

Chapter 2

The Kila Wari Stories: Framing a Life and Preserving a Cosmology

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This chapter is a sketch drawn from a work in progress about the way a collection of stories which together frame the life of a single heroic figure engender the identity of the Vula'a, a coastal people of Papua New Guinea. I conducted fieldwork in the Vula'a village of Irupara in 2001 as part of my doctoral research, and made a return visit in 2005. My doctoral research was concerned with Melanesian Christianity, particularly women's experiences of the United Church. During the first visit I did not anticipate the project that would be initiated by my male interlocutors. From the outset, the men were eager to tell me about Kila Wari, the great warrior of Alewai. At first I paid little attention to their stories, dismissing Kila Wari for his apparent lack of relevance to my research. Yet I came to realise that the Kila Wari stories were contributing to my historical and cultural understanding, as they have much to say about Vula'a religion and cosmology.

My investigation of these stories speaks to a number of theoretical concerns which arise in the interstices of the transition from an oral tradition to a written one. These include the relationship between myth and history and the influence of Christianity, the possibility of biography in light of relational theories of Melanesian personhood, and, consequently, the significance of genealogy and place in the constitution of identity. My perspective is both anthropological and phenomenological insofar as my focus is on the particularity of Vula'a story-telling—its context, intent and existential significance. I recognise, though, the richness of the narrations themselves and so present them as fully as space allows as an invitation to further analysis. Phenomenologically it is important to know who our story-tellers are and to whom their stories are told and why. This edict provides the framework for my discussion in which some similarities as well as differences in Vula'a and Western story-telling traditions may be discerned.

The Vula'a occupy six villages on the southeastern coast of Papua New Guinea, four of which are located on the western side of Hood Bay and two on the eastern side. Including those now living in the National Capital District, they constitute a population of more than 4,000. The largest of the Vula'a villages is known as

Hula, a term which also describes the language and which has been widely used to refer to the people. Nevertheless, the so-called Hula people call themselves Vula'a and I follow their convention. Traditionally a maritime people, the Vula'a settled in the Hood Point area at the beginning of the 19th century, having migrated from the Marshall Lagoon area, further east. By the beginning of the colonial period they had established themselves as expert fishermen and traders. The Vula'a first encountered Christianity in the early contact period of the London Missionary Society (LMS) during the 1870s. And it has been claimed that they were the first people in the LMS sphere of influence to enthusiastically adopt Christianity.¹ Further, by the end of World War II the LMS is said to have consolidated its position in Hula village with almost all social activities being undertaken in the name of the Church.²

The Hula language forms part of what is sometimes called the 'Austronesian One' group which is mainly found in two language patches in the southeast, one in Milne Bay and the other in Central District.³ Today the Vula'a use the *Tok Pisin* term *stori* when referring to a range of story-telling activities, from anecdotes and local gossip to events of historical importance. Vula'a enjoyment of *stori* is noteworthy, as is the fact that conversation is given a high social value. Generally, social interaction begins with the chewing of betelnut, is followed by *stori* and, on some occasions, concludes with the sharing of food. There is another Hula term, *rikwana*, that may also be translated as story, but has almost fallen from use. This term was originally translated from the Hula language by Lillian M. Short in the 1930s as 'story of olden times; folklore'.⁴ It is usefully compared with Malinowski's translation of the Boyowan (Trobriand) word *libogwo*, a general term for 'old talk' which, he suggests, includes historical accounts and myths, or *lili'u*.⁵

The stories of the past most frequently told in the Vula'a villages of Irupara and Alewai recall the important events of the life and death of the great warrior Kila Wari. In the past, the Kila Wari stories would have been classified locally as *rikwana*. In Western terms they most closely resemble our classification, 'legends', and this is how English-speaking Vula'a would translate *rikwana* today. Most importantly, these stories traverse the divide between myth and history. They are not strictly 'myths' in the conventional sense because they do not have the quality of timelessness which characterised the old stories. They have now been fixed in time—historicised. They do, however, retain other mythic qualities. As myth, they are experiential and demonstrate a tangible connection between place, teller and ancestor. This is aptly demonstrated in the convention of introducing the stories with the teller's genealogy. And although they are now often invoked in the context of local land claims, the Kila Wari stories have come to serve a quite different Vula'a concern—the preservation

of pre-Christian language, tradition and cosmology in the face of a growing sense of cultural loss.

Even though they focus on the life and death of a local hero, a uniquely identified individual—the Kila Wari stories both are and are not biography. While a number of Vula'a and non-Vula'a people know the Kila Wari story, each of them tells their own inherited version. Together these are complementary rather than contradictory and it is only when they are organised by the researcher that we see a resemblance to Western biography. For the Vula'a, though, they are 'biographical' in a different sense and this is related to their ontology—the particular way in which they experience their existence. From this perspective, the biography is not that of Kila Wari, the warrior, but, rather, that of the Vula'a themselves. For it encapsulates their collective identity as a people and preserves the possibility of a mode of existence which belonged to their ancestors and so is also theirs. Those who tell the story of Kila Wari are also telling the story of themselves. In short, the stories are 'biographical' because that is how we read them but phenomenologically, they are not biography in the conventional sense because their intention is not to reveal the life of a single individual. They are a representation of cultural identity. They are existential. This makes sense for a people who, it has been argued, value relation over and above individualism.⁶

Genealogy as Wealth and Preface

It is important to recognise that the distinction between an oral tradition and a written one has become blurred in this part of Papua New Guinea. While oral conventions continue to operate insofar as the flow of certain types of knowledge is controlled through rights of inheritance, a significant amount of information is written down. This is not to say that it becomes public, though. In Irupara the 'traditional wealth' or 'customary treasure' of a lineage is passed from generation to generation in the form of the *poni poni*. The term refers to a small woven basket which actually, or symbolically, contains the treasured items. It was explained to me as follows:

A string bag (*bilum*) can hold many purse-like *bilums* inside. There could be several. For example, a mini bag for betel nuts, another for cigars and the other for gas lighter parts etc. in different mini bags all in one shoulder-to-waist-*bilum*. Of all these, one is the sacred *poni poni*.

Such treasure may include remedies for certain types of sickness, incantations for abundant food, the tooth of an ancestor, special gingers for successful fishing, the rights to land, or it may simply consist of the passing of a 'genealogical book' which has replaced the remembered relationships or *gulu ai* (lit. generation counting) of former times.

The purpose of the genealogical book was explained to me by Wala Iga, a senior man who holds a *poni poni*, as *maino* (peace). Its keeper is the designated

mediator in matters of conflict. For instance, if there is a dispute between two men, the holder of the genealogical book will use it to link the men to a single ancestor and say 'You are not foreigners [strangers] but brothers. Why then are you fighting?'

As an anthropological tool, genealogies have the capacity to verify certain types of information, such as the approximate dates of settlements and battles. They help us to situate individuals and, therefore, events in time and place. For the Vula'a, genealogy attests to identity and endorses a person's authority or right to tell a story by claiming a connection to ancestor and place.

In the 1960s, Nigel Oram commented on the fullness of Vula'a genealogies. He wrote that 'not only wives' names and origins are known but the shifts in descent group allegiances of various individuals are remembered'.⁷ Vula'a genealogies do not trace blood-lines. Rather, they are mnemonic indicators of the obligations and entitlements constituted in human relationships. They are, in a sense, stories in themselves. Vula'a genealogies *gather*. They gather person to ancestor and ancestor to place. It is to village founders that origins are traced. Genealogies may thus be invoked to explain such things as an inter-village alliance, a person's entitlement to land, or their claim to certain types of knowledge. And so it is that each and every story which constitutes the legend of Kila Wari may be, and generally is, represented by its teller in terms of a genealogical relationship. If we wish to translate the Vula'a convention into our own we might aptly say that the relationship story serves as a preface.

The accounts of Kila Wari's exploits, like those of many legendary heroes, have taken on mythic proportions, but there is no doubt that he actually existed. He was the fourth-born son of the founder of Alewai village, a fact which is easily demonstrated in the genealogies I collected. Alewai village was settled at the beginning of the 19th century by Kila Wari's father, Warinumani Lui, and Vula'a oral traditions which present the period between about 1820 and 1860 as one of intense warfare along this section of the coast comfortably accommodate Kila Wari's life span.

The complex of stories that constitute the legend of Kila Wari is thus clarified diagrammatically. The kinship diagram shown in figure 1 identifies the founders of the western Vula'a villages. It also illustrates that an important connection between Warinumani Lui, the founder of Alewai village, and Kana Vali, one of the founding brothers of Irupara, was established during the early period of settlement. It happened that Kwamala Wari, Warinumani's third-born son, married the daughter of Kana Vali. Her name was Kopi Kila Kana and Irupara people say that regardless of the custom of patrilocality she persuaded Kwamala Wari to settle in Irupara because it was still a young village and there was a lot of work to be done there. The people of Alewai village claim that Kwamala Wari

went to Irupara to oversee land there that had been given in compensation for the death of Kila Wari.

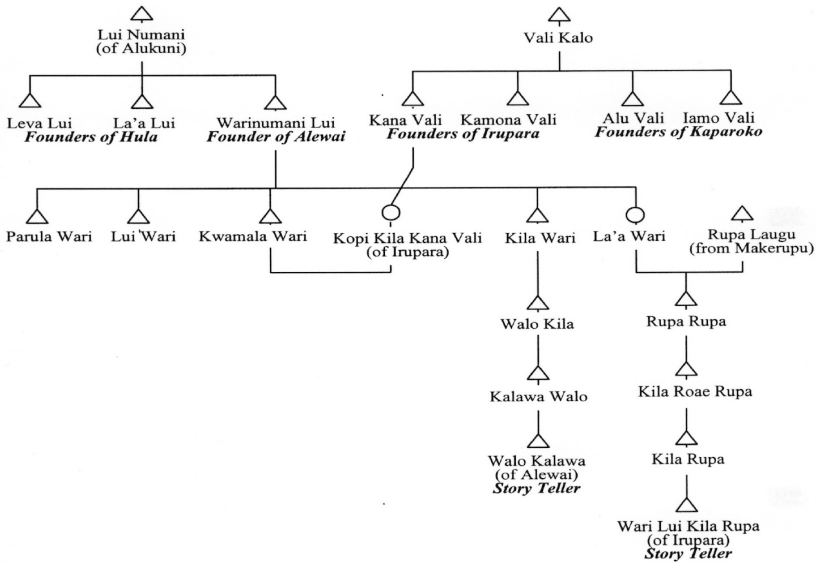


Fig. 1. The founding fathers of the western Vula'a villages (following original migration from Alukuni), and genealogical links to two story tellers cited in the text.

Meeting Kila Wari

My introduction to Kila Wari came from Wari Lui Kila Rupa of Irupara. Wari Lui was, at the time of my fieldwork, a man in his mid-30s whose self-stated occupation was 'Christian evangelist'. As such he had devoted himself to spreading the gospel and was not often to be found in his home village. Our meeting was fortuitous. Wari Lui told me that he and a brother had wanted to film a documentary about the life of Kila Wari which was to be titled 'Shark Warrior' but the demands of his work did not allow the time to pursue this goal. He anticipated my assistance and consequently shared with me his accumulated knowledge of local history—his 'family treasure'—most of which had been gathered by his father during his long employment as a magistrate in the land courts.

Wari Lui's family treasure includes a genealogical book such as that described above as a *poni poni*. His underlying motives for sharing his family treasure with me are partly obscured by a complex intertwining of local politics and Christianity. Nevertheless, his evangelical employment suggests that he is well placed to recognise the power of a good story. To Wari Lui's credit, then, *The Shark Warrior of Alewai* will be the title of my book. He is not, though, the only

story-teller of note in this collection. We will encounter a cast of other narrators as well, all of whom are important contributors, and discover that the telling of the legend of Kila Wari does not entail the construction of a single 'true' story or a fixed chronicle of events.

I will begin with Wari Lui and note that his genealogical relationship to the great warrior is of the utmost importance.⁸ His brief, written account of the Kila Wari story is prefaced by a genealogy which links him to the warrior's sister, La'a, who married one of the chiefs of a neighbouring inland village in order to secure land for the people of Alewai. Having family links to that village, Makerupu, as well as Irupara, Wari Lui describes himself as being of 'mixed-blood' (see figure 1). He explains that:

Wari Lui's (the founder of Alewai) daughter, La'a Wari, Kila Wari's sister was given to the chief of Makerupu's son in exchange for land and peace. She was eventually forced to return to Alewai with her children. She had two sons and two daughters. Her first born daughter married land lords of Irupara.⁹ Her second born son married the daughter of Irupara land lords. From this alliance came my grandfather Kila Rupa. His son, who was also called Kila Rupa had seven children. Among them I am the sixth born named after the forefather and founder of Alewai village.

Before I relate Wari Lui's story of Kila Wari, I want to draw attention to an aspect of its narration. James Clifford, commenting on the characteristics of myth in Melanesia, has written that the mood of a story is recreated as its teller re-enters the space-time of the occurrence.¹⁰ This was borne out in the transformation which Wari Lui's person underwent as he recounted the greatness of Kila Wari. Drawing on every aspect of his ancestral connections, he appeared as the embodiment of the legendary figure. For instance, Wari Lui did not merely describe Kila Wari's spear throwing ability, he lived it out. His expression changed. His eyes were seemingly focused on another reality as he demonstrated the action the warrior used. The persuasiveness of his engagement with the subject—his familiarity with the minutiae of the events described—was captivating. Ancestor, place and story-teller became a single mythic identity in that moment.

What follows then is Wari Lui's verbal description of Kila Wari.

Wari Lui, the father and founder of Alewai village, had ten children. Kila Wari was the fourth born son. One day the father took his sons out to the reef to fish. At low tide the father sighted a small shark in a reef pond. He challenged his sons saying, 'The one who catches the shark will become a great warrior'. The brothers rushed to the pond. Although Kila Wari was the youngest among his brothers, he caught the shark and held it up by the tail. From that day onward, he was to live like a

warrior—fasting, eating only certain foods and sleeping lightly. He was not to touch any woman but to sleep in the company of men.

As a young warrior, Kila Wari underwent extensive training and had to pass many tests. Wari Lui elaborates:

Kouagolo, near Kwaipo¹¹ village, was known as a mountain of power and mystery. It had been said that no one ever returned alive from this mountain. Kila Wari was the first warrior from the coast to receive its special powers and return unharmed. He procured a powerful ginger called *lavi rakava* [bad, or spoiled evening] which made him a fierce and great battle warrior. The Kwaipo war chief gave him special gingers and spells for protection and extra strength. His final test, which he passed, was to jump into many spears.¹² Kila Wari became known as a great spear-thrower. He could kill his enemies from 50 metres away. Enemy spears were beaten aside by a wooden club. In his left hand other spears were caught and thrown back at the enemy with accuracy, never missing their targets. He would move four to five metres ahead of his fighting men with his armoury bearers following behind him with dozens of spears. His eyes were fixed and forecast on the enemy. Spears were placed one by one in Kila Wari's hand as he charged forward without fear. He could throw them from 30 to 50 metres ahead. His head dress was unique and colourful. He fought his battles as far away as Kapa Kapa, Kila Kila, Manumanu and on to Kerema.

Walo Kalawa of Alewai is a direct descendant of Kila Wari. I will say more about him later. Here I include his description of Kila Wari's visit to Kwaipo.

One day Kila, wanting to get some *mula'a* (power from some plants or other sources) went to Kwaipo, further inland from Kalo village. Upon meeting the Kwaipo chief, Mapakulu, they tested him making him jump from the treetop and onto the ground where sharp sticks were planted pointing upwards. This he achieved without injuring himself. And so to him was given an *ivoa* (ginger) called *lavi rakava*.

The special powers that Kila Wari received from the mountain near Kwaipo village are part of a system that is conceptualised by the Vula'a as *waka*. Generally speaking, *waka* is a form of ritual preparation which is based on a period of fasting and sexual abstinence. *Ani waka* (lit. food abstinence) is that part of the preparation which relates specifically to fasting. It includes restrictions on the type of food eaten as well as the way it is cooked and usually consists of so-called 'burnt' vegetables, the emphasis being on dryness. *Waka* abstinence aimed to eliminate moisture and hence softness from the body. For example, fish and meat were to be avoided and smoked banana was acceptable. The aim of the practice

is to become like the ancestors, who are perceived to be dry and light. It is used today in preparation for sporting events.

Traditionally *waka* aimed to develop a relationship with the ancestral spirits—to gain their favour, and protection against malevolent forces. The more difficult the task to be undertaken the more intense must be the *waka*. In the case of warfare, there is a sense in which the battle is fought by invisible forces as well as visible ones. Certain types of hunting and fishing are approached in the same way. Battles undertaken by war chiefs required an intense *waka* which also included social restrictions such as periods of seclusion, and the chewing of powerful gingers. To be in breach of these requirements was to invite death. Wari Lui told me that Kila Wari returned from Kouagolo Mountain, where he had gone for his *waka*, via the village of Makerupu. He was in such a wild state that he was yelling and screaming. During this ‘uncontainable’ outburst he is said to have killed a pregnant woman.

Chewing special gingers during *waka* heats the body, providing courage and power. Both the terms ‘heat’ and ‘power’ are translated as *iavu* in the Hula language. When a successful *waka* has been performed the practitioner is said to be in a state of *vea’a*. In Christian times *vea’a* is translated as holy. Ultimately, the success of a war chief was perceived to be determined by his *iavu* but, as we have seen, Kila Wari was appointed over his brothers because he exhibited chiefly qualities. Much of Wari Lui’s description focuses on Kila Wari’s physical prowess. The kinds of skills required of such a great war chief are consistent with the legends of other areas of the Pacific. The Hawaiian story of ‘Lono and Kaikilani’, for example, in which we are told that ‘Early in life Lono exhibited remarkable intelligence, and as he grew to manhood, after the death of his father, in athletic and warlike exercises and other manly accomplishments, he had not a peer in Hawaii’.¹³

Telling the Battles of Kila Wari with Some Contributions from Western History

It is said that Kila Wari’s reputation extended from Mailu in the east to Kerema in the west. He had established friendly connections with the war leaders, Mea Gure and Gure Gure, two brothers from Paugolo (the neighbouring inland village which is now known as Babaka). In their own village the brothers are known as Mega Velapo and Gure Velapo. The war leaders had assisted Kila Wari and his war party when they fought with Mailu in the southeast and in the battle of Kila Kila. (Apart from the battle at Babaka in which Kila Wari finally met his death, he is most often remembered for the burning of the Koita village of Kila Kila which is also called Kira Kira.) While the Gure brothers had been Kila Wari’s allies in this task, accompanying his war party when they travelled down the coast in their war canoes, they were later instrumental in bringing about his death.

The Koita or Koitapu as they are sometimes called have been described as the 'uncompromising enemy' of the Vula'a.¹⁴ Oram sheds some light on the rivalry explaining that 'The western group of Vulaa villages, who traded with the Western Motu, were hostile to the Koita because they thought that the Koita caused wrecks and loss of sago [their main cargo] through sorcery'.¹⁵ When he visited the Papuan coast in 1885 Lindt observed that 'The charred ruins of old Kapa Kapa [Gaba Gaba] were still discernible away to the east of the ship. This village had been destroyed about two years ago by the Hula natives, who, sparing women and children, massacred three of the men'.¹⁶ Eleven people were also wounded in this battle which Oram has suggested was probably the last traditional war to take place on the Port Moresby coast.¹⁷ He gives the following explanation for the incident:

A Hula man returning from Hanuabada with two women in a canoe laden with pots was enticed on shore by some Gaba Gaba people who speared him. According to one account, an inland man speared him. In those days there were two Gaba Gaba villages and in retaliation the Hula in their war canoes burned the Eastern village.¹⁸

Sometime before the burning of Gaba Gaba, the Vula'a are reported to have burned a Kila Kila site on the hill of Varimakana. Evidence suggests that Kila Wari was dead by the time of the destruction of Gaba Gaba but he led the expedition that was responsible for the burning of Kila Kila. Oral testimony cited by Oram claims that the Vula'a destroyed the Koita villages of Kila Kila and Roku. More recent Vula'a accounts focus on the role Kila Wari played in both battles.¹⁹

Through a number of conversations with Wari Lui, I learned the details of the events that led to the burning of Varimakana village.

The chief from Kila Kila would invite other chiefs who were known for their victories and bravery to his village for friendly visits and assassinate them. One day he and his warriors visited Kila Wari at Alewai. Kila Wari had invited them to a great feast. On their way they had killed a chief from another village, removed his necklace and hidden it in their canoe. While Kila Wari was entertaining his guests his servants were cleaning the Kila Kila chief's canoe. There they found Kini Olo chief's lime pot and necklace hidden in the inner section. Meanwhile, Kila Wari had agreed to go and talk with the Kila Kila chief in his village and they set a date. At that time days, weeks, and months were counted on tied knots. Kila Wari tied knots in a string and gave it to the Kila Kila chief along with his necklace, string bag and lime pot. He was to hang them as a sign outside his house. When the chief left the servants took the necklace and lime pot to Kila Wari. He became furious and vowed that on the arranged date he would challenge the Kila Kila chief. Tied knots were

untied. Days, weeks, months passed until only a few knots remained. As the days grew closer to the meeting with the Kila Kila chief Kila Wari gathered his fighting men. They paddled their canoes to the host camp under cover of darkness. By sunrise they had sunk the canoes in the mangroves and marched to Sabama and surrounded the mountain village. They beat their drums so the Kila Kila chief knew there was going to be a battle. He put on his armour and waited. Kila Wari made his way to the chief's house. 'Who has come to fight with me?' asked the surprised chief. 'Don't they know I am the mighty warrior of Kila Kila?' Kila Wari answered, 'I have come to kill you'. The Kila Kila chief threw his spear and missed. As he rushed back into his house for his weapons, Kila Wari thrust his spear through his chest killing him instantly. The Alewai warriors killed men, women and children and burnt the village to the ground. The site of the battle was given the name Kila Kila which means 'talk' because Kila Wari had promised the chief he would talk when they met at the feast.

Walo Kalawa also tells the story of the battle of Kila Kila. Importantly, he recalls that they sang a song to mark the event of the death of the Kila Kila chief. He explains that 'after killing Iovauna, the Kila Kila war chief, and burning the village they sang this *lekwai*'.²⁰

Kira Kira ati vanuga rage rage
Kila Wari na mora geana
Iovauna venena kouta koutalia
Kwamala Wari ama kini veatona
Lekwai, lekwai.

Although Kila Wari had named the battle site Kila Kila it is also known as Kira Kira which the Vula'a translate as humiliated, destroyed, or trampled flat. The shore of a small bay near Kila Kila is known by the Vula'a and the Motu as Taikone, which means 'beach of tears'. It was so named because of the destruction of Kila Kila.²¹

The Death of Kila Wari

The death of Kila Wari is the centrepiece of the legend. It exemplifies the warrior's bravery and enforces important cosmological precepts.

Wari Lui explains that some time after the burning of Kila Kila, Kila Wari and his warriors killed a man from Paugolo (Babaka). This man had two sisters who walked up and down the streets²² of the village crying over their brother's death. After this went on for a number of weeks, Mea Gure and Gure Gure began to feel sorry for them. They prepared themselves and their weapons to take revenge on Kila Wari and his party. When everything was in order the two brothers went early one morning to Alewai village.

According to Wari Lui, on the day Kila Wari was killed he was visiting his uncles in Hula village. The point is significant because, as we know, it was usual before a battle to undergo *waka*—a rigorous regime of preparation and fasting. But on this day Kila Wari had eaten fish with his relatives. (The point attests to the strategic timing of his enemies.) It was at Hula that Kila Wari received the news that Babaka warriors were at Alewai, which is adjacent to Hula on the western side. ‘He got his string bag and his spear and rushed to the battle zone’, explained Wari Lui.

The most detailed account of the ensuing events is provided by an Alewai resident, Kila Kaile Igawai, who at the time of telling was aged in his early 70s.

The brothers [Gure and Mea] went down to the beach as they regularly did. They called the name ‘Kila Wari’ and said ‘say goodbye to your family and follow us’. Kila Wari heard them and went after them and his brother, Parula Wari, followed him to Paugolo. However, Kila Wari was not afraid of Mea and Gure’s tricks because he knew they could not take him by surprise. He followed them to the entrance of the village where the battle began.

Wari Lui recalls that: ‘When Kila Wari reached the battle zone he was pushing the enemy back’. He goes on to explain that a man from Riwali village, who was fighting with the Babaka forces, had been instructed to aim for Kila Wari at close range with a poison spear—this would ensure his death. Attacking from the rear, he speared Kila Wari in his right leg.

Igawai’s account states that it was one of the Gure brothers who speared Kila Wari and that it was his left leg that was hit. According to Igawai:

Mea Gure speared Kila Wari in the left leg and called out ‘*ah, kea kino kolovana*’. Kila Wari struggled through the bushes with the spear in his leg until he reached the site where the present church station is. Then Kila Wari fell down and the war party threw spears at his body. At that time La’a Wari (Kila Wari’s sister) ran to her brother and threw herself on top of him. The fight stopped. Later, Parula Wari and others took the body back to Alewai for burial.

Again, Wari Lui adds to the description of Kila Wari’s death. He explains that after he was speared and ‘as spears landed on him like rain’ he instructed his brother to run for his life. His body was then taken to the village for public display and for Babaka warriors to use for target practice. As we know, Kila Wari’s sister, La’a was at that time living at Makerupu. Hearing of the incident, La’a ran to her dead brother and took off her grass skirt and placed it over his body. The violence to her brother’s body ceased immediately. The reasons for this remain unclear, although I am confident they will be found in further investigation of the cosmological system.²³ What is known is that Kila Wari’s

head would have been removed if La’a had not acted as she did. The head of a warrior was a valued trophy. Alewai warriors then took the body home, intact, for burial. Later they joined forces with Riwali and Kaparoko in a revenge battle in which they killed the Babaka chief.

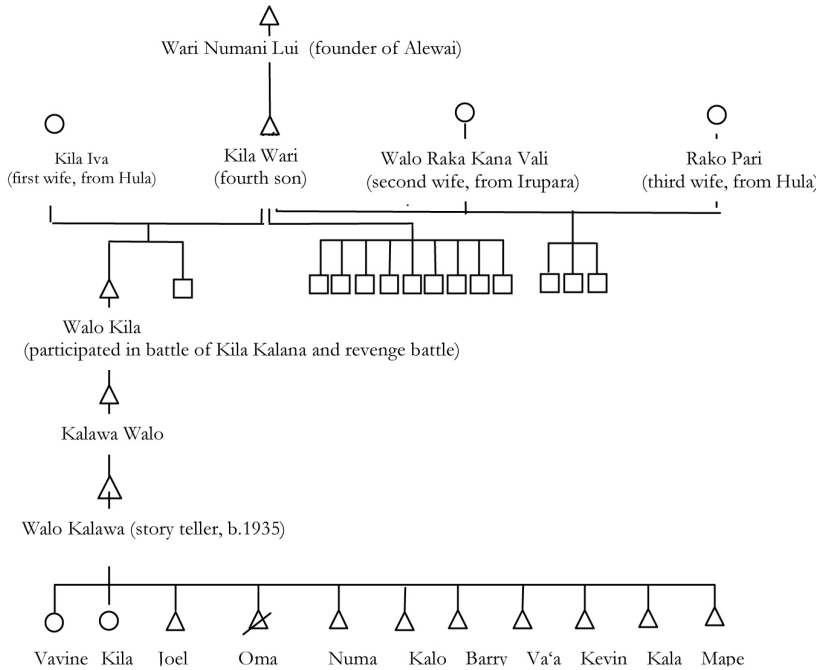


Fig. 2. Patrilineal relationship of a story teller, Walo Kalawa, to Kila Wari. Other relatives are included as named and/or described by narrator.

As I have said, Walo Kalawa is a direct descendant of Kila Wari. His genealogical story (see figure 2) reveals that Kila Wari had three wives and many descendants. Here is Walo Kalawa’s version of Kila Wari’s death. He begins with the assumption that Kila Wari is at Hula village when Alewai is attacked:

Kila Wari although absent sensed defeat and joined his warriors to wage a full scale war. They fought almost as far as Babaka village when Gure Velapo, the Babaka chief, speared Kila Wari on the ankle above the heel. Walo Kila, his son, realising his father was struggling and in agony, raced to help his father to maintain his standing to give courage to the warriors. By then Kila Wari, going weak with heavy loss of blood, pleaded for his son’s safety and said ‘*magulimu on avua* (run for your life)’. His warriors then retreated with a broken heart and left him. Babaka then took their trophy—Kila Wari—alive and lined him up for target practising. La’a Wari was at her husband’s village when news arrived that Kila Wari was captured and the warriors were spearing him at Babaka. La’a Wari

was devastated and ran all the way sobbing to the spearing place. There she untied her grass skirt and covered her brother's body. Seeing the nakedness of a woman the warriors broke up and left quickly without chopping off the head. Kila Wari's body was brought back by his people to Alewai for burial and the people mourned for some time.

The place where Kila Wari was speared to death is called Kila Kalana, now the place where Babaka United Church is. Previously it was called Iome Kalana—a place where a poor old lady was buried.

Kila Wari's spear was made into a *warimo* (long-tom[garfish]) spear for fishing which my grandfather, Walo Kila, used.

The View from the Other Side: A Babaka Story

I went to Babaka village to hear the story of Kila Wari's death from a descendant of a war chief of the enemy side, Numa Nama Gure. Numa Nama's knowledge and authority in this matter are located in the genealogy which relates him to the war chief who fought Kila Wari (see figure 3). Numa Nama was born at Babaka in 1927. His father was Gure Kila, Gure's father was Kila Mega, Kila's father—Numa's great grandfather—was Mega Velapo, who, alongside his brother, Gure Velapo, had been involved in the killing of Kila Wari. Before Mega Velapo came Velapo Vanua, Vanua Kila and Kila Keina. In figure 3, I compare Numa Nama's genealogy with that of Walo Kalawa. It shows that Numa Nama's great grandfather was a contemporary of Kila Wari and, because Numa Nama's is the lineage of Babaka village war chiefs, it is reasonable to conclude that his ancestor was involved in the battle in which Kila Wari was killed. It is interesting, in light of the ancestry illustrated here, to note that Numa Nama is a deacon in Babaka United Church and that Walo Kalawa is also a retired United Church deacon.

In the course of my meeting with Numa Nama I was shown the place where Kila Wari received the fatal blow and also the place where he died. The distance between was significant, attesting to the warrior's endurance. Numa Nama's version of Kila Wari's death provides some additional details and clarifies some points that have already been made. Most importantly, he claims that it was Gure Velapo, or Gure Gure as he is known in Alewai, who actually wounded Kila Wari in the leg with the first spear.²⁴ He begins:

Kila Wari was a great warrior. One day he killed someone from Babaka (name unknown) so...He had two sisters. When this man was killed by Kila Wari his sisters wept so much for him and wished for someone from Babaka to kill him for doing that. While this was going on, two brothers, Gure Velapo and Mega Velapo, my great grandfathers, sent some people over to remove the dead man's necklace and to comfort them. When the two had gone over to remove the neckwear the sisters stopped them

saying, 'Whoever thinks they are strong enough to kill Kila Wari can come and remove the neckwear. There is also food there that we will give in return for the killing of Kila Wari'. The men became scared because Kila Wari was such a great warrior.

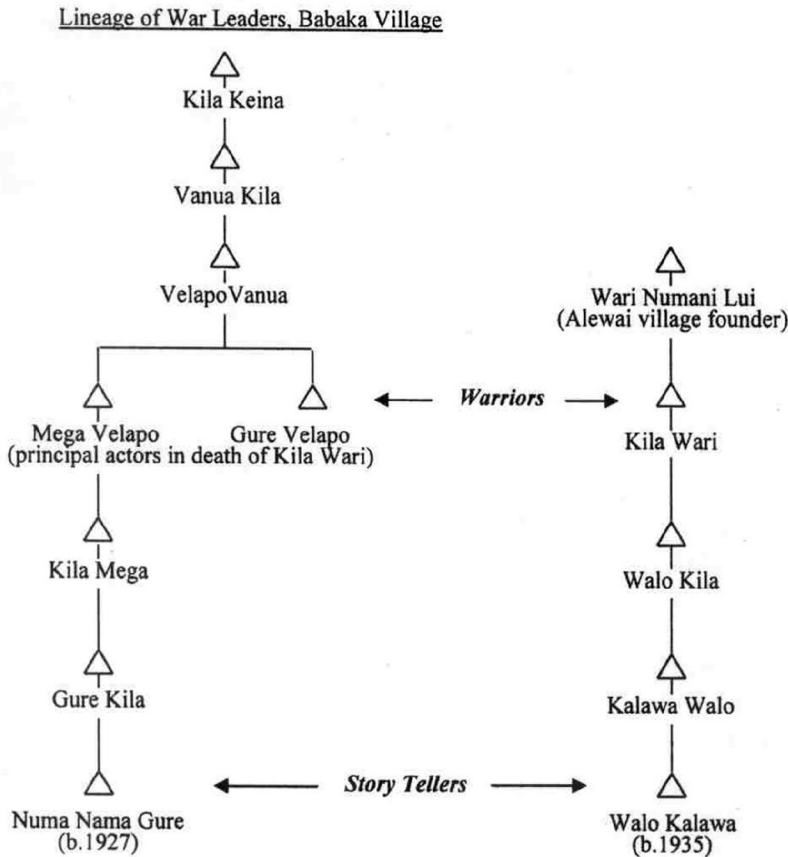


Fig. 3. Patrilineal relationships of two narrators to principal figures in the Kila Wari stories.

Seeing this, the two brothers, Gure and Velapo, spoke to each other. After some time the younger, Gure, went over and removed the neckwear. Later they discussed tactics and began intensive exercise and training—not only the brothers but all the warriors in the village. They practised until it came to the time when they thought they should avenge their loss. They sent word to Kila Wari. They didn't send messengers. They went themselves. Arriving in the early hours of the morning at Alewai beach they called out to Kila Wari (his house was over the sea),

‘Kila Wari Oh! Kila Wari Oh!’ (the houses were built some 200 metres off shore).

Then Kila Wari appeared from his house and said ‘Who are you? You think you can just call my name like that? Wait, I’m coming over’. Hearing all this Kila Wari’s warriors got their weapons and the fighting began. But it had been carefully planned. They fought their way inland and just before reaching the village (Rilo),²⁵ fresh men in large numbers joined the Velapos but Kila Wari’s dignity did not allow him to withdraw. Then suddenly Gure Velapo speared him on the leg just above the heel. As Kila Wari jumped up, Gure called to him, ‘Eagle where will you go? You are going to die’. Then Kila Wari’s brother came and fought beside him while Kila Wari, still throwing spears, was struggling to kick off the spear in his heel. [During the course of the interview it was mooted that the spear had barbs that would prevent it from coming out.]

By now Kila Wari had tired so he spoke to his brother, Parula, who had been trying to help him safely home while fighting at the same time, ‘I’ve been hit. It’s no use, I’m dying so leave me here. But please go back or else you will end up dead like me’. It was here that they left him and his enemies killed him. This place is called Kila Kalana (Kila’s grave). Because Kila Wari was a war chief the Velapos wanted to cut off his head (this was the custom). But the ladies from Babaka rushed over and covered Kila Wari, who was speared again and again (the ladies’ names are unknown). So they did not cut off his head. He had a fishbone tattoo from jaw to mouth on both sides. They did however remove his chiefly neckwear.

Numa Nama concludes by saying that because the two women had now avenged their brother’s death and because some other women had covered the body, nothing more could be done with it so his villagers carried him back. He says that nobody knows the exact spot where the death took place because there was no village there then, although ‘it was a busy place’. The general vicinity is now the grounds of the United Church pastor’s house and it is marked on local maps as Kila Kalana (Kila’s grave).

Collectively, these accounts of the death of Kila Wari are rich in detail. We notice, though, that they present a number of contradictions. For instance, that three different men inflicted the mortal wound—an unknown warrior from Riwali and each of the Gure brothers. Such claims are not contested, however. It is evident from the multiple versions presented here that those who tell the story of Kila Wari are telling the story of their own ancestors. That Kila Wari is at the centre of these stories is coincidental. So, when Numa Nama was questioned about the revenge battle that inevitably followed the battle in which Kila Wari was killed his response was to suggest that we should speak to Kila Wari’s

descendants about the matter. The inference was that the revenge battle was not a story told by his family.

The point Numa Nama did make was that when his ancestor, Gure, was killed his body was badly mutilated, unlike the death of Kila Wari when 'they didn't spoil his body or cut off his head'. This Christian descendant of a war leader finds himself on familiar ground with regard to the importance of taking the head of a dead warrior. Numa Nama explains, 'Chopping off the head was important. It signifies something. Think about David and Goliath. David chopped off Goliath's head to prove he killed him'.

We return, then, to the Vula'a villages for the story of the battle that was to avenge the death of Kila Wari. First, we have an account from Wari Lui:

Riwali and Babaka people were invited to 'bring and buy'²⁶ [this was a common form of trade] at Kaparoko [the westernmost of the Vula'a villages]. Alewai warriors chose to go fishing on this particular day. Riwali and Kaparoko chiefs together with Hula and Alewai warriors had made a plan to kill the Babaka chief. After the 'bring and buy' the Babaka chief was making his way home. The Alewai warriors hid in the bush waiting for him to come their way. They had placed a large human excrement on the road where he would pass (to signal the impending death). When the Babaka chief saw the human waste he knew something was wrong. Minutes later he was ambushed and taken alive. His ears were cut off and he was told that he was going to die because they had killed Kila Wari. After they killed him they cut off his head and rolled the body from Irupara to Alewai. The head was taken to Alukuni and sold for pigs' tusks and arm shells.

Walo Kalawa also gives us an account of the revenge battle.

Then came a time when Babaka and Riwali agreed to a *raiwa* [trade]. Traditionally a knot was tied to mark the day and month of the *raiwa*. Just days before the *voi/raiwa*²⁷ a Riwali man broke the news of the *voi* to Kila Wari's brothers who were still mourning the death so an ambush was planned by Wari's brothers. Very early on the morning of the *raiwa* Babakas made their way to Kaparoko through the bush (it was so early that the birds were up and about trying to catch the first worm and the people's presence caused a commotion). Gure's warriors were cautious of the natural warnings but Gure reassured them saying '*auna paga vagia*' (we killed him [Kila Wari]). After a while they found a human waste. Gure realised someone had gone before them. Just then someone shouted '*poika amana era*' (now you are finished) and a battle erupted. Surrounded and seeing his men die, Gure ran for his life with Walo Kila, who was holding a *kora* [net], and Lui Wari in pursuit. Finally he was

caught by Lui Wari and pleaded for his life, '*Koa Kila govagi kona era?*' (Koa Kila—brother of the dead man—are you killing me now?). And was answered, '*Arimai poro va magulia, paga na va magulimu*' (Should you spare our brother's life, we would...[spare yours]). Then they pushed all the rubbish including the morning leaves into his mouth and killed him. The man who chopped his head off was Pala Pika (the head chopper). Gure's head was then rolled all the way back while spearing it. At Hula it was given to Vele Kopi for transportation to Keapara [on the other side of Hood Bay, adjacent to Alukuni]. The place where Gure died was called Gure Kalana (Gure's grave) and is now commonly known as Gurika—just after you leave Kone Kone creek towards Kaparoko.

It is said that after this battle Alewai village was given land *maino pakunai* (for the sake of peace) between the coastal villages and their inland neighbours.

Relations between the Vula'a and Babaka people have remained relatively friendly. Inter-marriage is common and the presence of the United Church has created greater opportunities for a shared sociality. As we might expect, though, it is considered unwise to raise the topic of Kila Wari when both Babaka people and Vula'a people are present. More problematic today is that the people of two Vula'a villages, Irupara and Alewai, who describe themselves as 'one family' and, as such, share 'the same story' dispute its legitimacy in the determination of land claims. The question is a simple one: what *was* Kila Wari fighting for? Some say land, others disagree. The purpose of this chapter has not been to find answers to these questions, however.

Myth, History, and Existence: Some Concluding Remarks

It was Wari Lui's intention that the story of the life of the Shark Warrior be told to an audience beyond the southeast coast of Papua New Guinea. His request has been met. Clearly, though, this collection of stories has a significance far beyond the documenting of the life of a great warrior. For myself as researcher, the Kila Wari stories have provided a focal point for examining many aspects of Vula'a history, culture and cosmology. For instance, the practice of *waka* which emerges as an important theme in the narratives can be linked to similar concepts—the themes of other Vula'a narratives—which together provide a glimpse of a more complete cosmological system.

We have also seen that each and every story which constitutes the legend of Kila Wari is represented in terms of a genealogical relationship. These *treasured* relationships connect people to their ancestors in a most immediate sense. They also serve as a form of logic²⁸ that maps people *into*—because it is an experiential conjunction—the locations of emplaced events. Although differently conceived, genealogies are maps for the Vula'a and for the anthropologist. As maps they offer a unique opportunity for translation.

For the Vula'a, the Kila Wari stories embody identity. Although they are not widely known among the younger generations, they are held in trust by those who know their value. And while the application of this knowledge is occasionally invoked in the context of local politics, the Kila Wari stories serve a broader purpose. They are a repository for 'traditional' knowledge in a climate where the practices of the past have been significantly eroded by Christianity. Most importantly, they are reminders of an alternative way of life—a possibility of Being that is available, at least in the imagination, should people choose to engage it.

We have seen the weight that Wari Lui attributes to his genealogical connection to Kila Wari and glimpsed his mythic enactment of the warrior's life. Similarly, when Numa Nama Gure speaks of the chiefly lineage to which he belongs, he is not merely commemorating the past. Rather, he is acknowledging a possible present—a present in which he may be called upon to enact the duties of his forebears. And he remembers the actions of his ancestors largely in terms of the landscape in which they are embedded. The Kila Wari stories speak of history but they are also mythic. They tell of the life of a great man but they also tell of what it is to engage with such a life—story-teller, ancestor and place participate in a shared identity that is aptly described as mythic.²⁹ Western philosophy makes the existential point that human existence in the world is the primary concern of historical reflection.³⁰ Although the Kila Wari stories are profoundly existential, they are more than the reflection of historical subjectivity. They encourage mythic Being in the face of social change and feelings of loss. Nevertheless, there is a common ground that transcends distinctions usually made between myth and history. The motivation for 'telling lives' stems from the need to reproduce identity—our sense of 'self' in whatever way that is conceived.

Acknowledgements

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ N.D. Oram, 'Culture change, economic development and migration among the Hula', *Oceania*, 36:4 (1968), 254.
- ² Ibid., 259.
- ³ J. Kolia, *The History of the Balawaia* (Port Moresby 1977), 21-22.
- ⁴ L. Short, *The Phonetics and Grammar of the Hula Language with Vocabulary and Translation and Notes of Other Dialects of the Hood Bay District* (Adelaide 1963 [originally MA thesis, University of Adelaide (Adelaide 1939)]), 68.
- ⁵ B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York 1961), 299.
- ⁶ See Goddard this volume; D. Van Heekeren, "'Don't tell the crocodile': an existential view of Melanesian myth", *Critique of Anthropology*, 24:4 (2004), 430-454; Van Heekeren, 'Feeding relationship: uncovering cosmology in Christian women's fellowship in Papua New Guinea', *Oceania*, 75:2 (2004), 89-108; J. Robbins, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinea society* (Berkeley 2004); M. Jolly, 'Epilogue', *Oceania*, 74:1-2 (2003), 134-147; M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia* (Berkeley 1988).
- ⁷ N.D. Oram, Papers, Nigel Oram Collection, Box 4, Folder 23, MS9436, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- ⁸ Some of the narrations that follow were given to me in written form, others are transcriptions of taped interviews. The tapes were translated by Gerre Rupa who also collected some of the written accounts. As much of the material was prepared for an audience unfamiliar with its details, it occasionally has an explanatory tone. The narrator's explanations appear in the text in round brackets and where I have felt it necessary to include further elaboration for the sake of coherence I have used square brackets.
- ⁹ Wari Lui's use of the term 'land lords' should be taken as referring to the lineage head, or other designated individual who is responsible for overseeing family land. I have also heard the term used to refer to the ancestral spirits that have guardianship of garden land. I see little difference in the two examples, however, as the ancestral lineage is the significant aspect.
- ¹⁰ J. Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian world* (Berkeley 1982), 253, note 27.
- ¹¹ In a paper published in 1898 R.E. Guise describes 'Kwaipo' as 'a much dreaded village', 207. He offers no explanation but it is reasonable to assume that it is due to its reputation for powerful magic.
- ¹² Wari Lui is referring particularly to the ability to pass through a shower of spears without being hit.
- ¹³ D. Kalakaua, *The Legends and Myths of Hawai'i: the fables and folk-lore of a strange people*, ed. R. M. Daggett (Honolulu 1990), 321.
- ¹⁴ J.W. Lindt, *Picturesque New Guinea* (London 1887), 113.
- ¹⁵ Oram, 'Pots for sago: the hiri trading network', in Tom Dutton (ed.), *The Hiri in History: further aspects of the long distance Motu trade in Central Papua* (Canberra 1982), 9.
- ¹⁶ Lindt, *Picturesque New Guinea*, 60.
- ¹⁷ Oram, 'The history of the Motu-speaking and Koita-speaking peoples according to their own traditions', in D. Denoon and R. Lacey (eds), *Oral Traditions in Melanesia* (Port Moresby 1981), 220-221.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Oram, 'Pots for Sago', 9.
- ²⁰ *Lekwai* is an archaic song form which had a commemorative purpose. There is no accurate translation of this song because the language is archaic. Nevertheless, it is evident that the actions of the protagonists, Kila Wari, the Kila Kila chief, Iovanu and Kila Wari's older brother, Kwamala are celebrated.
- ²¹ Oram, 'The Hula in Port Moresby', *Oceania*, 39:1 (1968), 7.
- ²² This is not merely a modern interpretation. Early European visitors found that the houses in the agricultural villages of this area were built in rows creating 'streets'. The Vula'a villages were built mainly over the water until after World War II. Their houses were also built in neat lines.
- ²³ In Maria Lepowsky's account of women's roles in warfare on the island of Vanatinai (Milne Bay District) she explains that the removal of an outer skirt expressed the woman's protection or, according to context, signalled an attack. Leposky, *Fruit of the Motherland: gender in an egalitarian society* (New York 1993), 62.

²⁴ A leg wound is the equivalent of a fatal blow. The victim can no longer jump to avoid further spears, or run at sufficient speed to escape. When the infamous Papuan Karo was hanged for murder by the colonial government many stories were told by the Papuans who witnessed it of the wounds inflicted by his white killers. One of these claims that when the body was taken away from the gallows there was a knife wound in its side and both Achilles tendons had been cut. Amirah Inglis, *Karo: the life and fate of a Papuan* (Canberra 1982), 119.

²⁵ At the time of Kila Wari's death Babaka village was located further east near the present site of Rilo school. It was then known as Paugolo (the name the people call themselves) until the move took place around the end of the 19th century.

²⁶ Here Wari Lui used the contemporary term for a gathering where food is prepared by one village and sold to another, usually to raise money for church projects, rather than elaborate the more traditional form of exchange of goods which was locally known as *raiwa*.

²⁷ 'Voi' is a general term for trade as compared to 'raiwa' which refers to a more 'social' exchange which included feasting.

²⁸ I use the phrase 'form of logic' here because I do not wish to suggest an abstract framework. Rather, I want to emphasise that genealogies are a concrete reality intrinsic to identity.

²⁹ Van Heekeren, "'Don't tell the crocodile'".

³⁰ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London 1962), 433.