meri suwaka, tingting bilong yu
prendim mi, no ken prendim narapela man
salim pas i kam long yungu pakura
woman from Suwaka, if you think to
befriend me, you cannot befriend another man
send a letter to yungu pakura Hirane

This chapter explores songs associated with obtaining or maintaining relationships with the opposite sex. As in the previous chapter, here the focus is on song texts and song function. I choose to label the songs featured in this chapter ‘courting songs’ rather than ‘love songs’. This is because I am writing of songs that have courting as their specific function. Stewart and Strathern also choose to use the terminology of ‘courting’ over ‘love’ and for more or less the same reason. They write:

Courting songs may also be referred to as love songs but the term ‘love songs’ begs the question of the sense in which the word ‘love’ is being used…Love is in any case a broad and diffuse category and our aim is to look for specific modalities of sensibility that appeal to a combination of values and senses. (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:29)

It has in the past been suggested that ‘love’ is a relatively new concept for the Duna, introduced by Christian teachings. Ex-missionary Were (1968:35–6) writes of the initial mission work at Kopiago station: ‘the missionary showed pictures and talked of the Bible and of God who loves people. Kagi and his kinsmen could not understand this at first, especially the part about love.’ While I personally do not agree with this view, it is not the purpose of this chapter to theorise the nature, the presence or the absence of a Western concept of ‘love’ in Duna society.

I have visited Duna courting songs already in this publication. Chapter 2, in its description of Duna ancestral music genres, gave information about yekia and selepa, the two song genres whose primary function was to court women. In Chapter 5, we saw how these courting songs praised the land of the singer and often that of his desired woman. In Chapter 3, we discovered that the courting practices that took place during the performance of these genres were banned from contemporary Duna life. This ban was never in fact lifted and although it is seemingly not enforced in any way by the local church leaders, these practices appear to have not resumed. Actual song forms, though actively discouraged,
Steep Slopes

proved harder to remove. 1 Listening to previous recordings made by Peter White (1970s) and Don Niles with Nicholas Modjeska (early 1980s), it appears that these song forms remain largely unchanged in terms of their sonic structure.

This chapter will first consider how the banishment of yekia and selepa courting practices has given the function of these genres an unexpected turn, opening them up to express contemporary experiences. I will focus particularly on the genre of yekia, the ancestral courting song genre to which I have had the most exposure, illustrating its application to the political experience. I then turn to introduced styles of courting songs and practices, revealing the continuity that comes about partly as a result of the suppressed expression of past practices. I examine the elicitation of sympathy by a singer as an important aspect of courting songs across the Highlands, in both old and new genres, and the effect such an emotion can have on the listener. To conclude, I revisit the event of Wakili’s death in order to explore the relationship between courting and death in Duna song.

New application of the old

The following yekia (Example 6.1) was sung by a group of Duna men at Six Mile, a settlement area in Port Moresby, in 1983, and was recorded by Don Niles of the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies in collaboration with Nicholas Modjeska. The text, which I transcribed and translated with Richard Alo in 2006, 2 expresses a new context for yekia as entertainment among men only.

---

1 Yampolsky (2001:179) points out that it is the intangible nature of music that allows it to survive over time: ‘Not only is music a powerful symbol of ethnic identity (and all other identities), it is an intangible one, one that can retain its power when other more tangible proofs—such as a society’s autonomy, its land, its forests, its religious practices, its economy, its settlement patterns, its traditional modes of clothing—have been arrogated or crippled or outlawed by authorities or abandoned by the society itself. In the face of many pressures toward social integration and uniformity, intangible symbols such as music are sometimes all that people can retain of their identity.’ Regarding the Duna, Stürzenhofecker (1998:160) claims that ‘certain patterns of thought survived this ritual demise’ of Christianity. She suggests that beliefs and practices associated with death are examples of such patterns of thought that might have survived due to being camouflaged or veiled by Christian practices—that is, they were not explicitly in contradiction with the new doctrine. This might account for why laments have survived better than other sung traditions. My own observation on the night of Wakili’s death supports Stürzenhofecker’s suggestion: in my field journal (2005–2007:18), I wrote ‘[i]t is as if grief is the only place the West can’t touch here’.

2 Modjeska used some of the Six Mile recordings, including this yekia, for a National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) radio program. His notes for this program, provided to me by the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, include a similar, but not identical, translation of this yekia (Modjeska’s translation does not make reference to giving cassowary pinions). The translation I provide here, however, is considered to be more accurate (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 7 March 2007).
In this yekeia, the men deplore the absence of women at the yekeianda (yekeia house). They complain that men have to give each other gifts of courtship, such as cassowary pinions, because women no longer attend yekeianda to be courted. It is most likely that the Duna men were singing figuratively here. In Port Moresby, in 1983, the Duna population was unlikely to have been constructing yekeianda—the ritual of yekeia being curtailed in Duna-speaking country more than two decades prior. Furthermore, yekeianda are usually constructed over sites of death such as the place where a person has died or their former residence or they are constructed during the time that a secondary burial is taking place (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:78), which would have been difficult in the city of Port Moresby to which these singers had relocated. Therefore, the men are altogether ‘outside’ the yekeianda and regret the lack of this form of courting available to them. Some Duna men, however, find their situation humorous in that they are faced with only men to sing to and therefore court; this is indicated by spoken interjections and bursts of laughter throughout the recording session.

Another yekeia (Example 6.2), recorded more recently and in an entirely different context, reverses the gender absence. Recorded in Hirane parish at Kopiago in 2005, it is sung by a solo woman (Pokole Pora) for women (Kipu Piero and myself) and describes a group of women meeting together, but without the company of their men.

---

3 Building houses for courting on top of burial sites inevitably links courting with death. This connection between courtship and death is explored further towards the end of this chapter.
Yekia composed in recent times are open to references to the contemporary world in which Duna people live. In Duna society, modernity came hand-in-hand with the change of performance context of the genre and thus elements of a new lifestyle and repression of ritual surrounding courting songs encourage new topics to be introduced (as we will soon see in detail when songs of politics are examined). This yekia describes me and my fellow female researchers from The Australian National University (namely, Lila San Roque and Nicole Haley), who often travelled together to Kopiago but without our partners. The praise-name sequence ela, elape and rukupe represents white people; the fact we are a group of women is implied by the first line, which uses one of the Duna praise names for women generally: wara. The praise-name sequence, however, is commonly used to refer to items associated with modernity as introduced by white people, such as aeroplanes, so equally in this yekia we could also be described as ‘aeroplane women’ (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 7 September 2006).

This is the only yekia I have discussed here that has been composed and sung by a woman. I have established that this is a men’s performance genre in the yekianda setting; men initiate verses with their own or with pre-existing lines of texts and other men join in at the second line. Women could join in the singing with the other men at the second line, but under no circumstances would a woman initiate a yekia. Outside the yekianda and the courting context, however, women are able to create their own yekia or replicate those they once heard in the yekianda.

It is notable that the only yekia I have heard by Duna women are sung/initiated/led by the older generation of women (aged about fifty-five years or more), who experienced yekia either in the yekianda themselves or through their older sisters who attended the yekianda (there could be yekia created by younger women, but any such examples are as yet unknown to me). The musically similar Duna ancestral courting genre of selepa is another genre I have heard sung only by the older generation of women. Among Duna men, there seemed to be no such generational distinction in performance—both yekia and selepa are popular with younger men (aged about thirty–forty years) as well as their fathers’ generation, and I have recorded boys as young as eight years attempting selepa (though their lack of knowledge of multiple praise names makes their performances very short, and quite amusing to their parents). So the courting genres yekia and selepa remain largely male performance genres.

Men today sing yekia among themselves in men’s houses, makeshift or otherwise. By way of an example of a makeshift men’s house, most of the yekia presented for me to record have been sung in one particular hut belonging to Kenny Kendoli and Kipu Piero (see Figure 6.1). This hut is used primarily for cooking, but also to house male guests who are visiting temporarily (women who are visiting generally sleep with Kipu and the children in the family home). Thus, of an
evening, this ‘hauskuk’ (cooking house) sometimes functions as a men’s house, where cooking by the hearth is a key feature. Men are said to encroach on the space of the women and dominate the shared space in the contemporary setting (Stürzenhofecker 1998:142), and the monopolising of the ‘hauskuk’ space is a classic example of this.4

Despite invitation, I have chosen not to record in, or even enter, a true men’s house, of which there is at least one established in every Duna parish. They are the reserve of men only and I have chosen to follow this gender distinction. Makeshift men’s houses are also maintained by this unspoken rule, evident in the following fieldwork account. On 15 March 2005, my hosts at Hirane arranged for an eminent pikono singer who was visiting the area to sing a pikono for my recording in the above described ‘hauskuk’. Kiale Yokona had sung a pikono just the previous evening in the Hirane men’s house and though we were invited to enter, my fieldwork companion, Lila, and I instead experienced a

---

4 Duna men and women use space differently for socialisation. Men congregate at the markets, while women are rarely seen in groups (for fear of being accused of witchcraft) and see other women only while in their homes, at a funeral place (khene anda) or perhaps working in the garden (though gardens are often a place for solitude). Men are less likely to be seen alone, as it is when they are alone that they could be the targets of a witch (Stürzenhofecker 1998:148–50). This use of space seems to be reflected in music: men usually sing in groups, while women often sing alone (though this is changing with church singing).
short section of his story through the wall before returning to our hut. By the
time Kiale had arrived the next night to sing in the ‘hauskuk’, eight or nine
other men had set themselves up in the hut with cigarettes, sweet potato and
a glowing fire, with coffee provided by myself on their request. Women and
children were banished from the hut and I felt the significance of my admission
as I set up to record. The event of his pikono telling (including its intervals)
lasted for more than three hours. When the performance ended and I was told
that it was all over, I assumed it was. Lying in bed not long afterwards, I heard
the unmistakeable melodic shape of yekia and I then realised that there was a lot
more to the evening than what I had been permitted to experience.

In the absence of women, the primary function for yekia as courting songs has
diminished, thus opening up the genre to other functions, such as singing songs
of political protest.

**Courting politics**

We have seen how modern elements in Duna society and experience can be
introduced into yekia with the example above of a yekia describing the behaviour
of white women. By and large, however, the majority of yekia performed by
Duna people that sing of modern experience describe events and sentiments of
contemporary politics. In this way it can be said that the courting function of
yekia continues, but this time it is voters and votes that are being courted. This
kind of adaptation of courting songs is similar to what has happened in another
part of the Papua New Guinea Highlands—the Melpa region in the Western
Highlands Province, where a traditional genre of sung tales about courtship has
been used in an election campaign to compose and perform an allegorical tale
about how a certain candidate would court the vote (Rumsey 2006b:331–2).

The next three yekia (Examples 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) were sung by a Duna man,
Lekari Lombaye, who was resident in Mount Hagen during the 2006 Koroba-
Lake Kopiago by-election. The compositions describe elements of that important
event and contain both a literal meaning and a figurative one.

**Example 6.3 (Audio 42) Yekia.**

```
upia nginitia ralu sopana (na) papa
hundalu hatia karutia irina sarere etota kenda
akapa hundalu hatia karutia irina
    sarere etota kenda
akuya hundalu hatia karutia irina
    sarere etota kenda, aiyo ai.
```

Mbara upia red birds of paradise sons' ralu place down there, (on them) at Mbara I have closed the door, next
week Saturday I will see
( on them ) at akapa Mbara I have closed the door, next
week Saturday I will see
( on them ) at akuya Mbara I have closed the door, next
week Saturday I will see, aiyo ai.
Example 6.3 literally describes the red birds of paradise from the parish of Mbara. The birds and the lowlands area where Mbara is located share the same praise name—upia—Mbara being a place where these birds are found in abundance.\(^5\) It is on these birds that the singer of the ye\(k\)ia closes the door, and on whom he will look in, next week on Saturday, the suggestion being to see whether they have escaped or not.

At the time this ye\(k\)ia was recorded (5 July 2006), ‘next week Saturday’ was the anticipated end of voting in the Koroba-Lake Kopiago by-election. Of course most ye\(k\)ia in any context have a hidden meaning and the true meaning of this ye\(k\)ia was something other than locking up birds and checking on them later. Here the birds represent the people of Mbara and the singer describes blocking their independent voting by instructing them all whom to vote for (in most cases clan affiliation to a candidate determines how the majority of people in the electorate will vote). When he checks on them at the end of the voting period (that is, when the votes are counted), he will know who gave their vote to another and who listened to him; those who listened to him will have voted for his desired candidate, thus achieving a win for that candidate.

Another ye\(k\)ia sung by Lekari directly after Example 6.3 was recorded uses a similar song text structure, but names two prominent men from the Hewa-speaking area of the Southern Highlands Province, which backs onto the Duna-speaking area, to identify the place in question (Example 6.4). From Wanakipa, on the other side of Mount Apima, Salo Auwale is known to be a ‘fierce man’ with many wives, while Wualo Tupiao was once married to a Kopiago woman and this is his Duna connection (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 26 July 2006).\(^6\)

Example 6.4 (\(\text{\textbullet} \) Audio 43) Ye\(k\)ia.

\begin{verbatim}
apima Wualo Salo ruwata rayaneyya hewa ralu sopana hundalu hatia karurua ngina sarere nduta kenda

pima hundalu hatia karurua ngina sarere nduta kenda

apima hundalu hatia karurua ngina sarere nduta kenda

apopa hundalu hatia karurua ngina sarere nduta kenda, aiyo ai.
\end{verbatim}

Wualo and Salo of Apima they say, of the Hewa ralu place down below, now I go down and I close the door, in one week I will see

pima Hewa people, now I go down and I close the door, in one week I will see

apima Hewa people, now I go down and I close the door, in one week I will see

apopa Hewa people, now I go down and I close the door, in one week I will see, aiyo ai.

\(^5\) The praise name upia is usually applied to the Duna parish of Aluni; however, it also represents general lowland areas (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 7 March 2007). The context of this use of upia—that is, immediately preceding the listing of praise names specifically belonging to Mbara parish (papa, akapua and akuya)—further clarifies its meaning here.

\(^6\) According to Richard Alo, these men are not from Mount Apima exactly; the singer made an error.
Lekari provided the above two political ye’kia verses as examples of what one would sing in support of candidate Ben Peri (who is, incidentally, the candidate Lekari supports). When I asked him what the supporters of another candidate might sing—for example, the supporters of candidate Petros Thomas—Lekari provided the following ye’kia (Example 6.5).

Example 6.5 (► Audio 44) Ye’kia.

\begin{verbatim}
ale karuka ralu roma kuru hundalu hatia karurua ngonia sarere nduta kenda
ako hundalu hatia karurua ngonia sarere nduta kenda
andako hundalu hatia karurua ngonia sarere nduta kenda
paliako hundalu hatia karurua ngonia sarere nduta kenda, aiyo ai.
\end{verbatim}

This ye’kia appears almost identical to the previous one when their texts are compared. On closer examination, however, it can be seen that the difference between the songs of the supporters of the two candidates lies in the place references. It appears that those in the parish of Mbara, and those who live around Mount Apima, are mostly supporters of Ben Peri, and those living in the area of Auwi Lagayu, though they used to support Ben Peri, now mostly support Petros Thomas (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 26 July 2006). Once again, as we have seen in the previous chapter on land and song, key song information is held in the references to places.

Ye’kia have taken on a new and important role in Duna musical life, due in part to the restrictions placed on their original courting context. They are a forum for debate and decision, and—as is evident in other examples—the inevitable expression of dissatisfaction that surrounds the introduced experience of contemporary politics. The genre continues to thrive with this new application and courting continues in a sense as its function.

Contemporary courting practices

Introduced styles of song often reveal in their texts the new ways in which women are generally courted. One of the primary forms of contemporary courtship is through the letter, as Example 6.6 indicates.

Example 6.6 (► Audio 45) ‘Meri suwaka’.

\begin{verbatim}
meri suwaka, tingting bilong yu woman from Suwaka, if you think to
prendim mi, no ken prendim narapela man befriend me, you cannot befriend another man
salim pas i kam long yungu pakura send a letter to yungu pakura Hirane
\end{verbatim}
In this song, the singer addresses a woman from the parish of Suwaka. He tells her that if she wants to become his lover she cannot simultaneously obtain another man's affection; rather, she should send a letter to the singer to establish their relationship. Although this recording was sung by a number of Duna men, it is identified as the song of Jim Siape, who led the group. He is from the parish of Hirane (it is his father's parish) and his wife is from the parish of Suwaka. Jim's use of the kēiyaka for Hirane—yungu and pakura—reaffirms this identity. Once again, we can see the importance of land references in the formation of identity in song.

The movement of letters through the landscape is significant. Often the letters of courtship travel down in the water, as illustrated in the song cited in this previous chapter that describes letters travelling down Wara Gerimb (Example 5.17). Tools of literacy, such as the letter, are obviously introduced phenomena to the Duna. A message travelling down through the water, however, echoes the way of the past, when ipa siri (water spirits) would carry the sentiments of a man to his sweetheart and back again (Lepani Kendoli, Personal communication, 11 July 2006). The role of the ipa siri in courtship was referred to briefly in Example 5.21. The next song illustrates more directly this relationship between lovers and the water spirits who bring them together.

Example 6.7 (▶ Audio 46) ‘Sola alimbu leka suwano’.

Ruwa nguanania rewapi siritiaka ruwa nguanania they will talk, the Rewapi water spirits, they will talk (to you)
Imane yo, sa ngutiani rewapi siritiaka ruwa nguanania girl oh, if you lose your way the Rewapi water spirits will talk (to you)
Waya kata, waya kata sola alimbu leka suwano you come, you come break a stick of cane grass and hold it

Sung by a group of men and women in this recording, this song appeals to a certain young woman that if she would like to come up to the Hirane area of Rewapi (a subsection of Hirane parish adjoining Kalipopo), she need not worry about getting lost, as the Rewapi water spirits (rewapi siri) will guide her way. When she does come up, however, she should break off a piece of cane grass and use it as a walking stick (sola alimbu leka suwano) in order to help her climb. The implication is that Rewapi is located on a steep slope, not a flat area, as is Kalipopo (see Example 5.3), which is identified and praised with the phrase mei konenia (steep slope). It will be recalled that the woman visiting Kalipopo is also instructed to use a walking stick.

---

7 The phrase used in Example 5.3 is sola alimbu kone leka suwano. The word kone (meaning ‘true’, ‘really’) is sometimes added to existing song texts for emphasis and to decorate otherwise sustained notes with an additional two-syllable pattern.
As is the case with the Auwi boys of Example 5.22, the *ipa siri* of this song are said to represent the Rewapi boys who are offering to show the girls the way to their home. This metaphorical representation is a continuation of the layered meanings present in *awenene ipakana* such as *yekia* and *selepa*.

Water spirits appear in many courting songs. Example 6.8, composed by a group of young women about 2002–03 and sung by them for recording in 2004, describes the locations where men (as *siri*) are sighted.

**Example 6.8 ( {*} Audio 47) ‘*Itape koke*’.**

**itape koke auwi ho irina**  
Itape river bend and Auwi creek is over there

**wayapere sopa reyana**  
Wayapere grassland is down there

**auwi karaka siritiaka khana yapa siyata ole ndoletia**  
The Auwi frog-like water spirits carried two stones each at dusk

At a metaphorical level of interpretation, the frog-like water spirits again refer to boys. Some reasons have been given for the existence of this metaphor: the boys of this area (near Auwi Creek in particular) are slender, not at all fat (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 25 July 2006); the boys do not have a lot of pig money (that is, they are not wealthy), do not eat well, do not have good ‘bilas’ (body decoration) and—in the case of Example 5.21 where catching fish is described—they spend their time playing in the water rather than tending gardens, which would be a more fruitful pursuit (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 6 August 2006). In another opinion, the boys of this area appear like *ipa siri* when they put mud on their faces (Deni Kilapa, Personal communication, 7 August 2006), which is something done for decorative and/or emotionally expressive purposes (for example, to show grief at the memory of the deceased). Whatever the reason, or combination of reasons, the metaphor of young men as *ipa siri* is well established in Duna song.

The song describes the boys down at Auwi Creek carrying stones and it is implied that they are carrying gifts to give to their girlfriends. The song ends with a play on the word *ole*, a shortened version of the word *olele*, which is the name of the type of cicada insect heard at dusk and which lends its name to that time of day. This abbreviation, *ole*, is followed by a playful nonsense term, *ndole* (with the addition of the past visual/[sensory] suffix -*tia*). Kenny Kendoli (Personal communication, 25 July 2006) muses that this verbal construction, *ole ndoletia*, might represent the sound of the two stones being hit together.

*Siri* are important in the Duna belief system of the ‘taim bipo’ (time before), and reference to them, in particular their role in courtship, metaphorical or otherwise, is here seen to continue into introduced forms of music adopted by the Duna.
Two of the three songs in the previous section—Examples 6.6 and 6.7, whose recording was led by men—were composed as guitar songs. This is significant as it gives an indication of the performance context for the songs. Secular guitar songs are often created for the purposes of courting, as Example 6.9 details.

Example 6.9 (Audio 48) ‘Manki pakura pilaim gita’.

This song describes a modern courting scene: a boy from Hirane parish plays guitar and ukulele ‘pairap pairap’ (meaning ‘noisily’); a girl from Suwaka parish becomes desirous of him (and his playing) and writes him a love letter. Significantly, a gender divide is foregrounded: the male is playing the string instruments; the woman is listening and responding in turn. This is typical of Duna musical practice regarding the guitar (and ukulele). Women sometimes play guitar privately to accompany Christian songs, but usually it is men performing with this instrument, and women joining in by singing, and perhaps moving their bodies in time. In the home, outside a public performance realm, women are more likely to attempt to play the guitar. I have heard my female friend Kipu sing this song and accompany herself on the guitar, using ‘imitation’ chords and with the song lyrics changed to sing about her male and female dogs courting. Unsurprisingly, the gender roles in the lyrics did not change, even with this entirely different species (the male dog played guitar while the female dog swooned).

The lyrics of this song are as malleable as other Duna song texts—ancestral and introduced—and while this version was recorded by a group of Hirane girls, people from different parishes can tailor it to their needs. For example, in another recording, Kipu sang of the ‘manki upia’ playing guitar and the ‘meri yungu’ full of desire writing a love letter, accompanying herself again with the guitar. The names yungu and upia are praise names for the parishes of her and her husband (Hirane and Aluni respectively). In this more personal version, the gender role as expressed in the text for guitar playing as male is preserved, even though in this recording she was the one in fact doing the guitar playing. So, song texts are malleable, but not without convention. Despite such efforts as Kipu’s, guitar and ukulele playing in public remains the domain of Duna males rather than females (see Figure 6.2).
Courting through musical instruments was important to the Duna in pre-contact times and today some men continue to win over women through their skill at playing the *kuluparapu* (bamboo panpipes), *luna* (bamboo jew’s harp) and *alima* (mouth bow). The Duna use the introduced instruments guitar and ukulele for courting in much the same way (though one important and notable difference is that the guitar is not said to ‘voice stories’ as ancestral instruments are said to). In fact, these new instruments are so closely associated with courting that married men report having their guitars confiscated and their musical activities curtailed, even in the home, by their wives. It is in the ‘disco’ setting where guitars, and guitar-based songs, are brought into the public realm by Duna men—generally the young and unmarried, who are keen to find a lover.

**The disco**

The disco in Papua New Guinea is a continuation of the stringband *pati* (‘party’), which has been present in the country since the 1950s. According to Crowdy (2001:140), ‘*pati* generally consisted of dances in an enclosed area with one or more stringbands performing. Admission fees were often charged and refreshments made available.’ Six-to-six parties (conducted between the hours of...
six in the evening and six in the morning) eventually developed into an electric arena with the use of ‘power bands’ (bands using amplified instruments such as electric lead and bass guitars, and keyboards) (Webb 1993:107–8). Although at Kopiago attempts were made to form power bands with the inventive use of radio equipment, and later the purchase of electric guitars, keyboard and drums by one particular aspiring politician, the lack of a reliable source of electricity was a primary hindrance to such musical activity. The acoustic stringband remains, at this stage, the principal form of group instrumental music for the Duna.

Stringband music in the less remote parts of Papua New Guinea is considered by some to be unfashionable and associated with earlier attempts at playing guitar music in the 1970s and 1980s (Feld and Crowdy 2002:80–1). For those far from town (and even village) life, such as the Duna, stringband music is, however, a connection with the wider world and the world of which they aspire to be a part. Feld (in Feld and Crowdy 2002:81) writes of the Bosavi people’s relationship to gita gisalo, their local form of stringband music: ‘It [gitagisalo] is the Bosavi way of connecting with PNG modernity; it is their jump from making pre-modern PNG music to modern PNG music. For Bosavi people, the fluency in this new music is really just like gaining fluency in tok pisin and English.’ The same can be said for the Duna.

Richard Alo described to me the stringband performance scene at its height in the 1980s. At this time, he was the ‘captain’ of the Auwi Sola stringband. There were several stringbands in the region at that time and stringband ‘resis’ (‘races’ or competitions) were held at events such as the celebration of Independence Day. Groups would come to Kopiago from parishes such as Aluni, and even as far away as Kelabo (see Figure 1.2). At these competitions, prize money could be won (amounts of about K60–80), which would then be divided between the members of the group. This was in the period before Richard married. He then explained that after he married, he felt ashamed to play the guitar in public—for example, during the day at the market—preferring, if he played at all, to play at home at night. Even then he recalls that his wife frowned on such activity, leading him to eventually give away his playing and his instruments (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 18 June 2006). This account reinforces the belief in the guitar as an important and effective means of courting.

Stringband competitions are rarely held in Kopiago anymore. This could be due to the relative scarcity of working guitars, though in 2005 there was no shortage of guitar strings available for purchase at the local market. It could be due to the movement of young men, who would otherwise have formed such groups, out of their home environment in search of work (see the section in the previous chapter on the Duna diaspora). Not least, however, it could be due to the proliferation of the cassette culture in Papua New Guinea developing the listening side of Duna musical practice.
Instead of using live bands, discos at Kopiago now most commonly use pre-recorded music in the form of cassette tapes played on a portable stereo for entertainment. Discos are the first point of contact for many people with cassette culture (listening, responding, borrowing, copying and trading). Before the disco, trade stores were a place to convene and listen to cassettes and the radio, and this still occurs, but at a reduced level. It is the disco that is the main forum for exposure to cassette music (and, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, the forum for the formation of identities and knowledge of the outside world). It is also the disco that provides the only form of night-time public courtship, thus it can be considered an extension of one of the functions of the yekian da.

The following fieldwork account, taken from one of my field notebooks, describes the unfolding of regular discos in Hirane parish, which were held within earshot of our house (see Figure 6.3):

7 April 2005

First disco at Hirane. ‘DJ’ was Peter Kambua, whose house is close to the mission station. He brought his own ghetto blaster and tapes. The tapes he bought in Tabubil [a mining community in another province] when he went to visit his sister (he caught a plane from Kopiago). Most of them are from the ubiquitous Tumbuna Tracks Studio in Madang. ‘Med Wagi’, which I have, is one of these tapes.

When we arrived (8pm) they were just starting, with a bonfire but no lamp. The girls, they said, were hiding by the road and wouldn’t come until there was a light (they were afraid, the boys said). A pole was across the path, channelling people into the fenced off area. Admission 50t.

The scuffling of the dancing was sometimes louder than the music! Boys just danced with boys, as no girls present [at that stage].

14 April 2005

A week later a more successful disco was held. A lot more men attended, and by 10pm approximately six girls had arrived (ourselves [me, Lila and Lila’s mother who was visiting at the time] not included), though hiding themselves with headscarves and umbrellas (though no rain) and sticking very much to the side, often behind the mother figure selling handfuls of peanuts. A man was also sitting on the ground selling peanuts, and two groups of men sat nearby playing cards. Next to them was the tarpaulin area, under which the ‘DJ console’ was set up. This consisted of Peter’s stereo and tapes, hooked up to a battery, and all
resting on top of a newly-made wooden platform/bench. Later flashing fairy lights were hung overhead (courtesy of Lila). On the corner of the tarpaulin tent hung a kerosene lantern (what was much sought after on the first evening).

Men danced with men. Their movements were surprisingly angular, with rigid folding and unfolding of the body, and jagged knee-lifting. We wondered how women would ever get involved in the dancing: the only one dancing was Kipu, who danced with an old (declared ‘crazy’) man every time, going up to him and saying ‘Scuse mi’, ‘dancing’ with him and then leaving him at the end of the song. I wondered how much this kind of interaction was successful as a courting ritual, and how much it replaced yekia and selepa movements as courting dance.

Then a man called out between the songs: ‘All women must ask a man to dance now’ (in Tok Pisin). Amazingly the men stood around waiting for a proposition—amazing as the girls still stood to the very side and had barely revealed their identities, let alone identified men to partner. No-one but Kipu went forward [it is significant that she is already a married woman with several children, so was not taken seriously as a courting participant—also her role as chaperone for three white women on this occasion is likely to have prevented any advances], and so the music went back on and the men continued to dance in pairs and groups of three.

We left at 10pm. I imagine that more women eventually arrived and the atmosphere loosened up, as by 6am when the final song was played, I heard the distinctively loud laughs of Juli and Sendi [two teenage girls, eligible for courting].

23 April 2005

Today I’m dubbing Peter’s disco tapes. Lately (and always?) the discos have been going ’til 6am more or less exactly, adhering to that six-to-six standard. This going-to-6am attitude is expressed/reinforced in some of [the lyrics of] these disco songs eg. ‘six oklok pinis na mi no save…’ (‘it’s six o’clock already and I don’t know [what to do]’).

The above account illustrates the typical set-up and structure of the disco as it is held in the Kopiago region. It also describes to a point the divide between men’s and women’s participation in the event. What it does not describe are some of the more negative aspects of discos as perceived by the Duna community, especially in certain contexts, such as someone’s death.
To hold a disco close to the time of a death, particularly the death of a significant member of the community, is considered inappropriate and could even suggest that the participants in the disco were in part responsible for the death that occurred. It is not only discos that are avoided at this time, but also ancestral dances and songs and the killing of pigs for consumption—essentially any public activity that is considered enjoyable. It is necessary that ‘ol mas i stap bel sori’—that is, people should be sorrowful and express their sorrow. If happiness is expressed then suspicion is aroused (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 24 July 2006). The practice of avoiding ceremonial/celebratory activities at the time of a death is of course not limited only to the Duna. Schieffelin (1976:25) writes that the Kaluli do not hold ceremonies at funerals ‘for Kaluli feel it is improper to jiggle a dead person with dancing. Besides, after a death people are grief-stricken, somber, and angry and are more in the mood for murder than ceremonial dances.’

An example of this kind of conflict occurred during my fieldwork at Kopiago in April 2005. The community leader and former local government councillor Simon Hongei was reported to have drowned when his canoe overturned in a body of water not far from Lake Kopiago (his teenage daughter who accompanied him survived as she knew how to swim). A day or two after his death, when members of the community were still grieving over his body at the khene anda, others were preparing to hold a disco at Hirane parish. Those grieving began to ask why this disco was being held. Richard Alo, who was at the khene anda at this time and who heard this talk, declared that he would go and find out and put a stop to the disco, which by this time had already begun. In the aggression that reportedly ensued, he took one of the speakers and smashed it onto a tree, effectively putting an end to the dance. He later explained to me that it was for the good of the Hirane people and the visiting Australians that he protested to the disco in this way—he did not want to see any of us implicated in Simon’s death (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 24 July 2006).

Apart from the consequences of discos immediately after deaths, holding discos is generally frowned on by other community members because it almost guarantees sleeplessness, resulting in tiredness and a loss of productivity the next day. They also attract people from outside the immediate area, who might not be welcome. Strathern and Stewart describe a disco in the Duna parish of Aluni in 1991, which was held as a fundraiser for local projects. They write: ‘As an experiment in fund-raising the discos were not repeated, because they caused so much trouble. For days before and after them outsiders, male and female, came into the area, playing cards, drinking alcohol, and disturbing local patterns of decorum’ (Strathern and Stewart 2004:110).
One of the key aspects of Duna life at stake in the disco scene is the issue of sex and discos. Controlling sexuality is considered important for the Duna as without this control the marriage system is threatened (Stürzenhofecker 1998:120), and this in turn threatens the social and economic future of the entire community. In the past, the restraint of desire was important to Duna people (Stürzenhofecker 1998:130). Stürzenhofecker (1998:121) writes that ‘a perceived crisis in control over sexuality could stand for a perceived crisis in continuity itself, since such continuity is seen as dependent on the orderly sequencing of the creation and payment of debt arising from sexuality [that is, bride price] over the generations’. Considering this, then, one can see why there has been general objection, particularly by older Duna people, to the discos held at Hirane and elsewhere.

**Bride price and song**

Although the economics of courtship is partly what throws the discos into disrepute, young Duna people are conscious of the obligations of bride price payments expected of them by their families. Songs are often composed with
the issues of money and of bride price in the foreground, and these songs, composed with guitars, would have been intended for the public party context. I now present two such popular songs (Examples 6.10 and 6.11).

Example 6.10 (► Audio 49) ‘Imane ketele’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>imane ketele ketele konenia</th>
<th>really little little girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>antia apaka ita moni nanda</td>
<td>your mother and father say they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rita ma ritape? (x 2)</td>
<td>want to eat pig money, did they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma ritako</td>
<td>tell you to go (to me)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ma ritako ipa wala kendo</td>
<td>if they told you to go (to me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nayilia randa wano (x 2)</td>
<td>at water Wala drink</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here the male singer addresses a young woman, who appears to have been sent away by her parents to find a suitor. The singer assumes that the parents are hungry for ‘pig money”—that is, they are greedy for bride price, which in large part is made up of the gift of a number of pigs, some of which are consumed directly in celebration of the marriage. He invites the girl to drink from water Wala through the leaf spout there and rest by him. He is prepared to entertain the idea of marriage to her.

Stewart and Strathern present a courting song from the Duna genre of laingwa (accepted to be the same genre as yekia, as explained in Chapter 2) with a similar meaning in the final line of text. This line is ‘ko tanda rakuku rapa’, which they translate to mean ‘drink water, come and sit down’ (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:80–1). The authors suggest that the song that centres on this line ‘reflects the actual social pressures on a newly married wife to stay at her husband’s place and not visit her own kinsfolk’s area, where she might become disinclined to return to her husband’ (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:81). This was very much an ancestral ideal; from my experience of contemporary Duna living, it is not always the case that Duna women move to their husband’s area—often men chose to live on the land with which their wife strongly identifies. There are various reasons why this might come about: the wife’s land might provide better employment opportunities, more fertile land, refuge from a clan or parish dispute or an opportunity to strengthen ancestral ties the man himself might have to his wife’s place. Although the Duna text that Stewart and Strathern provide differs from that which I have presented above, the meaning as taken from their translation appears to be the same. Thus it can be said that this sentiment and the ideal that it invokes, now set to a contemporary guitar-based song, have been carried over from the ancestral past.

Young women are under a considerable amount of pressure from their parents to accept a marriage proposal, as parents want to receive the bride price. It is not uncommon for relatives to assault (‘paitim’) the girl if she is unwilling (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 24 July 2006). Similarly, men are under
pressure to find the large sum required to pay the bride price. During recording, Example 6.10 was followed directly by Example 6.11, effectively its partner song, concerning bride price and how to raise the payment.

**Example 6.11 (► Audio 50) ‘No awa’.**

no awa mali mbatia ngaya hapia kheneo (x 2)

imane ka wanda ayia kuri patia no ita moni paka sandape? girl you come asking me often, but from where will I get pig money?

ita moni naraya pina I do not have pig money, it is so

naraya pina anoa yane ralirua ko ngano I do not have, it is so, so find another man and go

Here the singer explains that because his father has died he is disadvantaged as far as raising the required bride price is concerned (paying the bride price is not the sole responsibility of the suitor but of the whole family or clan). He tells her instead to leave him and find another man to marry. Rather than his message being to dismiss his bride-to-be, however, the sentiment expressed in this song encourages sympathy (‘sori’) from the woman. It suggests that she might be moved to accept his proposal without a bride price payment, which is increasingly common for Duna people, who, for complex social and economic reasons, must endure rising bride price payments but without a similar rise in income for most (Stürzenhofecker 1998:110–18). ‘Sori’ is a sentiment integral to courting songs in many areas of Papua New Guinea (and indeed across Melanesia), in both ancestral and introduced styles of song.

‘Sori’

The Tok Pisin term ‘sori’ (meaning essentially sympathy) is most commonly evoked in courting songs through statements of self-denigration by the singer/composer.8 A number of researchers working in Papua New Guinea have documented this phenomenon from an anthropological perspective.

Andrew Strathern has published a collection of courting song texts (*amb kenan*) of the Melpa people of the Western Highlands Province. In these songs, *kond* (sympathy or pathos) features prominently, often literally, in the lyrics (Strathern 1974). He also discusses *kond* in relation to Melpa songs in a later, co-authored publication (Stewart and Strathern 2002a). Stewart and Strathern (2002a:119) write: ‘The emotion of *kond*, which predominates in the [courting] songs, reveals a certain balance of sensibilities, the wish for an ideal outcome combined with a regret that it may not be possible.’ They go on to describe

8 In Duna language, the term ‘sori’, in this sense, is *khenowa* (to be/feel sorry, ‘stap sori’, is *khenowa kana*) (see San Roque 2008:264–6, and also p. 94, concerning expressions of sympathy).
kond as ‘a highly positive, if ambivalent, emotion, expressing how people feel bonded to one another yet recognize their separation. It accurately captures the uncertainties of the life phase of courtship and marriage; as well as the ultimate realities of life and death themselves’ (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:212). Some Melpa marriages do result from the singing of courting songs (Stewart and Strathern 2002a:63) and this suggests that the sentiment of kond, when used to attract the opposite sex in song, is an effective one.

Of the Kaluli, Schieffelin (1976:131) writes: ‘People who are disappointed or frustrated in their desires and feeling sorry for themselves sometimes express their feelings and try to strike a sympathetic image by breaking spontaneously into song.’ Feld (1982) explores the poetics of sorrow in the Kaluli sound world extensively in his publication on the topic. Weiner (1991) too writes of such a sentiment in Foi song. So it can be seen that ‘sori’ is a concept translatable across many language groups in Papua New Guinea and is an integral part of performance genres.

Reactions to ‘sori’: self-mutilation

In the previous chapter on land and song, I presented an example of a song about travelling in which a Duna person leaves his home for Port Moresby, and at the end of the journey he has lost his thoughts of his family and lover (Example 5.18). I mentioned that this kind of tragic song can elicit violent reactions from the listener against their own person—for example, cutting off a part of their finger. This happens when the listener—it could be a man or a woman—is consumed by their emotions, their passion. To cut off part of the finger is acknowledged as a sure way to elicit sympathy, and in the case of a man returning home (it is rarely a woman embarking on journeys away from home), could unite the lovers again once the woman has shown the man what she has done to herself over him.

If the lovers do not, or cannot, reunite (for example, if the woman marries another in her lover’s absence), the stump of the finger acts as a mnemonic to the relationship that once was so cherished. It is said that if the woman becomes unhappy in her marriage—for example, if her husband beats her or they become very poor—she will sit alone, hold the stump of her finger and cry. She might return to her former lover eventually, and listening to love songs on cassettes is reported to occasionally provoke people to run away from unhappy marriages and back to their lovers.

Of course, such dramatic reactions are not only the domain of these newer denis ipakana (‘disco/dance songs’). The courting songs of yekia and selepa can equally break the heart of a lover. A woman can be driven to self-mutilation if another
is chosen over her during this time of courting. If a man desires a woman who
is being courted by another man through yekia performance, he would form his
own group of men and sing yekia close to the rival group in order to win her
affections, to praise his place well, showing his riches so she would choose him
instead (Kenny Kendoli, Personal communication, 26 June 2006). If, however, he
is ‘out-sung’ by a richer man, or a man better skilled at the courting genre who
can describe and praise his land in a more appealing manner, he could inflict
harm on himself (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 24 July 2006).

In the most extreme cases, a lover can commit suicide over a relationship. This
appears to be largely a female response and is often used as an act of vengeance
by the woman towards her family and/or husband in order to create economic
havoc in their lives (remembering the concept of bride price).

Courting and death

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned the connection between courting and
death in Duna song through the physical location of the yekianda of pre-
contact times on top of the grave sites of ancestors. In such a physical setting,
yekia performances fostered a sense of renewal as relationships for the future
were instigated virtually on the graves of the past (Nicole Haley, Personal
communication, 28 November 2005). There are, however, more ways in which
this connection between courtship and death is maintained, and one of the key
ways—more readily transferable into the new performance context—is through
song texts. To explore this further, we shall now return to the death of Wakili to
revise some of the observations made in that earlier chapter in a new light and
to consider another lament composed for her by Kipu Piero.

Death is connected with courting in the lyrics of many khene ipakana. In Chapter
4, Example 4.4, Kepo Akuri sings of her sister Wakili breaking the apia plant
off as she travels away from the land of the living. This plant happens to be one
of those used in making armbands and armbands are one of the items given in
courting (another is the cassowary pinion, which was sung about in one of the
yekia examples earlier in this chapter). Kepo appears to be suggesting to Wakili
that as she goes she should take apia with her in order to make armbands to give
to the dead men that she is about to join. Such a sentiment is common, though
usually expressed more directly, in laments sung by other Duna women (Kenny
Kendoli, Personal communication, 7 March 2007).

9 A similar dialectic also seems to occur for the Foi. Weiner (1991:151) writes that times of sorrow are also
times of courtship/enticement.
In an excerpt from another lament (Example 6.12), Kipu Piero sings for Wakili to join dead men in a game of ball and to flirt with them by just throwing them a glance (not staring but being modest).

**Example 6.12 (► Audio 51) Khene ipakana (‘re lene keno’).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>line</th>
<th>translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane pakala nane mbalo weinania re lene keno</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>pakala</em> cloud boys a ball game they will play, you must just glance at them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane isiki nane mbalo weinania re lene keno</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>isiki</em> Port Moresby boys a ball game they will play, you must just glance at them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane wasiki nane mbalo weinania re lene keno</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>wasiki</em> Port Moresby boys a ball game they will play, just glance at them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane ela nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>ela</em> aeroplane boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane pakala nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>pakala</em> cloud boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane yuwei nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>yuwei</em> cloud boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane eperi nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>eperi</em> Port Moresby boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane pakala nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>pakala</em> cloud boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antiali wane yuwei nane mbalo weinania sokoma rano</td>
<td>dear mother daughter, the <em>yuwei</em> cloud boys a ball game they will play, you must sit down and view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This lament was recorded while Kipu was washing some clothes by hand (see Figure 6.4). The lament is reflective, formulaic but not strictly structured. Almost absent-mindedly, she repeats each line, alternating praise names as they come to mind, not in their anticipated sequential order as they would be performed in public. When I checked this translation with Richard Alo, I acknowledged with him song text differences between this lament and those I have recorded in the past by older women (such as that of Pokole Pora in Example 4.2). I suggested that although the text differed slightly, the ‘nek’ (melody) remained essentially the same. Richard disagreed, citing again the textual differences in further detail. He shook his head, saying that Kipu’s lament did not sound good, that the singer should not jump from one clan to another and back again as Kipu had done, as that did not show enough ‘sori’. The fact that Kipu began every line of this lament with the exclamation *antiali wane* was also, he claimed, not traditional. He concluded that she must have been practising (Richard Alo, Personal communication, 16 August 2006). In arguing against melodic similarities by citing textual differences, it was proven once again to me that in Duna ancestral song, the text is paramount—so much so that one does not have a vocabulary, or indeed a need, to describe melody as a separate concept, apart from labelling its genre. Further to this, it is textual inventiveness (within convention) that is prized by the Duna; melodic inventiveness is generally not prized.
This lament is non-conventional in the features expressed above; however, there is another striking difference in the text. The activity in which the dead men are engaged is a game of ball. It is unclear what type of ball game is being referred to in this lament as several are currently practised in the Lake Kopiago area. These include basketball, volleyball and rugby league. All these are introduced games from the colonial period, which is indicated in part by the English-derived term for ball, *mbalo*. It is significant that from Kipu’s vantage point sitting at the table outside her house the local place for playing ball games—most commonly basketball—would have been in her line of vision. This could have inspired the reference to ball games in her lament. References to flirting with the eye (*re lene keno*) would have appeared in *awenene khene ipakana*; however, the setting for such flirting would not have been the same. In many ways, though, this lament is a continuation of the laments of times past—it addresses the deceased, is ruled by repetition and utilises a very similar melodic contour (based on a restricted three-tone refrain). Particularly, it maintains through the text a connection between courting and death in the absence of the *yekianda* and in doing so contributes to the understanding of fertility in death (as described in Chapter 4).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has taken a circuitous journey through the courting songs of the Duna, moving from ancestral courting songs to the introduced, and back again. It has been deliberately circuitous in order to blur the boundaries between what I continue to identify as ancestral and introduced forms of song. I began and ended with examples of ancestral song that incorporated elements of the new; *yekia*, in its new performance context out of the *yekianda* and away from women, is now often composed with politics in mind, while *khene ipakana* incorporates references to introduced social activities. Contemporary courting practices were revealed to show continuity with the past—in particular, the movement of love messages through the water and the metaphorical reference of men to water spirits. Courting through the playing of musical instruments was seen to continue in the use of the guitar (and ukulele) and parallels were drawn between the *yekianda* and the disco as night-time courting rituals.
Figure 6.4 Kipu sings while washing, with daughter, Monika, by her side.
Themes of times past were shown to continue in song texts and in particular the elicitation of sympathy (‘sori’) and reactions to that emotion in ancestral and introduced genres was shown to be crucial in courting songs for the Duna (and indeed across Papua New Guinea). Finally, the relationship between courting and death was explored with the revisiting of Wakili’s death and the examination of an additional lament composed for her.

This chapter develops the premise that ancestral songs can look forward while introduced songs can look back, building on the experiences and understandings of the past. It is in this way that a continuum of musical practice is forged. Now we will examine continuity at the very beginning of musical practice—the creation of songs.