become their *opipi* instead.

It is clear that for the Ugousopo clan history the terminal ancestor,

Danato, and his son Waroda were born and died at Maji Hill on the Kumusi River. It is Waroda's children who migrated to Eraga on the Mamba River, perhaps when they were adults. The detailed activities of my *opipi* and *etutu* are blurred, although the history of the next three succeeding generations is abundantly clear.

Let me use several analogies to illustrate this complex perception of the historical process. First, take a banana tree that has six leaves numbering 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Place them along the terms of each generation from 1 to 6: as *opipi*, *etutu*, *ewowo*, *apie*, *mamo*, and *mai*. The number 1 is *opipi*; this is the dry banana leaf, too old to remain on the tree so it falls to the ground. This happens when the new leaf emerges right inside, first as a small shoot and later as a leaf. That is, when the sixth leaf (*mai*) appears, the first one (*opipi*) dries and withers away. As soon as the new leaf or generation develops, *mai* becomes *mamo*, *mamo* becomes *apie*, *apie* becomes *ewowo*, *ewowo* becomes *etutu*, and *etutu* becomes *opipi*, which "pushes" the former *opipi* away like the old leaf.

For the second analogy, let me return to the metaphor of the conical fishtrap, *sirawa*. The outer *sirawa* represents the *embo matu* or *gisi badari*, the three older generations (*ewowo*, *etutu*, and *opipi*). The inner *sirawa mai* represents the *mai teka*, the three younger generations, the oldest of which is *apie*. In other words, *apie* or grandparentage is significant in terms of sorting out traditions worthy of retention or worthless and to be eliminated. It is against the knowledge of the living *apie* that the knowledge of the succeeding generation is tested and checked for its originality and the reliability of its sources.

This process is symbolized in the *sirawa* itself where "feeding," sorting, and elimination occur (see Figure 1).

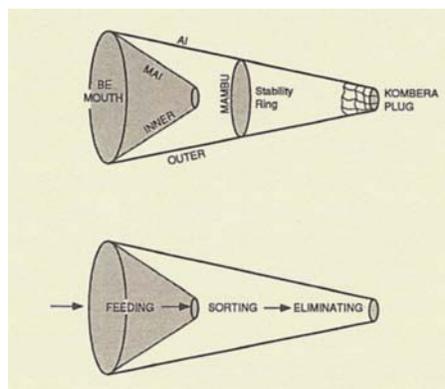


Figure 1. The Binandere Fish Trap

The diagram shows that oral traditions in the form of life experiences, incidents, and accidents are fed into the *mai* trap where they are sorted out with the store of traditions retained from the past. Some traditions that are not valuable, relevant, applicable, or practicable may have been discarded through time. Let us imagine that the third generation from the ego, the *apie* or grandparents, is like a repository for the oral traditions. But as the *apie* generation recedes into the past there occurs a critical point when traditions undergo changes: as a person separates the debris from the fish, so some traditions are selected and retained. This is neither a deliberate nor a conscious process but a slow and natural occurrence inherent in a society where oral communication is predominant. In short, the Binandere perceive time and sequences of events in a spiral form and not necessarily in a linear progression. There is repetition, as the *mai* generation changes into *mamo* and the *mamo* becomes *apie* and so on, but there is also movement forward in time; it is the endless cycle and advance of the spiral, it is both repetition and change.

This technique of using metaphorical language to represent changing detail is a way of condensing evidence into a form that can supplement the memory of man so that he can understand the past beyond the limit of six generations although he no longer retains detail. J. C. Miller puts it well when he distinguishes the historian who reads and writes history from written evidence and the historian who does not know how to read and write but seeks to explain events and draw evidence from oral tradition:

Gradually forced by the limitation of the human memory to rely on abstract and condensed references to the original historical event, oral historians strive to retain historical accuracy (in exactly the Western literate sense) by eliminating the relatively unstructured details of proximate accounts from their performances. They substitute more easily remembered verbal formulae which indicate the event instead of dwelling on specific circumstances of the sort preferred by Western historians. They may embody significance in a proverb, in a stereotyped image or cliché, in a conceptual contrast drawn from their cosmological system, or in other symbol-laden verbal or mental construct and easily remembered form. It is this verbal nucleus that is historical in the sense that it conveys some combinations of a past event and its significance for oral historians and their audience down through time.³

Oral Traditions and Art Forms in Binandere Culture

The preceding discussion on how the Binandere metaphorically conceptualize the endless reflection and change of the past/present forms the background to the account in this section of the main types of

³ I am very grateful to Dr. Miller for kindly allowing me to quote this unpublished material from a manuscript I read in 1980.

Binandere oral tradition. It also helps to illuminate the processes by which these are formulated and transmitted.

In terms of an oral time-line, Binandere place legends beyond the *opipi*, the terminal ancestor. Thus *kiki opipi* or stories having to do with terminal ancestors and beyond, contain precepts or ethical rules about the society. Moreover, the *kiki opipi* have a value as oral literature independent of their importance in transmitting values within the community. In spite of the changes that have taken place in the past one hundred years, the *kiki opipi* still reflect and enforce general Binandere morals and perceptions; they are still an “applied art.”

The “Head”: Legends as Oral Literature

It must be emphasized that *kiki opipi*, myths or legends, do not constitute a neat collection of straight threads making distinct patterns and portraying easily understood moral lessons. Rather they are myriad tangled strands and weaving knots passing one on top of the other, mingling sacred and secular values, and leaving the listeners to unravel a small part of the mystery of right behavior.

In fact, among the Binandere there is a cultural warning that any legend contains puzzling and even contradictory elements. This feature is found in the standard opening phrases. The teller begins a myth with the following images: “*kiki akou pepeia papeia, bono jimi watawata; ato kirara karara; angu enune.*” This is literally translated as “story shell (coconut) flat; *bono* (a type of) lizard’s tail wriggling; *ato* (a kind of an edible) plant’s leaves with rattling noise; as it happened I am going to weave a story.” This introduction contains two nonsensical things (the flat coconut and a crackling noise from the *ato* plant) and one which is sensible, and shows the weaving together of elements that are readily understood with those that are not easily comprehended. The opening phrases signal to the listeners that a legend is about to be told and may be interpreted as “there are many strands whose ends do not meet or make sense but I am going to tell it as it is—as a whole passed down from the past;” or, “I am going to trace the weaving of the story as faithfully as I can remember the version I have learned from my mother/father.”

At the end of the legend the teller again recites a well known formula: “*ro mai da, ra mai: iji vitari da, iji wotari da: rorae / wo isirari gido tede orote tede na rorae / wo etena.*” This means literally “men everywhere, from sunrise to sunset, find the existence of this thing/animal and tell a tale about it, so I have become a thing/animal.” These standard opening and closing images are not used at all when the Binandere relate accounts of migration and warfare, although the narration starts with the

tugata: “I am so and so; my father is such and such of Z clan, and I come from X village. It is I who am going to weave the story as I heard it from my father.” Then he or she finishes by reidentifying the source of the story again as “I am. . . it is I who have told it.” The stylized beginnings and endings clearly distinguish between the legends and the stories of warfare in terms of their validity as “history:” just as a Western scholar might ask how does this informant know, so the villagers question the reliability of the storyteller.

The context of the *tugata* is one way of keeping the oral tradition extremely “pure,” since no one can tell a story without admitting and acknowledging his source. Anyone in the village environment can judge whether that person learned the story from a reliable person who really knows it or not. When he says “I know it from my father,” he is actually declaring to someone who might challenge his authority by saying “my grandfather told me”—which may be a better version of it. This is how the oral history is kept so particularly well.

Thus Binandere have a clear distinction between myths or legends, which form an integral part of the body of literary tradition of those generations beyond the terminal ancestor, and history, which begins with the ancestor and goes down to the youngest living member of the clan. The litmus test for the distinction is to apply the basic rules underlying history: when, how, why, and who. If the answer relates to human beings or tangible things, then it is clear that one is dealing with history, particularly when the events relate to those generations on this side of the *opipi*. Beyond this point the test fails. In a nutshell, the terminal ancestor is an important landmark for much of clan history among the Binandere as they try to choose between myths and history.

I have on many occasions approached individuals who appear to know a certain tradition. They would not tell me any of it unless it is their story to tell. They would respond, “I am sorry, I know that story because I was there, but the central person who was involved with the events is Z, so Z is the right person to tell you.” As a result, one avoids the poor version because the people keep referring the interested party back to the right person for a “correct” version; and that “reference,” together with the fact that when they sing songs they must remember the words exactly, keeps the oral records intact. *Kiawa*, or Europeans, have literacy, but they have a poor memory of the activities of the members of their recent generations. Yet all peoples, *Kiawa* or otherwise, when they are not literate, have very good memories; and they are very concerned about keeping their traditions correct.

The "Tail": Art Forms

Earlier I mentioned that the "head" and "tail" concepts for traditions dealt with the way in which some testimonies are created, condensed, or codified, and I referred to the sifting processes. There are three filters, consisting of primary, secondary, and tertiary stages, through which oral traditions flow and by which they are distilled. This section takes up the specific oral sources that deal with what happened between *opipi*, the terminal ancestor, and the *mai*, the living generation. It also deals with the types of art forms that are arranged in the order of the distilling processes, beginning with the types of different primary art forms and the techniques of their creation and retention, then going on to the secondary art forms in which the primary is formalized; and then continuing with how the traditions are adapted into a tertiary art form to facilitate memorization and recitation among the Binandere. The section also concerns itself with the method by which all the three art forms are passed down from one generation to the other.

These different forms have different structures. For instance, that known as *ji tari* (see below) represents the spontaneous recording of an event that happened at the very time the event occurred, and the songs describe the persons or emotions in the immediate situation. The *ji tari*, like all traditions, start with an individual responding to a given situation and the individual expressing his emotions in song. A person may die and a relative burst into cry, and another close relative or perhaps a poet mentally records the chants; this may be called a primary art form because a chant is created over death. It is primary in the sense that the death creates a situation in which the original cry is composed by an individual. After the mourning period is over, with very careful recall of the exact words of the original cry, the gifted artist can turn the *ji tari* into *guru*, or more formal song with a standardized structure. The repeating of the original *ji tari* by such an artist may be termed a secondary art form simply because the artist adopts the *ji tari* into a formal set. This modulation simplifies memorization and recitation. The artist then embodies the chant and teaches other people, who may perform it on social occasions. The chant then becomes an item to reproduce as exactly like the original as possible, and it is in a form that can be recalled. This standardized *guru* I call the tertiary art form.

Thus there are three parts to the establishment of oral poetic tradition: an individual creates it in response to an emotional situation, a poet formalizes it to facilitate recall, and a group recites it in the form of *guru*. This evolution requires the cooperation of generations; creators, artists, and memorizers all play a crucial part in the repertoire of traditions for the next generation. There is a continuation and creation of things, as

opposed to the static view of “old tradition” being handed down. But this situation creates vulnerability within each tradition. Among the Binandere, the members of each generation are taught to use the three art forms.

Each stage of primary, secondary, and tertiary art is marked by a filter through which oral tradition is distilled. This means that distortions are likely to creep in during the various stages, particularly between the secondary and tertiary art forms, because the composers of *ji tari* on which the later *ya tari* and *guru* songs are based may be dead. The chances of distortion increase when the *guru* passes from one generation to another because members of a given generation are more likely to remember traditions nearer to them than others from the deep past.

My analysis of the song form is, in fact, a decoding or de-condensing of the chants that includes the treatment of meaning and dating of the various art forms. This is because I have the advantages of being a speaker of the language and of knowing the method by which the Binandere encode their oral traditions, especially the *ji tari* chants and the *guru*, so that I am able to unravel the process by which condensing is done. I now turn to a detailed analysis of the structure and the rules that determine the creation of Binandere oral poetic literature, the *ji tari* and its associated *guru*, and how they are performed. The complexity of the composition and the allusions contained in the language make this type of oral art almost impenetrable to the outsider.

It is extremely difficult to take the terms of a Western discipline and apply them within a non-Western culture. The following attempts to simplify and describe selected poems, and then to present a detailed analysis of the composition and content of the *ji tari* and *guru*, may at least allow a person from another culture to see artistic order in what may otherwise be taken to be spontaneous, formless, or repetitive. I present types of different art forms and discuss their structures and meaning. There follow two examples of what I call primary art and the context in which they are created.

Ji Tari: Creation of a Primary Art Form

A *ji tari* is a kind of chant of lament, “a monotonous and rhythmic voice” uttered on occasions of death, loss, and pain. *Ji tari* express sorrow or happiness in a poetic manner, depending on the context in which they are composed. I start with the type of vocabulary that describes the lyrics and the complex or simple body movements that communicate meaning.

The *ji tari* is thus a cry. Chants take place when death occurs, over losses of items, at arrivals, and even at the temporary absence of loved ones. Indeed, people do “cry” on these occasions and another person listens carefully to the chant and mentally records it. Later the *ji tari* is adjusted

to two kinds of songs. The listener decides whether the *ji tari* is *guru* or *yovero*; the former has meter and rhythm whereas the latter lacks repeating patterns of syllables.

The structure of the poem reveals three characteristics: images, meter, and repetition, each having a unique role for evocation, repeating pattern of syllables, and recurring themes, respectively. Thus, *ji tari* is poetry in the sense that poetry is a condensation of everyday language. A poem must contain a complete event, but this event is not described in detail; instead it is being evoked through a series of images.

The conversion of a *ji tari* to a *guru* is the work of gifted poet and singer. He (or she) takes the intensely felt emotion of a particular moment and makes it into art. It should be obvious that this careful memorization makes the *ji tari* a good source of history, provided that the material is deciphered properly, even though it is a register that keeps track of events and names of individual members of a lineage. It is a way of compressing events around a genealogy, of making them into a concise form for commitment to memory. The *ji tari* is also a technique for coding happenings that become a part of a body of traditions passed down from one generation to another.

Indeed, *ji tari* is the creation of the primary art form that involves the spontaneous recording of the event(s)—sung about the persons in the immediate situation. *Ji tari* is also the repeating of the songs by others, after the event is over, in a secondary form sung by an individual or a group. *Ya jiwari* is a tertiary form based on the primary *ji tari*. Therefore, it is significant that the source of all Binandere art forms is the musical expression given a particular real event or moment in time by someone who is very moved by strong feelings of some kind. This musical creation can then be used, if faithfully recorded by others, with altered forms and join a wider repertoire.

Ya Jiwari: Memorizing and Reciting Secondary and Tertiary Art Forms

In the art form known as *ya tari*, *ya* means both “song” and “dance,” and *tari* is “to sing.” The *ya* is derived from *ji tari*, a special term for it being *yovero*, a song sung by a single person; a group who sings a *ya*, especially while engaged in a physical labor, is given the name *tebuia*. The *ya* that expresses romantic love stems from *bote*, the songs lovers sing about each other. There is no aesthetic body movement—only the melodic voices. *Bote* and *ji tari* are spontaneously created songs about the person’s own immediate situation; they are therefore primary art forms. *Ya tari*, on the other hand, are the repeating of those songs by others, sometimes after the event. *Ya tari*, in fact, is a secondary art form which involves

some kind of formalizing of the songs.

The *ya jiwari* is a new form, although it is based on the *ji tari*. *Ya jiwari* has a formal structure in terms of verses and stanzas. It contains a standard form called *guru*. It may be termed a tertiary art form because of the way it is standardized for the purposes of memorizing and reciting on public occasions. *Ya jiwari* involves singing songs to the rhythm of drum beats. In the men's *ya jiwari*, sometimes called *guru*, the *ji tari* is adjusted to *embo da ya*, the men's dance. There are rules that govern the adjustment between *ji tari* and *guru*; the strict social sanction of remembering the members of a clan from senior to junior is a good example of the difference between the two. The *guru* requires accuracy. There are also rules that control the meter, image, association, cue, and repetition of the *jiwari* in songs. Two other conventions concern the order in which the *guru* is sung. There is the "first" *kumbari*, termed the *maemo*, by the male lead (equivalent to the precentor in Western music). This is followed by the "second" *kumbari*, often called the *be*. The second rule is that the man who follows the *maemo* must take his cue from the precentor so that the items in both *kumbari* match, or come from related categories of animals and plants. It is here that it is so important to remember to sing the names of a given lineage and not to confuse the sequence(s) of individual people in a given generation. The third rule is that the *jiwari*, or the rest of the men in the group, must repeat the *be* when they join in the singing; that is, they must give the names of individual items or human beings that the second *kumbari* has chanted.

During the final feast in honor of a dead relative, the *guru* takes place at night when men come together in the *arapa*, the center between the *mando* and *oro* of the family that holds the feast. The young men beat the drum, blow a conch shell, and join in the *jiwari*. The men of middle age and over sing the first and second *kumbari* by virtue of the fact that they are old enough to know the songs and indeed recite the genealogy. The men move to and fro within a space that may be a distance of about ten yards across. Also there are rules that govern the movement. The three sequential rules described above (first and second *kumbari* plus the *jiwari*) make up one complete *ya be*, and a *ya be* must be sung and danced twice before another *ya be* starts. It is sung the first time by the dancers moving through the *arapa*, and then repeated as they move back to their original positions. Each double performance of a *ya be* is followed by *kewoia*, a kind of buffer to give an opportunity for the elderly men to remember some more *ya be*, since one man leads and the rest join in; but it has also two stops before a new *ya be* begins.

A *ya jiwari* performed to a different kind of drum-beat is called a *kasamba*. By contrast this is *eutu da ya*, a women's song. It is often called *ba da ya*, or the Taro's song, so termed because it is performed at taro

harvest times. The procedures that govern the singing of *kasamba* are simple: there is only one *kumbari* and the rest join in repeating the monotonous pitches; but the same *ya* has to be sung twice before another one starts. To sing *kasamba* both women and men sit around the fire. The conch-shell is the accompaniment to the men's *guru* and the women's *kasamba*, although each pitch is at different tempo.

Guru: Reciting a Tertiary Form

I have said earlier that the *ji tari* is a form of register; death is an important occasion to be remembered and the *ji tari*, and later the *guru*, serve to record such events as death and the emotion of the time. I have also shown how *ji tari* are changed to *guru* to highlight the creative method, the content, and the form of *ji tari*. The creative process is still going on and will continue in the foreseeable future. As one generation passes through time, deaths occur and new *ji tari* as well as *guru* are created and incorporated into the charter of traditional art forms, while the old *ji tari* and *guru* are forgotten. It is a creative and continuing process. A third point I wish to emphasize is the artistic use of image, meter, and repetition. It should be clear by now that *ji tari* is, in fact, a poetic way of recording an event with some details, while *guru* is a technique of condensing the same event into a precise form of recitation; in this precise form it can then pass to succeeding generations as part of the community's oral traditions.

The original chant is retained when it is changed into the *guru*. It is only the rhyme that is adjusted; everything else remains the same. The original *ji tari* is always a solo, the expression of an individual on a particular emotional occasion. *Guru*, on the other hand, is the work of a single creative person but performed by a group; it is the product of a gathering of men, young and old, singing with the repetitive drum beat. When sung in a social gathering, the *guru* in fact follows a different order from the one I have presented. The lead is given by the *ya kumbari* (literally the "song-taker"), who sings the first line, and he is followed by a second *kumbari* or solo singer before the *ya jiwari*, the group members, come along to repeat the lines of the second *kumbari* as a chorus in concert. The examples given a little later will make it plain that *guru*, or the tertiary art form, provides the entire recitation during the public performance.

Sequences of Events and Changes in Traditions

Earlier I have attempted to indicate the way in which Binandere relate the sequence of events that are determined or ordered by generations. Nowadays they talk about the past in terms of pre- and post- *Kiawa* (European). Indeed, the white man arrived during the time of my grandparents, so that the accounts of warfare and the initial contact histories described earlier—told from my father’s generation and above—are one generation removed from me. The roots of the traditions that deal with the post-contact situation are very shallow because they extend over only two generations. Obviously, they are much more reliable than those of the pre-contact. The traditions associated with the earlier generations *ewowo*, *etutu*, and *opipi* are embedded in the deeper, although recent past, so that the chances of distortion are much greater than in the post-*Kiawa* times. I will give some examples to illustrate how the changes occur in the primary, secondary and tertiary art forms, which also often usher in distortions.

The first is a lament uttered by an ancestress. *Kaiae* was an unmarried woman, probably of the *Dowaia* clan. But for some reason or other she determined not to marry *Yaurabae*, and avoided him at all times. As a warrior he was called to go on a war expedition to an enemy land. Decorated and armed for war, the warriors left by canoe. *Kokito*, a sea animal, attacked the canoe with its tentacles, sinking it and drowning all the warriors.

Kaiae lamented the loss of *Yaurabae* who was her *ru*, her “brother.” She cried for him and regretted her lack of interest in him; and her *ji tari* was put into a *guru*. Her would-be husband was from the *Dowaia* clan. This is evident from the names of individuals: *Bingoru*, *Gina*, *Gauga*, *Omena*, and *Barago*; *Yaurabae* is not mentioned at all.

Iu <i>Bingoru apie</i>	Husband <i>Bingoru</i> grandson
<i>Mimai eite</i>	Catching sweet perfume
Iu o ru o	Husband brother
<i>Mimane tae</i>	I have lost the scent

Kaiae was more attracted to a man from her own clan than *Yaurabae* of *Yopare* clan, but perhaps deep down in her liver and lungs (said to be the source of love, rather than the heart) she desired *Yaurabae* as a potential husband. Perhaps she avoided him as a protest against those who arranged the marriage. The *guru* does not contain much information on the closeness of the kin relationship between the two, which might have been the reason for *Kaiae*’s avoidance.

It is possible to say something on the dating of this *ji tari* because we have detailed information on *Yaurabae*’s clan. A genealogical chart of *Yopare* clan shows that *Yaurabae* was one of the sons of *Waiago*. The

latter was one of the five clansmen who migrated from the Kumusi to the Mamba via Daiago Swamp, a distance of about 30 miles, as a result of constant wars there. There have been four generations since Yaurabae lived: two have died and the members of the other two are living members of the clan. The oldest of the living generations, S. Teiane, was about seventy years in 1979 and the youngest of his generation is about forty-five years of age. The oldest of Teiane's children would be about thirty-five and the youngest about four years.

As yet I have not collected detailed genealogies of Kaiae's clan, but it would seem from the use in the chants of the suffix *apie* that her lover was a grandson of Bingoru and others. This means that Kaiae's *ji tari* has a time sequence of two generations prior to and four to five generations since she lived—a possible total of seven generations. This situation suggests that the *ji tari* and the sequent *guru* concern events that took place earlier than the time derived from genealogy alone; by using the information contained in *guru* still known today, it may be possible to go back further into clan histories than through genealogies. In other words, normally the *guru* gives the names of the parents and grandparents of the person lamented in the chant. Where the *guru* is set in a time at or beyond the limit of currently remembered genealogies, the chant effectively takes the listener a further two generations back.

The above example also brings out the subtle manner in which changes or distortions are likely to creep into the process of transmitting poetic tradition from one generation to another. In the original, Kaiae chanted Bingoru, Gina, Gauga, Omena, and Barago. It was clear that Kaiae was the third generation from her terminal ancestor, and so was Yaurabae; most elders know that and they recite his clan's names as well. Without the elders, however, the younger generation replaced the original names with people such as Ororo and Baude *apie*:

Iu Ororo apie	Husband Ororo grandson
Mimain eite	Catching sweet perfume
Iu o ru o	Husband brother
Mimane tae	I have lost the scent

But men such as Ororo and Baude in fact come after the Kaiae and Yaurabae generation. The younger people have fallen into the expected error of replacing distant ancestors with those more familiar to them. And this is precisely one reason why the old and the young dance and sing *guru* in which the genealogies are recited, dramatized, and passed on.

The songs of the Binandere not only record their people's history, but like all songs and poems, they also reflect what the composers find intensely moving. The *ji tari* are in this way history invested with a community's values and emotions. The value of the songs as sources for the historian is made apparent by connecting them to incidents in Binandere

history. For the *Kiawa*'s writings there is a disadvantage in that they show cultural bias, but taken as a whole the songs do express the feelings of all the community.

I illustrate this point with two laments from my clanswoman, who was born before the *Kiawa* reached the area but died after the contact. On one occasion Gewara, a Bosida woman whose husband, Aveia, had passed away, put on a *boera*, a jacket of Job's Tears. During this period of mourning her *bi*, a term used by a wife to refer to her husband's sister, a woman called Mimbai, also died. Her body was buried when Gewara was not in the village. The chanter imagined what Gewara's dead husband would want to know as soon as the spirit of Mimbai arrived in the village of the dead. He would ask, "How is my wife?" Gewara, the chanter assumed, would wish her *bi* to answer him, "Your wife still loves you very much to this day, as is evident from the fact that she has not removed the jacket from her body; she has not made love to anyone." The pathos of the moment is increased because the absent Gewara had been unable to say anything to the dying Mimbai; she had missed a chance to have a message carried across the barrier between the living and the dead:

Teiano visido	I have not washed
Buie de teiko	She should say to him
Takimba aro	If he asks
Giwasi o teiko	How is my bonded wife, the wife once so tightly bound to me.
Binano visido	I have not removed my <i>boera</i>
Buie de teiko	She should say to him
Jijia aro	If he asks
Giwasi o teiko	How is my wife now held by time-loosened binding.
Domano visido	I have not abandoned him
Buie de teiko	She should say to him
Punduga aro	If he asks
Giwasi o teiko	How is my wife still held by the knots which never untie.

In the Binandere language the closeness of husband and wife is conveyed through the terms used when lashing fence poles together. *Takimba* in the first verse describes the tight, new vine; *jijia* in the second verse implies that the bindings have dried and loosened, but in the third verse *punduga* is the firm end knot that must hold, indicating that Gewara is still tightly bound to her dead husband. The sequence of metaphors is readily understood by a Binandere audience, but cannot of course be translated literally for outsiders.

The mourning jacket remained on Gewara's body until the final feasts. She climbed onto the display platform, and during the ceremony

she wept that she was going to remove the jacket because she was still emotionally attached to him:

Iu bindedo	Am I to remove him with the jacket
Domain o enita?	And abandon my husband?
Iu gagara Koia da aie	I am Koia's mother.
Iu te'edo	Am I to wash my body
Domain o enita	And abandon my husband?
Iu gagara Upari o aie	I am Upari's mother.
Iu kokedo	Am I to cast off my old skin
Domain o enita	And abandon my husband?
Iu gagara Gori da aie	I am Gori's mother.
Kapura maia o	He hunted alone in Dapura's dense forest
Binain o enita	Am I to desert him?
Iu gagara Koia da aie	I am Koia's mother.

The Binandere ancient oral art which was developed prior to the arrival of *Kiawa* continued to record significant incidents in the post-contact period. Again the songs are worth close analysis to uncover the response to the demands of the new order:

Tangsia Wowore	Daring with pineapple clubs
Apie ito da	Were your grandparents,
Leveni embo de	But red-ribboned people
Dede gesiri e	Have frightened you.
Kepata wowore	Brave with <i>kepata</i> weapons
Ewowo o ito da	Were your great-grandparents,
Kaia embo de	But under the knife-people
Tosi e genteni e	You have submitted.
Taiko wowore	Courageous with <i>taiko</i> spears
Etutu ito da	Were your great-great-grandparents,
Benesi embo de	But under the bayonet-people
Siro e esiri e	You have suffered defeat.
Bunduwa worore	Fearless with disc clubs
Opipi o ito da	Were your ancestors,
Pausi embo de	But the pouch-men
Dede gesiri	Have humiliated you.

The red ribbon which was worn on the edge of the police uniform, the knife, bayonet, and pouch refer of course to *Kiawa* and the policemen. The poet contrasted these items with the traditional weapons, the *kepata*, the knife-like instrument, and the *taiko*, the spear, both made from black palms.

Translation of Gewara's songs diminishes much of the power of the images. The historian who wants only the "evidence" may be satisfied with

bare prose and a description of the context, but the “art” is no longer there. “Emic” and “etic” are descriptive terms employed by linguists and anthropologists who study societies other than their own. K. L. Pike, a linguist, defines the words (1967:37):

The etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside a particular system, as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system.

This approach omits a third possibility that the colonized might use to describe their own society. This third approach is signaled by the Binandere term *tono*. At present I would use it to express my purpose in contrast to that of, for example, F. E. Williams (1969). I am inside the Binandere community that is itself changing, and share many of that community’s values. I am also equipped with the techniques of the outsider—including of course the language—that I am applying as well as I am able to the culture of my own people. I have tried to “unwrap” some of the songs so that others can see right to the *tono*, to the very basis of their creation and meaning.

Williams, a sympathetic observer, did not have sufficient understanding of the language to appreciate the art of the *ji tari* and the *guru*. He praised the drama that was displayed before him, but the ear of the outsider is deaf to the subtlety and the allusions of the *ji tari* and *guru*. In addition, the *ji tari* and the *guru*, as compressed statements, retain much recent history and may provide clues to a more distant past. As I have shown in this article, the *ji tari* and *guru* as well as other oral traditions are still being created, but at the same time fragments are being lost. The *ji tari* and *guru* are fixed to no pages; they are part of a dynamic culture and move with that culture alone; the *ji tari* and *guru* are thus a continuing process.

Conclusion

The condensation process therefore changes the nature of the reconstruction of the past, in the real sense that it may also allow distortion and/or corruption to creep into the body of traditions, particularly the oral kind. The fact is that every generation tends to sort out its own traditions with great care in such a manner that what is passed down in a refined form through word of mouth is still something that is very useful in re-creating the past and indeed in interpreting the present.

By and large, in Papua New Guinea the egalitarian nature of the social structure provides great scope for developing methods to analyze the social history of the many communities in the recent past. However, the

acephalous society also imposes severe limits on the social historians: one such constraint has to do with the seasonal and generation-bound time scale whose memory-span spreads within ten generations as a rule (although there are exceptions). The bearers of traditions are not necessarily specialists who are assigned the responsibility of the clan's or tribe's repository. This situation means that almost every member of each clan is obliged to learn and keep alive—as well as to pass on—the customs, traditions, and history of the clan.

Each member of the nuclear family—grandparents, mother, father, and children—listens to and learns stories, legends, and the history of the lineage and other traditions of their immediate and extended family in greater detail than do those outside the clan. Just as the mother and father transmit their knowledge to their daughters and sons, so that they in turn can preserve and transmit the history of the descent, there is no one person who is set aside or above as the unique carrier of traditions (possibly with the one exception of the sorcerer of the clan). Just as the authority and influence of the recognized “big man” of the group does not go beyond the clan, so too the detailed knowledge of history in each lineage remains within the bounds of the small society. In a nutshell, the sources of history for the group are not confined to a specialist but are spread around among the members of the group, as opposed to the situation in hierarchical societies elsewhere.⁴

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⁴ A version of this paper was presented at the Pacific History Association Conference held at the University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 27 June to 2 July, 1985. Another version was delivered in the “Myth and History” section of the Sixth International Oral History Conference, Ruskin College, Oxford, England, 11 to 13 September 1987. I am grateful to Drs. Cliff Moore, Edgar Waters, and Ms. Inge Riebe for their comments, suggestions, and criticism. They are absolved from any error of interpretation or judgment, for which I am entirely responsible.

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