

2. Yuna *Pikono*

Kenny Yuwi Kendoli

Preface

Kenny Yuwi Kendoli is a Yuna¹ man, born at Hayuwi in the Aluni area, Southern Highlands Province. His primary place of residence at the time this chapter was written was Hirane in the Kopiago area. Kenny has more than a decade of experience working with researchers in the disciplines of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and linguistics. He has worked closely on the recording, transcription, and translation of several *pikono* performances and, along with the late Richard Alo, has contributed extensively to ongoing examination and discussion of *pikono* as a genre. He has also attended numerous *pikono* performances as an audience member.

In this chapter, Kenny outlines the place of *pikono* within Yuna culture, and describes some distinctive content and performance characteristics of the genre. He comments on the experience of being an audience member and suggests some criteria for evaluating the skills of a *pikono* performer. He reflects on change and continuity in *pikono* practice, and outlines views concerning the future of the genre.²

This chapter is based on Kenny's spoken words from an interview with Lila San Roque, conducted mostly in Tok Pisin. Kenny then assisted with the translation into English, provided additional clarification concerning some issues discussed in the interview, and approved the editing and arrangement of the text. The original interview is reproduced in full in the online supplementary material to this volume (online item 1).

Introduction: *Pikono* was really at the source of things

In the past, *pikono* was really at the source of things. The older men would sit at the men's house and perform *pikono*. As the *pikono* was going on, they would

1 Kenny indicated that he preferred that the indigenous term "Yuna," rather than the term "Duna" (as is conventional in written English material), be used throughout this chapter.

2 Questions asked in this interview were based on a list compiled by Kirsty Gillespie, Nicole Haley, and Lila San Roque, drawing upon their individual research; various discussions concerning *pikono* with Richard Alo, Kenny Kendoli, and Petros Kilapa; and topics raised during the 2006 Chanted Tales Workshop (Goroka).

think about killing pigs, looking after pigs, making gardens, and going to war. These things are the real source of the older men sitting in the men's house and performing *pikono*.

Previously, women, girls, and younger boys didn't listen to *pikono*. It belonged to men and the bachelor-cult boys. Sometimes, a few of the ones who lived in the bachelor cult, preparing the food, and transmitting the practices, knew *pikono* and the way it is performed. They would gather the young bachelor boys to sit down together and listen. I haven't done this myself, but that's what people say they used to do.

There are two kinds of stories. One is *pikono*, another is what is called *hapia po* 'before story' [events of previous times]. Children and women tell these stories. They are *hapia po*. *Pikono* stories are really of earlier times and practices; they describe battles, pig-killing, and so on. When *pikono* stories are performed, these *pikono* boys are described building houses or making gardens. The next morning the audience members will remember this and think about it—right, I'll do it, I'll do the same things. So when they go to make a garden or kill a pig, the work will go well.

They will follow the *pikono* boy's example. They remember the story they have heard—oh, this young man, he made a garden, he was eager to work—so they will finish the garden in two or three days. And it's the same for tending pigs, killing pigs, and for going to war as well. The day before a battle, they tell traditional stories and, going to war the next day, they'll feel reckless and brave, and they will fight. He has taken courage the previous night, so he will fight. If he has been tending pigs, looking after pigs until he has a great many, and if he has many gardens, now he will think about taking two or three or four wives, too.

Content: Stories begin in the lowlands

In the stories it's not usual to describe things happening in mid-altitude areas [i.e., areas of current domestic settlement]. Sometimes people describe lowland places, they start there and come up to mid-altitude areas. All the stories begin in the lowlands. Then they come up to the mountains, to the colder high-altitude zone, and this is how the story will continue. It can't start in the mountains and travel downwards; this would be wrong. At the end of all the stories as well, they will travel around this place and that place, and then return to the lowlands again for the final place at the end of the story.

The way a *pikono* story goes is that a young man, for example Yeripi Pake or Sayanda Sayape, will make a garden, live within the bachelor-cult precinct, travel and fight, go up to the mountains where nut pandanus grows, travel back, kill pigs and tend pigs, marry, and finish up in the lowlands.

Sometimes the places in the *pikono* story are not real places, but the *pikono* teller will describe *pikono* places in the story. Sometimes real places, for example up in the mountains, will be put in the story too. Sometimes, when they are counting the mountains and the waterways, the high mountain areas will be named in the story, and sometimes lowland areas will be named.

There are particular special birds, trees, and nut pandanus [that can be referenced in *pikono*]. Fruit pandanus cannot be included in the story. If the performer includes fruit pandanus in the story, you will know this is not genuine *pikono*. But nut pandanus will be included. There are special kinds of nut pandanus, trees, and birds too. Rushes and grasses will be included, as will casuarina trees, particular special trees. Waterways too will be included, but not all waterways will be named. The large waterways of the lands of the cannibals will be included, for example *ipa rouya* [Rouya River].

The borders—the waterways and mountains—between the *pikono* people and the cannibal giants will be included because they mark the boundary of the two groups. The *pikono* people and the cannibal giants are enemies so they don't live together. However the *pikono* boys fight amongst each other as well. But later when they want to fight the cannibal giants, they will join together. They have their own enemies. They fight between themselves, but when they want to fight with the cannibal giants they become allies.

[Meeting beautiful women, fighting cannibals, and so on] are all things from *pikono* stories. In *hapia po* stories, things get cut short; for example, when older women or mothers are trying to get their children to sleep, they'll tell a story but not a very long one, maybe just five or ten minutes. This isn't *pikono*, this is just *hapia po*. A detailed description of a beautiful woman or a battle and suchlike only occurs in *pikono*.

In *hapia po* stories as well, these things are included: oh, there was a lovely young woman, she saw smoke rising in the distance and followed it. This kind of thing will happen in *hapia po*, but it will be brief, lasting maybe four or five minutes, until the children have gone to sleep.

Pikono stories are not for describing real events. They are an inspiration to make gardens, kill pigs, go to war. If you just told them in ordinary speech, it would just go for an hour or so and be over. If you didn't include counting the mountains and waterways and so on, it would only last about an hour. However, when you keep going, counting all the waterways and so on, it will last a long time.

Skill and delivery: Their own way of performing

During a *pikono* performance, people don't speak as in ordinary conversation. The performer will change [his style of delivery], it is like singing, but the melody and voice are different. For singing songs, [the voice or melody] is high. The Adam's apple [vibrates] (hums some notes). This is how it goes. Now it is like this, the way that women mourn. Mourning is another kind of musical performance. It [*pikono*] is similar to mourning songs, but mourning songs are only short. In *pikono* the performer will keep counting waterways and mountains, going on and on, then have a rest to smoke and eat. Then they start again, and after one or two hours, counting the names throughout this time, they will rest again to drink or smoke. But their performance is different and something special, because we others are not able to follow it easily ourselves or sing along.

It's a difficult thing. We others will forget things, mountain places, waterways, counting all the names is too hard for us. They have their own special way of performing, whereas our speech is ordinary. It is hard for us to count [the landscape features] and this sort of thing. With an experienced *pikono* performer, some of the older men who were alive in the old days would also find it hard to follow the counting of the waterways and mountains and so on.

[A performer's knowledge and skill] is something out of the ordinary. We say, hey, what kind of a mind does he have? How many boxes of things does he have inside there? We say, what, does he have a little machine inside his head to play cassette tapes or something? We really say that.

[For describing landscape features] the performers will use praise names. For example, if they are talking about Horaile [a place], they won't say "a Horaile man once lived" or "the sun's going down over Horaile." They won't say the name Horaile. You'll hear something like *heka ayuka* and you will realize, ah, he's going to Horaile now. For Karuka too, it's the same; Aluni too, it's the same; Hirane too, it's the same. They won't say Hirane and so on. They will say things like *awi yungu wanetia*, *yopo*, *yeke*, *akura*, *pakura*, and you'll realize, oh, he's arrived at Hirane, hasn't he?

They [the performers] use praise names for things like wild pig and cassowary. They won't use the real names in the *pikono*. They won't say *ukura* [cassowary], "there was one *ukura*," or this sort of thing. They won't say, "I want to kill a *khawua* [wild pig]," no. It's not possible to use these words. These are heavy on the tongue, and the performers are reluctant to use them because people will think this is not a genuine story. They will only use praise names. The rule is that you can't use real names. In the past our ancestors said this and so people follow this practice.

The sound of them [praise names] is enjoyable. If you use a word like *khawua* [wild pig], well there is only a single word to be said, if you use *ukura* [cassowary], it's just a single word. This is flavourless. So they don't use these in the story. They use praise names, for example, *rakali antia*, *rekeya antia* [praise names for wild game] and these will be more flavoursome. So the audience will be pleased.

This is real *pikono*. If it's a *hapia po* story, then you'll just sit down normally and talk in the normal way. Then you'll know it's a *hapia po* story or just some kind of narrative, for example, something that happened last year or whatever.

Response and evaluation: They told this story and I listened

[I first heard *pikono*] when I finished grade 6 in 1980. This was in Aluni. They were doing this at the men's house. They were having a men's pig-killing, a *reke ita*, and I went there with my father. They told this story and I listened. I thought it was just some story or whatever, and I fell fast asleep. Everyone kept on calling out, sitting there for ages, and I thought, what kind of story is this that they're telling? Now I realize that this was *pikono*.

I was a child, I had just finished grade 6 and I didn't enjoy the story because it was hard for me to understand. How did it begin and how did it end, they were counting the mountains and waterways, and I thought, they're up to something, all the men keep calling out! This was in 1980, around December.

I heard *pikono* at other times and became more interested. After I became a married man, I would hear that *pikono* performers were coming. They would stay at my house and say that they wanted to perform *pikono*. From these times I understood more and more, and now it's all clear to me. Now I am keen for *pikono* performers to come to my house, and I am interested to listen.

It's like watching a film or something like that. If you've seen John Commander and Chuck Norris films, when you hear a *pikono* story you'll think about them again. Hearing about the battles, you'll think, ah Yeripi Pake [a *pikono* hero] must be like Chuck Norris or Mel Gibson, able to defeat so many enemies although he is only one.

With some *pikono* performers, the stories themselves are the same, but some performers don't count the mountains and rivers and locations step by step in sequence. They jump over to here, then over to there, come back, go this way, come back again, and this is not so good to listen to. If the start goes this way, the finish comes this way. Okay so starting from here again, counting the mountains and waterways, here in Hirane, naming the places of Hirane itself, then naming

the places of Hagini [area contiguous to Hirane], if it's like this, this will be so flavoursome and you'll be riveted, you won't feel sleepy. If you skip Hagini and come back to Hirane and go to Suwaka [non-contiguous area] then go back to Hirane again, this is confusing and makes it hard to stay interested. Also, if their voices go very low, it can be hard to understand, or if their pronunciation is strange or unclear, the story is hard to understand.

[Some currently renowned performers are] Kiale, Kiliya, Alipulu, Teya, and Teya's brother Samson. Teya's brother Samson speaks Bogaia, Yuna, English, Tok Pisin, and Hewa. He can perform in all of these. He has only schooled to grade 10, but he can perform *pikono* in five languages.

I have three *pikono* favourites. One is a *pikono* man named Urungawe Pukani, in a performance by Kiliya; another is Amina Kelo, in a performance by Luke Ranga from Yokona. Amina Kela is a dog looked after by Yeripi Pake that transforms into a water spirit at night and goes hunting. In the morning Yeripi Pake can't understand where the game has come from. I only heard this story recently, and it is an extremely interesting story.

They're favourites of mine. I really like them and these two are the ones that I particularly enjoy. Another one is Yeripi Pake. There are a lot of stories about Yeripi Pake, but one story is that a woman took him to the cannibal areas to fight. This was a story told by Teya. The woman had the power to turn light to darkness and make herself and Yeripi Pake invisible. The cannibals could hear the twang of Yeripi Pake's bowstring as he shot them, but they couldn't see him anywhere. And she fought as well, stabbing the cannibals with her long fingernails. In this story the two of them climb up into the top of a pine tree and go to the land of the cannibals. The cannibals had killed Yeripi Pake's brother and carried him off. So they went to fight them there. The woman Ula Rendeyame went with Yeripi Pake to battle there. These three stories are my favourites.

I really like to hear about the dance celebrations and ceremonies in *pikono*, and living at the bachelor cult and killing pigs. I am extremely interested to hear about when the *pikono* boys go and fight with the cannibals. I'm always really excited to hear about this because the cannibals get the *pikono* boys and then I get quite furious sitting there. [When we hear about the cannibals killing a *pikono* boy] everyone gets really angry. Everyone [in the audience] will call out, for example, when they hear about a young woman, *heee!* Everyone will call out because they're excited to hear the woman's voice. The *pikono* tellers change their voices to pretend that it is actually the woman talking. At this point everyone will call out.

[Listening to *pikono*] we think, oh, this place that he is in now is the lowland plains. At this time, when they are in the lowlands, I will remember the Strickland

Gorge and areas like this [where KK himself has travelled extensively], ah, now they are there. When they go up to the mountains, we will think, aah, now they must be in a place like that, a different place, and remember [mountain places we have been to ourselves].

Suppose you have four or three brothers and one of them has died in a fight, or suppose a baby sibling was lost, left hanging alone in its netbag cradle when the parents were taken. When this sort of thing happens in a story—for example, if a pair of brothers goes to fight and one dies—I will remember my own brother who died in a fight. Or if the *pikono* boy is orphaned and alone in the forest, I will remember my brother who was lost as an infant. Or if my mother has died, when the mother [in the story] is killed and carried off, I will think about how my own mother died or something like that, I will think about it again. All these sorts of things arise. Or if [someone in the *pikono*] dies by the coast or far away, he will think again about his own brother who died in Port Moresby or Mt. Hagen or Lae, he will be reminded again. It comes out of one's memory.

Continuity and change: *Pikono* must stay with us

Some others and I have the opinion that *pikono* must stay with us. It is the practice of our ancestors. We can't lose it. I think that if we hang onto it, that is better.

For example, a *pikono* now inspires garden-making. It does not inspire trouble. If we are working the gardens, looking after pigs, and settled at home, if trouble comes our way, well, we know that the *pikono* boys went to fight when it was called for. So we will fight. If we're just living quietly, okay we'll live quietly. If people speak of attending the bachelor cult, and if it existed, we could go there to learn about life, it would teach the younger children how to behave and grow up well. Now we realize that the bachelor cult is a little bit like church. All children, mothers, men, and women must attend church. The missionaries can look after them there. If we could hang onto both the bachelor cult and church together, things would be peaceful and without trouble. But this is difficult now, because the men who knew about the bachelor cult are all passing away.

[The early missionaries] said that exchange practices, the bachelor cult, and the practice of killing pigs, cooking them, and making offerings to the *ipa ane* water spirits, they said these things are of Satan, leave them. Everyone thought this was true and they abandoned these practices. People like me, living now, we think that *pikono* and the bachelor-cult practices were good things, but they are lost.

The first missionaries forbade *pikono*. Earlier on, they forbade it. A few men who didn't join the mission would do these things secretly. Now everyone, including Christians, is interested to listen to *pikono*.

In my area, Aluni, people still talk about [earlier *pikono* performers, such as,] Kiliya's father Hipuya, Welia from Nawua, and Mbakali Raka. People still remember them now. They say, these families were the ones to do really excellent *pikono*. People say now that Kiliya is taking the place of his father, Hipuya. People say that Teya and Samson's father before them used to do traditional stories, but not so well. Now, people say that the *pikono* that the two [brothers] do is excellent. Kiale's father used to do the traditional stories, and people say that Kiale is taking the place of his father.

Pikono has not changed significantly from earlier times. One small change is that performers now include places like Port Moresby, Rabaul, and Buka when they are counting places and so on. Before, our ancestors did not count these places. Then people started going to Port Moresby and returning, or going to Buka or Rabaul and other coastal places and coming home. At this time people started to include them in the counting, they heard the travellers' descriptions and included these places.

A few changes and replacements have arisen, but we can hear now that things are correct, it is done rightly. They don't skip places or make mistakes in counting the mountains or waterways of the coastal areas. They include all of the places from this place at the origin, travelling all the way to the end. [The way the stories go] is true to the past. Talking about bombs [in the battle scenes] and so on are just trivial changes.

I think that [we will keep doing *pikono*]. Now, people like me and others are really interested in hearing *pikono*, so I think we won't lose it. We will keep it going, keep beginning.

[Having research done] is quite good. We can describe it now and later, when my children are grown, they will see the books if we have a copy. The kids can follow it and say, oh, so this is someone who did *pikono* is it? We should look for this. The knowledge and memories we have or the tapes and so on that we have made can be kept, they can follow this. I think it's good that this is done.

Something else that we have been thinking about is to make a film acting out the *pikono*. We could do the action of the *pikono* first and later the *pikono* tellers could sit down and tell the story. We've already thought about this. Act the *pikono* first and then explain to the storyteller, okay, this happens like this and like this, and finishes like this. Or, for example, you're sitting there, and then if you go to shoot a pig or fight with a man, the *pikono* teller will go to this location too. They can tell the story as a voiceover [while the others are doing the filmed action]. Many of the *pikono* tellers and other men want to do this. They are really interested in making a *pikono* film.

We're very interested in *pikono*, and I'm pleased to be doing this description now. It's good to produce the book as we didn't have this previously. Now if children or other Yuna people see this book, they will know what has been done and who did it.