3. Timelines

The social landscape of Kubo has never been static. There has always been change as people were born and died, created new alliances or dissolved old ones. But the changes observed at Gwaimasi were of a different order, grounded in an increasing awareness among the people who lived there that they were on the periphery of a much larger world, with sources of power and wealth located elsewhere. A newfound awareness of themselves as Kubo—occupying and defined by a shared place in this new world order—was tempered, too, by a realisation that new opportunities might not be distributed equally.

In this chapter we trace local histories of engagement with the wider world that shaped those changing perceptions. We begin with stories told by the first representatives of that world to reach this area, emissaries of empire and enlightenment who came seeking to know, and thus control, this ‘last unknown’. In drawing up maps and censuses, pinning people to communities and places in the process, these explorers and colonial officers constructed Kubo as a distinct category of people. But the people who came to bear that name watched too, and told their own stories of what was happening—stories of relationships and interactions with each other, with the land and with the new outsiders. These we trace next, as they reveal the shifting perceptions, hopes and desires that shaped the lives of the individuals and groups we first met at Gwaimasi. As Papua New Guinea (PNG) moved towards Independence, the stories of engagement took on a somewhat different complexion. Missionaries came in search of souls to save and others came in search of resources—gold, oil and gas—to extract, each bringing with them new understandings, new possibilities and new expectations. And as resources were found
near this area and plans for extraction projects took more concrete form, the state began to play a more active role in the imaginings of local people. The Department of Petroleum and Energy (DPE), in particular, through its little-understood but clearly crucial bureaucratic imperatives, has come to exert a defining role in the ways local landscapes are being reconfigured in the early twenty-first century. Its language of tribes, clans and subclans, of Incorporated Land Groups (ILGs) and Landowner Companies, of equity and royalties and business development, have increasingly infused the ways Kubo people frame identities and the strategies they devise to achieve desired ends.

The various histories we trace here interweave. In each of the four sections of this chapter we tease apart and follow particular threads through the events and changes of the past, into the ‘present’—the early years of the second decade of the twenty-first century—of which we write in the rest of this book.

Stories from the Outside

We saw a catamaran-like raft on a creek; and just beyond this was a clearing in the forest, on which was a square native home. There were many birds about in the scrub. Coming round the next point, we saw several short, chisel-shaped dugouts, quite different to anything we had seen before tied up to stakes in the mud. On this rocky promontory we saw a rather light coloured, short, thickset native, with a mat of hair hanging down his back: he had a stick across his shoulder, from which hung a string of what looked like several small fish. He gazed at us for a moment, raced up the bank, and disappeared into the jungle. What must our whaleboat have looked like to this primitive man, who had never seen a white man, or anything larger than a catamaran? Our whaleboat had the sails set, three Javanese rowing on either side, the Union Jack flying above the mast, the Captain steering and the rest of us white men sitting along its sides. We lowered the sail and ran the boat up on the rocks. Shaw and I jumped ashore and crossed to where the native had been standing. We found a fishtrap set in the water between two rocks, and tied by a rattan cane to another rock. This ingenious trap was simply a large funnel of plaited rattan, lined inside with strips of the spined lawyer palm placed so that the spines curved inward: the bait was fishes in the small end of the funnel. Anything could enter the funnel trap; but, when retreating, the curved spines held the intruder on all sides. We took the trap to the whaleboat, and took some turkey red cloth, hoop iron, and a small looking glass back to the place where the native had stood (Froggatt 1936, spelling amended).
The first expedition sponsored by the Australasian Geographical Society left Sydney in June 1885 heading for the Aird River on the south coast of PNG. At Thursday Island this plan was changed. Instead, Captain Henry Everill, with 11 Europeans, 11 Javanese, a Cingalese cook and, as translators, three Kiwai men, took the Bonito—a 77-ton paddle steamer—up the Fly River and turned eastward into the previously unnamed and unexplored Strickland River. For two months the Bonito was grounded on a gravel bed more than 150 km from the mouth of the latter river. During this period of forced inactivity Everill ventured north in the whale boat. He was accompanied by five of the Europeans and six Javanese. Their most northerly campsite, on 27 September, was on the west bank of the Strickland River between the junctions of the Murray and Carrington Rivers, at the border of Kubo and Febi territories.¹

During six days in Kubo territory, when they had respite from the arduous task of towing the whale boat upstream against the current, the explorers collected geological, botanical and zoological specimens, mapped the course of the river and observed many signs of human activity. Footprints were seen on sandy banks, trails disappeared into the forest, small houses and shelters were visible and there were rafts and canoes at various places along the river-bank. On the first day they collected two string bags and a ‘fine stone hatchet’ that had been abandoned only minutes before. The bags contained ‘a freshly caught fish, a live crayfish, a small dead lizard, some rolled up tobacco leaf, and some ornamental bird plumes’ (Froggatt 1936: 49). In exchange they left trade cloth, hoop iron and what was probably the first steel axe—a small hatchet—to reach Kubo territory. Near these gifts they placed ‘a little Union Jack flag in the sand’ (ibid.). But, throughout those days, they saw only one person. In 1936, 50 years after what he called ‘the forgotten expedition’, Walter Froggatt—twenty-seven-year-old entomologist and assistant zoologist to the expedition—drafted an account of his experiences. It was never published.

In his diary Froggatt called the rocky promontory ‘Fishing Rocks’. One hundred years later, this was a favourite fishing spot of a young married woman named Babio. We ourselves fished there often and know the rocks by their Kubo name, Woimotibi. Froggatt’s visit was on 25 September,

¹ Everill (1888: 184; Anon. 1887) reported that his most northerly campsite was at lat. 5° 30’ S, long. 142° 22’ E, close to what was then the border of the British administered territory of Papua and the German administered territory of Kaiser Wilhelmsland. This was not correct. Dwyer et al. (2015; see also Mackay 2012) provide a revised interpretation of the travels of Everill’s party on the Strickland River.
1885 and, that night, the party of explorers camped a little north of the place where Gwaimasi village would be eventually established. Three days later, returning from the north, they again landed at Fishing Rocks. The items they had left as ‘payment’ for the fish trap had not been touched and the canoes were still present. They found a track and followed it to a house which had a palm leaf basket hanging above the door. The basket contained a painted skull which they collected as a ‘valuable ethnographic specimen’. Again, they left trade goods in exchange (Bauerlin 1886; Everill 1888; Froggatt 1936).

It was 42 years before another European passed through Kubo territory. Charles Karius arrived from the north and in spectacular fashion. On 22 May 1927, with a party of six police and 21 carriers, he boarded the first of four rafts on a ‘wildly exciting’ journey down the Murray River, camped overnight in Kubo territory and, the next day, continued southward by raft and canoe, reaching the coastal outpost of Daru on 10 June (Karius 1928; Craig 2013).

In the year that Walter Froggatt died and one of us was born, Jack Hides and David Lyall, with 40 Papua New Guineans, travelled through Kubo territory (Hides 1939). Hides had resigned from his position as patrol officer with the Papuan government and, in 1937, embarked on a private venture to prospect for gold (McGee 2007). He left Daru on 23 February, carried a radio to contact sponsors in Port Moresby and was irritated that country east of the Strickland had been declared an Uncontrolled Area. Officially, he was not permitted to land there.

Upstream from Lake Murray the party transferred from the 30-ton Ronald S. to the 32-horsepower, shallow draught Peter Pan. At the Rentoul River, the Peter Pan turned back and Hides’ group continued by canoe. Late in May they passed the mouth of the Baiya (Cecilia) River and soon were within the territory of Kubo people. Progress was slow because multiple trips were needed to ferry men and supplies between campsites. It was not until 30 June that they reached the Murray River. Through this period they had several friendly encounters; at first, to the south and on the west bank, with Pare people but later, to the north and on both sides of the river, with Kubo people. Hides described the latter as ‘tall, dark skinned; they wore a belly armour of bark, and their long hair hung in ringlets, matted with mud and dirt and vegetable oil’ (Hides 1939: 73). He met these men on the east bank opposite the mouth of a stream that
we know as Dua. They gave him ‘paradise plumes, packets of red ochre, dogs’ teeth necklaces, and net bags of native food’ and he reciprocated with a mother-of-pearl shell and a ‘bright new tomahawk’.

The one who took both presents made a long speech, punctuating it many times by stamping his foot on the ground, and, taking in the whole of the country to the northward with a wave of his arm, repeated the word *Hakwoi*, which I took to be the name of his tribe (Hides 1939: 73–4).

The man had said ‘*hugwa* (come)’. He was inviting the foreigners to a house not far to the north. They did not understand, returned to their camp and, the next day, again joined people on the east bank. They talked and smoked with them and exchanged a second tomahawk for a large and fat domestic pig. They slept one more night at the Dua River campsite and then continued to the north. They were watched by men, women and children who ‘waved the pearl shell and chopped the trees with the tomahawks we had given them’ (Hides 1939: 76). By 1937, at least, Kubo were accepting and appreciative of steel tools.2

By early July, Hides’ party had moved north out of Kubo territory and into, and beyond, the land of Febi-speakers. It was 1 September before they returned. They had had a hellish time. From the top of the ranges Hides had seen ‘a great valley system of fertile river flats, of timbered and grass plateaux, and smooth rounded domes and slopes’. He had seen ‘columns of smoke rising far up in the valley’ and pictured ‘the inhabitants stirring their fires to life to roast their early morning meal of taro and potato’ (Hides 1939: 120). But he could go no further. Lyall was sick and nearly blind. They waited in vain for an airdrop of food and medicine, and finally their radio failed. For two weeks they carried Lyall back from the mountain top, negotiating their way south through precipitous limestone. More than 20 other men became desperately ill with beriberi; five died. When the debilitated party reached the Strickland those who were well enough spent three days building two large rafts. It rained continually. Their only sustenance was tea and saccharine tablets. The rafts were large

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2 Froggatt (1936) reported that the man seen at Fishing Rocks was wearing a bailer shell genital cover and described the house seen in this vicinity as having slung hearths. The Upper Strickland men seen, and photographed, by Hides wore bark aprons, ‘belly armour’, crossed strings of beads on their chests and nose plugs (Hides 1939: 118f). It was only further south on the Strickland that Hides saw men wearing bailer shells (1939: 38f). In 1986–87 the customary dress of men living at Gwaimasi was as depicted by Hides and not as depicted by Froggatt. Further, it was only in 1986–87 that people at Gwaimasi commenced making slung hearths and, in the following years, we observed this practice being taken up by people living to the east. It seems likely that, at the time of the Everill expedition, the people who lived close to the Strickland, south of the Murray River, were not, in fact, Kubo-speakers.
and heavy but insufficient for everyone. Hides, with Lyall and the sick Papua New Guineans, moved off first. The others remained to build a third raft. The river was in flood and the men had a wild ride south through the Strickland Gorge. In calmer waters, north of the Murray Junction, they stole a dugout canoe and, that night, camped beyond Kubo territory near the Rentoul River. Two weeks later they reached Daru where David Lyall died. Hides returned to Australia. He too died before his dream of payable gold at the headwaters of the Strickland was realised by discoveries at Mount Kare and Porgera (Biersack 1999; Golub 2014).

By 1986, Kubo had no recollection of these early visits by Europeans. But, though forgotten, they must have left their mark. Everill’s party left trade goods. Hides’ party provided steel axes and saw them being used. By the time Hides departed, Kubo understood that somewhere else there were other kinds of human beings and other kinds of material things. They had certainly learned that it was possible to exchange food that they themselves produced for some of the material items carried by outsiders. When Europeans again entered Kubo territory, their arrival was surely confirmation of rumours that were still in circulation.

In the years before and following the Second World War, outsiders appeared quite regularly in the lowland country north of Lake Murray, and bounded by the Fly River to the west and the Strickland River to the east. These were land-based expeditions, often reliant upon trading for food with local people, which established both shorter and longer-term campsites at many different locations. Some were led by government patrol officers establishing contact with little-known people. Others were by teams from the Australasian Petroleum Company (APC) and the Island Exploration Company (IEC) prospecting for oil (APC 1940). The maps produced by these latter expeditions recorded topographic features and, with varying degrees of accuracy, the names and locations of living places and language groups. Near the Strickland River, for example, Supei (Samo) people were located on the east between the Nomad and Cecilia Rivers, Daba (Kubo) people on both sides of the Strickland north of the Cecilia, and Kanai (Konai) people west of the Strickland and south of the Blucher Range.3

3 Original APC and IEC maps are not available but details from those maps are incorporated on the map accompanying Besaparis (1959) and on Mount Leonard Murray, New Guinea S-B 54-6 S600-E14200/200 AMS T401 First Edition (AMS 1), 1942 (U.S. Army Map Service). Viewed 23 August 2015 at: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/new_guinea_500k/index.html. The name ‘Daba’, used for people living near the Strickland River north of the Damami River, may derive from ‘Dabamisi’, the name of a Kubo oobi with land in the south of this area. On the 1942 U.S. Army Services map, Cecilia River is named Fairfish River.
3. Timelines

Figure 3.1: Patrols by Des Clancy and Brian McBride in, respectively, 1947–48 and 1959.
Source: Authors.
Note: Clancy’s group arrived at the Strickland River on 28 December 1947 and the last members departed on 21 May 1948; McBride’s group arrived at the Strickland River on 19 October 1959 and departed on 15 December 1959. Sites at which geological specimens were collected by G.A.V. Stanley’s team are shown as ●. The territory of Kubo people, as reported in 2014, is highlighted.

The first official foray east of the Strickland River, and the first into Kubo territory, occurred in the early months of 1948. On 3 December 1947 an APC team led by geologist George A.V. Stanley and accompanied by patrol officer Des Clancy, four other Europeans, five police and 143

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4 Exploratory patrols by at least APC sometimes ventured, unofficially, into ‘uncontrolled areas’. In 1953, for example, Dave Calder (1953) led a government patrol through southern reaches of Gebusi and Bedamuni territories and reported passing an earlier APC campsite near the junction of the Rentoul and Nomad Rivers.
‘native’ carriers departed from a base established on the Fly River south of Macrossan Island and headed more-or-less east (Clancy 1948; Stanley 1948; Allen 1990). From the headwaters of the Black River the party travelled southeast to reach a relatively wide stream (Dua) and then east to a tributary of the Strickland (Sigia) on 28 December (Fig. 3.1). At a Strickland River campsite they made a 45-foot canoe.

In early January, Clancy established a base camp south of Sigia, inland from the mouth of a stream named No (Dege). Here his carriers cut a drop site and for five consecutive days, from January 7, a Catalina aircraft flew low over the site and dropped supplies. Between January 12 and January 16, with 15 carriers, Clancy travelled north by canoe, turned into the Osio (Carrington) River, established a campsite well upstream, briefly met some local people and, following loss of gear when the canoe capsized, returned to base camp.

The Osio campsite was used as a base by Stanley and his assistants from 22 January to at least early April. Clancy, with police and carriers, crossed the Strickland River on 29 January and, surveying with compass and chain, travelled southeast to reach a site north of the Cecilia River and east of the present location of Suabi on 21 February. Here a second drop site—approximately 600 x 100 ft—was prepared and supplies (including freezer goods and reams of foolscap paper) were delivered on at least six days. Some of these supplies were relayed to Stanley’s party on Osio River. This latter group conducted surveys south to the transect established by Clancy and in two locations up to 7 km north of Osio River (Fig. 3.1). Having established a site from which Stanley’s party could be serviced, Clancy now headed further east, crossed the Cecilia and cut southeast, to reach the Nomad River. He was establishing campsites and food stores that would be used by Stanley’s team as they surveyed the Cecilia anticline (Craig and Warvakai 2009). It was only at his furthest campsite, beside the Nomad River, that Clancy met relatively large groups of men, women and children. They were Bedamuni. After an initial tense encounter, bananas were exchanged for beads and steel. By 6 April, Clancy’s party was heading back to the Strickland, reaching the base camp four days later.

Local people who visited the Osio campsite and, eventually, the Cecilia drop site were few in number; they were probably Kubo and, perhaps, Febi. In the vicinity of the Strickland River base camp, there were many signs of people—tracks, small gardens, sago processing sites—but, at least
at first, people were wary. By mid-April it seemed that Pare people from the south and southwest were visiting the camp. Clancy left the Strickland for Kiunga on 25 April, leaving the geologists to finalise their work. The last members of the team left the area on 21 May.

Clancy had mixed feelings about the area east of the Strickland. In his diary he noted that ‘cassowary and the usual pile of birds were obtained’ and continued ‘no tinned meat has been necessary since we arrived at this huntsman’s paradise’ (Clancy 1948: Diary 3 March 1948). In his concluding remarks, however, he observed that the population was ‘very sparse, and it would hardly be worth the time and energy expended to patrol the area again’.

There were, however, further patrols—though it was not till 1968 that these again ventured north of the Cecilia River, where Clancy had spent most of his time. Rather, attention focused on the area between the Cecilia and Rentoul Rivers. In late 1959, Brian McBride with two Europeans, ten police and more than 50 carriers led a patrol from Kiunga southwest through Pare territory to reach a pre-established base camp west of the Strickland River and a little south of the junction with the Cecilia on 19 October (McBride 1960). In the course of the next seven weeks, McBride undertook two patrols east of the Strickland (Fig. 3.1). The first intruded into Kubo territory between the Damami and Cecilia Rivers, cut southeast through Samo territory, and followed a circular route through the heart of Gebusi territory before returning to the Strickland River camp. The second patrol traversed Samo territory from west to east, and then crossed the Nomad River to enter Bedamuni territory where, through the next week, there was a series of often tense, and sometimes frightening, encounters with relatively large groups of armed Bedamuni men.

These early encounters with Bedamuni revealed, first, that their territory was more densely populated than land to the west and northwest where Kubo, Samo and Gebusi people lived and, secondly, suggested that Bedamuni, more than their neighbours, were engaged in frequent intertribal and intratribal fighting, cannibalism and undesirable mortuary practices. For these reasons, R. Lang’s extended patrol of 1961 was charged with establishing a government station on the Nomad River (Lang 1961a, 1961b, 1961c, 1962a, 1962b; Russell 1962; Stott 1962).
From here it was thought that the ‘fierce’ Bedamuni could be brought under control and the supposedly less aggressive Kubo, Samo and Gebusi guided towards more ‘civilised’ ways of living.

It took 18 months for Lang’s men to build an airstrip and associated facilities at Nomad. They themselves received supplies that were carried overland and ferried across the Strickland near its junction with Baiya. A labour force of more than 150 men, mostly outsiders recruited from Kiunga, Debepare and Lake Murray, was employed. Some people living within a day’s walk of Nomad were employed as labourers, encouraged to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle and ordered to abandon customary burial practices and cannibalistic raiding. They gained access to European clothing and steel tools—a steel axe-head in payment for a month’s work—but it would be some time before they were introduced to the anonymity that characterises monetary transactions.

From 1963 onward, with Nomad Station fully operational, there was a more concerted effort to contact outlying communities. Near at hand, rest houses for European patrol officers and barracks for police were built. Some of these attracted larger communities of Samo and southeastern Kubo people (Suda 1990; Shaw 1996: 34–7). To the east, in Bedamuni territory, a regular and well-armed government presence was necessary before raiding was reduced. In 1964, for example, Bedamuni people burned a Kubo longhouse to the ground, killed four people and kidnapped three girls. Later, in the same year, matches, soap, mirrors, knives, 24 axes and three Australian flags were stolen during a raid on the equipment store at Nomad. In 1967 Kubo people killed four Bedamuni and carried two bodies away to eat (Anderson 1970: 19; Barclay 2012). On these occasions and others, men were arrested and, after being tried, often jailed at the distant coastal town of Daru ‘partly for security reasons and partly to broaden the horizons of these isolated bush peoples’ (Hoad 1964).

Kubo people who lived north of the Baiya were seldom visited. There were only a few hundred of them living in widely dispersed communities. Tracks in the area were difficult to follow and the rivers were often in flood. Local guides were uncooperative and, most importantly, from the viewpoint of administrators, the people were not troublesome. They were easy to ignore. Indeed, for much of this time, they were regarded as a separate language group, more closely related to southeastern Kubo than to Samo but bracketed with Febi of the mountains to the north as the Daba.
Through a five-year period from 1964 to 1969, patrol officers Bob Hoad, Allan Johnson and William Patterson spent a total of 28 days north of the Baiya (Hoad 1964; Johnson 1968; Patterson 1969a, 1969b). These patrols, however, were on the western side of Kubo and Febi territories close to the Strickland River. At most they met only 15 to 20 people at each community they visited. They reported that wild pigs and sago were readily available and that the supply of garden food was less reliable. They mistakenly thought there was little interaction between neighbouring communities, and where, by chance, they met small groups temporarily based at a bush house—a base for hunting or processing sago—were predisposed to identifying the people as ‘true’ nomads. They reported the relatively slow penetration of European artefacts into this area and the people’s enthusiasm for steel axes and machetes.

In 1969, Patterson’s group spent several days at Sigiafoihau, on the west bank of the Strickland. They purchased food, processed a sago palm, provided medical treatment and found the people hospitable. They did not know that, either shortly before or shortly after their visit, these people hosted a party at which five of the guests were killed and eaten. In 1987 we snacked on breadfruit at the long-abandoned site of that longhouse, only 20 minutes north of Gwaimasi. The old clearing was now overgrown with bracken fern, and the forest was closing in. Where the ground had been turned by a pig, we found part of a stone axe. Uhabo and Geswa had cooked the breadfruit while their wives, Fafobia and Tiotidua, processed sago nearby. The two men were of Gumososo oobi and this was their land. When Patterson left Sigiafoihau, Uhabo guided them up Sigia stream into the territory of the Konai-speaking Watia clan. He was one of the guides that Patterson reported ‘was of much more use in showing us the way out of an area than into it’. Repercussions of that cannibal feast, of the tensions it generated, of initiations held and marriages arranged as attempts to restore good relations, continue to the present day.5

From May to August 1970, W.A. Cawthorn led a major patrol from Nomad that travelled north to the Baiya River, northeast to the Osio River, west to the Masi River, north through the territory of Febi people of Wuo oobi to the southern reaches of Bogaia territory, south along the

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5 In May 1969, ten days after Patterson’s visit, John McGregor (1969), patrolling from Kiunga, listed the names of 16 people from at least three Kubo oobi and two Febi oobi at Sigiafoihau. Seven of the people named, including all five children, were alive in August 1986. All were then living at Gwaimasi, about 15 minutes walk from Sigiafoihau.
Navigating the Future

Strickland River and via communities living in the wedge of land between the Strickland and Murray Rivers to Magwibi, between the Baiya and Damami Rivers. From Magwibi the patrol moved east to the Damami and, after six days, reached Adumari in Bedamuni territory (Cawthorn 1970). This was the first patrol since Des Clancy’s visit in 1948 to traverse central Kubo territory and eastern Febi territory, and only the second to meet people living in the southern reaches of the Strickland-Murray wedge.6 No people were encountered during either the traverse of central Kubo territory or the journey that followed the Damami River into Bedamuni territory though scattered groups, including people of seven oobi, were met, or spoken of, in Febi territory. In the early 1960s, raiding by Bedamuni had led Kubo people living in the eastern portion of their territory, north and south of the Baiya River, to join communities to the west.7 Indeed, people at Magwibi told Cawthorn that the land to their east, along the Damami, was occupied by Bedamuni. It was not until after this patrol, and in response to both the increasing pacification of Bedamuni and the year-long presence of the petroleum company Texaco in the upper reaches of the Baiya River, that Kubo people resettled these portions of their territory (Meintjes 1972, 1973).

Cawthorn had intended to lead his patrol into the headwaters of the Damami and Baiya Rivers on the western slopes of the Karius Range. It was known that some people lived here, but they had not yet been contacted by government patrols. Time constraints and a shortage of food meant that he was unable to accomplish this aim. However, Rob Barclay led patrols into this area in 1971 and 1972 and contacted some small groups of people—variously named in patrol reports as Siali, Sialu and Siae—who he considered to be more closely aligned by language and clothing to Etoro, on the southern slopes of Mount Sisa, than to either Bedamuni or Kubo (Barclay 1971a, 1971b, 1972).8 They lived at moderately high altitudes—750 metres above sea level and higher—and appeared to be more reliant on tubers, including sweet potato, than sago

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6 In 1968 the anthropologist Frederik Barth visited communities in the Strickland-Murray wedge when he accompanied John McGregor on a patrol from Olsobip (Barth 1971).
7 Our understanding that Kubo people had effectively abandoned the northeastern reaches of their territory through the early 1960s, and did so in response to Bedamuni raids, is based on both interpretations of patrol reports and some accounts by Kubo people themselves. In recent oral accounts it is sometimes suggested that the Bedamuni raiders were acting as ‘mercenaries’ on behalf of eastern Kubo people.
8 It is probable that descendants of the people named as Siali, Sialu or Siae in the early 1970s now reside at Gesesu in Febi territory, self-identify as Tsiani (or Sabalimatie Tsiani) and are referred to by Febi, Kubo and Huli as Mora (Denham et al. 2009: 4.23, 4.60–66).
and more reliant on hunting and gathering than on gardening. In 1972, Barclay undertook a lengthy patrol that covered the western slopes of the Karius Range and, in Febi territory, revisited eastern, northern and western areas that, earlier, had been patrolled by Cawthorn.

Barclay (1971a) and others refer to the devastating effects of three influenza epidemics that swept through populations near Nomad in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The source of these epidemics was attributed to employees of the companies Texaco and Compagnie Generale Geophysique, exploring for oil and gas in the region. Among Bedamuni alone a minimum of 168 influenza-related deaths were recorded—estimated at more than 5 per cent of the population—but there are no estimates from other language groups in the area. Barclay commented that deaths from influenza were usually taken to implicate sorcery and sometimes resulted in sorcery killings which continued to and beyond this time. He noted that most of those implicated in these killings were males between 18 and 25 years old. He suggested that, in response to recent changes in their society:

there is a desire by youths to ‘prove’ themselves to be more mature members of the community. Hence, when dying relatives indicate the sorcerer (or the sorcerer is discovered by other means), it is invariably the young men who volunteer as executioners.

Throughout the 1960s, northern Kubo communities and their Konai and Febi neighbours were viewed as a remote backwater. Hoad judged them to be among ‘the most primitive people I have encountered’, often living completely ‘within the stone age’ with ‘little trade, little wealth and little promise for the future. To them their horizon has no allure’ (Hoad 1964). In the mid-1960s they seemed timid, avoiding Hoad’s party of more than 50 carriers, but by the close of that decade were much more welcoming of outsiders. They were relatively healthy, contented and, though ignorant of new laws, not disruptive. In Hoad’s words they were ‘incomparably lovely’.

To those early patrol officers, the decade of the 1960s offered risk, adventure and new experiences. It was an exciting period of their lives. But it could not be sustained. By the early 1970s Nomad Patrol Post was well established, the ‘fierce’ Bedamuni were settling down, and for a new generation of patrol officers, some with wives and young children, life was becoming more mundane. They continued to visit outlying communities, but these were now known; there was less that was new.
The tasks became routine: taking a census of people who did not come when wanted, reprimanding them because trails and village houses had not been maintained, attending to festering wounds and other health needs, and acting to minimise and punish theft of government property. By October 1973, most Kubo people, together with some Konai and Febi, were aligned with six communities.9 These assemblages were short-lived, however. Through the mid-1970s, many northern Kubo people dispersed as smaller longhouse communities and many Konai and Febi moved back to their own lands.

Amalgamation as larger communities and its possible consequences were seen in different lights by different patrol officers. Cawthorn (1970) argued that:

it is a moot point whether village grouping at this stage is a good thing … socially it would have a disruptive effect on their society if implemented too early … to control nomadic groups a government must first change their nomadic way of life. But, in doing this it must be careful not to alienate them by destroying their traditional society (Cawthorn 1970: 27).

Others felt more frustrated at what they saw as the recalcitrance of the northern Kubo. Philip Fitzpatrick’s (1971) guides were uncooperative and, at one village, the performance of the probationary village constable had been unsatisfactory. He wrote:

The average Supei/Kubor, in his relatively idyllic albeit apathetic situation does not particularly wish to become politically aware, in fact, given his daily bread and license to do as he please, he doesn’t care at all about what is happening in his country. The political situation in the Upper Strickland Census Division could best be described as ‘stagnant’ (Fitzpatrick 1971: Situation Report 3).

9 Census records from late 1973 record Sigiafoihaimuson west of the Strickland and south of the Murray River junction (near the future location of Gwaimasi) with an estimated population of 43, Headubi east of the Strickland and north of the Baiya with 140, Soabi 2 which was close to Wa stream and east of the former Soabi with 71, Magwibi and Udamobi east of the Strickland but south of the Boye with, respectively, 143 and 85, and Siuhamuson (later Tesabi) north of Nomad with 85 people (Meintjes 1973). Sigiafoihaimuson was probably mixed Kubo, Konai and Febi while Udamobi and Siuhamuson were probably mixed Kubo and Samo. Many of the recorded people probably lived elsewhere but, having advance knowledge that a census would be taken, satisfied government requirements by assembling at a focal village.
But the people did care. They were vitally interested in what was happening on and near their land. Change was rapid; there was little consistency from year to year. Through the 1970s missionaries came, companies exploring for gold and oil continued to visit the area, an experimental agricultural station was established at Nomad, linguists and anthropologists lived among Samo and Bedamuni people. PNG became self-governing on 1 December 1973 and an independent nation on 16 September 1975. The last expatriate patrol officer left Nomad in early 1976 and, thereafter, the station was run by trained Papua New Guineans. These men were threatened with, and anxious about, sorcery; patrols through regions, and among people, that were still poorly known rapidly declined (Robin Barclay and Laurie Meintjes, personal communications, 25–26 November 2014; Mike Milne, personal communication, 1 January 2015). From 1974 to beyond the year 2000 there were no visits by government officers to Strickland River communities in areas to the immediate north and south of the Murray River junction.

Stories from the Inside

When APC [Australasian Petroleum Company] came to the Strickland River they gave a ‘white’ woman to the older brother of Asekai’s father. He was a young man at that time, and not yet married. The woman stayed with him and they were happy together. But when the white men came back there was a problem. The white woman’s husband was quarrelling with another man about ownership of a bark cloth. The white men misunderstood. They thought the quarrel was over the woman. They said that if she was going to cause trouble then they would take her away. And that is what they did. Her husband was very sad.

The APC camp was made at Dege Hafi—the place where the stream Dege joins the Strickland River. No is another name for Dege. The old men did not behave well—they stole things—and the white men left. If the old men had been better behaved then the white men would have stayed. They would have built ‘Mosebi’ at Dege Hafi but they built it at Nomad instead.

These brief stories date from 1948, when APC visited Kubo territory. On that visit, a base camp was established at the stream named No. Memories of that camp prompt the earliest stories that Kubo tell of
the arrival of white people. The second is mirrored in the east of Kubo territory, where it was another 1948 APC base camp, this one at Auma Hafi near the Baiya River, that people say might have become ‘Mosebi’.

In the mid-1980s Kubo knew little of Port Moresby. To them, Mosebi was the centre from which development would come. It held almost magnetic attraction. In 1995, people at Gwaimasi discussed moving the site of their village. Should they move one hour’s walk to the northwest to a site on the bank of Sigia stream or one hour’s walk to the south to a site on the bank of Mome? They chose the latter. Mome, they argued, was in the direction of Mosebi. Sigia took them in the wrong direction both in space and in time: ‘we would be going backwards’, they said.

When white men first visited Kubo territory they were named *bou*. They were spirit beings. But *bou* assumed a more general referent and came to connote outsiders in positions of authority: patrol officers, police, company employees, missionaries and anthropologists, among others, irrespective of the colour of their skin. As the years passed by, and the English language took hold, it was sometimes necessary to back-translate. In some contexts *bou* became ‘white’ and the woman who may or may not have lived for a time with the older brother of Asekai’s father may well have had brown skin. There is, of course, no record of carriers, let alone white men, taking female companions with them on early ventures exploring for gold or oil. That might have been frowned upon.10

In our earlier years with Kubo they told entertaining stories of the trickster, Dikima, and his fall guy, the buffoon Wamagosai. In one tale, for example, Dikima chews on a vine, the sap runs and his teeth become black. Wamagosai is jealous; he too wants black teeth. Following Dikima’s untruthful instructions, he climbs a tree, tells his grandmother to light a fire underneath and, overcome by smoke, crashes to the ground. When children hear a tree falling in the distance they may be told that it is really Wamagosai. Vanity, they may come to understand, can have unwanted consequences.

In other stories an animal—a fish, frog or flying fox, for example—appears in the form of a man or a woman and lures a partner to an alternative world, below the surface of the water or in the forest canopy,

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10 Five wives to policemen accompanied the James Taylor and John Black Hagen-Sepik patrol of 1938–39, though Taylor preferred that this not be generally known (Gammage 1998: 2, 209–10).
requiring them to behave in certain ways. If the partner behaves according to instructions then marriage and a family might follow; if not then the human-animal departs leaving the prospective partner alone and sad. One such story concerns the mullet woman.

A man lay still, with his eyes closed, pretending to be dead. People painted him with red ochre and rubbed his body with juices from a dead and rotting bandicoot. They carried him to a stony beach and they cried. The man opened his eyes a little and watched them mourning. Men and women were present but after several days and nights all but one big woman departed. The man opened his eyes, stood up and took the woman to his house. He told her that she should sleep on the woman's side of the house and he would sleep on the men's side. That is what they did but, at night, the man would wake. He could hear a noise like that made by a fish when it flapped its tail on land. He thought he must be hearing a fish in the distance. One day, after they had been together for some time, an old man came. He had much skin fungus. He invited them to a feast but said that first they must kill wild pigs and dry the meat and prepare sago grubs. They did these things but at night when the man ate some of the pig the woman ate only worms and small black snakes. When it was time for the feast they carried their offerings and walked to the river. The woman told the man to hold her hand and close his eyes. He did so and when she said he could open his eyes again he saw that they had come to a large house with many men and women present. They were given sago to eat and tobacco smoke. There was dancing and singing and they watched this until morning. The old man returned. He told them that other men were coming to kill them and that they should be ready with their bows and arrows. There was a big fight. Everyone was killed except the man and the big woman. These two started to return to their own house. They reached the river and the woman again told the man to hold her hand and close his eyes. He did so and when he opened his eyes they were at their own house. Now, however, a second house had been built and people were present eating fish. The woman told the man that he could visit that house but he must not eat fish. 'If you eat fish I will not stay with you.' She went to her own house. The man went to the other house, saw that everyone was eating fish, was tempted and ate fish too. When he returned to his own house the woman smelled the fish. She got her string bag and went to the nearby stream. She jumped in. She cut through her legs in such a way that she was now a fish. She was a mullet—a Tio—with markings like skin fungus.

Occasionally we elicited sketchy origin tales: the man who poured water from a cylinder of bamboo to create the Strickland River and caused the land of Headubi ooobi to be divided. There were ‘just so’ stories that
provided prompts about food taboos. There was a time, for example, when the crocodile lived in trees and the water goanna was unable to climb. The crocodile was heavy and often fell to the ground. The two creatures changed places and that is how they live today. Each is ancestral to one of two neighbouring oobi and each was taboo to its descendants. Or, again, the white and black spotted cuscus Baiamo once rested in a hole in the ground and the grey cuscus Nawi rested in trees. But Baiamo was easy to see by men who looked into ground holes. So the two kinds of cuscus changed places and now, when men look up into trees, they do not detect Baiamo because the broken pattern of its markings looks like leaves against the sky. There were, as well, stories of cannibalism, always with the caveat that 'we've stopped eating people now', about the murderous raiding and the burning of longhouses by Bedamuni men and, always with feeling, stories of deaths due to sorcery or, more hesitantly, hints about the killing of sorcerers.

A few stories explained connections between distant but related oobi (Dwyer et al. 1993; Minnegal and Dwyer 2011a). Headubi is the name of a constellation of at least six oobi holding non-contiguous areas of land within Kubo, Febi and Konai territories. The originating group occupies land northwest of Suabi, spanning the Strickland River. Dogs there fought over a bitch in heat. One dog, chased by others, fled into a cave. It emerged 25 km to the southeast on a small island—Sodiboko—in Damami River south of Suabi. The descendants of that dog are the Damami River Headubi. Another dog emerged far to the north in the land of Febi people, from a hole that can still be seen, and gave rise to the Febi line of Headubi. Sisiti Nomo tell of a pig that entered a cave in their land, beside the Baiya River near where Suabi is now located, and emerged from a hole near the centre of Bedamuni land; men of the Bedamuni clan Kebo (pig) are recognised as their brothers. Gumososo and Dumiti are ‘brother’ oobi, unable to intermarry though their lands are not contiguous, because an underground road once linked those lands until a falling tree blocked the entrance at Doitafa despite the best efforts of a bird to hold it up. These are not stories of migration, like those characteristic of Highlands societies—stories that trace journeys made overland by ancestors, recording interactions with people and places along routes and thus providing a charter of claims to land along the way. Only one story came close to that form. The Kubo oobi named Yawuasoso and a Febi clan of the same name recount how, long ago, one man travelled north and another south, swapping places and carrying
with them plants and animals that otherwise would have been found only in their original setting. But this, too, is a story of connection between social groups, not with land. It has little to say of the land traversed on the respective journeys of these two ancestors but, rather, establishes a ‘brother’ relationship between men of different oobi and, through this, a prohibition on intermarriage.

In the early years of our research, however, the deep past was not focal for Kubo (compare Bird-David 2004). There was little ambiguity about access to land and they did not yet feel the need to establish rights by reporting mythological connection. That would not come for 20 years from the time we first met them. Instead, the stories that they commonly told—and continue to tell—were about travel within and beyond their own territory, about the aggregation of communities in response to government wishes, about the influence of missions, about formal education and the possibilities of employment or business opportunities. Noah’s personal history contains all these elements.

When Noah was a small boy ‘enemies’ came from the east, attacked the mountain community where he lived, and killed his parents. His youngest sister, a nursing baby, was killed by the same arrow that killed his mother. The enemies burned the longhouse where everyone lived. They killed pigs, destroyed gardens, and abducted Noah’s teenaged sister Sesgei. Noah was about ten years old. The attack occurred in the late 1960s.

Noah recalled his fear and confusion. ‘Where is my father?’ he asked a big man who was covered in black and white paint. ‘He has gone to get sago,’ the man lied. But Noah, too, was taken by the invaders. He lived with them for a year or so, was reclaimed by his kin, met a ‘white man’ who was conducting a census, travelled with him to Udamobi, south of the Baiya River, was given his first European clothing and, from time to time, attended a recently established Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) school where Tok Pisin was the language of instruction.

In 1976, less than a year after Independence, and soon after he had been initiated, Noah moved to Nomad to continue his schooling. The school at Udamobi had closed. At Nomad he met a man from Tari. That man encouraged him to go to the Highlands and further his education. Some people said that he should not go but he ignored them. ‘I decided for myself,’ he said—a recurring refrain throughout Noah’s account. In 1979–80 he walked more than 100 km through the lands of Bedamuni, Etoro and Huli speakers, enrolled at a school in Tari and, by 1984, had completed his primary level education. He worked as a houseboy but was often hungry.
Now, because he could not afford school fees, Noah rejoined his sister at the newly established Suabi Mission Station. She was with her third husband, a Yawuasoso man who gave Noah money to assist with further schooling. He returned to Tari but was growing restless and school was less attractive. By late 1986 he had come back to Suabi where, resisting encouragement from western kin to realign with the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea and live with them, he helped another man establish a small SDA community north of the Baiya River. Suabi, and the SDA Church, remained his focus for the next 13 years. He married, divorced and remarried, became father to a daughter and in 1997—the year of a major drought—relocated to the newly established community at Mome Hafi on the Strickland River.

Noah was appointed as Kaunsil (Council) for three relatively close villages. He facilitated access to an annual government grant that paid money for cutting ‘roads’ through forest, cleaning villages and building churches. He and his family—he now had a son as well as a daughter—followed SDA conventions of worship, though no one else at Mome Hafi did so. A dispute emerged over access to land. Tensions heightened. Noah was often away, negotiating with government officials at Nomad. He felt that others gave no help to his wife and children during his absences. And Mome Hafi lacked services. There was no school or community health centre. There was no airstrip or radio. In 2006, Noah suggested that he should use some of the annual government grant—PGK1,500 in that year—to build ‘Komagato Corner’ at Suabi; a few houses where people from Strickland River communities could stay when they visited or children could live if they chose to attend school at Suabi. It was not to be. No one, he told us, would listen to him or do the things that needed doing. So ‘I withdrew myself’ from the community, he said.

Noah returned to Suabi, experimented with growing rice and wondered about the potential for a tourism business. He built an SDA church on the north side of the Baiya River and facilitated services. He was a local SDA leader. But he had not been formally trained as a pastor. He was told by church leaders to leave Suabi for two years, take up the challenge of training and, if successful, relocate to another community to preach and to guide people in how to run a church. Noah was diffident. He didn't want to go. He was getting older and wondered who would care for him in years to come. But the church leaders insisted and Noah left. It was only here, when Noah recounted his history, that he did not say ‘I decided for myself’. He was pessimistic. He was approaching his mid-fifties.

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11 See Dwyer and Minnegal (2007) for more details concerning Noah’s time at Mome Hafi. Some details of his account in 2014 differ from those he provided in 1995.
His political and economic ventures had not been successes. A position in the church hierarchy was the remaining possibility. Perhaps in the future he would be posted back to Suabi, to his own people. But he knew that, by then, he would be an old man.

By 1963 Nomad Patrol Station was fully operational and, in the years that followed, people to the immediate north and east of Nomad were visited regularly to conduct censuses and, as necessary, enforce colonial laws. From that time onwards, people living in these areas—Samo, Bedamuni and southern Kubo—progressively assembled as larger and, ultimately, more sedentary communities (Shaw 1996). To the north, however, in Kubo territory across the Baiya River and in Febi territory in the mountains, such visits were much less common. For at least ten years, people in those areas continued to live as relatively well separated longhouse communities and continued to engage in both intercommunity raiding and sorcery killings.

Though seldom visited by government officers, the northerners heard much of what was happening to their south. They travelled more and attended feasts in communities that, previously, they had rarely visited. Young men had illicit love affairs. They saw new ways of living, new kinds of clothing and new material goods. They desired these things. So, where possible, some joined patrols as guides or carriers, made their way to Nomad seeking work that might be rewarded with clothing or an axe, or sought enrolment in primary school where outside languages—Tok Pisin and even English—were on offer.

As a boy, Edisa joined a patrol in the Strickland River area and travelled to Nomad to learn Tok Pisin and become a *tanim tok*—a translator. He did not enjoy Nomad, ran away and made his way back home. Roisy had more success. In the very early 1970s he too went to Nomad, to enrol in an SDA-sponsored literacy class. He did well and his teacher helped him travel to Wabag, in the Highlands, where by 1979 he had completed Grade 8. He found employment with petroleum companies, continued schooling with the College of External Studies and, in 1982, earlier than any other Kubo person, had completed courses to the ‘Form IV level’. It was 13 years before Roisy came back to Suabi. He had received word that his brother had died. Even now, however, he continued to work with petroleum companies in the Strickland River area. He did so to the mid-1990s, when he married and redirected attention to raising a family and training as an SDA pastor.
Other young men were also on the move. As a newly initiated, young unmarried man Digimo moved from Kesomo land at the headwaters of Toio stream to a longhouse community near the river Wa, about 5 km from the future site of Suabi. This was before Independence. He came, his widow told us, because ‘government’ had said that all the ‘bush people’ who lived scattered across the land should come together at one place. Years later, at Suabi, Digimo assumed the role of pastor to his own people. He died in 2005. Sisiagwei, of Bosua clan, moved from the mountains at much the same time and for the same reason. He joined a longhouse community near Baiya River, in western Kubo land. He encouraged his sister to join him but she refused. She stayed behind to look after her pig, Biyohwo—the ‘child’ of a Bosua mountain named Biyo—and that is where she died. Atimu came from the mountains a little later. He too, like Digimo, moved to the community near Wa. But the movements of these young men were not entirely unprompted. At more southerly communities patrol officers had encouraged older men to bring in the ‘bush people’. To the west, Modu took on this role; to the east it was Habukau.

A few youths and young men, like Noah and Roisy, pursued the option of formal education, travelled to Nomad—often under the auspices of SDA—and, in some case, moved further afield. They were the exceptions. More youths and young men drew nearer to the government centre. But they were cautious. Raiding had eased but sorcery accusations and sorcery killings continued. Many of those who moved south from the mountains remained within Kubo territory, where at the least they had affinal links, perhaps even in-married sisters. By the mid-1970s many people had moved to newly established villages north and south of the Baiya River. Subsequently, however, these communities fragmented as people returned to their own lands and, in the case of Kubo, recolonised lands close to, and along the length of, Baiya River. When, in the early 1980s the airstrip at Suabi was initiated there was a handy workforce living nearby at Wa River. The people there were from multiple clans. The site selected for the airstrip lay where the lands of three oobi—Andibi, Domiti and Baiyameti—converged. These three, with Gobogometi, Osomei, Sisiti and Wamiti, ‘came together’ to build Suabi, and they continue to be credited with bringing the associated benefits to the community. The airstrip project, as it neared completion, attracted more mountain people, both Kubo and Febi. By the mid-1980s there were no Kubo longhouse communities at higher altitudes, though people still
visited their clan lands to hunt and fish and make gardens. Through the early 1980s, Febi people established their own permanent ‘corner’ at Suabi though, in fact, some Febi had lived with Kubo affines for so long that they had become, effectively, Kubo. The movement of Febi people to Suabi has continued since that time. A dispute in 1995 saw a group from Siabi relocate to Suabi and, more recently, a perceived need to have access to the outside world has seen more people arrive. The airstrip also attracted as many as 50 Bedamuni who settled on the southern side of Baiya River but, by the early 1990s, in response to emerging tensions, they had returned to their own land.

Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, 50 years after the Nomad Patrol Station was opened, the stories young men and some young women tell of themselves, or the stories that are told about them, are, at one level, different and, at another level, the same. The magnetic pull of Nomad has given way to the attraction of Kiunga in the west, the Highlands to the northeast and Port Moresby. People are still exploring the world beyond. As before, they are still both excited and anxious. As before, some who go will remain away for decades or, perhaps, never return—though now, since 2011 they can sometimes communicate by mobile telephone. Young men and young women are doing what their parents did before them. But the scale is different and the consequences for life at home—for the lives of those left behind—will also be different.

**Seeking Souls, Seeking Resources**

In 1963, one year after the Nomad Patrol Station was established, the Asia Pacific Christian Mission (APCM)—later named the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG)—built an airstrip at Honinabi within Samo territory. The small mission station was staffed by two Papua New Guineans—a pastor and medical orderly—who ran a small trade store and initiated instruction in Christian beliefs and the English language (Shaw 1990). In the late 1960s a remarkable Australian, Tom Hoey, established a mission at Mougulu within Bedamuni territory. He and his growing family lived there for more than 20 years. He built an airstrip, wire suspension bridges across major streams and a small hydro-electric plant, and he facilitated the development of schools and community health centres (Dwyer and Minnegal 2007: 259). He continues to visit. His influence is felt throughout the region.
Dan Shaw, an American missionary-linguist-anthropologist affiliated with both the APCM and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, settled in Samo territory in 1970 and, a year later, Papua New Guinean pastors of the SDA Church opened a few schools at Nomad and further north towards the Damami River (Shaw 1990, 1996), including the school at Udamobi that Noah attended. By the late 1970s, SDA was established within southeastern Kubo at a community now known as Testabi, and had moved north across the Damami where, unsuccessfully, they attempted to build an airstrip at Tiamobi.

In the late 1970s an American missionary, John Fletcher, came to Honinabi. He sought a suitable site for an airstrip and mission station north of the Baiya River in the east of Kubo territory. His first choice was vetoed by the experienced Tom Hoey. The final choice was an area of unused forest that, to local people, was a sacred resting place—a toi sa—of the spirits of the dead. The new mission station was named Suabi, the third location in official records to carry this name. A Bedamuni man, Fiagone, had preceded John’s arrival. He was the first pastor here. Later, when the airstrip was completed, John relocated to Suabi from Honinabi. In the early 1990s John and his wife, Celia, returned to the United States of America and were replaced by Tom and Vicki Covington who, with their growing family, stayed for more than ten years.

To the west, on the border of Konai and Kubo territories, in 1979 a Papua New Guinean ECPNG pastor brought 60 or so Konai, Kubo and Febi people together at Sesanabi, on a tributary of the Strickland River. Pastor Krubi was replaced by Pastor Mama in 1982, and in 1985, soon after the latter departed, the community fragmented (Minnegal and Dwyer 2000b: 44). By the late 1980s, the Christian Brethren Church had established a foothold at Tobi in the land of Febi people.

The ECPNG missionaries and their wives were talented and practical people. They learned local languages, translated the Bible, taught pastors, promoted literacy, maintained airstrips, went on patrol to distant communities, provided medical and obstetric care, initiated and assisted local business ventures, facilitated the work of anthropologists and others and patiently cajoled government authorities into providing schools, community health centres and employment opportunities. But always

12 In 2014 people at Suabi celebrated Fiagone’s contribution to their lives at a market day event with speeches, reminiscences and a substantial offering of food, material goods and money.
they, and particularly their sponsors living in distant places, understood their primary purpose to be more serious. By ‘planting’ the Word of God they were shedding light where there had been darkness; they were freeing local people from the evil influence of Satan. Where possible, and within the limit of their abilities, they strove to make their own teaching culturally appropriate. As Dan Shaw expressed it: ‘As an anthropologist and Bible translator I was interested in combining the two disciplines … in order to make the “message” understandable but minimally disruptive to a specific group of people’ (1990: 6).

Shaw was concerned by the legalistic emphasis of the Christian instruction preached by many Papua New Guinean pastors: ‘don’t smoke, chew betelnut, eat people, or fornicate’ (Shaw 1990: 182). He argued that this alienated people from the work of the mission. Indeed, it was the pastors, rather than the European missionaries themselves, who, with varying degrees of success, discouraged local birth control practices and forms of ritual and ceremonial expression. And it was the former, though with the compliance of the latter, who routinely promoted the long-standing wish of government that people should live as larger and more permanent communities. As much as people tried to oblige, their customary ways of living were disrupted and they became increasingly frustrated when expectations, and the imagined promises of others, were not fulfilled.

While the missionaries came to find untouched people and ‘give’ to them, others came to find untouched resources and to ‘take’. They too took advantage of the airstrip at Nomad. In about 1968 an oil exploration company, Compagnie Generale Geophysique, visited little-known areas to the north of Nomad and in 1969–70, for 12 months, Texaco undertook exploration work and drilling in the headwaters of the Baiya River. In 1982 Gulf Oil Corporation initiated geo-surveys and drilled for oil at Juha, in mountains well to the north of Nomad (Goldman and Ernst 2008: 9) though, at this time, their access point was Tari.13 In 1984 they completed the Šuabi airstrip to facilitate access to Juha. Additional geo-surveys and seismic surveys were conducted in the area in 1991 and 1994 (Goldman and Ernst 2008: 9). To the northwest, across the Strickland River, other companies undertook exploratory work in 1985

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13 Hides (1939: 95) reported that ‘Juha’ was the local name for the Strickland River in the area near its confluence with the Murray. It is likely that his rendering was a mishearing of the name we know—Wua.
at the Kubo–Konai border and, between April and July 1989, from a base at the Konai community of Dahamo, conducted seismic and geo-surveys in foothills and mountains to the east.

None of these early ventures led to extraction. The promising Juha sites had been put on hold and it was not until the mid-2000s that they were revisited and two more wells drilled. At that time Esso Highlands, a subsidiary of ExxonMobil, was the primary operator. Through much of 2006 and 2007 they used Suabi as a base. Eventually, however, a conglomerate of companies joined forces to form the integrated Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas (PNG LNG) Project: the project was led by ExxonMobil and participating partners were Oil Search, Santos, Nippon Oil, National Petroleum Company of PNG (representing the government) and Mineral Resources Development Company (representing affected landowners).

Late in 2010 the PNG LNG Project was thoroughly underway. The Hides gas field was developed and readied for operation, a major airstrip was built at Komo south of Tari, and the massive pipeline from Hides and Angore to the coast and, thence, underwater to processing plants at Caution Bay, near Port Moresby, was completed. Once again, however, the Juha field was inactive. The pipeline that would link Juha to Hides was not in place. To local people—Febi and Kubo—this was frustrating and puzzling. Their expectations were not, as yet, fulfilled. It was, as so often it seemed to be, Papua New Guineans living elsewhere who benefited from development.

Exploration continued in the area and, from late December 2012 to May 2014, Suabi hosted base camps for the explorers. In the first few months of 2013, lines were cut through rugged limestone country north of Juha to facilitate a geo-survey (Fig. 3.2). From April to June of that year the same operators—Oil Search and Oilmin—initiated new seismic surveys in the Juha area. The survey lines cut through dense rainforest reached into Hela Province, and beyond the tree line. They ceased work in late June—bad weather was implicated in a helicopter accident—returned in September, moved their campsite to Juha and, with several hundred employees, continued the interrupted seismic project. The camp at Suabi was taken over, and enlarged, by Talisman who, for three months, undertook geo-surveys and seismic surveys on the western slopes of the Karius Range. Thereafter, to at least the end of April, the camp
was put on hold—it was operated by Gama ProjEx\(^\text{14}\)—while Talisman managers, based in Calgary, Canada, decided whether to continue work on the Karius Range, move elsewhere or find a new client for the Suabi camp. By late April the decision had been made and the camp was being dismantled.

![Map showing route of proposed pipeline and the location of exploration-related activities in the years 2012–14.](image)

**Figure 3.2:** Map showing route of proposed pipeline and the location of exploration-related activities in the years 2012–14.

Sources: Based on Google Maps and authors’ data.

Notes: Solid lines depict seismic and geo-surveys. The precise locations of earlier survey lines within and near Petroleum Development Licence area 9 (PDL 9) are not known to us. The fine dashed lines show the location of seismic surveys in the years preceding 1993. Some that cross Kubo territory extended further to the northeast than we have been able to show; of these, only the survey that crosses Osio River was conducted after 1986. The territory of Kubo people, as reported in 2014, and the area of PDL 9 are highlighted.

\(^{14}\) A description of a Gama ProjEx modular camp was viewed on 12 May 2015 at: technology.tki.org.nz/Resources/Case-studies/Technologists-practice-case-studies/Electronics-and-control-technologies/Modular-field-camp-system.
From June to mid-October 2013, a preliminary social mapping study and associated environmental studies were underway along the route of a proposed pipeline that would cut southeast from recently proven wells at P’nyang, in mountains to the northeast of Kiunga. The pipeline would cross the Strickland River just south of Kubo territory, near its junction with the Damami. Suabi provided a convenient location for refuelling and for assessing whether any Kubo people held rights to land in the impacted area. They missed out by about 5 km. And, again to the north, in the early months of 2014, from the Juha camp, a fifth seismic survey was initiated to the west near the Strickland.

From the perspectives of Kubo and Febi people, through these three decades, exploration activity was intermittent. The explorers sometimes found valuable resources and held them for the future. There was, it seemed, much secrecy. Eventually, however, those resources would be taken from the ground and royalties paid to land owners. In the meantime it was necessary to host the company representatives and, as possible, accept employment at base camp or in the field as labourers, assistant loadmasters, security officers, laundry workers, assistant cooks and so forth. Only one Kubo man had permanent employment associated with exploration activities, as a fully trained loadmaster with Pacific Helicopters. Kubo people, in particular, felt disenfranchised. They hosted the base camp. To their north, east and southwest, at the borders of their land, touching it but never on it, they saw and sometimes worked with exploratory ventures (see Fig. 3.2). Decades earlier a few lines had been cut through their own land but these had come to naught and the explorers had departed. Kubo people thought of themselves as being at the ‘centre of Juha’ but never received what they felt they deserved: mineral resources or gas on their own land and the unambiguous ownership rights that would follow.15

15 Additional activity, known to us, since mid-2014 is a 72 km seismic survey west of Juha close to the Strickland River and, in 2016, drilling of two wells associated with this survey and a well named Muruk 1 immediately northeast of PDL 9 (Oil Search 2015: 29, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). The first of the Strickland River wells, close to the junction of the Liddle River with the Strickland, was plugged and abandoned after the Darai limestone was found to be water-bearing (Oil Search 2016a). The second Strickland well was plugged and abandoned in November 2016. In December 2016, Muruk 1 was reported to hold as much as USD14 billion of gas, providing the potential for an additional gas production train and enhancing the likelihood that the Juha wells will eventually be brought into production (Chambers 2016). In February 2016, Frontier Resources Ltd reported that it had been granted an exploration licence that covered areas at the headwaters of the Baiya
Geology was the problem. What the explorers wanted was in the mountains north of Kubo territory. The backswamps at lower altitudes offered little that sustained the interest of the mineral, oil and gas hunters. But some Kubo people saw it differently. Satan was implicated. He had stolen the valuable things—gold, diamonds, oil, gas—and hidden them deep in caves or in mountain hideaways where few people lived. White people had learned his trickery so this is where they searched. But there were deep caves that they did not know about. One day, properly equipped, with ropes for climbing and torches, local people would gain access and claim what was rightfully theirs.16

Petroleum and Energy

Patrol officers, missionaries, geologists, anthropologists, school teachers and community health workers may come and go—that is their fashion—but, when present, they are present in person. They and their impacts on local people are tangible. But the State—government bureaucracy—is distant and anonymous. It is the State, however, initially through Acts of Parliament, but subsequently through the practices of various national and provincial departments, that ultimately determines how, and to whom, royalties that flow from resource extraction ventures will be distributed. Multiple steps are entailed. They are complex, legalistic and seldom implemented in accordance with the letter of the law. And, further, the ‘letter of the law’ is itself subject to change.

The PNG Oil and Gas Act 1998 requires that, prior to exploration, a preliminary social mapping and landowner identification study should be undertaken (Goldman and Ernst 2008: 10; Fitzpatrick 2010). This provides an initial frame for meetings of local-level stakeholders: a meeting at which all relevant stakeholders sign an Umbrella Benefits


16 Local people working on survey lines are advised by landholders to use a ‘special language’ when at higher altitudes in the mountains. In particular, some names must not be said; rather, to offset the likelihood of violent and terrifying storms, their referents must be alluded to by metaphorical equivalents (compare Franklin 1972). The belief that Satan had hidden valuable things, and that white people knew this, was reinforced in January 2015 when local men became concerned that the ‘Devil’ had infiltrated their mountain campsite and the white labour manager hired the Suabi pastor to perform what proved to be a satisfactory exorcism (Jim Savage, Willie Samobia, personal communication).
Navigating the Future

Sharing Agreement and a subsequent meeting at which landowners within each licence area are allocated their share of project benefits—the Licence-Based Benefits Sharing Agreement (LBBSA). Further, the PNG government prefers that benefits from extraction of oil and gas be distributed to legally recognised ILGs. To this end, it revised an earlier pre-Independence Act of the PNG House of Assembly and passed the *Land Group Incorporation (Amendment) Act 2009*, with a 42-page guide book and a 123-page training manual provided to facilitate implementation (GoPNG 2012a, 2012b). The revised Act came into effect on 1 March 2012.

In 2005 Sari Mora, accompanied by two community affairs officers from Oil Search, arrived at Suabi to conduct a preliminary social mapping study of people living in the Juha area. Prior to this year, oil and gas exploration had proceeded in the absence of social mapping. Mora’s report provided a history of resource development activities in the area and discussed ‘ethnic groups’ (Goldman and Ernst 2008: 14). It is likely that at this time Febi people received advice with respect to setting up ILGs, for 11 applications had been lodged on 30 August 2005 (Ernst 2008: Appendix 3; Goldman and Ernst 2008: 170–3). Each of these carried the name of a purported clan: ten qualifying (by 2014) as Febi, one as Kubo.

In May 2009, the PNG DPE—‘DP’ to residents of Suabi—convened the Umbrella Benefits Sharing Agreement meeting for the PNG LNG Project at Kokopo, the capital of East New Britain. The meeting, which lasted for weeks, commenced with 150 hand-picked delegates but blew out to several thousand as people arrived from areas associated with the project (Fletcher and Webb 2012: 69; Garnaut 2015). Present were representatives of the National Government, four affected provincial governments, seven local level governments and project area ‘landowners’ from the multiple licence areas to be impacted by the PNG LNG Project. Their transport and accommodation costs were covered by the DPE.

The Kokopo agreement comprised 55 pages with an additional 69 pages for signatures (GoPNG 2009), though none of the ten Febi and Kubo representatives whose names we recognise have actually signed. Future benefits to landowners were to accrue from royalties, equity and a development levy. In addition, the State would set aside PGK1.2 billion for Infrastructure Development Grants and PGK120 million for Business Development Grants, with the latter accessible only by local landowners who had registered a company. Over the anticipated 30-year lifespan of the
3. Timelines

project, landowners were expected to receive more than 20 billion kina. These benefits were to be distributed differentially among landowners associated with licence areas and with well heads, buffer zones and pipeline easements. Details of how benefits would be distributed to individuals or groups within particular licence areas were not considered at the meeting.

In mid-November 2009 an LBBSA meeting was convened at Suabi. This was specifically concerned with potential beneficiaries associated with the area covered by Juha Petroleum Retention Licence 2. Key participants were the Independent State of PNG, two provincial governments, two local level governments and representatives of 18 named Febi and Kubo ‘clans’ together with six named ‘clans’ whose primary affiliations were with Huli and Duna-speaking peoples from what was to become Hela Province. Some of these people asserted historical and mythological connections to the Juha area and argued that the Gesesu community, 15 km south of the Juha well heads, was mixed Febi and Huli (Ernst 2008: Appendix 4; Goldman and Ernst 2008: 98–9). The Hela participants were dissatisfied by the venue chosen for the meeting. It was too muddy, facilities and food were inadequate, women came to the meetings and there was risk of sorcery. Their arguments and insistence prevailed. On 3 December the meeting moved to more salubrious facilities at Moro, a long-established base for Oil Search, near Lake Kutubu in Southern Highlands Province.

The Moro agreement stated that Juha area landowners would comprise Febi clans together with other Western and Hela Province clans ‘as invited by the Febi clans’. In essence, those who signed the agreement were accepting that the PNG LNG Project was valuable, should proceed without impediment and that, to the date of signing, all that had happened was in accordance with the law. However, it was only with respect to CDOA equity that the agreement specified the distribution of future benefits to clans. This equity arises from a Coordinated Development and Operating Agreement that had been signed by PNG LNG Project companies in May 2008. The three clans considered to be most closely

17 Hela Province, formerly part of Southern Highlands Province, was formally created in May 2012. The Hides gas field, the most productive of the PNG LNG fields, and the gas processing plant at Komo are within this province. We use the name Hela for this region even when referring to years before 2012.

18 Our information about the Suabi phase of the LBBSA meeting and the Moro agreement comes courtesy of Anaïs Gérard, who was at Suabi for much of the meeting and who, on a later visit, photographed all pages of a copy of the agreement held by a Febi man.
associated with the well heads were to each receive 15 per cent of the CDOA quantum allocated to the licence area as a whole. The other nine Febi clans were to each receive 5 per cent, the six ‘invited’ Kubo clans would share 2 per cent and the six ‘invited’ Hela and Duna clans would share 8 per cent. Should Febi clans fail to agree to this proposed distribution before 15 January 2010, then the matter could be resolved by a gazetted ministerial determination. The Moro agreement also stated that DPE would coordinate a clan vetting task force that would ‘identify, coordinate and facilitate incorporation of land groups for each affected clan or sub-clan identified within the licence area in accordance with the Lands Group Incorporation Act 1974’.

The Moro meeting was an expensive exercise. Hela participants were flown first to Suabi and then, together with at least 59 local-level participants—including two church and three women representatives—were flown from Suabi to Moro. At the close of the meeting many of these people were returned to their home villages by either plane or helicopter while others were provided with transport and funds to attend meetings at Port Moresby. And the meeting failed in its primary purpose. Some people, who asserted they were landowners, fought with DPE officers during the meeting (Bashir 2010a), and the agreement itself, signed by local-level participants but not, apparently, by any government personnel, immediately generated controversy (Anon. 2009). There was disagreement about the proposed distribution of benefits, there were assertions that the social mapping studies were flawed and incomplete (McIlriath et al. 2012), and there was much concern about the fact that the PGK11 million allocated to the Juha licence area for Business Development Grants had either not been released or had been corruptly mismanaged (Bashir 2010a, 2010b; Rouzet 2013).

19 ‘Clan vetting’ was devised by officers of PNG government departments after the Kokopo meeting in an attempt to resolve perceived difficulties with social mapping and landowner identification studies that were required under the Oil & Gas Act 1998 and were conducted as consultancies under contract to relevant petroleum companies. These studies did not name the individuals who might eventually be judged to be legitimate beneficiaries of royalties and other benefits and this proved frustrating to both bureaucrats and local people. The clan vetting process, conducted in the field by DPE officers, attempted to list all deserving clans and subclans together with their named representatives. The process has not, however, been implemented in accordance with government legislation and, in the years from 2010 to 2016, has been often challenged by the judiciary (Koim and Howes 2016).

20 The copy of the Moro agreement that we have seen was signed by representatives of all named Febi, Kubo, Huli and Duna groups but not by any government personnel.
At around the time of the Moro meeting a massive PNG LNG Environmental Impact Statement, including a 1,610-page social impact assessment, was finalised and submitted to the PNG Department of Environment and Conservation (Coffey Natural Systems 2009). In October 2009, this was accepted by the PNG government and, a year later, the PNG LNG Project was approved by participating partners. Soon afterwards, much of the Juha area was reclassified from Petroleum Retention Licence 2 (PRL 2) to Petroleum Development Licence 9 (PDL 9). The former classification applies to areas awaiting further appraisal, the latter to areas of intended resource extraction.

On 8 March 2010 Hon. W. Duma, Minister for Petroleum and Energy, signed an *Interim Determination of Juha Field (PDL9) PNG LNG Project Identified Landowner Beneficiaries*. Representations and lobbying by Huli and Duna speakers had been effective, for where, under the Moro agreement, they were to receive 8 per cent of benefits their allocated share was now 34.5 per cent. With few exceptions, the *Interim Determination* did not specify named groups within each of four broad categories of ‘landowner beneficiaries’. That was yet to be achieved.

In December 2010, under the auspices of the Nomad Local Level Government (Western Provincial Administration), 36 Febi and Kubo men representing 12 clans met in Kiunga and, after a briefing by technical officers, continued to Port Moresby. Here they held meetings with both government and PNG LNG Project officers. Their aim was to counter representations by Hela people, finalise and sign a *Juha PDL 09 Landowners Declaration* and, once again, seek release of, or access to, funds that had been set aside for Business Development Grants. Under their declaration they agreed to ‘honor the conditions of the Juha Petroleum Development Licence 09 License Based Benefit Sharing Agreement (LBBSA) that we signed in accordance with the Moro LBBSA Forum on the 08 of December, 2009 in compliance with the Oil and Gas Act’. There was no reference to the Minister’s determination of March 2010. Their presentations, and those that emanated from Hela, reinforced the growing understanding that more work was needed before rightful claimants to the Juha area could be identified. But it was not until November 2013 that this process came to fruition. In that month DPE organised a clan vetting exercise at Siabi, the small Febi village closest to the Juha wells.21

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21 In 2007 the population at Siabi was estimated to be 73 (Goldman and Ernst 2008: 32). By 2013, it was considerably less.
Most of the people who attended reached Siabi by walking, a minimum of two days through mountainous country from Suabi. As reported to us, DPE officers who ran the meeting sought to validate authentic landowners by eliciting knowledge of named features of the landscape, and paid minimal attention to assertions of mythological connection. They were aided in their endeavour by one employee whose paternal affiliations were with Febi.22

In April 2014, DPE released a *Juha PDL 9 Recognised Major Clan and Sub-clan List*. At the time of the Kokopo meeting it had been asserted that 11Febi clans held rights over the Juha area. At the time of the Moro meeting, Febi representatives acknowledged 12 Febi clans, six Kubo clans and six others as legitimate beneficiaries. But much had changed. Where, previously, Febi disputed the legitimacy of Huli and Duna claimants they were now, additionally, engaged in redefining themselves. A combination of internal discord and strategic thinking (Minnegal et al. 2015) saw the number of clans judged to be eligible increase from the 24 listed at Moro to 53—of which, in our 2014 judgement, 23 are unambiguously Febi, eight are unambiguously Kubo, three are admixtures of Konai, Febi, Siali (Tsiani) and Huli and the remaining 19 are Bogaia, Duna or Huli (see Table 5.1). By late 2014, DPE had made no moves in the Juha area towards advising and assisting with the establishment of ILGs.

**Entangled Histories**

The histories of outside engagement with Kubo and Febi people by explorers, government officers, missionaries, and men seeking gold, oil or gas, overlap in time and in influence. They are not discrete. Each category of intruder draws on the experiences of those who preceded them. And, in turn, the people themselves seek ways to navigate the shifting terrain of the multiple ways of living in, and knowing, the world to which they are exposed. Through the 1960s and 1970s people living north of the Baiya River were seldom visited by agents of the colonial government. They were left alone. They themselves initiated changes that occurred,

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22 The Febi man employed by DPE was listed as the representative of one subclan within his natal clan and as the representative of both a different major clan that was unambiguously Kubo and a subclan within that clan. The DPE employee's connections to the latter clan were through his mother and, in fact, his mother's brother would have had a greater claim to be nominated as the clan representative.
though sometimes at the prompting of government representatives. After Independence in 1975, there was even less contact. If people felt a need for government intervention or advice they were expected to report to Nomad; the officers based there seldom came to them. In the 1980s, it was missionaries and pastors, rather than government, who settled in these areas—ECPNG in western Kubo, ECPNG and SDA in eastern Kubo and the Christian Brethren Church at Tobi in northern Febi territory. It was missionaries who facilitated the arrival of education and health services, though in fact, north of the Baiya River, this occurred only at Suabi in eastern Kubo land. Though government did eventually begin to staff schools and medical aid posts, support for those staff was minimal, salaries often were not paid, and retention of staff unsurprisingly was difficult; missionaries continued to play a crucial role in the viability of those services.

From the mid-2000s, however, with the advent of what would become the PNG LNG Project, Kubo and Febi people were catapulted into worlds of bureaucracy, printed words and the law. They had no prior experience that might help make sense of these new worlds. Relatively few people could read. None could comprehend the language of Acts of Parliament or of documents generated by government departments. Indeed, in 2014, we met no one at Suabi who knew what ‘percentage’ meant. No one was sure what an ILG was or how one went about registering either an ILG or a company. But gradually, through that decade, it became necessary to traverse this terrain. The wells that had been drilled at Juha held the promise of great wealth for, at least, some people. To ensure access to that wealth—to ensure legitimacy—it was necessary to comply with all that it seemed government demanded. And it was necessary, too, to discover or invent connections of kinship and history with those who, it seemed, had unambiguous rights to that wealth. For ten years people were confronted by a ‘promise’ that seemed never to be fulfilled. For ten years they navigated a barely comprehensible, and ever-shifting, terrain that led to the future. What they did is the subject of later chapters.