

## **The need for strong and balanced communities through education: Kang Rom (Story-telling) as a way of building communities in PNG.**

**Michael A. Mel (PhD), University of Goroka**

This paper joins the growing concern in our region that as much as there was a need to have an educated community for industry there is also a need for an educated and responsible citizenry – the need for social capital for our communities. The Education Reform in PNG has been a wake up call for an education system that must, amongst other things, educate its citizenry in terms of both human and social capital needs. In my paper I offer a perspective on why we should make cultural education an elemental part of any formal curriculum. Cultural education in indigenous communities served to provide the building blocks for an aspect to life that built social capital of a community. The paper focuses on the age old traditions of story-telling as important and significant vehicles for building a sense of place and a sense of belonging in a community – aspects very much to do with social capital. The ways of story-telling in *kang rom/tom yaya kange* in the Melpa and Ku Waru areas in Mt Hagen have been the basis for a small workshop that began last year and is the beginning of a journey to record the stories and their story-tellers, write the stories, tell the stories and even train the story-tellers for tomorrow.

*'We cannot build a nation simply from technology; we cannot build a nation purely on the basis of the wheel and on the basis of the steam engine. We must build this country; we must build our civilization on values, which have been passed on to us from generation to generation. And I say this: that if we do not agree on common values if it is not now the basis and the stem upon which we nurture and grow our children, then I say there will be no future for this country.'* (Narakobi, 1991).

### **Introduction**

In Papua New Guinea (PNG) there have been many social and cultural upheavals experienced by people at all levels of the country prior to and since Independence in 1975. Cultures that were once located in small and often isolated areas now have had to come to terms in being a part of PNG. This has created much tension. The tension, however, is not necessarily about temperament or violence, but one that is about people making choices of belonging. Where do I belong? What is important for me? This paper initially explores the dimensions of this tension. Allow me to share a story – an important vehicle for this paper.

*Margaret sat in the corner, her head aching and confusion clouding her heart. Why couldn't she go out to the dance with her school friends? She pictured her friends enjoying their freedom while she obeyed her mother and stayed at home. She was lost between her culture and a modern perspective on life. To go out to dances, might mean finding a boy-friend, which would embarrass her parents in their traditional society. How could she make her people see that times are*

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*changing and so are values. Margaret fears being an outcast in her own society yet strongly believes in some of the changing perspectives on life. There she was – the pride of her parents, a top student at school, with a bright future, yet torn and confused inside. She looked around her and realized that nothing had changed in all those years: the same room, rules and lifestyle. Finally she went to bed and cried herself to sleep. (Gibbs 2003: 61)*

For many of us we have shared the tension felt by Margaret. It is about subscribing our allegiance on the one hand to our small community and our heritage and on the other hand be drawn into an exciting new world and the nation of PNG. Like Margaret, these thoughts and questions can be both confusing and disorientating for us - as moments of schizophrenia. We are living in a time fraught with tensions that pull and push many of us between our own communities we live with, the institutions we work in, and the nation-state at large. What does that mean about the future of our own local communities, our tribal languages, histories, myths and experiences?

Any response to these questions and any others related to them can be examined by looking very briefly at the different historical dimensions of being members in our various PNG communities. These dimensions are not separate entities and often they crossover in our discussions and behavior in various situations and circumstances. Hall's (1990) approach to 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in the Caribbean identity from an historical perspective has been helpful here.

### ***Pasin bilong tumbuna***

In PNG prior to colonization many different cultural groups had their own way of socializing their young for their communities. In these communities there was an intricate network of social and family relationships that helped to ensure survival of the group through interdependence and cooperation. People did not define themselves in terms of their individuality, but in terms of group affiliation. Basic to their thinking and knowing was mutuality, not separateness. People's actions stressed participation in activities with others and the establishment of meaningful relationships between people and the environment. People and the world was an intricate and interconnected cosmos. All knowledge was viewed as inter-connected with all aspects of the world that included cultural, social, spiritual and personal dimensions. *Pasin bilong tumbuna* refers to a sense of a shared culture through history, language, mythology and ancestry that is seemingly unchanging and maintained to remind us every now and again of where we have come from.

### ***Taim bilong masta***

Another aspect to a connection to our community relates to our colonial history, the '*Taim Bilong Masta*'. This second aspect of our sense of place is not often talked about but is an important one. We were treated differently by the colonial masters because we were different in language, behavior, skin-color, and custom. Subjected to work and

serve, we learnt to become someone and we have internalized this sense of being different.

*Nelson Giraure, writing in 1976 makes for us a revealing confession when he describes his formal schooling experiences. He was taken away from his village early in life. His heathen name was replaced with a Christian name and then forced to speak and think in a foreign language. He recalls feeling confused and frightened initially and then becoming a vegetable in primary school because he had to think and do things in a completely foreign way. Gradually he acquired the skills and knowledge and managed to progress through the system and in doing so his language, dances, values and all that was about his people were abandoned.*

*When he went back to his village for holidays felt like a stranger. He writes: 'By this time we looked with horror upon village life. To go back to the village was a fate worse than death.' The depth of his oppression hit home when he went fishing with an 'uneducated' Manus Islander. As Giraure fumbled and struggled with a fishing line, the Manus fisherman reeled in two other lines easily and came to help him laughing 'tumas skul'. (Eyford n.d.)*

Giraure felt humiliated and frustrated. He realized he was becoming a stranger in his own place – an alien. This process of alienation relates to the machinations of colonization of the mind. Western education and knowledge are internalized and considered more important than local knowledge (Burnett, 1999). Papua New Guineans come to accept and know the introduced culture in all its forms, shapes and sizes and it as being totally logical and meaningful. Our own becomes totally strange, foreign and even illogical and meaningless.

### ***Yumi iet***

The final dimension I wish to mention is our sense of connection with the present time, the notion of '*Yumi iet*'. Shifting cultures has meant for a Papua New Guinea cultural context that is both impulsive and unpredictable. The situation is made even more precarious with the emergence of a global economy and the transformation through interconnections of the World Wide Web which have made a world that is virtually miniaturized. Influences, both direct and indirect that are being brought about by the technological innovations (via television, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Virtual Reality Games, Advertising, and other multimedia and mass media related practices) are dazzling and beguiling, especially for many communities in Melanesia that may be innocent in their naivety. Communication and dispensation of information through technological innovations have made the spoken and written words appear unwieldy and archaic. A new kind of literacy is needed in order to read and better organize and manage the meanings and influences brought on by the new technologies. Lacking that literacy, these new technologies further compound the ideological situation in the maintenance of power and control of the region.

Which way do we want our children who are caught in tensions to go? What values and knowledge underpin their choices? The process of educating our young is a significant process in cultivating young minds that acknowledge their heritage, their history and what is important for themselves and their communities. The Reform that we have engaged with is very much underpinned by that agenda in my view. I also believe that we need to continue to pursue these aspirations. I would like to share with you a project that I and a team of persons have approached. This project aims to address issues in terms of cultural disruption and discontinuity as experienced above, for researching and storing for the future important intangible cultural heritage and to ensure that there is recognition of what is truly our own sense of place.

### **The Chanted Tales Project**

This project will bring together an interdisciplinary team of researchers from Papua New Guinea as well as beyond engaged with chanted tales of the region. The team is comprised of those who come from the region, grew up with the tradition of chanted tales and have now been educated and trained in ways of the West. The team plan to collaborate and develop digital recordings of the range of chanted epic tales performed in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. These recordings will then be written in the local languages and translated in *Tok Pisin* and English for heritage purposes for Papua New Guineans and others. The material will be for use by children in schools in order to learn their language, knowledge and values.

### **Background to Chanted Tales**

In the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea, including the Southern and Western Highlands and Enga Provinces, there are remarkable oral traditions of chanted tales. The chanted tales have been poetic vehicles through which peoples of the region have maintained their histories - and shared with others their knowledge of the land and people. They are also an enchanting means of community entertainment.

Often the tales were told in the evenings and indoors. In *pikono* tales of the *Duna* area of the Southern Highlands the stories would be told by a lone story-teller over some 7-10 hours. This is an interesting because the stories from the *Melpa/Ku Waru* areas of the Western Highlands lasted between 30-40 minutes. Notable also was the pace of the language in the two regions that was used to tell the stories. In *pikono* tales, the pace was slower, more akin to normal speech, which partly accounted for the time it took for the stories. In contrast the pace of the *Melpa/Ku Waru* language used by the story-teller was quite rapid. . In both areas there was an inherent rhythmic pattern and repeating melodic structure to the language used in telling the stories.

The stories that were told ranged from love stories of a boy meeting a girl and of conflicts between people and cannibals, ogres or giants structured around the universal themes of good and evil. The stories provided entertainment as well as being a record of history, a pictorial or image map of the home lands and folklore with stock characters that served to educate the

members of the communities on the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of their societies and other important knowledge and values that bonded them.

The story-tellers were masters of their craft. As they chanted the stories they captured the attention of the on-lookers with images of heroes, heroines, journeys, places and deeds. Masters of oral imagery, they beguiled and bedeviled the on-lookers as they juggled and juxtaposed words that were chanted in a seamless rhythmic pattern – an art form which would be new to many today, yet deeply rooted in the Papua New Guinean context. The art form of chanted tales formed a vital part of peoples' lives in entertainment, history and knowledge in their communities.

### **School and Home Cultures through Chanted Tales**

Stories, legends and myths are elemental components of our folklore and mythology in our communities. They serve as windows into the deep and powerful store houses of history and knowledge. Reviving stories of our past is a journey of discovery. All kinds of knowledge and stories lie submerged. This process of discovery will be a way to see, understand and appreciate the wisdom of our people. This is definitely a challenge for us. We gaze at the television screens with value laden stories and images from across the world. We compete with the world of science where our stories and myths appear to be unscientific. While they may appear scientifically ridiculous they represent the deeper recesses of spiritual reality that provided the basis for livelihoods.

One of the tragic experiences described by Giraure was the difference between home and school cultures. The chanted tales project is a way to help dismantle the separation of school and home and see them as extensions of the one context. This will be in the way language, and the knowledge within it, are used both in the home as well as at school. Efforts need to be made to reduce the gulf between school culture and home culture in order for children to see the value and significance of what they learn at school and at home to help build and structure useful and meaningful knowledge and skills.

Language is an important element in the Chanted Tales Project. Social and cultural context is very much identified by language and the use and maintenance of language is important in this regard. The use of language in chanted tales is not just ordinary language. Some of the words and terms used are most common and sound like everyday terms while there are others that deal with images and poetry constructed in the chant by the story-teller. The constructing of the chant language is a skill displayed by the artist. The listener also is given the opportunity to listen, decipher and create images in the minds eye as the words come off the story –teller in rhythmic patterns. The construction of the characters, events and the ebb and flow of the story are powerful processes of cultivating the minds eye. In addition the chants provide clues and indications of familiar turf and terrain of the land and creatures that are part of the mythic and folkloric traditions of the community where the listeners of chants belong.

### **Building of strong communities**

Chanted Tales, like any good story, have within them a culture's sense of what is right, a sense of beauty and perfection. Immersing children in the stories and chants and enveloping

their minds and imagination in the events, characters and action, is a journey to help them sense what beauty might be and what maybe deemed as the right and wrong of their communities. These are processes through which important and essential ingredients in building strong and solid communities, where members know what to do and how to go about their duties and responsibilities.

In our heritage telling of myths and folktales were processes of that emphasized the essential oneness of humanity and nature especially in the coherence of land, people, nature and time. Notions of living a meaningful life depended not only on the quantities of knowledge but also on the qualities of knowledge one had in the community. The quality of knowledge related to the *how* in living and to human values that are foundational to building and sustaining communities and the arts were important conveyances that socialized the young to become articulate and responsible members of the community. Our indigenous communities regarded and practiced education as matters that concerned the hand, head and the heart. These were not seen as discrete entities. They were interrelated components of an individual, and educating a person was about connecting all of these within each person. A couple of writers speak well on this matter.

Thaman (1995) describes the concepts of *ako*, *'ilo*, and *poto* as they relate to the Tongan worldview of the education process. *Ako* denoted teaching and learning; *'ilo* denoted knowledge and understanding; and *poto* related to having a good mind or intelligence. The three concepts are interrelated and cannot be entirely separated from each other although there has been some re-interpretation or 'misunderstanding' of the older sense of *poto*. In contemporary education circles *poto* means a person's ability to read and write and do arithmetic while the older meaning related to a person maintaining good relations, having wisdom and the ability and capacity to do something and to do it well under difficult and trying circumstances.

Another example is found in my own work (1995), which provides important philosophical background to the Moge people in PNG. I describe three concepts of *Noman*, *Mbu Noman* and *Nuim*. *Noman* relates to knowledge and knowledge creation in an individual. *Noman* is to do with thinking, feeling, doing and knowing. Learning and acquiring knowledge is understood as developing the *Noman*. The skill and dexterity of an individual in speaking, knowledge of history and social relationships, and showing respect for others relates to *Mbu Noman*. Someone who is able to display *Mbu Noman* is said to have attained the quality of *Nuim*. *Nuim* is not necessarily intelligence alone but an individual's capacity to work with others and for others in difficult and demanding situations. To have attained the quality of *Nuim* was really about the getting of wisdom.

In giving recognition to and realizing these three complimentary components of education, people in our heritage saw that the process of education as a whole was really about character building. Character related to ideas like humility, responsibility over actions, respect for authority, giving, caring for people and so on as much as growth of the intellect and skills. It was also about was our best and finest. Students in the villages of a bygone era were not only taught the skills and knowledge to live but also *how* to live. Chanting tales and stories were

important vehicles, among other ways, significant ways to inculcate history, social and moral character in persons.

A recent report, that of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century titled *Learning – the treasure within* (Delors 1996); has attempted to review, evaluate and map the future of education. In the Report among a number of key ideas one of them speaks of the most effective way for education with an emphasis on lifelong learning, based on four pillars (Delors 1996: 22-23):

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to live together
- Learning to be

The forms of education that have shaped much of the latter part of the last century in the last millennium have been built on the first two pillars. The last two have been given very little attention in education although they are an inseparable part of living. They are in fact the deepest and most fundamental dimensions to human actions.

What is now needed in our schools today is to include these aspects in education. Western education should not be about intellectual knowledge (rational/cognition) and skills (practical/affective) alone, but include matters relating to the heart (emotional/sensibility). The community and its aspirations, its values and beliefs must find a place alongside the two dominant aspects of contemporary education. All three are attributes of being human. Focusing on only two aspects will contribute to a person appearing knowledgeable and skilful, but lacking a certain capacity — the wisdom to recognize and live in a community. Chanted Tales and story-telling are journeys into internalizing a sense of perfection, of beauty, of what is good and right.

Let me now play a story for you and help translate parts of the story for your benefit (see details of story and translation at the end).

### **Educating and contextualizing**

In implementing this project our quest is to begin the process of providing options and opportunities for our young, as they grow up in a competing world of meanings, they are grounded in some way to their place. This sense of being grounded is an important one and will provide the closure to this paper.

This idea of being grounded relates to ideas that have been expressed eruditely by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Knowledge is not objective and value free. In other words knowledge is not independent of human beings and each individual has the capacity to see, experience and produce knowledge. The important point for us is that knowledge exists insofar as there are people who produce that knowledge. The knowledge when institutionalized sets out predefined patterns of conduct and people follow them into routines and thereby the institution creates in us a sense of an objective

reality that is meaningful. For example when we, in various circumstances play roles of being a parent, an uncle, a teacher, an aunty or a student we participate in the social world. There are routine behavior patterns we learn and gradually we think the teacher, student, parent and so on. There are also values we begin to attach to these roles. May I remind us of the stories of Margaret and Giraure? We accrue a body of knowledge that makes the role appropriate and acceptable to ourselves and to others. As we live out these roles they become real, subjectively real. We are grounded!

Now, imagine if we can go through a sense of unsettlement of our given world. This is most often experienced when we travel to a new and strange place. We have lost our bearings, we feel vulnerable and insecure. We look for something or someone that maybe familiar to help compose and place ourselves. If we know the language it may help. But what if we allow ourselves some degree of opportunity to be open to what there is in the new and different? The strange can be frightening and scary. Again, picture Margaret and Giraure in their situation of unsettlement and choice. Which way to go? What are the priorities? In our Reform process this is a key element - to engender a sense of unsettlement into what seems settled. The dominant regimes have settled and are well positioned in our ways of thinking and knowledge and how we feel and prioritize our lives. To bring back or even better, to bring ourselves back to our languages, our knowledge, our myths and our values is really a quest to offer alternate ways of looking at and talking about the way things appear to be.

The stories are a journey to beginning the process of legitimizing our ways. It is a journey to say that our ways are not strange or foreign and we do not have to experience a sense of being lost in our own land. Our children should in beginning the process of education be grounded in their own world as they juggle with the world outside. If we can adapt Berger and Luckmann and their thinking of levels of legitimizing knowledge and behavior, our children should go through processes of enculturation that give opportunities to:

1. Learn the stories by naming them, the characters and their deeds (pre-theoretical).
2. Learn the stories and the relationship of those stories to their place – for example how a mountain came to be (rudimentary theoretical proposition).
3. Learn the stories, the relationship of the stories to place and their placement, ownership and care for the past as well as for the future. These rules and knowledge of conduct are taught by specialized persons (explicit theories).
4. The stories are points of entry into total picture of the community in the way it sees the world and responds to it. As member of that community everything I do has a consequence to that total picture (symbolic totalities).

It is interesting to note the juxtaposition of this process to Giraure's experiences in going to school into how he came to legitimate the western way and began to disown his own place and people.

If our language is to protect and maintain our heritage as we engage with what the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to offer then our next generation needs to be engineered to be able to recognize and settle things from the our history – our own ancestral knowledge, our colonial history, and the ways of other cultures that pervade our shores.

## Summary

Papua New Guinean communities have become far more complex than the conventionally truncated voices of tribalism and cultural entities. The mythologized comforts of village life as serene locations away from the hubs of the hasty race of town life are imaginings of an 'elsewhere' which serve as rhetoric to gloss over the real images of rising ghettos, fringe dwellers, and the politically and economically marginalized. There are less tribally distinctive societies and even looming threats of cultural and tribal disintegration. These are the contemporary PNG communities that have moved in to pick up the pieces where colonialism left off. State machineries advocate for greater conformity for purposes largely directed at economic wealth generation and nation building. It is the cosmopolitan admixture of highways and bi-ways where we have left our homelands, our hamlets and our villages in search of work, education, marriage and in some cases as itinerant visitors and workers. But in the leaving we have brought with us an assorted luggage of our languages, customs, stories myths – in part real and in part imagined - and memories of childhood. While we negotiate and forage in the modern cosmopolitan locations we find time to claim and cling to some authenticity. This is the location of creolized food, dances, songs, and costumes – a pot-purri of the modern Papua New Guinean communities.

Our Reform process is a journey very much about re-vitalizing and even re-inventing ourselves. It must be supported. If there are hiccups let's talk about them and deal with them as best we can because if we do not go with it the price is just not worth contemplating.

As Freire (1970: 76) wrote: 'Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world [sic]. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it'.

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Translation of a *Tom Yaya* Performance By Kopia Noma, March 1997 (The full version of the *Tom yaya* performance and prose summary of the tale can be found in the article by Alan Rumsey as indicated in the reference) CD recording of the performance for the conference presentation was also recorded and provided to me by Alan Rumsey.

1. kang mel we mel kaniyl e	Though the tinniest slip of a lad
2. kang mai pup yaka nyirim e	That boy strode from perch to perch
3. kang komonga mong yaka nyirim e	That boy strode from mountain to mountain
4. ukuni yabu tobu midi nyirim e	He wanted to slay the Ukuni
5. kobulka yabu tobu midi nyirim,	He wanted to slay the Kobulka
6. kang mel we mel kaniyl e	Though the tinniest slip of a lad
7. kang piditap mel kaniyl e	Who'd been ignored since the day he was born
8. pilyini kub nai-ko, nyirim e	And who's ever heard such a tale?
9. kanuni kub nai-ko nyirim e	And who's ever seen such a thing?
10. kang mai pup yaka nyirim e	That boy strode from perch to perch

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|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 11. kobulka yabu tokur midi nyirim e | The Kombulka tribe he would slaughter |
| 12. minabi yabu toku midi nyirim e   | The Minyabi tribe he would slaughter  |
| 13. kang mel we mel kaniyl e         | Though the tinniest slip of a lad     |
| 14. pilyini kub nai-ko, nyirim e     | And who's ever heard such a tale?     |
| 15. kanuni kub nai-ko nyirim e       | And who's ever seen such a thing?     |