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Representing Sorrow in Stringband Laments in the Madang Area, Papua New Guinea

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The people of Madang, who live in small-scale communities surrounding Madang town, have produced guitar band music since the end of World War II. Today, a couple of villages are known as places where laments for guitars are composed and performed at Christian funerals and burials. To the young people this practice of composing and playing guitar music for mortuary rituals is a way to express loss and to induce crying among the mourners. The songs are composed in the native languages in most cases. In Yabob village laments for stringband are generally called *sore singsing*, or "songs of sorrow," in which the image of a sailing canoe—a metaphor for a dead person in the native language—appears frequently. This type of lament is unique in that no lamentation, except for women's crying, is known in Madang before the arrival of Christianity. This new phenomenon is a product of the contemporary cultural landscape where the native languages, with their incorporation of the Tok Pisin word *sore*, have created a feeling of loss induced by the sound of the guitar. Guitar band music was once regarded as a mere entertainment, but as broken love and separation from the homeland were taken as themes for the songs it has become capable of expressing much deeper feelings. The evaluation of *sore singsing* varies according to cultural background, from the positive attitudes of Yabob residents to total rejection by outsiders who have little knowledge of Yabob images and general and persist in associating guitar band music with outdoor 'disco' dancing sessions.

Laments sung with stringbands, especially for mortuary rituals, are apparently a new vehicle of expression as well as a local invention as a result of the dissemination of guitar band music by means of media such as the radio and cassette tapes and live band performances for dancing. This makes the cultural aspect of the *sore singsing*, or "sorrow songs" as the local residents sometimes characterize them in Tok Pisin, even more subtle: there are multiple discourses in and on the performative context, for the genre crosses the boundary between Christian piety and earthly entertainment, and between the authentic and the spurious, both of which constitute *kastom* or *tradisen* in Papua New Guinea. In this article, I explore the issues surrounding this music-making invention, which has been a vital part of expressive culture in Papua New Guinea, in an attempt to present the way musical expression attracts a particular range of feelings among the people in the contemporary cultural landscape.

Keywords: guitar band music; lament; Madang; Papua New Guinea; oral poetry; social change.

The two villages in Madang in which *sore singsing* is performed seem to have invented it independently. In this article I will take the examples from Yabob village,[1)] an Austronesian-speaking community to the south of Madang town, where I undertook field research between February 1997 and January 1998 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

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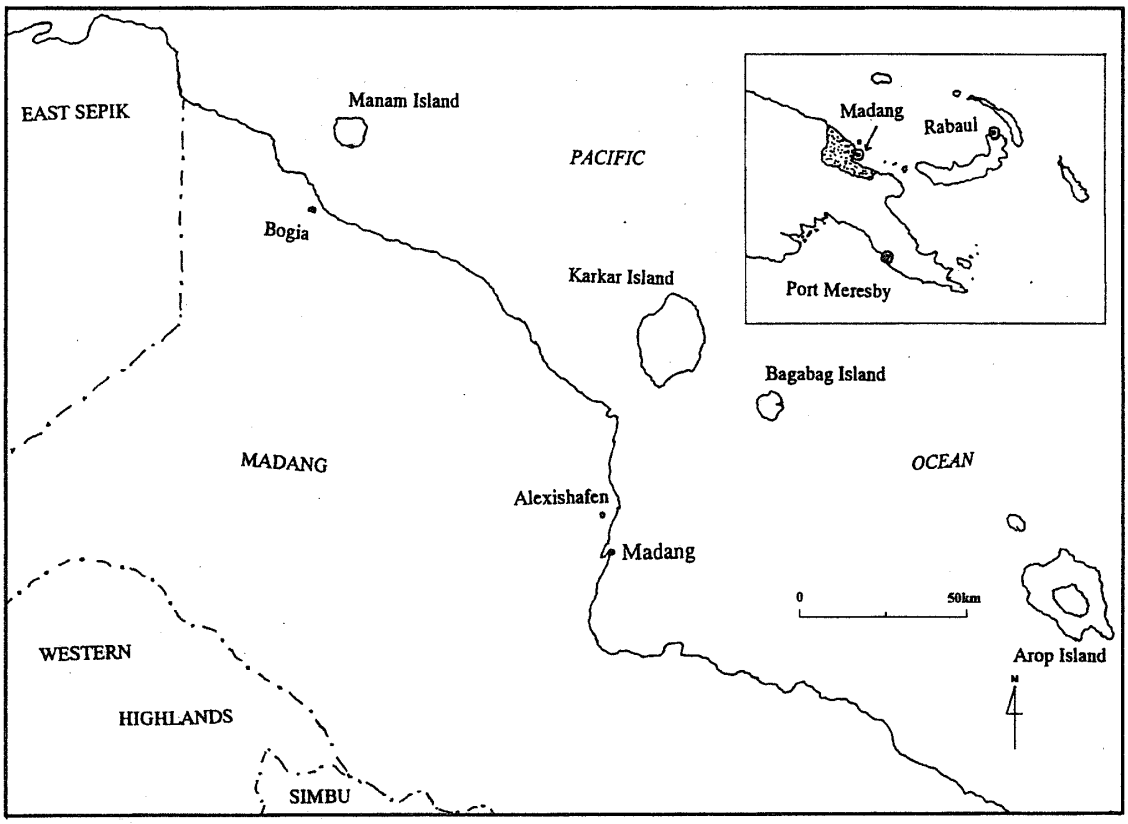

Figure 1. Madang Province.

Among the communities surrounding the Madang Town, or what I have characterized as 'peri-urban' villages (Suwa, 1999),[2] a couple of villages were known to perform guitar band music at funeral and burial by request, which is rather a rare phenomenon in Melanesia. This form of lament is regarded as neither traditional nor a new kind of *kastom* in a strict sense, for it has never involved the communities on a large scale, regularly, or over a long span of time. Also, many guitar band laments are actually composed after the burial or even for memorial services. For such features *sore singsing* is probably better described as a type of stringband genre with particular thematic orientations that can be categorized as "laments." In this regard, currently *sore singsing* is not a distinct musical category but a local contention of lamentation style. However, the importance of *sore singsing* lies in that in every case the listeners were moved to cry as the songs were sung, despite the conservative association of the stringband with entertainment. In fact, many of the songs continue to remind the attendants of the dead, even after some having been arranged into electronic pop music and included in commercial cassettes. By incorporating stringband song style into mortuary practices, a nexus consisting of guitar bands, mourning, electronics, and imagination has been amalgamated.

To Kenneth E. Read, who studied the Gahuku-Gama of New Guinea Highland in the early 1950s, the social change that has accompanied the urbanization of Goroka was a surprise indeed. While he does not characterize contemporary Goroka as a kind of postcolo-

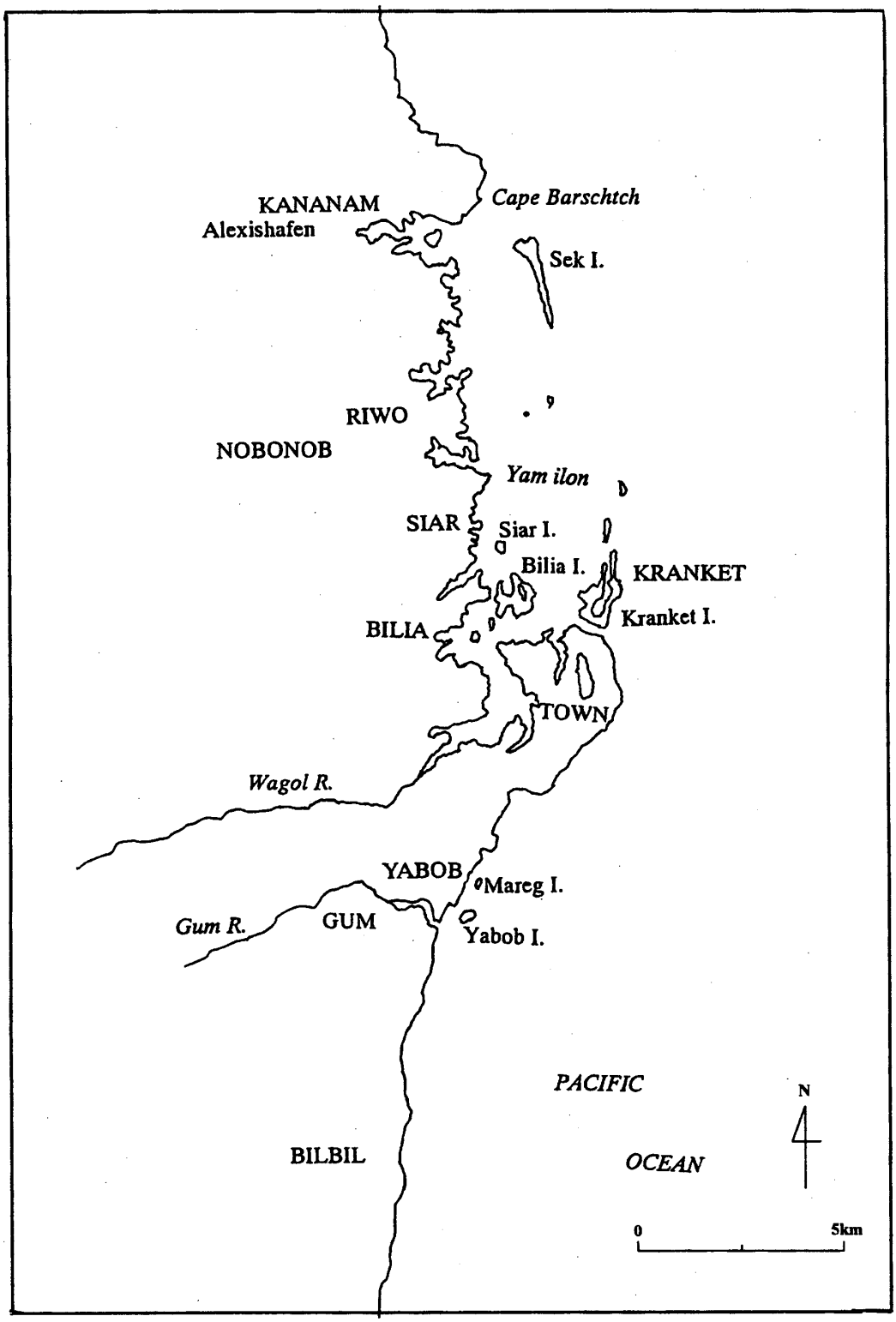

Figure 2. Mandang and Around.

nial nightmare, his dismay at the disappearing cultural heritage and his mixed feelings toward modernization (though it is some extent favourable to women's social advancement) are obvious from:

> Some of the changes that have occurred in relationships between men and women are implicated in juxtaposing the sound of the *nama* flutes and the "reggae" band playing in an open truck to announce a "six-to-six." I don't think anyone seeing the Gahuku now would be able to appreciate the contrast suggested by placing it side by side, however. They wouldn't hear the *nama* flutes now—or any kind of flute for that matter. They would probably conclude that the "six-to-six" music is not traditional, and anyone from the West would recognize what the style—young men and women dancing face-to-face and occasionally touching in public—conveys about change in intersex relationships (Read, 1986: 190-191).

Here, Read describes the sound of electronic music as a sign of the times. Flute music is contrasted with six-to-six dancing in order to represent the displacement of sexual relationships from the rigid sexual opposition of traditional times. "Reggae" music is a metaphor for both sexual liberation and promiscuity. Read further writes that the Goroka youths would make "excursions in mixed groups in trucks to Kainantu, staying there overnight and returning the following day. The *six-to-six* brings this more relaxed atmosphere into the village where, indeed, even everyday interaction shows less formal inhibition than thirty years ago" (Read, 1986: 223). Like Read, other observers also regard contemporary guitar band music, with the introduction of electronic technology, as a reflection of urbanization and mobilization (Webb, 1993: 157-164; Magne, 1995). While guitar band music is certainly a contemporary cultural product and might appear to be a symbol of modern Papua New Guinea, such modernity is really an amalgamation of indigenous and post-colonial elements that Tok Pisin speakers often call *pasin bilong nau* (ways of life today).

The relationship between music and cultural construct in Papua New Guinean societies has been elaborated in some monographs as a symbolic practice in which sound making is an enactment of a certain complex of symbols. Often, sound-producing instruments themselves would convey symbolic meanings. Among Sambia men, Herdt has seen the long and the short bamboo flutes, which are called "male" and "female" and always performed in pairs, play an essential role in initiation ceremonies (Herdt, 1981: 233, 283-284). Juillerat found a similar male-female pair among trumpets, made in the Yafar of Upper Sepik, which are carved from trees (Juillerat, 1992, 1996: 1-6). Wassmann found a rich world of symbols in the songs of the Kandingei people of Middle Sepik to describe how esoteric knowledge based on moiety social structure is kept by the elders who keep the chants secret (Wassmann, 1991). The literature on ethnomusicology of Melanesia, on the other hand, has dealt with 'indigenous' musical expressions in relatively small-scale societies, such as Feld's "Kaluli groove" (Feld, 1994) or "the social semantics of sounds" of the Waxei of the East Sepik Hills (Yamada, 1997: 241). Feld described how representation works in terms of the interrelationship between sound and culture (Feld, 1990: 14-15), and noted that sound representation has an emphatic structure whereas metaphor or icon (perhaps the latter term seems more appropriate though Feld uses the former in his 1990 monograph throughout) is the vehicle of cultural code. To these scholars sound-producing practice is an enactment of supernatural beliefs: Feld explains Kaluli mimesis of bird's voice in

singing (Feld, 1990: 20-43), and Yamada looked into the voice of spirit expressed as overtones in the sound of bamboo flute (Yamada, 1997: 241-253). Sound-producing practice is not a symbolic act but an epistemology that allows the people to locate their feelings and contact supernatural beings, as the sound of music vibrates through the air.

In *Sound and Sentiment,* Feld analysed the interrelationship between music, dance, and lamentation as one of the central themes in Kaluli expressions. The monographs by Edward Schieffelin and Feld on the Bosavi communities (Schieffelin, 1976; Feld, 1990) show that the feelings of loss, sorrow, and mourning are almost literally coined as a burn on the skin of the dancers. The singing, to which the mourners cry and are moved to burn the dancers, is woven with the local mythology of grief (Feld, 1990: 20-43). The expression of condolence in crying and in words forms "continua relating the speaking and singing voice" (Feld and Fox, 1994: 39). Describing the singing and musical performance, Feld and Fox relate: "The continua of tuneful textual performance in lamentation are often further stylised together with 'icons of crying' like voiced inhalation, cry breaks and sobs, falsetto vowels, and creaky voice, features that are linked to the emotional states and affective projection of lament performance" (Feld and Fox, 1994: 40). In other areas in Papua New Guinea, Maschio (1994) found rich oral poetry for mourning and memorial among the Rauto people of West New Britain, and Weiner (1991) found a similar oral practice among the Foi. As these studies delineated, the lament genre has been an indispensable means of poetic, often musical, expression among small-scale village communities in Papua New Guinea. Whether or not the Madang stringband lament turns out to be a solid generic expression as in the cases of the Rauto, the Foi, or the Kaluli, it is capable of inducing strong sentiments among the mourners and certainly occupies a significant place in the local music-making and poetry. In the Madang area, whether indigenous oral poetry has almost completely disappeared since the conversion to Christianity, or whether it hardly existed at all, is difficult to determine. The making of stringband laments, therefore, demonstrates that the wish to compose oral text in memory of loved ones, who once shared the communal way of life, is on the rise in these semi-urbanized communities today.

As for guitar band music in Papua New Guinea as a popular or folk music genre, the incorporation of guitars in the urban, international, and post-colonial landscape has been documented and debated in a number of studies. Webb, in his study of the Papua New Guinean musical industry (Webb, 1993, 1995) outlined the role of basically urban settings such as Rabaul, highlighting musicians from multiethnic backgrounds, especially Chinese-Melanesians in the urban centres, as the main actors in the introduction of Western pop music (Webb, 2000). Hayward (1998) documented the interaction of urban-based Papua New Guinean musicians collaborating with Australian pop groups on the international cultural scene. While cross-cultural interactions and the presence of the media landscape are receiving more and more attention in Papua New Guinean popular music, especially with regard to the increasing multinational contact that Papua New Guinea faces today, the production of guitar band music at the local and communal levels has been of relatively minor concern. Frank Magne's observation of the complex relationship between multilingual speech community around Goroka and its music culture is a fascinating and indispensable study of the contemporary Papua New Guinean musical and cultural scene (Magne, 1995). Since Papua New Guinean guitar band music involves local practices and highlights constructs such as language, group membership of musicians, learning schema, and composi-

tional themes (Suwa, 1999), it should be examined in the way it was discussed in monographs on indigenous productions of sound.

The people in rural communities, including squatter settlements, can be best described as "grassroots," and they tend to be contrasted with the affluent (Neuenfeldt, 1998; Gewertz and Errington, 1991, 1998, 1999). Of course, there is a wide continuum and complexity between village residents and materially successful urban elites: most people in Papua New Guinea fall somewhere between the two ends depending on political, economic, residential, and educational backgrounds, and probably most are actors in more than one situation. I would categorize "grassroots" basically as a group of Melanesian or Papuan people who have identities in village communities in some way, and have access to consumer culture in some degree, including transactions with commodities like betel nuts or laundry soap. To these people, radio-cassette players are not very easy to purchase, but they may have some access through their more affluent *wantok*, and guitar band songs have been composed as an important way to express and imagine things and life in community. Listening to someone else's cassette player and sitting on the playing field to feel the beat of local bands at night is a communal experience during which feelings toward the sound of the guitar are cultivated, to be fed back to the bands.

Guitar Band Music in the Madang Area

In the Madang area, the indigenous musical before Christianity probably took several forms. A missionary-anthropologist Emil F. Hannemann,[3] who undertook his assignment at the Protestant Siar mission, commented on one native musical genre:

> The dance represented so many rituals of pagan religion, absorbing native's attention to the exclusion for the time of all other interests. The dance made concessions to the physical side of man not in harmony with godly purity [...] Siar, on the other hand, was for keeping the dance, basing its dissent on two thing, viz the periodic request of the District Officer (then Australian) that they dance for tourists and Australian officials on inspection trips, and the concession Siar saw fit to make to its people by way of supplying social diversion and entertainment (Hannemann, 1996[n.d.]: 93).

In a footnote Hannemann explained what "the physical side of man" entailed: "Women were enticed by the dancers and illicit relations frequently took place" (Hannemann, 1996[n.d.]: 93). These resurrected dances, today known inclusively as *singsing tumbuna*, faced cultural extinction largely due to the presence of the Lutheran missionaries who arrived in the late 19th century, but were resurrected by petition to the Australian administration in 1923. The dance was edited in order to accommodate performances in cultural shows, tourist attractions, and governmental inaugurations. For instance, courtship songs for young boys and girls in Yabob, known as *daik*, were turned into *singsing* pieces, with dance steps, for public performance. Today, this new *singsing tumbuna* has become the source of communal identity.

Although young people never vocally opposed or intently turned away from participating in *singsing tumbuna*, it was always the younger generations that accepted and appropriated new musical expressions. The guitar band was first introduced to the local people of Madang as early as in 1945 as a result of contact with the Allied troops, as it was

in many other parts of New Guinea Territory such as Rabaul (Webb, 1993: 2-4). Soon the youths learned guitar band music from workers from other parts of Papua New Guinea who lived in the government compound in town. This kind of band, formed by guitars and a ukulele, was called stringband. The songs, mostly sung in foreign languages, were learned verbatim, usually without the knowledge of the meaning of the words, while some new compositions were in native languages, including Tok Pisin. The music was for social dancing, and in the early days it was played in private gatherings in the village or town. The most important occasions for stringbands after 1960 were fund-raising concerts and annual competitions. Almost all villages had at least one stringband, and prizes were the major concern for the bands.

In the 1980s, the audience turned to electronic "powerband" (*pawa*: electricity) music, which basically started as a copy of Western pop music. Powerbands developed followers and completely took over stringbands, whose competitions were discontinued in 1978, and concerts today feature only powerbands. About a dozen powerbands have been active in the Madang area, including the squatter settlements, and (like stringbands) most bands are formed and parted in terms of kinship and friendship network based in communities. In the mid-1980s, local recording production was established in town to release cassette albums of original tunes, and some bands are known nationwide. Dance music concerts, often sponsored by entrepreneurs, involve either live bands or a "DJ" who plays cassettes, and they are the major public entertainment in the area today.

Lament in Practice

Rather few facts are known about mortuary practices in the Madang area before the arrival of Christian influences. No written recordings of them are left, and the extent of the impact of Christianity and the several cargo cult outbreaks (Inselmann, 1991 [1944]; Lawrence, 1964; Morauta, 1974: 36-38) on the old practice—some kind of mortuary rituals were certainly present—is uncertain. The following information on pre-contact mortuary ritual is from the Yabob villagers. At least in Yabob village, a corpse was carried on a piece of broken canoe to the burial site. The family of the dead stayed awake with the body through the whole night. The next day, men would dig a hole under the stilted floor of the house of the dead, and bury the body in a squatting position. Occasionally there was some singing, especially when the corpse was being watched. The hourglass drum, *kundu*, kept the rhythm of the song, "in order to give the last respect for the dead." The songs were dance tunes, and there were no special compositions for mortuary rituals. Women's crying was perhaps the most emotional aspect of the funeral. The women, regardless of age, would cry in trembling enunciation with a strong attack. The content of lament usually was regret for the untimely death of the dead, and very often the phrases involved the metaphor of a sailing canoe: "O here the canoe goes!" (*O wag iyowade!*) and so forth. The arrival of Christianity, however, changed a number of the old elements. Today, the corpse is carried in a coffin; a Christian funeral service is held; the dead is buried in the graveyard; and there is no *kundu* singing. If there is any music to be sung, it is hymns. Only the women's crying is still present to mark the occasion, and it is the most memorable aspect of funerals in Madang.

Despite the fact that the *sore singsing* was an invention in the age of powerbands,

Table 1. *Kundu* and *Sore Singsing* in Mortuary Practices

	Time	Contents	Performance
Kundu singsing	Pre-Christian	Dance song	Ad libitum
Sore singsing	Contemporary	Lament	With consent

their performance invariably takes the form of stringbands.[4] Some informants claim that the *sore singsing* is a development to take the place of the *kundu singsing* of pre-Christian times. However, the former differ from the latter in that 1) they are original compositions with a special thematic inclination for mourning, and 2) they should be performed either at the request or with the consent of the host (Table 1).[5] Also, a lament is performed during the funeral service and/or burial and very often ignites women's crying, an aspect that was not seen in the case of *kundu singsing*, which has no formal distinction from dance pieces. During my field research in 1997, I had occasion to witness a burial with guitar band songs. Since I did not know of the existence of such songs, I failed to record the tunes. But the following is an approximate description of the event in my diary:

> P (my key informant) said that villager M's daughter had a quarrel with her parents over her boyfriend and she committed suicide by taking chloroquine tablets. She will be buried today in the graveyard on the island, to which her clan belonged. A dinghy arrived with a coffin. The dinghy left the beach to transport people, while the coffin was placed on the beach. A woman threw her body over the coffin, weeping. As the crowd gathered on the beach, the pastor started a sermon. Intermittent cries throughout.
>
> As the coffin was carried to the graveyard in the bush, a group of youths started to sing while two of them accompanied by acoustic guitars. After the final prayer, the crowd threw flowers and the coffin was buried. The band started to play again, the singers were shedding tears. As the singing started, even more fervent cry with a wailing vocal contour was heard from a few adult women, saying something in a local language. At least one of the songs was a well-known gospel tune. P delivered its text in Tok Pisin:
>
> *O Iesus yu wari mi / O Iesus yu wari mi / Harim mi o tarangu rabis man / O Iesus yu wari mi.*
> (O Jesus, pity me / O Jesus pity me / Hear me for I am a poor wretched one / O Jesus, pity me.)
>
> However, I was not sure of the others. Later P said that there were a couple of the non-gospel tunes sung in the Gedaged language,[6] to which the dead was related on her father's side. There was no pig-killing or feast. It is said that witchcraft was the true cause behind the girl's death....

The *sore singsing* was performed, in this case, during the burial. These stringband laments are different from the Lutheran *Kanam* hymns[7] and gospels, for they involve indigenous and secular images rather than Christian ones. In Yabob, the first *sore singsing* appeared in around 1981, entitled *Wag ta*.[8] A nephew of the dead composed *Wag ta* to sing in the funeral as a patient was dying on her bed of a long illness. The coffin arrived at the beach of Yabob Island with a group of mourners and the pastor, and the last sermon was given as they gathered on the beach where the coffin was placed. As the coffin was about to be carried into the bush to the graveyard of Yabob Island, a group of young men, led by a man with an acoustic guitar, began singing a song. The lyrics of *Wag ta* are as follows:

Uuuu wag ta
Dirimal ilon iyowade
bi a, bi a
mesimesi iyowade.

A canoe
Sails along the waters of Dirimal.
Auntie, Auntie,
It sails away on the sea.

(Sandie Gabriel,[9] *Wag ta*)

At first, the gatherers wondered what the group of youths was about to do with guitars, especially when they recognized the form of stringband music in the strumming. At that time, the stringband was still considered to be a pastime. As soon as the audience heard the tune, they were moved to tears and began to cry. Some remembered it as one of the most emotional funerals in those days. As P put it: "A lot of people cried. It was a nice (*nais*) funeral." If there was a reason for such a burst of tears among the participants, aside from the quality of the performance, it might have been the canoe reference in the lyrics. As it will be explained below, the image of a departing canoe vanishing into the horizon is one of the strongest symbols to the village people.

The Images of Lament

Table 2 lists all of the Yabob laments that were described by my native informants. Here, I treat what the natives call *sore singsing* (sometime also referred to as *singsing bilong sore* or *singsing bilong wari*) as a song type, for these songs can evoke the feeling of loss and memory of the dead.[10] The *sore singsing* in the larger sense is a song composed for any formal or informal occasion to mourn the dead. Since in many cases it is difficult for the composers to predict and announce the death of their own or others' kin, most pieces of *sore singsing* are composed during or after the funeral service. The *sore singsing* in the narrower sense, on the other hand, are the songs that are used for funerals. The dominant language, like that of the powerband tunes, is the native tongue of the village, together with some Tok Pisin, English, and the language of the neighbouring Bilbil village. There were at least six funerals with the *sore singsing* between 1981 and 1997, and *Balangut* was sung at more than one funeral. *Nimor wag* has never been sung in a funeral, but the informants feel it can be sung any funeral to follow from the subclan Kakon Nimor-Darem. *Long solid days* alone is classified as a *sore singsing* here because of the basic atmosphere of the lyrics, which potentially can be played for a funeral, although the song is about parting from a mother. The two songs *Damag o* and *Sapar* are considered as *sore singsing* because they are believed to be a premonition of the deaths of certain villagers.[11] As the last column shows, many of the songs are arranged into commercial cassettes, except for the full stringband rendition of *Sapar*, which appears in the archives of the local Radio Madang station.

Table 3 shows the basic idioms employed in the Yabob laments. Unlike the gospels and *peroveta* in the Hula area (Niles and Webb 1988: 4), *sore singsing* contains no religious subjects: this is probably this characteristic that makes the Yabob laments most stand

Table 2. The *Sore Singsing* of Yabob

Title	Year	Language	Aspect of Performance 1	Aspect of Performance 2
Bau	b1981	Y(, ?)	C	S
Hangu ses e	b1981	Y, Bilbil	C	S
Wag ta	c1981	Y	F	S, R
Balangut	c1983	Y, TP	F	M
Nen a	c1983	Y	C	S, R
Sapar	b1988	Y	F?†	S, R (for strb.)
Bi a	198-?	Y	C	S, R
Long solid days	198-?	TP	O	M, R
Lui	198-?	Y	C?	S, R
Umar malain hei	198-?	Y, TP	?	S, R
Damag o	c1991	Y	F†	S, R
Nimor wag	c1991	Y	C (F possible)	M, R
Brata bilong mi	1992	TP	C	S, R
H.S. Bubengu	?	Y, TP, E	C?	S
Sad memories	?	Y, E	?	M, R

Abbreviations: c - circa. b - before. Y - Yabob. TP - Tok Pisin. E - English. F - Performed for a funeral. C - Performed for other commemorative occasions. O - Others. † - "Premonition" song. S - Singular performance. M - Multiple performances. R - in cassette recordings.

N.B.: The languages appear in order of their proportion in the lyrics.

out. I divided the idioms into three groups: addresses to the dead, metaphorical references to a sailing canoe in the village landscape, and references to death and sorrow. Most of the samples in one way or another include the third category to describe the situation and to express condolence; calling to the dead and the references to a canoe are considered especially emotional part of the songs. As will be discussed in greater detail, these three elements actually interlock with each other in the song text.

The dead is often accused of untimely death in an elaborate way. The following *Umar malain hei* mourns the death of a young man who suddenly died of illness:

(Verse 1): *Umar malain hei tamasdeg binama*
pik ta tamas hei
hina sain malain iendeg bedeni
sori bubengu.
(Chorus 1): *Piap ngalon pe gomu uyan ta ngapau pe*
hei ga binamag o ule e
kankan hunamag bubama rubuti mok mok e
sori o hangu e o ule e.

(Verse 1): It is not for a long time that you lived and stayed with us
As if you have never really been here
You had a long time more to live, yet you ruined it
Sori, my dearest.
(Chorus 1): If you were able to speak, then I would say something nice to you
But no, you left us and you are gone

Table 3. Basic Idioms in the *Sore Singsing* (in 15 songs)

Categories	Idioms	Numbers
Address to the dead	Individual Names	6
	bubengu	6
Sailing canoe and landscape	*ilon*	2
	mesi	3
	wag/balangut	4
	Arop	1
	Dirimal	1
	Kuru	1
	Mareg	1
	Morelang	1
	Panu Domon	1
	Yabob	2
Reference to death and sorrow	*mat/dai*	5
	rubuti/bagarap/bruk	4
	sori	2
	"Not for a long time"	4
	"To go away"	3
	"Never to forget"	3
	"What to do"	2

> Our feelings are struck, hearts truly broken
> *Sori*, my dear, you are gone.
>
> (Sandie Gabriel, *Umar malain hei*)

This usage of *bubama rubuti* and *bubengu* is also a favoured expression among powerband songs about separation and broken love. Clearly, the intention of the composer is to express a loss comparable to separation from one's beloved and homeland. The grief-struck addresser is identified as "hearts truly broken" (*bubama rubuti*), and the dead is addressed as "my dearest" (*bubengu*: literally refers to the liver as seat of emotions). This song employs the speech form of mourning talk (*tok sore*) as well. Mourning talk in Yabob is mostly done by women of all ages; it is delivered with a distinct pattern of sobbing, accusing the dead of passing away. Here, as in women's mourning talk, the addresser accuses the dead for having died at a young age by saying: "You had a long time more to live, yet you ruined it." Since guitar bands usually consist of men, the stringband musical form in a sense allows men to incorporate the speech genre that once exclusively belonged to women.

Weiner noted that what he called a "moving image" is created "as a result of the serial juxtaposition of linked place names, species, and so forth" in Foi memorial poetry (Weiner, 1991: 183). Yabob stringband laments, similarly, have the "moving image," but as canoe

references. The canoe (*wag*) references describe a scene in which a canoe sails a way from the land to vanish into the horizon in quiet fine weather. The direction of the canoe is always the Pacific Ocean, where the sea meets the sky, and for Yabob residents it is also the direction from which the breeze *dolou* blows as a sign of a tranquil sea (Fig. 3). This image of a safe voyage is used to emphasize the hope of a calm and painless departure for the dead. As Table 3 shows, words such as *mesi* (sea) and *ilon* (bay, inlet) are used to describe the waters surrounding the homeland. An uncharacteristically tranquil sea is imagined here despite the fact that the Yabob waters are stereotypically known as *murin*, rough outside sea, in contrast with the Yam *ilon* north of Madang town. Since *ilon* also refers to the harbour for canoes, the theme of departure into calm waters appears even clearer. Like the address to the dead, the expression often involves an address to the leaving canoe, as the following verses of *Nimor wag* clearly delineate:

(Verse): *Ngalon hei e ngabol inan hei e*
hangu Nimor wag donden mok rebesi ne
dolou bagenlon iyo wag iyo wag
iyo wag ipadal ile.
(Chorus): *Hangu Nimor wag donden masde*
uuuu wug wabip ngalon pe
Mareg buruwanlon Yabob buruwanlon
iyo wag ipadal ile.

(Verse): I do not know how shall I speak of it
My canoe Nimor, where has it really gone?
It sailed away to where the *dolou* blows
And it is gone.
(Chorus): My canoe Nimor where are you?
O answer back to me so I can hear you
In the waters of Mareg, in the waters of Yabob
The canoe went sailing and is gone.

(Sandie Gabriel, *Nimor wag*)

Calling out the names of familiar geographical features, which consist of everyday landscape for all villagers, visualizes the course of the canoe. As the leaving canoe is the metaphor for the dead in the mourning song, the audience can vividly feel kinfolk and homeland vanishing into the oceanic and invisible realm. Out of the fifteen samples, the canoe theme appears in only five songs; however, all of them are the *sore singsing* in the narrower sense—the ones that have been performed in a funeral. The word *balangut*, which appears in the most frequently sung lament, means a canoe of the ancient type.

As these examples indicate, the metaphor of the sailing canoe creates a strong image in the hearts of the Yabob people. The most important feature of the canoe reference is that all pieces of *sore singsing* incorporate it only in the native language (*wag*, *balangut*), and never in Tok Pisin (*kanu*) or English, the other prominent languages used in Yabob social life as well as in guitar band music. In fact, no Yabob guitar band songs for ordinary string-band or powerband replace the native word for canoe with Tok Pisin or English. This is rather interesting in that some of the most experienced performers actually use Tok Pisin as their first language due to distant exogamy and migration, and speak the local language *haphap tasol* ("just a little bit").[12] For those who live in the village, as the songs describe

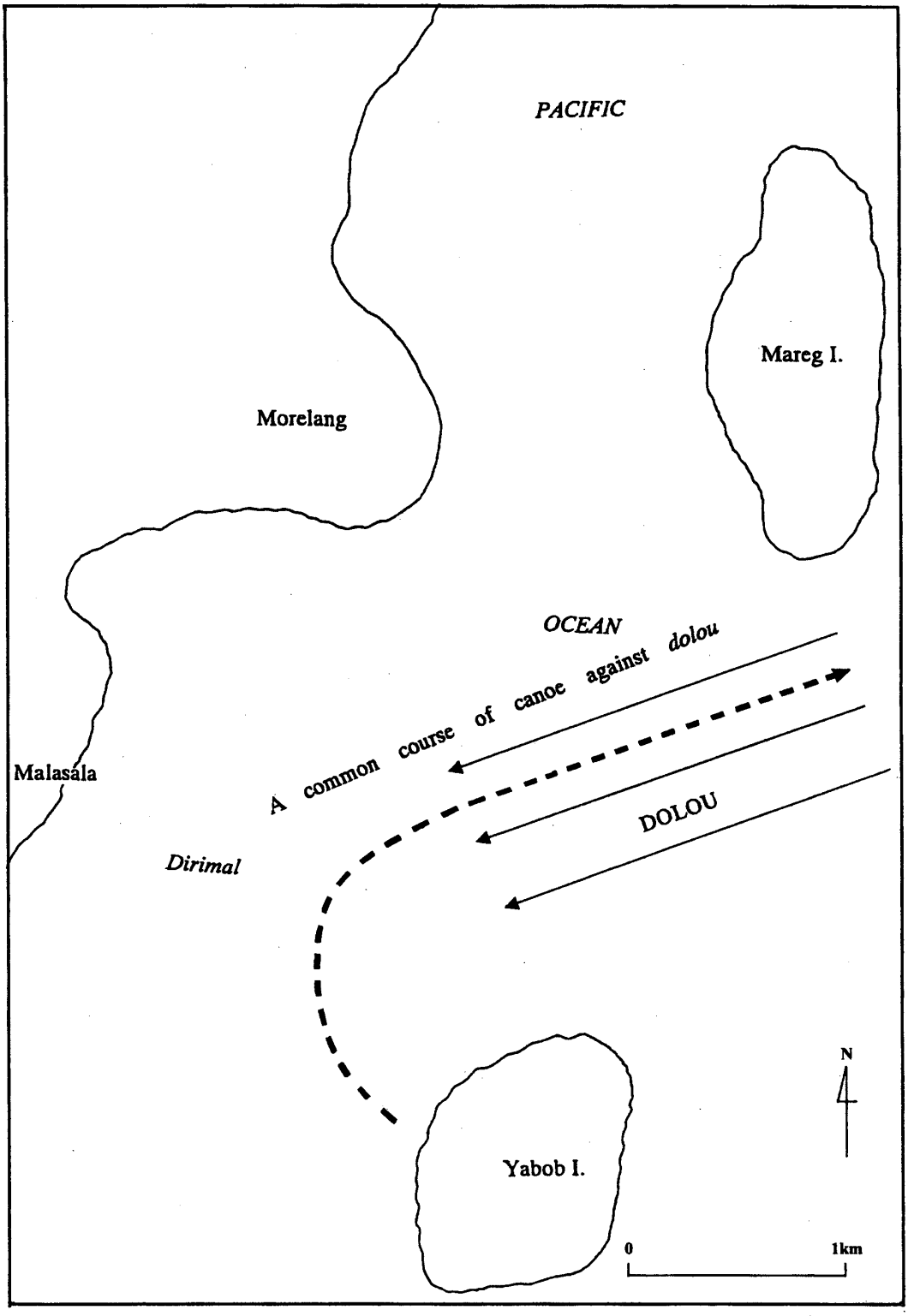

Figure 3. Yabob Village.

the course of the canoe that fades into the horizon, the naming of geographical features and calling the canoe *wag* or *balangut* must have a vivid and moving effect.

The Construction of Lament

Although the word *sore* itself does not frequently appear in the lyrics, the theme of *sore singsing* is clearly the feeling *sore* ("sorrow"). The word *sore* (or *sori* as exclamation) is actually a Tok Pisin lexical item but is incorporated in most local languages of the Madang area to signify the equivalent condition, as if the word *sore* had no direct translation. There are some native words—for instance *gadon* in Bel and Yabob—to describe sorrow, misery, helplessness and self-pity, but *sore* is always preferred in guitar band songs, as in the following Yabob powerband tune:

O sori hangu panu
bala uyan mok e iende
mesi manini manini mok
usop tadup wag tasop tala e
hangu panu me bala mok e.

O *sori* my village!
Beautiful things are there
The sea is very calm.
Come, pull the canoe and let us go
For my village is a beautiful place.

(John Saul, *Hangu panu*)

The incorporation of the word *sore* to express sadness seems to appear from the middle of the 1970's, when the stringband culture became the mainstream entertainment in the Madang area. It first appeared in the songs on broken love and separation, such as the following phrase in the Kananam language, composed in 1978:

Sori mok o Elsie o ngibidu e.

Very *sori*, Elsie, oh, I must leave you.

(Adolf Gatagot, *Elsie*).

As these instances show, frequently the word *sore* appears in the native syntax in texts that speak of cherishing the homeland and one's beloved. This feature of the word *sore* in fact draws a stark contrast with other words that depict psychological conditions, such as *hamamas* (be glad, be happy, gratitude), which rarely appears in lyrics except in Tok Pisin songs for public celebrations like Independence Day and other ceremonial occasions. Of all Tok Pisin words, only *sore* seems to be capable of moving a multilingual audience, who otherwise would not properly understand the lyrics sung in the native tongue of each village. The enunciation of *sore* constructs the overall image of the lyrics that express yearning for homeland, loss of one's beloved, or heartbreak. The condition of *sore* is the most valued feeling of all to reach for a large number of audiences. The representation of the quiet *ilon* landscape as homeland is *sore*, just as separation from the beloved ones is *sore*—these associations were vital in order for the *sore singsing* to evoke the images of a calm voyage

by canoe and of heartbreak addressed to the dead, and to become a song that moves the crowd. The invention of *sore singsing* has its roots in such usage of the word *sore*.

This appropriation—in the sense that the Tok Pisin vocabulary is used for music expression including mourning—of *sore* into the song type suggests a couple of points with regard to the invention of the stringband lament. First, the address to the dead has a strong connection with the production of guitar band music that focuses on the feelings of sorrow and separation. As the history of guitar band music became rich almost to the extent of a *kastom*, it was rather taken for granted by younger generations after the War. This meant that events that evoke the memory of the dead were attached to the sound of the guitar, and the images for mourning consequently emerged. The elaboration of saying things in combination with *sore* created a new form of expression that never existed in the age of *singsing tumbuna*. People became more and more skilled in expressing particular issues, events, and personal memories in a serious yet vivid manner by means of music.

Second, perhaps as a more crucial point, the ways to express *sore* in guitar band music have finally displaced its original context of dance music. Guitar band music was a pastime in which dance tunes were sung with jolly and comical texts, and competitive performances were enjoyed as major public entertainment. However, when the first *sore singsing* was performed in a funeral, the audience cried to the sound of the stringband tune. The stringband lament was invented when the interaction took place between the performers and mourners, who shared the same reaction with the stringband and felt it appropriate to use music to mourn the death of one's beloved. The memory of familiar places and faces turned the whole signification of nostalgia and romanticism into mourning, as it was incorporated into the lament. Now the sound of guitar is *sore*, something that reminds listeners of a canoe sailing away from the village to vanish into the ocean, analogous to the dead.

As in Geertz's model of "thick description" (Geertz 1973), the rich layer of imagination might be too specific to convince non-Yabob who do not have adequate knowledge and acceptance of the *sore singsing*. The image of a canoe sailing away from the calm landscape of *ilon* to vanish into the horizon makes one *sore*, as it is a metaphor for death. When I gave a presentation in front of Papua New Guinean audiences in Port Moresby (Suwa, 2000), my account of *sore singsing*, with musical examples, was received with disbelief. The most general response was that no residents of Papua New Guinea grassroots areas possibly could be induced to cry and mourn the death of a loved one with the kind of music similar to the one that entertains teenagers at *six-to-six* outdoor concerts.[13] Such rejection might also be based on the fact that *sore singsing* contains no religious subjects. Also, since the songs are sung in a local language, listeners who are not familiar with it may never comprehend how *sore* the song sounds. Some of my samples of *sore singsing* were taken from the cassette pop versions and the recordings were not made during funeral: it is no wonder that the non-Yabob speakers were puzzled. It might be possible as well that what I categorized as "stringband" gave them an impression of a full-size Tolai-style guitar band, or that the cassette examples of powerband arrangements were misleading. Some of the examples that I presented were actually powerband versions on cassette, which probably brought further confusion. If the imagery of *sore* expressed in the form of guitar band tunes is hard to come across, then the *sore singsing* becomes nothing but a puzzle to an audience that associates pop music with the capitalist world of "desire" (Gewertz and Errington, 1998: 345). Powerband cassettes, along with the *six-to-six* dancing, belong

to technological, sexual, and capital advancement of the contemporary (anti-traditional) world, which Reed's anecdote so vividly contrasted with the old cultural values. Indeed, the "power-band" is a power related to progress.

The invention of *sore singsing* poses questions about the manipulation of symbols. Maschio argued that the introduction of a rich world of metaphors in Rauto that "could help explain salient beliefs and practices" produced a phenomenon that can be termed "Rauto religious phenomenology" (Maschio, 1994: 6). By the same token, Yabob *sore singsing* can be a belief in practice that reflects Yabob phenomenology and reality, revolving around experience in the village. The stringband lament belongs between a *kastom* and the invention of "tradition" (Wagner, 1981; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The *sore singsing* is not a cultural canon, for it has never been the mainstream practice of mortuary ritual and remains optional. However, the compositions using native language to express the feeling of *sore* reflects the fact that small-scale societies are an instrumental source of imagining the *wantok*. The invention of stringband laments might be compared to the development, or re-fashioning, of the *singsing tumbuna*, or "ancestor's songs," in the Madang area to a certain extent. Unlike the "indigenous" music that tends to represent old cultural values and traditionalism, by being fashioned as a cultural canon and reified as major attraction in the cultural shows and public inaugurations, stringband laments induce the audience to remember of the value of their communal life in its own way. The dead are remembered in the lyrics in the form of addressing and metaphor, which is deeply related to communal ways of life.

Conclusion

The stringband laments are invented as *sore singsing*, a type of song. The *sore singsing* probably developed from songs that express a general sense of loss such as that of a lover or of one's homeland, and such songs used the word "*sore*" to emphasize the overall atmosphere of the composition. As the examples from Yabob village have shown, the guitar band lament was created in the course of the introduction of guitars in the Madang area, in the process of which sorrow became a realm of emotion to be expressed for composition. The lament consists of addressing the dead and of references to a sailing canoe, which are particularly used as mourning words, and in such a way the songs induce the feeling of *sore*. Most of the song seem to take their words from women's mourning words and metaphorical references to death. The songs about a sailing canoe particularly move the audience, for this metaphorical image vividly remind them of the departure of the dead. The initial performance of the *sore singsing* took place rather as a surprise to the funeral attendants, but it turned out to be effective as a lament, invoking much solemnity and grief in the local community. Since then, the stringband lament has become a strong means of expressing the sorrow of separation.

There is a crucial distinction between *singsing tumbuna* and *sore singsing* in that the Yabob musicians and audience do not regard the stringband lament as a part of *pasin tumbuna* ("ancestor's fashion"). Also, it seems that no conscious attempt has been made to "preserve" or "empower" the stringband lament even in Yabob. The funeral lament in fact should be performed in here and now, to "show respect" (*soim rispek*) to the dead and for the mourners so that they can cry, just as cassette recordings never replaced actual perfor-

mance. These examples regarding the invention of *sore singsing* suggest that mourning with clear narrative and musical types still plays an important role in the communal ways of life in the Madang area, despite recent rapid modernization and industrialization, along with the preservation of local speech genre and metaphor.

Notes

1) Yabob consists of three islands, Yabob, Mareg, and uninhabited Urembu (or Urib), and the mainland section, which was developed after World War II. The residents claim the population of the entire village to be about 1,000, based on the voter's poll of 500 for the election of 1997. Yabob, like its southern neighbour Bilbil, is famous for women's pottery, and traditionally relied on fishing, gathering, cultivating taro, and trading by canoe. Today, most villagers have given up the old way of life, especially the mainland residents, and live on various kinds of trade and employment for varied lengths of time.
2) By the word "Madang area" I mean the town and its surrounding villages of North and South Amenob Census Divisions. The villages are usually identified in terms of native languages such as Trans New Guinea languages and Austronesian languages.
3) According to a Yabob informant, born in 1921, Hannemann was fluent in Bel and understood some of Bilbil and Yabob languages. He left Madang in 1940.
4) There must be a number of practical reasons for the preference for stringband: 1) electronic sound may be too loud; 2) electronic and stage equipment is hard to prepare and transport; and 3) electronic instruments require a skill of which not very many villagers are capable. Usually, one or more acoustic guitars are involved in funeral performances, without any ukulele.
5) *Kundu singsing*, which is basically synonymous with current *singsing tumbuna*, has little narrative element but mostly involves repetition of words or single phrases. Since dance pieces were subject to intertribal exchange, many such words lost lexical meanings completely. For some of the basic styles of pre-Christian Madang music, consult the cassettes with a booklet issued by the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies (Niles and Webb 1988).
6) Bel is often synonymous with Gedaged, the native language of Kranket. Bel was once the standard language for the Bible in the area. Today, Bel is the native language of Kranket, Bilia, and Siar villages.
7) *Kanam* refers to either a book or a piece of Lutheran hymnody composed and compiled by the mission (Rheinisch Missiongesellschaft, 1930). Since *kanam* used to mean "song" in the Gedaged language, it is also a name of *singsing tumbuna* widely spread in the coastal area of Madang Province.
8) *Wag* also means a vehicle in general. However, in the case of *sore singsing* it is always used in the narrower sense, the canoe.
9) Sandie Gabriel of Yabob (?-1992) is one of the best known powerband artists in the Madang area who composed a number of *sore singsing*. Willie Tropu is another composer of *sore singsing*, who started his musical activity around the same time as Gabriel. Individual talent was one of the most significant impacts in inventing the *sore singsing* in Yabob. Wesley Bosli is the composer of *sore singsing* of Kranket, whose

compositions are in Bel.

10) There is no reference to stringband lament in the Yabob language, nor in Bel. This fact further shows that the laments are a contention or a song type and not a particular genre or form.
11) The words of *Damag o* appeared in a dream to a band member, who composed the melody with his friend. When the song was made, one of the members died of a sudden illness. The song was sung at the funeral of the deceased band member. The lyrics of *Damag o* were about a sailing canoe. *Sapar* was a middle-aged man with mental illness from somewhere else who was under the care of a church member in Yabob. The text of *Sapar* half-jokingly told the villagers to treat him well. The news of his sudden death in hospital reached the stage as the band was playing this very song in a dance concert. The presence of these premonitory songs connects the image of death and the sound of guitar band tunes in a particular way.
12) When a child is raised by Yabob father and non-Yabob mother (Yabob is patrilineal and patrilocal)—say a town resident born to the family of a Samarai father and a Ramu mother—he or she is most likely to use Tok Pisin to communicate with both. Also, the husband would use Tok Pisin, instead of Yabob, to his wife. All members of this family most likely understand the Yabob language, but they do not use it frequently. This sort of creolization seems to be increasing as more Yabob live away from town or seek partners from the outside, even from a foreign country like Australia.
13) University students in a music program who attended the conference were assigned to submit written responses in music class. Some of the comments clearly reflected their ambivalent attitude split between their identities as popular music artists, Papua New Guinean intellectuals facing a foreigner (me) representing Melanesian practice, and Melanesian Christians.

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