Jeff returned from work soon after 7 am. Through the night he had been a security guard at the exploration base camp. Now he was tired and slept. In mid-afternoon, he joined a group of young men and boys in a small, high-set house where they played cards and gambled for money. He had seen little of his wife Alice, or their eight-month old daughter Kamari, through the day. Alice was exhausted. As happened every day now, she had washed nappies and clothing in the river, hung them out to dry and cared for the child. She had little relief from these chores. She was six or seven months pregnant, emotionally overwrought and feeling abandoned. With Jeff and Kamari, she was living with his parents but did not get on well with them. Nor, with Jeff working, could she contribute as much to daily subsistence tasks as was expected.

In the late afternoon Alice, carrying Kamari, started to fence a small household vegetable patch that she and Jeff had planted several months earlier. But the fence was unnecessary. Alice was making a public statement, showing those nearby that it was she who supported the family and that she did so without assistance from her husband. She worked, while Jeff slept and played cards. He did not harvest food from gardens, or hunt, or fish to support his family.

Alice and Jeff had been having difficulties for some time. Jeff had been angry when their child was born. He had wanted a son, blamed Alice when she gave birth to a daughter and talked of finding a second wife. Today their growing difficulties spilled over. Jeff saw what Alice was doing, raced down from the house where he was playing cards, pulled Kamari away, thrust her into the arms of his youngest sister, ran back and threw Alice to the ground. She fought back and keened: high pitched, almost unintelligible as she gave vent to her complaints through tears. He didn't help with the work, he gambled, he didn't share his money
with her. She grabbed a stick, tried to hit him, picked up cooking stones from the pile outside the house and threw them at him. He danced out of the way, laughing at her. He ran at her again, pushed her and became furious. He punched and kicked the trunk of a banana plant. People gathered, watching, increasingly concerned as the fight escalated. Two older women moved in, standing between them, holding them apart, wresting sticks and stones from Alice’s hands. Paul appeared—he was the locally-appointed Law and Order Committee—and ordered them to stop. Still keening loudly, Alice retreated to her house. Other people moved to a different house. They discussed the problem. ‘Cards,’ they concluded. Jeff was playing cards and Alice was ‘jealous’. Gisio found the pack of cards and threw them into the fire. ‘Cards always cause trouble,’ she said. Now they have caused a major problem in this part of the village. She told her own small children to leave: ‘There is nothing to see here,’ she said.

Alice wept through much of the night. The next day, Jeff returned to work. One foot was bandaged. He was limping and using a stick for support. His mother was sitting with us as he limped past. Her child’s wife caused the injury, she told us. ‘Sobo bami’ [bad woman], she declared vehemently. But Jeff was not hurt; his injury was fabricated. Within a week they were fighting again.

It was in March 2014 that Jeff and Alice fought. Twenty years earlier tensions between husband and wife rarely escalated to physical fighting. At Gwaimasi and Mome Hafi, during five visits amounting to 25 months, there was only one occasion when a man struck his wife. He had been hunting for several days, failed to kill a pig, felt that he was ageing and was no longer capable, returned from the forest, sat moodily at his hearth and, irritated with himself, deliberately broke an arrow to mark that his hunting days were over. His wife comforted him. It was just bad luck, she said; he would kill a pig next time he went hunting. He did not want comfort. He hit her, a single blow and was deeply shamed. Now, however, people encountered different pressures. Population growth, aggregation into larger and more sedentary communities, emerging constraints on access to land, changes to marriage practices and expectations, paid work and its effects on both access to money and the distribution of subsistence tasks among men and women, were all implicated in the deterioration of the relationship between Alice and Jeff. These are themes that we shall take up in this chapter where we depict life at Suabi in the years 2011 to 2014 and reflect on changes through the preceding two decades.
Place and People

The village now known as Suabi came into being in the early 1980s. The missionaries Tom Hoey and John Fletcher chose a site on a bend of the Baiya River as the location for a new airstrip, and encouraged people from nearby longhouse communities to help build it. Through the next few years, as the airstrip became a reality and John Fletcher and the Bedamuni pastor Fiagone settled nearby, increasing numbers of people relocated from previously scattered longhouse communities so that, by the mid-1980s, 150 people identified as residents of the new village. Most were Kubo-speakers, some were Febi-speakers and perhaps 50 were Bedamuni-speakers who, attracted by the prospects of the airstrip, had relocated from the southeast and established a cluster of houses on a ridge overlooking the river. At first, most of the Febi-speakers were men who in earlier years, sometimes as children, had moved south from the mountains, married Kubo women and, for the most part, lived as Kubo. Other Febi-speakers came later—and, indeed, continue to come—to access the school, health services and communication facilitated by the presence of the mission station. Bedamuni-speakers returned to their own land in the late 1980s, after a dispute, but re-established a community a few kilometres from the airstrip about 20 years later.

Table 4.1: Population census of Suabi (March–April 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNERS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>S &amp; G</th>
<th>G &amp; D</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married ♂</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married ♀</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced ♀</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried ♂</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried ♀</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>143</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
<td><strong>171</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>764</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ work.
Notes: Separate records are provided for six discrete assemblies, comprising eight Corners, within the greater Suabi community. Corners are coded as S = Suabi; O = Owabi; T = Timaguibi; S & G = Sasosi & Goonabi; G & D = Gweobi & Dufosi; B = Bigusubi.
As the number of people living at Suabi grew, and the village increasingly assumed an air of permanence, earlier structuring principles of exchange marriage and co-initiation that had patterned co-residence weakened. Within the greater Suabi area, people established household clusters that, in large part, were formed on the bases of language and both clan and mission affiliation. (In this chapter, and later, we follow contemporary practice at Suabi by using the word ‘clan’ rather than oobi to refer to group affiliation, a shift that reflects both the penetration of government discourse, the increasing use of Tok Pisin in the community, and the multi-lingual composition of the community.) By April 2014, there were 764 people residing at Suabi, together with one community school teacher with his wife and son, and seven boys and three girls from other communities who lived with families at Suabi while attending elementary or community school. The ratio of males to females was 1.18.¹ These people were dispersed as six residential clusters, locally termed Corners, though some people talked in terms of an even finer classification (Table 4.1, Figs 4.1, 4.2).²

---

¹ This value will slightly understate the bias in that more males than females have permanently departed from the community. Records of 103 births at the Suabi Community Health Centre for the years 1999 to 2015 yielded a male-biased sex ratio of 1.26. Our own records from 1986 to 1995, for a small sample of 23 cases where date of birth is known and underreporting of females can be excluded, yielded a male-biased sex ratio at birth of 1.3.

² We provided five people with forms on which, with the assistance of others, and for each household in one or two Corners with which they were familiar, they recorded the names of resident married men, widowers, married women, widows, divorced women, unmarried men/boys, unmarried women/girls, child-boys and child-girls. ‘Residents’ were classed as those whose primary residence was said to be Suabi. Our assistants decided who did and who did not qualify as a resident—they had very firm opinions—and recorded the location of people who were absent at the time of the census. We cross-checked completed forms against previously recorded family lists, school enrolment lists, community health centre records and long-term diary and kinship records and asked our assistants, and others, for clarification wherever there was ambiguity. This was particularly important because people have, and use, multiple names. It was also important to eliminate multiple listings of the same person. Some young males and females regularly move between Corners of the greater Suabi community and some were listed more than once or forgotten. With these very mobile individuals we decided which Corner qualified as their primary residential focus. Despite our guidance regarding the distinction we sought between unmarried man/boy and child-boy, and between unmarried woman/girl and child-girl, there was little consistency in the judgements made by our assistants. In Table 4.1 we have pooled these categories as, respectively, ‘unmarried male’ and ‘unmarried female’. The PNG National Census of 2011 recorded population data for Corners of Suabi south of the Baiya River—pooled as Timaguibi—but not for those north of the river. Census officers visited the market at Suabi Corner, explained what they wanted and were told forcefully that ‘government’ always came wanting something from the people but never gave anything in return. People north of the river refused to cooperate and, thus, no population statistics were collected from Suabi, Owabi, Gweobi, Dufosi or Bigusubi Corners.
Figure 4.1: A schematic representation of the greater Suabi community in 2014.
Source: Authors.
Note: Clusters of houses—‘Corners’—are shaded. Direction and distance are approximate.

Figure 4.2: Entrance to Owabi Corner.
Source: Photograph by Peter D. Dwyer, 2011.
In broad outline, though with the exception of Suabi Corner, the affiliations of nearly all senior males at each Corner reflect an orientation of residence to the location of the land of their clans: at Owabi to the west and northwest, at Timaguibi to the west but south of the Baiya River, at Sasosi to the south and east, at Gweobi to the north and at Bigusubi to the east. Predominant language affiliations are Kubo for Owabi, Timaguibi, Sasosi and Goonabi Corners, Febi for Gweobi and Dufosi Corners and Bedamuni for Bigusubi Corner. Suabi Corner is more diverse than others with respect to language affiliation. In 11 households the senior resident was Kubo, in four he was Febi by birthright though with long-standing Kubo affiliations, and in three others he was an outsider from, respectively, Bedamuni, Oksapmin and Morehead. Primary mission affiliation also maps onto residence. Residents at Suabi, Owabi, Sasosi, Goonabi and Bigusubi are, for the most part, aligned with the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG) though at Owabi, since the mid-1980s, one cluster of households is aligned with the Seventh-day Adventist Mission (SDA). Timaguibi was established as an SDA community in the mid-1980s, though that connection has been diluted through the past decade, and the predominantly Febi Corners, Gweobi and Dufosi, are aligned with the Christian Brethren Church. By 2014, though no one expressed disbelief or doubt in relation to the Word of God as represented by the Bible, there were increasing numbers of people, especially of men in their later 20s and 30s, who rarely, if ever, attended church services.

The size of the aggregate Suabi population in 2014 is, in part, the product of more people settling there on a permanent basis and, even more so, the product of rapid population growth arising from increased infant survival and increased longevity. Our tentative estimates of annual population growth are 3.6 per cent from 1987 to 1999 and 5 per cent from 1999 to 2011. The latter figure approaches the high of 5.4 per cent recorded for the Southern Highlands Province in the 2001 National Census. Since 1986, the Kubo population has doubled to approximately 1,000 people. Between 1999 and 2011, the number of living children per female increased by

---

3 Our estimates of population growth rate draw on data from people who were resident at Gwaimasi in January 1987 and separate the periods 1987–99 (population size 21 to 32) and 1999–2011 (population size 32 to 57.5, adjusting for cases where a man or woman moved into or out of Gwaimasi or, after Gwaimasi was disbanded, Mome Haifi). Data on the numbers of living children or grandchildren per female are based on records from 1999 and 2011. Sample sizes for females include only living, married females for whom details are complete. For living children per female, n = 27 and 38 women respectively for 1999 and 2011; for living grandchildren per female, n = 27 and 35 women respectively for 1999 and 2011. One older female who lost her first and only child and one nulliparous female are included in the samples.
a factor of 2.37, with some women now having eight or nine living children, and the number of living grandchildren per female increased by a factor of 3.0 with some women now having seven or eight grandchildren.4

Multiple factors are implicated in the increases in both family sizes and longevity. These include abandoning customary birth-spacing practices (progressively since 1987), abandoning infanticide of newborn babies born to unwed women (since 1987), abandoning the killing of persons identified as sorcerers (largely in place by 1987), and, since the mid-1980s, access to at least low-level medical care that has included missionary-sponsored emergency evacuation, the presence of a trained community health worker at Suabi, availability of community health centre pre-natal and post-natal care leading to increased survival of both mothers and infants, intermittent inoculation for infants, and treatment of malaria and a variety of infections. In recent years, mission doctors based at Rumginae have, from time to time, visited the village to conduct clinics. In 2004 a team from Australian Doctors International conducted clinics and distributed mosquito nets throughout the Nomad region, though many of the nets have been used for fishing and not for their intended purpose (Bowman 2004; Gentleman 2015; Minakawa et al. 2008. See also GoPNG 2005; JTA International 2009). And, in late April 2014, in response to an outbreak of measles in the Upper Fly River area, two paramedics visited Suabi to vaccinate people between the ages of six months and 20 years. They combined this program with another in which they vaccinated all females of reproductive age against tuberculosis and presented talks in which they spoke of hygiene and sexually transmitted diseases but not birth control.

But not all those at Suabi through recent years were from local language groups. One man from Oksapmin and another from Morehead married local women while based at Suabi as community health workers; one returned to raise his family there, and the other visited often to spend time with his wife’s family. Three women, one from Wabag, another from

---

4 Body size has also increased through the past two decades. Many young men and women in their 20s are taller than their same-gender parent. Increases in height, weight and Body Mass Index have been reported from other PNG populations but, though presumably linked to socio-economic change, key causal factors have not been unambiguously identified (Ulijasek 1993, 2003; Norgan 1995; Adhikai et al. 2011). Some local people assert that these changes had been prophesised by members of Nomo clan: a new kind of people would come, people who were ‘naked’ and did not have their noses pierced and, when they came, local boys and girls would grow faster and larger; they would stop respecting their parents, the girls would grow breasts when very young, start having sex too soon and marry before they were ready.
Ialibu, and a third from Kiunga had married men from Suabi, and returned with them to live at Suabi. Through 2013 and into 2014, when intensive exploration was underway in the nearby mountains, a handful of white men—camp managers, geologists, helicopter pilots—and a hundred or more nationals flown in from distant parts of Papua New Guinea (PNG), were living in the base camp near the airstrip. This activity attracted others, who made their own way to Suabi in the hope—usually unmet—of finding employment as labourers; a few young men from Ialibu, Mount Hagen and Goroka spent several weeks at Suabi through early 2014, invited by local youths who knew them from school. Though occasionally judged to cause trouble, they were nevertheless welcomed, seen as reflecting a long-awaited recognition by the wider world of Suabi’s importance.

**Livelihood**

Gardening, sago processing and hunting and fishing remain primary as life-support systems at Suabi, though changes have occurred in the expression of all these practices. Bananas continue to be the primary carbohydrate food produced at gardens but, relative to earlier years, sweet potato has become more important and the diversity of greens has decreased with *abika* (*Hibiscus manihot*), which is eaten in quantity on many days, the most important of these. Bananas and tubers require different modes of production and, for the most part, are grown at separate gardens. The yield from banana gardens is poor from about 20 months after planting (Dwyer and Minnegal 1993). At Gwaimasi, in the 1980s, banana gardens were abandoned after this time and sites left for 15 to 20 years before the well advanced regrowth was felled and the area replanted. At Suabi, people continue to take what they can for a longer period.5 But the outcome of increased population and sedentisation at Suabi has led to a 12-fold increase since 1974 in the area of gardens and secondary growth that encircles the village site (Fig. 4.3). To this time, most people have been establishing new gardens slightly further from the village than their previous gardens. Most of these are within a zone that is currently recognised as being open to access by all. There is only one area, towards Wa River, where Suabi residents have consistently been gardening more than a few kilometres from the village.

---

5 Shingo Odani (2002), working with Bosavi people of the Great Papuan Plateau, reported that banana production measured as kg/ha/year was reduced by as much as two-thirds when gardens were maintained beyond the time that the first harvest was completed. (See also Kuchikura 1995.)
Figure 4.3: Extent of gardens and secondary growth in the area near Suabi, 1974 to 2013.


Notes: Shaded areas show gardens, secondary growth and, in B and C, clearing associated with Suabi village and airstrip (solid bar). A: Shaded areas based on aerial photography at 1974. B: Shaded areas based on Landsat image at 30 December 1990. C: Shaded areas based on Google Earth image at 10 April 2013. Some areas of secondary growth shown on B do not appear on C; in part, this is because secondary growth becomes less easy to distinguish from primary forest after about 20 to 25 years; in part, it reflects differences in the quality of the Landsat and Google Earth images.
As yet, few earlier sites are suitable for replanting. Indeed, harvesting for longer than 20 months has the outcome that replenishment of soil nutrients takes longer and, hence, a longer fallow is necessary if yields are to be rewarding. It is likely to be for this reason that sweet potato has increased in importance. Sweet potato gardens must be fenced to minimise the depredations of wild pigs but this increase in labour is compensated for by the fact that a fallow period of only five to ten years is needed and that, with some composting achieved by burning before planting, production can be relatively rapid and high. At all Corners small household gardens are common but, unless composted, yields are poor. Old house sites, burned after salvaging usable building materials, are used as highly valued household gardens; they are very productive, though for only a single planting. Most vegetable waste from households is thrown into clumps of banana plants that then yield well. Coconut palms, which were not grown by Kubo before colonisation, are now abundant in the village area—some, in fact, are old and no longer yield—as too are okari nut trees (*Terminalia*).

When people began to settle at Suabi they were, initially, reliant on sago that they processed from palms that grew in swamps nearby. These were primarily wild, rather than planted, palms and, had people been reliant on them alone, they would not have met the requirements of the growing population. In the first decade or so after settlement people often travelled some distance to find suitable palms, returning to places they had recently abandoned to utilise palms that they themselves had planted. From the outset, however, they planted palms at Suabi, close to the numerous streams that drain to the Baiya River. It was 15 to 20 years before these palms would flower; the ideal time to fell a palm and extract the flour is shortly before it flowers and the starch stored in the trunk is redirected to flowers and seeds (Dwyer and Minnegal 1995). By the 2000s, then, there were many mature and maturing palms available close to where people lived. In the years 2011 to 2014 it was only when feasts were pending, and large quantities of sago flour were needed, that it was necessary to travel some distance, and sleep away from the village, to access suitable palms.
Wild animal foods remained important at Suabi, though people often complained that they were hard to come by and said that those living near the Strickland River ate much better than they themselves did. Hunting was less frequent than it had been at Gwaimasi and men who did go hunting—it was usually older men—were seldom away for more than a day or two. Wild pigs and cassowaries were now more often taken by snares than by hunting with dogs or ambushing from hides, and men who had set a snare would leave the village at dawn and be back within an hour or two. Snares had been introduced in the mid-2000s by outsiders employed by companies exploring for oil and gas. They proved very popular and were often successful. Many fish, crayfish and prawns were obtained by netting, trapping, spearing and line-fishing in the river and streams and, as in earlier years, beetle larvae were incubated in the trunks of felled sago palms. Smaller items like fish, crayfish, prawns, frogs, lizards, snakes and birds—the last shot by arrow or, more commonly now, catapult—were often eaten privately, either near the place where they were taken or away from sight, after dark, inside houses. Indeed, at Suabi, most houses—including separate kitchen houses—were enclosed, or built such that open cooking areas faced away from walking paths. They were structurally not welcoming. In the circumstance of a large resident population sharing was less common, and captured animals were more often concealed from view. For these reasons, people who may themselves have eaten meat quite often might say that animal foods were scarce.

Pigs, dogs, chickens and cassowaries are kept as domestic animals by people at Suabi. In contrast to practices seen at Gwaimasi, pigs are now managed in such a way that they are tame to everyone; though older animals may be released into the forest to forage or, if sows, to mate with wild boars, and some larger animals are penned, many roam freely though the village area. They are fed on cooked bananas in the early morning and in the evening. They are killed and eaten at feasts, to mark weddings, as compensation payments, at the conclusion of many locally held court cases (see Chapter 6) and sometimes because people from one Corner—usually young men—are ‘hungry’ for pig and raise enough money to buy

---

6 During four-and-a-half months in 2013–14, the 143 residents at Suabi Corner publicly butchered, cooked and distributed ten wild pigs and 12 domestic pigs. It is likely that some additional wild and domestic piglets were killed and eaten privately. These values translate as 0.015 wild pigs and 0.02 domestic pigs per person per month. Comparable values from Gwaimasi in 1986–87 are much higher, especially for wild pigs; respectively 0.22 and 0.03 (25 people, 15 months, piglets excluded; Dwyer 1993: 131, Dwyer and Minnegal 1991: 192).
an animal from an owner living at another Corner. Through the years 2011 to 2014 the numbers of village-based pigs varied greatly, because late in 2011 people were attempting to maximise their holdings to satisfy the perceived requirements for a spectacular three-Corner feast a year later; a three-day feast at which 65 domestic pigs, together with dried meat from hunted animals, were distributed throughout Suabi and to several hundred guests from elsewhere. Dogs were by no means as abundant, relative to the number of people, as they had been at Gwaimasi in earlier years. When men did go hunting they called up four or five dogs to accompany them. These, however, were not necessarily their own dogs. Because hunting with dogs had decreased in frequency, and because men could call on other people’s dogs, there was less reason for each family to keep many animals. There were about ten to 20 dogs associated with each Corner.

A few families reared cassowaries that had been captured in the forest as chicks. The animals were caged and considerable effort was entailed in provisioning them, on a daily basis, with diced pawpaw or, in season, tree fruits such as Java Apple (*Syzygium*). They were important in facilitating exchanges both between members of the SDA community—who neither ate nor raised pigs—and between people affiliated with other missions and SDA members. Finally, there were many chickens that ranged freely at all Corners. They were individually owned—sometimes by infants—and named, and often marked with a piece of coloured flagging tape tied to a wing. Eggs were seldom eaten, and mortality of chicks was high as a result, particularly, of hawk attacks and, less often, predation by pythons, dogs and pigs. Surviving young chicks were individually tamed and, from time to time, fed termites. Adult chickens, more often roosters than hens, were killed and eaten, sometimes after being purchased, to celebrate minor events such as the expected departure of a family member or, in one case, a child’s birthday. Killing always entailed a hilarious chase through undergrowth and numerous attempts to shoot the bird with an arrow.

While the vast majority of food consumed at Suabi continued to be locally produced, the rice and tinned fish that, through the 1990s, had become expected at intercommunity feasts by people at Gwaimasi have become a much more regular part of the diet. A shared meal to mark completion of a communal task—roofing a new house, or clearing the remains of a fallen tool-shed at the airstrip—would often now include these
‘modern’ foods. And those with money would occasionally purchase rice, tinned fish and noodles for an evening meal, eaten behind the closed doors of a family house. In terms of quantity, however, these foods contributed little to the overall diet. When available and affordable, people ate what they managed to procure immediately. When, as happened once a month or so, the trade store owner flew in a supply of rice the 200 kg that arrived was often sold, and consumed, within a day or two. Only those few who secured work at the base camp or on exploration lines through 2013 ate rice every day. But that, of course, simply added to the status of this food as epitomising modern lifeways.

When exploration companies were based at Suabi through the late 2000s, nearly all adult men and some women were employed and money flowed freely. ‘We ate rice every day’ was the primary memory people recited of that time. Local people began to experiment with growing rice themselves, and one man purchased a rice mill that, for a small fee, people could use to husk their harvest. But by 2011 the mill had broken; it had not been maintained. People now had to carry their crop to Nomad, a long walk with a heavy load that might result in a few cups of rice at most; the effort was ‘not worth it’, we were told. With no way to mill rice, people left seed-stock to rot. But the possibility of again growing rice remained of great interest, and possible ways to procure another rice mill were often discussed.

Involvement in wage labour for exploration companies had other effects, however. Through much of 2013, most men were again employed as labourers on a seismic survey near the headwaters of the Baiya River. Without men available to assist with building fences, no new tuber gardens were established through that time. By late December 2013, almost no sweet potato was available for harvest. Once the survey was completed, however, most families turned to clearing and fencing new gardens. The result was a synchrony in gardening and sago processing across the community, in marked contrast to the flexibility seen at Gwaimasi. With exploration work itself seasonal, constrained by the clouds that descend on mountains to the north and east from May through to September, a de facto seasonality of labour that had little to do with the local climate was now shaping patterns of food production and consumption at Suabi.
Navigating the Future

 Movements and the Outside World

The pattern of movements at Suabi was vastly different from that observed at Gwaimasi two decades earlier. At Gwaimasi in 1986–87, people spent 21.9 per cent of available nights at small garden, sago or hunting houses within the local subsistence zone, 6.6 per cent of nights at or near communities within a day’s walk of Gwaimasi and 11.5 per cent of nights further afield with nearly all these at Suabi or Dahamo. (These values exclude children.) At Suabi in 2013–14, again excluding children, people spent only 6.9 per cent of available nights sleeping at bush houses within Kubo territory. They spent 4.7 per cent of available nights sleeping at, or on the land of, neighbouring Kubo, Samo or Febi communities—some entailing an overnight stop en route—and 19.2 per cent of available nights further afield at Kiunga and nearby towns or at Highland and coastal towns, including Port Moresby.7

The huge reduction in absences at bush houses was unexpected. Given the great extension of secondary growth reaching out from Suabi (Fig. 4.3) we had expected that people would spend much time away from the village to satisfy subsistence needs. But this was not the case. Indeed, the reduction is greater than the values suggest because nearly half the recorded absences were associated with employment when a group of people, supported by an outside grant, contributed to upgrading part of the walking track between Suabi and a Febi community to the northeast. When a family made a sweet potato garden that had to be fenced then they might spend a week or more away from the village and, from time to time, a family or group of families would camp in the forest to fish and hunt because this was enjoyable; the mood was that the time away qualified as ‘holiday’ rather than necessity. For different families, however, these activities were seldom synchronised, with the outcome that our 137-day sample reflects an uneven distribution of subsistence-related absences from Suabi Corner. At Suabi the distances travelled to gardening, sago processing and hunting sites were often comparable to those observed at Gwaimasi, but while residents of the latter village would remain away for the period entailed by the task, those at Suabi often moved between village and work site on

---

7 Absences at other Kubo communities and at places beyond Kubo territory were monitored for 17 of the 18 households at Suabi Corner (74 people, 10,138 available nights). We were unable to satisfactorily monitor absences from the Bedamuni household. Absences at bush houses within Kubo territory were monitored for seven households at Suabi Corner (35 people, 3,857 available nights).
a daily basis. They would return on dark, or after dark, not infrequently in the rain. They preferred to sleep at home. They did not want to miss the central possibilities provided by Suabi—news or visitors from the outside.

Absences from Suabi in 2013–14 that were to, or near, the land of neighbouring Kubo, Samo or Febi communities were, proportionately, somewhat less than analogous absences from Gwaimasi. Moreover, while the vast majority of the latter concerned customary social interactions, less than 10 per cent of Suabi absences were motivated in the same way. Rather, employment at Juha and mission-sponsored functions at Honinabi accounted for most of these absences. Much of this difference between Gwaimasi and Suabi may be attributed to the large size of the latter community, in that many social obligations were fulfilled in situ—as, for example, exchanges and marriage negotiations between residents of different Corners. In addition, however, there was an expectation on the part of the Suabi community that people would come to them; an expectation that was, in a sense, reciprocated by the attractions Suabi held for those living at a distance.

In 2013–14, people living at Suabi were travelling further afield than was the case in the earlier period at Gwaimasi, and were doing so more often. Access to money, the value placed on formal education, relocation of kin and the desire, or felt necessity, to pursue ‘roads to money’ go some way to explaining the difference. About half these absences were to Highland and coastal towns (Mount Hagen, Goroka, Lae and Port Moresby) and half to Kiunga and nearby towns (Tabubil and Rumginae); at the time of our census, between 45 and 50 people classed as residents were absent at one or other of these locations. All absences in the first set of destinations were by males, with the vast majority by unmarried older youths and young men who were, purportedly, furthering their education.8

Absences at or near Kiunga were for diverse reasons, including education (70 per cent of records), health, school and mission administration, ‘private business’ and visiting kin. One young woman attended high school at Kiunga, another visited for reasons of health, one married woman visited

---

8 It was widely known—and, indeed, some of the youths themselves said as much to us—that some of these purported students, who had previously been at school, no longer attended; they used stated intentions to do so as an excuse to return to these distant towns because they had developed a preference for life beyond what they saw as the confines of Suabi. Some of these young men told us that they no longer liked the bush, that they did not ‘know’ it and did not ‘know’ how to hunt. A few stated strongly that they had no intention of returning to live on a permanent basis at Suabi.
to take a child to hospital and another accompanied her husband during a period of employment. These four records account for 26 per cent of absences at or near Kiunga. Men sometimes gave ‘private business’ as the reason for their absence (10 per cent of records). Sometimes they were purchasing stock for local trade stores, but most often they were intending to negotiate with government officials or with ‘knowledgeable’ Kubo or Febi men in the hope of receiving advice about accessing a Business Development Grant or registering an Incorporated Land Group. To people at Suabi, Kiunga was a busy and attractive place—for some men the temptations of women and alcohol were always in mind—and many visits were, in part, to visit kin and friends.

Visits to Kiunga were made easier for people from Suabi because, for a decade or two, there has been a well established ‘Suabi Corner’ in that town. In 2014, this comprised nine houses. The primary occupants of four of these are Kubo families, from Suabi, that relocated to Kiunga as much as ten years earlier. The primary occupants of two others are Febi families in which the senior male moves back and forth between Kiunga and Port Moresby and, only rarely, visits communities on either Kubo or Febi land. Between 25 and 30 Kubo people, together with about ten Febi people, are established as Kiunga residents. The remaining houses, commonly referred to as ‘Boys’ Houses’, are available to other Suabi people when they visit Kiunga.9

Increasingly then, for people at Suabi the movements that mattered were those that reached beyond the world of local subsistence. For Gwaimasi residents in earlier years, the bush was a place to escape the tensions of village life, and journeys beyond immediate neighbours had been primarily to render life at the village sustainable. For many of those at Suabi, however, it seemed the bush was now somewhere to go only if necessary, and usually for as little time as possible. Attention remained focused on the village, and the opportunities available there to remain in touch with—and perhaps journey out into—the wider world. It was to Kiunga or the Highlands, and not to the forest, that many people now looked for

9  Our discussion of movements has relied on quantitative data from one Corner at Suabi. With three exceptions we think the sample is probably representative. At Bigusubi—the Bedamuni Corner—it is likely that there were numerous reciprocal visits to and from Bedamuni territory that we were not aware of. At Gweobi and Dufosi—the Febi Corners—there were more ‘business-related’ absences at Kiunga and Port Moresby than at any of the other corners. And, finally, at Owabi, Timaguibi and Sasosi there were one or two families who visited their own oobi lands more often, and for longer periods, than did any families from Suabi Corner.
escape from the tensions—and, indeed, boredom—of village life. Yet, for nearly all, travel out into that world, and the networks established with people far beyond the lands of Kubo and their immediate neighbours, continued to be framed in terms of finding ways to draw the resources and excitement of that distant world back to the local community—securing the means to make Suabi itself ‘modern’.

**Emerging Institutions**

Kubo people valorise autonomy, the ability to ‘decide for themselves’ what they will do, and where and when they will do it. As a community, too, Suabi is now largely autonomous, though not financially independent. People here identify as citizens of PNG, and vote in local, provincial and national elections. The national anthem is sung at school graduations, and Independence Day is celebrated each year. But the various levels of government have little salience in day-to-day life. The nearest police are at Kiunga, and rarely respond to appeals for assistance in dealing with crimes. Politicians are known by reputation, but the only time in recent years that any have visited Suabi was in 2009, when the Licence-Based Benefits Sharing Agreement was being negotiated for the Juha gas field; though Suabi residents considered this a validation of their importance to the nation, there was no attention to local issues during that visit. Health and Education departments provide minimal oversight of locally-based staff, and there is little sense that people at Suabi are accountable to these external authorities; like ‘government’ itself, they are seen as potential sources of funds rather than as authorities to which people must answer.

Despite this, however, the notion of ‘government’ plays a crucial role in local imaginings of what it is to be modern. Its forms and its functions are replicated locally. There is an elected councillor, committee representatives for the different Corners, and two ‘Law and Order Committee’ men responsible for dealing with transgressions north and south of the river respectively. There is a head teacher in charge of the elementary schools who oversees three other teachers, a school board, a community health worker and associated Hospital Committee, a one-man Five-year Planning Committee and a one-man Market Committee. There are pastors, church management committees and Fellowship groups for women and youth, each with their designated leaders. Mission Aviation Fellowship had a designated local agent. And, in 2012, one man was standing for the position of President in the Nomad Local Level Government.
But though they had been accorded the ‘title’ and, not infrequently were both referred to and addressed by that ‘title’, the roles these men assumed, and the responsibilities they incurred, did not free them from the mundane business of gardening and hunting to provide food for their immediate family. Their status as personalised expressions of the world beyond was never generalised; they were not perceived as having power or superior knowledge beyond that entailed in the immediacy of their assigned role. Like everyone else in the community these men (and they were all men) were as likely as anyone else—indeed sometimes more likely, because their apparent prominence within the community could be interpreted as threatening local cohesion—to be challenged for perceived misdemeanours associated with customary expectations concerning exchange and sexual behaviour.

There were other domains, however, beyond those that made connections between individual men and the forms and functions of the outside world, where the emergence of ‘modern’ institutions was more powerfully expressed. These concerned local markets, school and church.

**Market: Performing Modernity**

Tuesday and Friday were ‘market day’ at Suabi. People began to arrive at the Suabi Corner market place from 7 am onward. Women brought small quantities of food for sale, displaying it on a sheet of plastic on the ground. If the river was in flood then people who lived south of the river could not attend. On different days different items predominated. Hibiscus leaves were regularly for sale while sweet potato, corn, lowland pitpit, pineapples and other food stuffs were sometimes present in quantity and at other times scarce. People bought from each other and, often, they bought foods that they themselves were offering for sale. Engagement with the social life afforded by the market was more fulfilling than the need to obtain particular kinds of food. Often, there were foods for immediate eating: edible bananas, cooked corn cobs, or buns made from flour and cooked in oil. These were popular, men buying them for smaller children or giving those children money so they could buy for themselves and learn early in life what money could do. Dried fish, a very few crayfish or, less often, cuts of wild pigs were sometimes available and these, though prices were higher, sold rapidly. Very rarely, when their own fresh supplies of vegetables were running low, men from the exploration base camp bought at the local market. For the most part, however, camp supplies arrived by helicopter at least once a week.
But locally grown or hunted foods were not the only items to appear at the market. Some people displayed small quantities of goods—torch batteries, soap, chicken stock cubes, packets of noodles and such like—that had been recently acquired at Kiunga, and one woman, a Highlander who had married in, regularly displayed clothing and, sometimes, bundles of dried tobacco. It seemed that everyone would like to operate their own trade store but that most lacked the means to do so. In fact, through the years 2011 to 2014 there was only one functioning trade store at Suabi. From time to time the man who ran it acquired moderately large supplies of goods—especially rice, cans of fish, cooking oil, sweet biscuits, Coca-Cola and other soft drinks, Digicel mobile phone FlexCards—which sold very rapidly. Earlier attempts by others to operate trade stores—there had been many attempts over many years—had routinely failed, in part because the demands of close kin jeopardised potential profits, and in part, as various people told us, because the unremitting ‘jealousy’ of non-kin was discouraging.

The market was a clearly gendered space. Traders were almost exclusively women, whether produce was from gardens, forest or Kiunga. Men might wander the arena, a few cigarettes in hand, or a length of rubber for diving spears, subtly displaying these to potential buyers. But they did not sit and wait for custom. They were there as consumers, it seemed, rather than ‘producers’. Admittedly, it was a man who ran the trade store, primarily men who dreamed of opening a trade store, or had done so in the past. It was men who at times sold small amounts of store-bought goods—rice, tinned fish, noodles—from their houses. And it was young men, too, who each week set up dart-boards at the market, selling nothing but hope and an opportunity to demonstrate skill. Unlike the women’s stalls, however, these were all ‘business’, requiring serious capital to set up.

Throughout the course of the market, older youths and men spent much of their time playing darts, risking 10 toea for a single dart in the hope of a prize-winning hit. Older men gathered in groups to discuss concerns that might be aired at the close of the market when, nearly always, as sales ceased, it was time for a tok save—for an information talk. Several themes recurred time and time again: the need to bring community schoolteachers to Suabi; the need to clear the school grounds and rebuild

10 Sweetened biscuits, soft drinks and sugar were popular at Suabi by 2011, with soft drinks used to pacify crying children and sugar, when available, added to tea and sometimes used to make ‘home brew’. In earlier years at Gwaimasi, sugar cane, which was thought of as a ‘drink’, and the uncooked larvae of wasps were the only sweet items on the menu. People did not eat honey produced by either native or introduced bees. It was too sweet and considered to be distasteful.
dilapidated classrooms and teachers’ houses; the need to initiate work on a new community health centre and undertake airstrip maintenance; the need to clean open areas and tracks at each Corner; and the concern that unnamed ‘school boys’ were accessing ‘drugs’ (marijuana) and alcohol and damaging, or thieving from, community property. Other less regular themes included calls for employees to work at Juha, the failure of government to provide support to the Suabi community, and the threat that Mission Aviation Fellowship would cease flights if there was ‘one more instance’ of smuggling alcohol in personal baggage. And, on one very lengthy occasion, a man who held the position of ‘Law and Order Committee’ read all 40 items listed on a typed document that was headed ‘Liklik los bilong Papua New Guinea wantaim ol panismen’ (the small laws of PNG and associated punishments). He first read them in Tok Pisin and then translated to Kubo. They included items such as ‘dring bia long public ples’ (drinking beer in a public place) which was to incur either a PGK40 fine or a month in jail, ‘tok nogut long narapela’ (speak badly of another person) which was to incur either a PGK300 fine or a year in jail, ‘holim ol nogut video kaset na megesin’ (being in possession of pornographic videos or magazines) which was to incur either a fine of PGK2,000 or a year in jail, and ‘man he selim pamuk meri’ (a man soliciting customers for a prostitute) which was to incur either a PGK800 fine or two years in jail. Many of the purported ‘laws’ were irrelevant to the Suabi community and, for those where there was potential for transgression, there was no way in which the declared ‘punishment’ could be imposed. Nor was anyone sure what should happen to the money if a fine had been put in place and paid. People seemed to assume that the money would rightfully belong to the person—the ‘Law and Order Committee’—who imposed the fine.

The market place, therefore, provided a venue for public discussion of issues that had implications for the entire Suabi community and were conceptualised as ‘modern’—as engaged with the world outside—in their content. It was not the place at which personal grievances between particular people or groups of people should be or were usually aired. This was made clear in a public notice displayed at the market in March 2014. The notice read:

This toksave serves to inform the landowners of Soabi communities, the public servants and the General public that the public toksave regarding the personal issues has been closed as of 23rd March and no more.

Any personal worries and issues that concerns you is not allow to toksave in the Market and Community.
The acceptable toksave in the market are if:

- Reasonable / or
- Genuine
- Urgent

Personal toksave as closed to avoid confliction such as:

- Civil wars
- Gossiping
- Describing and etc …

Note publish by the sensible guy and Acting Market Committee.

Personal issues were usually dealt with at local courts that, though on the surface formally structured in terms of understandings of the proceedings of government-run courts, were more faithful to earlier forms of resolving disputes. There were, however, two cases that did spill out into public debate at the market. On several occasions there was passionate discussion of inequalities between Corners as a result of school facilities, the community health centre, the ECPNG church and other mission buildings, and the market itself all being located at Suabi Corner. In consequence, speakers asserted, residents of other Corners were disadvantaged and, to some extent, treated as second-class members of the community. When this matter was raised, however, names were never mentioned. The other exception became more personal. It was thought by some people that several thousand kina of an infrastructure grant had been misappropriated. The problem was aired at a succession of markets, becoming more fraught each time until, finally, a ‘suspect’ was named and people came to blows. The altercation at the market then precipitated a court case where the matter was resolved (see Chapter 6).

At the market, people came together twice a week and demonstrated to themselves and to each other that they were, or aspired to be, ‘modern’ people. They were like people elsewhere—at Kiunga, at towns in the Highlands, at Port Moresby, perhaps even further afield. The potential that everyone could both sell goods—locally produced or acquired from distant towns—and buy what was offered for sale reinforced each person’s participation in that ‘modern’ world. And, as well, the concerns that were usually aired at the close of the market were those that reached out to that world. The market, as performance, was aspirational.
But there were many other ways in which people—for the most part acting as individuals rather than as a collective—expressed themselves as ‘modern’ people. Older youths and men, if they had sufficient resources, wore boots, long trousers and dark glasses. They mimicked the safety clothing that featured at exploration camps. Many younger women wore brassieres, and shorts beneath their skirts. Most mothers of infants used nappies rather than disposable soft leaves as absorbents. Some used ‘baby carriers’ that were supported across the chest in preference to carrying their infant in a string bag on their back, a very few experimented with very dilute formula as an alternative to breast milk, one sought a tubal ligation at the time she gave birth to her fourth child, and some young children were encouraged to learn to walk wearing shoes. A few older girls and young women purchased moderately expensive preparations with which they temporarily straightened their hair, while some used hair dyes. And nearly every household had an abundance of metal pots for cooking, purchased plates or bowls for serving food and spoons for eating. The implications of all these ‘modern’ accoutrements were, however, mixed. Some had been taken up for very practical reasons. Umbrellas were popular, especially for women who used them to shade infants that they were carrying. Men and youths who left the village to cut fronds of sago palms in preparation for thatching a roof now commonly wore gumboots and one heavy glove to make walking in the mud, where the palms grew, less unpleasant and to reduce the likelihood that they would be pierced by the abundant, long and sharp thorns of the palms. Straightening and dyeing hair—perhaps also the single case we observed of a young woman shaving her legs—presumably have aesthetic connotations. ‘Modern’ items associated with cooking and eating were hardly essential but were very convenient, though cooking pots increased the work of women because they blackened rapidly over the fire and much effort was expended in scraping them clean after every meal. Nappies, too, added to the work of the mothers of infants. But the new forms of clothing that men favoured—including heavy jackets that some had been issued when they worked in the mountains—were hardly appropriate to the high temperatures and humidity experienced at Suabi. They were statements of status, of membership within a new world of possibilities—of belonging

11 Martha Macintyre (2008: 183) comments that, in Papua New Guinea, ‘in towns, in mining areas and around projects where young men have access to money’ there are many who dress in ways that mimic ‘modern’ or ‘global’ styles and who do so as expressions of masculinity. We interpret analogous mimicry in dress by men at Suabi as an expression of a ‘modern’ status more than as an expression of masculinity.
to the category of those who wore such things. They were simultaneously, in their diversity of colours and styles, ‘badges’ of a person’s individuality and, to this extent, placed that person apart from conventional relational and egalitarian practices.

School: Structuring Modernity

It was in 1987 that a community school, intended to provide the first six years of formal education, was first opened at Suabi. In that year anyone who had not previously attended school could enrol, with the result that some young men and women in their late teens and early twenties were both students and an immediately available workforce for building classrooms. Through the next ten to 15 years, government support to remote communities waxed and waned and payments to teachers were, at best, intermittent. The number of teachers posted to Suabi varied erratically and, often, those who did arrive were dissatisfied and sought placements elsewhere. By the mid-2000s the school was again functioning well. Now, however, trained local men taught students for their first three years—Elementary Prep and Elementary 1 and 2—and only Grades 3 to 6 were taught at the community school. At this time too, with exploration companies operating out of Suabi, there was more money available and a cohort of young men and women advanced to high school level at Kiunga or at several Highland towns.

The key community school teacher through this period was Eneka Jacob—a Kubo man. Eneka was committed to his work and largely responsible for the fact that a number of students achieved entry to high school. In 2009 he initiated a building program, upgrading what were then seriously dilapidated classrooms. But in September of that year, on a weekend fishing excursion with his half-brother, he was bitten by a death adder and died. Eneka’s death was attributed to sorcery and, for this reason, other potential community school teachers—trained outsiders—refused to take up positions at Suabi. Eneka’s building project was abandoned.12

12 By 2014, three burials at Suabi were marked by above-ground memorial shelters that displayed former possessions of the deceased men. These celebrated the lives and achievements of Digimo, the first Kubo pastor at Suabi who died in December 2005, the school teacher Eneka who died in September 2009, and Sosoaho who died in December 2011 when he was in his 80s—older than any other Kubo person—and who would have been about 25 years old when the patrol post was established at Nomad. The memorial structures were built at Owabi Corner in places of high visibility. By contrast, people who, after they died, were judged to have been sorcerers were buried with minimal ceremony at locations that were relatively distant from the usual places visited by other
In 2013 the community school was again opened. Two teachers came, though they departed before the school year had been completed. There was mutual dissatisfaction between teachers and community members. The former felt that the community was neither cooperative nor interested in their children’s education, and submitted a negative report at the time they departed. The latter complained that the teachers had initiated illicit commercial ventures and paid unwanted attention to female students. In 2014, there was a long delay before a community school teacher arrived. The local school committee had failed to fulfil required financial obligations that would facilitate this process, and several teachers who had been posted to Suabi made alternative arrangements. Qiriwasi arrived on 2 April, in the ninth week of the first term of teaching. He was a Suki man but, in earlier years as a teacher at Honinabi, had married a Samo woman and they both came with their small child. Through the next two weeks community members devoted many hours to clearing the overgrown school grounds and restoring the two usable classrooms to some semblance of order. They had made only desultory contributions to this necessary work before the teacher actually arrived. Qiriwasi commenced enrolling students. He was conscious of the late start and initiated lessons on 17 April, during an official school holiday period. To the chagrin of some local people he also called students to school on 18 April—Good Friday: a ‘public holiday’, people said. At this time there were 54 students enrolled: 35 in Grade 4, 12 in Grade 5 and 7 in Grade 6. Qiriwasi felt that he could not handle Grade 3 as well. It was hard to imagine how, as sole teacher, he was going to provide for the educational needs of students in the three grades that he did accept.

The first elementary school teacher at Suabi, a Febi man whose family had long lived in the community, had sexual relations with some female students and was removed from his position by the local community. He left Suabi and, in 2008, was replaced by Taio, another local man, who had received one year of training. In 2011 Taio was joined by Dinosi and Okiset who had both attended a six-week training course and were, officially, eligible to teach only Elementary Prep. Taio was given the official status of ‘headmaster’. In 2012, Okiset, who lived at Gweobi Corner, established a separate elementary school there to cater specifically...
for the children of Febi-speakers. And, in 2013, Kabel, who had received a full year of training in Port Moresby, commenced teaching at a newly established Timaguibi school. Dinosi, Okiset and Kabel all worked under the supervision of Headmaster Taio, but Okiset had registered his school under the name ‘Juha Elementary School’; in the understanding of distant bureaucrats, therefore, this was not part of the Suabi set of schools and was eligible to receive funds that were not channelled through the headmaster.

In 2014 there was great variation in the commitment of elementary school teachers. In the 12 teaching weeks that we were present, classes were held at Timaguibi in ten of those weeks. The first teaching week was devoted to preparing classrooms and school grounds and, in the last week, the teacher attended a professional workshop at Nomad. At Suabi Corner, the headmaster and his junior co-teacher ran morning classes in, respectively, only four and five weeks and at Gweobi there were classes in four weeks. The general lack of commitment was, in part, simply a reflection of the way in which Kubo and Febi people undertook many work-related tasks. Procrastination was commonplace. A sense of urgency or, more often, evidence that someone else had taken preliminary action—evidence, for example, that a teacher had actually arrived before commencing cleaning the school ground—was required to stimulate engagement. It was a reflection, too, of the fact that two of the teachers felt they were not adequate to the task and were receiving insufficient guidance from the headmaster. Officially they should teach only Elementary Prep but were called upon to contribute to higher grades. It was influenced by the fact that resources were minimal or non-existent; in part because, in some years, the Education Department failed to provide an expected grant, in part because when a grant was received relatively little of it was spent in the ways intended, and in part because at the close of each school year any remaining resources disappeared. And, finally, it was influenced by the fact that some of the teachers contributed their time and effort for long periods without receiving any financial remuneration. Dinosi and Okiset both taught in three years without being paid and Kabel taught in 2013 and the first term of 2014 without pay. Through this period only the headmaster received any pay, though this too ceased in the second term of 2013, when the provincial teaching authorities learned that he was spending much time in Kiunga when he should have been teaching.
In 2014 both Dinosi and Okiset were finally successful in negotiations with Education Department officers in Kiunga—they had tried on several earlier occasions—and received payments of, respectively, PGK14,900 and PGK12,000 for the previous three years of teaching. The headmaster was also relisted as an active teacher though, due to bureaucratic oversight, he was in the fortunate position that he too received approximately PGK12,000 despite the fact that he had previously been remunerated for times when he was thought to be at Suabi and purportedly teaching.  

Enrolments at the elementary schools were high in 2014, with 80 students in three grades at Suabi, 27 in two grades at Timaguibi and 15 in one grade at Gweobi. Ages ranged from about six years to early twenties, and 45 per cent of the students were female. However, a strong bias favouring males was evident at higher levels of education; only 33 per cent of the 54 students enrolled at the community school were female—there were no females in Grade 6—and only two of the 19 students (11 per cent) purportedly enrolled at high schools or technical colleges at distant towns were female.

Formal education has had a chequered history at Suabi. In the first ten years from 1987 a considerable number of students progressed beyond community school to reach higher grades—though seldom the highest grade—at high school. A few went further and undertook technical training in, for example, carpentry, welding or plumbing. But virtually all this cohort was male. There was a period thereafter—of five or more years—when relatively few Suabi students moved on to high school. A second phase of successes occurred in the mid-2000s and it was in this period, for the first time, that a number of females from Suabi attended high schools at Kiunga or in the Highlands—though none completed their studies and a few returned pregnant. That phase was short-lived, however, and by 2014, when once again there seemed to be a promise of local opportunities for education, those who attended community school were, in general, older than would be expected for the grade in which they were enrolled.

---

13 Dinosi and the headmaster supported their claims for salary by showing Education Department officials a variety of well-presented forms that provided spaces for enrolment details, weekly activity plans and daily lesson plans in ‘language’, ‘cultural mathematics’, ‘me and my community’ and ‘me and my environment’. The forms suggested that much effort had been invested in planning the teaching year though, in fact, they were based upon forms provided during training and their rather well ordered, and multicoloured, appearance was because we had typed and printed them.
School: Learning to Be Modern

At Suabi, school structured people's learning experiences in ways that differed greatly from earlier times. And, together with church services, market days, timetabled clinics at the community health centre and scheduled radio contacts, it also structured people's organisation of time in new ways.  

At Gwaimasi, and neighbouring communities, in 1986–87 family sizes were small and children regularly accompanied parents or other kin to gardens and sago processing ventures where they observed, and in some ways participated, in the work that was done. As they became older and their interests turned in different directions, boys who wished to hunt larger game—wild pigs or cassowaries—took on an apprenticeship role with older, experienced hunters and girls developed competence at subsistence tasks and weaving string bags. There was little by way of formal instruction. Observation, listening, participation and experimentation were central to a child's education and what they learned was immediately relevant to their current and expected future needs. Their older kin, as incidental outcomes of their own activities, taught by directing attention to what the children needed to know and to ways in which they might accomplish what needed to be done. Children were enskilled rather than enculturated (Gibson 1979: 254; Ingold 2000: 22, 416; Pálsson 1994).

Education at schools is quite different. At Suabi, rote learning was common with, for example, pupils chanting vowel sounds, or words in English, in response to the teacher. Though, in fact, children developed more competence with both Tok Pisin and English through exposure to these languages in contexts other than school, the ‘performance’ of English in classrooms was seen as important. School education was valued by all, both adults and children. It was valued for the promise it held of a different and rewarding future, a future that could be accessed only if money was accessed; English, and the knowledge it seemed to represent, were understood to be ways in which this might be facilitated. As one man told the children at an end-of-year graduation event in 2011, ‘muscles’ were enough for getting food and building houses, but to get money they would have to use their ‘minds’ and school was the place to develop this capacity. Poor results in English told against graduation

---

14 Knauft (2002b) provides excellent accounts of the content and implications of classroom teaching, and of the scheduling of time, experienced by Gebusi people living at Nomad in 1998.
from elementary to community school and from the latter to high school. But few became fluent in speaking, much less reading and writing, this new language. High school reports for students often gave low grades for English. Some men, seeking fulltime positions with local companies—as helicopter loadmasters for example—failed in multiple attempts to pass the English component of an entry examination. At Suabi, those few with competence in written Tok Pisin or English were often called upon to draft letters for other people. Two men charged fees for providing this service.

What was taught at local schools had little relevance to the subsistence lifestyle that prevailed at Suabi. The focus was on possibilities of future employment that would take those who graduated away from their home community. Only teaching and health work offered the chance to receive a regular income at Suabi and, at best, the number of positions would not reach eight. The returns from school education were not immediate, and their relevance was to a lifestyle that was far removed from that which most youngsters would eventually have to follow. Observation, listening, participation and experimentation were not central to school education. What was taught was, in large part, concerned with a world, and with ways of thinking, that were far beyond Suabi. It created expectations and desires but, in the context in which it was delivered, provided no built-in mechanisms by which those expectations and desires might be satisfied.

But school had more profound effects on life at Suabi. At the times when classes were run the school bell rang at 8 am. Most children who were attending assembled early. Few were late, though there were some who avoided school and found other ways to fill in the day. Classes at elementary school finished at midday, those at community school continued into the afternoon but, in both the morning and the afternoon, there were scheduled breaks. School structured time in an orderly fashion, creating a frame which patterned the lives of both the pupils and many of their kin. The markets held on Tuesday and Friday mornings, the regular church services held on Saturday for SDA adherents and on Sunday for ECPNG adherents, the clinics at the community health centre, the assigned days and times when Mission Aviation Fellowship or mission doctors were in radio contact, and advance knowledge that a plane was expected to reach

At the Kubo community at Testabi the head elementary school teacher instituted a weekly ‘culture day’ on which pupils were encouraged to attend dressed in ‘traditional clothing’. There was nothing akin to this in the school program at Suabi.
Suabi at a particular time, all had the same effect. These were temporally fixed activities and people who wished to participate in them were obliged to pattern other activities around them. They had the outcome that many people were doing much the same thing at much the same time. This was in stark contrast to the flexibility, and family-level individuality, of activity scheduling seen at Gwaimasi in 1986–87.

Through the weeks when school was in session the children who attended could not travel with parents or others when these people went to gardens, sago processing sites or other places that were a few kilometres from the village. School, therefore, removed children from many of the activities that, in earlier years, had been central to their educational experiences. And those activities became less attractive to them. Many became less enthusiastic about travelling with their parents even at times when school was not in session. In the large Suabi community where, in the context of school classes, they were often with age mates, children increasingly associated with one another out of school hours—girls making and using fish traps, boys playing cards or mini-snooker, gender-specific groups swimming. A restlessness was evident, a restlessness that was exacerbated by the stories older youths and young men told of the excitement to be had at Kiunga or, especially, Highland towns, a restlessness that was often given expression by tensions within families and the frequency with which many teenaged children moved their sleeping arrangements between Corners and from house to house.

School: Expressing Modernity

At Suabi, there is little concern to capture anything of customary practices and understandings in the context of the formality of school education. Even at elementary school the emphasis is upon instruction in English and, to some extent, a disparagement of a child’s natal language. A well attended graduation ceremony held in December 2011 gave emphasis to the ‘modern’. With a single exception—a teacher who wore a cassowary feather headdress—neither adults nor children dressed in traditional clothing. The ceremony was organised to celebrate the achievements of elementary school pupils who, in 2012, would be advancing to a higher grade. But, regrettably, on the day, it was not known which children had qualified to graduate, because the headmaster was in Kiunga—his wife was due to give birth—and had not received or forwarded results of the end-of-year tests. Several hundred people gathered in the early afternoon. Entry points to the school grounds were decorated with
Navigating the Future

streamers made from stripped palm fronds and flowers, and signs indicated where ‘students’ (girls and boys separated), ‘parents’ and ‘professionals’—elementary school and university teachers, the Law and Order Committee, other community ‘leaders’—should gather. The pupils assembled as three carefully spaced lines in front of the PNG flag, sang the national anthem—*O arise all you sons of this land,/Let us sing of our joy to be free,/Praising God and rejoicing to be/Papua New Guinea*—and moved to their appointed sitting places. The ‘professionals’ made speeches. Then it was time for the ‘entertainment’. The Owabi string band and the Suabi live band—featuring guitars and, in the latter case, a drum—presented items that they themselves had composed and practised through the previous weeks. The third and final item, listed on the hand-written program as a ‘dramer’, was titled ‘Strit Mankis’ (Street Boys) and presented by teenage girls from Timaguibi Corner. It was a rich performance, accompanied by disco music from a boom-box powered directly from a solar panel. Seven ‘street boys’ crouched in a tight circle, playing cards, smoking, drinking and beginning to stagger as they got increasingly drunk. They stood, formed a tight circle, and danced wildly. They did not speak. They did not look at the audience. They were self-engrossed. One ‘boy’ moved from the group to stand at two leafy branches—‘trees’—and relieve himself. He was struck from behind by a *sanguma*—a ‘magic man’ or *hugai*—who he did not see, returned to the group and fell dead to the ground. His friends wept. A second group, girls and one older woman as pastor, silently watched the depraved behaviour of the ‘boys’, their disapproval evident. They quietly sang a hymn. The performance was over. The ‘boys’ had been punished but did not find redemption. It was probable that they would do the same again.

The Timaguibi girls had not learned of these matters at school. They had not created their drama in the context of school. Nor had they themselves been to the Highland towns where the behaviour they depicted was said to be common. They had drawn on the many stories that had been told and retold by both younger and older men who had visited Highland.

16 We were invited to speak at the graduation ceremony. It was 11 years since we had lived among Kubo people and, on this visit, we had been present for only one month. We recounted a little of our own life journey, reminisced about earlier days living with Kubo, talked of people we had known, of being impressed by the number of children now living at Suabi, and of the fact that so many people spoke three languages when, in earlier years, they had spoken just one. We spoke of the value and advantages of each of those languages—the ‘ground’ or ‘mother’ language, Tok Pisin and English—and stressed, particularly, that they should hold onto the first, that it was a ‘good language for a good place’. As we spoke, our words were translated. And when we finished, what was taken to be our key message was explained to the students: ‘if you want money, learn English’.
towns and laughingly reported their own participation. The girls did not need words to convey their message. Their drama spoke of risks to their own community and, particularly, of the harm that could befall young men who, attracted by the pleasures of town life, abandoned responsible ways of living.

**Church: Revealing Modernity**

Church services, and other mission functions, were also occasions at which, with a few notable exceptions, past practices were seldom evident. ECPNG services took place nearly every Sunday, though at Christmas and Easter there were multiple services across four days and, once a month, a special communion at which participants were served ‘tea’—warm water with powdered milk and sugar. Pastor Martin explained that ECPNG rules restricted communion to those who had been ‘water baptised’. He himself would like the rule changed so that all ‘believers’ could receive the blessing of communion, and those who had been baptised but did not, in fact, believe would not be eligible to join in.

Sunday services ran from about 9 am to 11.30 am, attracting congregations of from 60 to 150 men, women and children. People sat on the floor, men to one side of the church, women on the other side. If the pastor was absent, the service was led by another man who had received some training at Bible school or, rarely, was foregone. There were hymns, prayer sessions, usually one of two ‘testimonies’ from members of the congregation, offerings of money, food or minor trade store items to support the mission and the pastor’s family, a sermon and sometimes, at the close of the service, an open discussion of community concerns or of the need for practical help cleaning mission property. Martin put much effort into his sermons, was a natural teacher who drew on a comprehensive knowledge of the New Testament, a good performer able to elicit participation from those to whom he spoke. He alternated between Kubo, Tok Pisin and English.

In his sermons Martin spoke, variously, of the things that made a ‘good home’—the presence of Jesus, a good wife, a good husband and a Christian marriage; of the need to ‘fight evil’ in the world; of the importance of coming, not just once but time and time again, to Jesus for a ‘recharge’; of resisting temptation; of establishing a personal relationship with God before establishing good relations with others. At the close of each sermon he drew out his primary message: that, for example, the need to ‘live in the
light that was God’ should be understood as the need to live a ‘moral’ and, hence, ‘holy’ life, while the ‘darkness’ where Satan was found was a place of ‘mistakes’ and ‘sin’. Sometimes his focus was on matters he himself was grappling with, though at these times he preferred to open discussion to the congregation rather than reveal his own doubts and uncertainties. At one service, for example, he asked whether a Christian should eat of a pig that had been given as part of bridewealth, as a fine for adultery or as compensation for sorcery. If your unmarried son or daughter has been found to have had sex should you, as a Christian, contribute to the payment of the fine? If you are sick, or someone else is sick, and a ‘witchdoctor’ requests a monetary payment for offering a diagnosis or suggesting a cure, should a Christian accede to that demand? In these examples, Martin was abstracting from recent cases. His questions elicited prompt responses. A Christian should not do these things. But, to Martin, it was more complex. A pig, he suggested, is ‘just a pig’. There should be nothing wrong with eating it. It is the context that should provide the clue. Only if the context is ‘bad’ is doing so wrong and not Christian. His challenge to his audience, and his own uncertainty, was to know where the cut-off was between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in a continuum of possibilities.

It was matters concerning sorcery that Martin found most difficult to resolve. He himself had seen people die after being attacked by an assault sorcerer (hugai). He had seen people fall ill, and eventually die, in response to parcel sorcery (bogei). But he did not know how the old people knew these things, how they knew that the symptoms someone displayed were the result of sorcery of a particular kind or emanating from a particular source or how they, or others, knew how to ensorcel. He understood that assault sorcerers killed a person, stole organs, brought them back to life and sent them home where they would die for a second time. But this, Willie told us, contradicted his Christian understandings that only God could return someone to life. He accepted it as true—he had seen much evidence—but was bewildered by the apparent contradiction between customary Kubo beliefs and those that he had come to hold.

Martin was born in the mid-1970s. He attended community school at Suabi, moved to Nomad for technical training in carpentry, initiated training as an elementary school teacher and received some practical teaching experience at a Balimo school. In 1997, now back at Suabi, he organised the distribution of relief food that was provided by the Australian government during the course of a devastating El Niño-induced drought (Minnegal and Dwyer 2000a), and soon afterwards, encouraged
by the local American missionary, trained as an ECPNG pastor. In the
mid to late-2000s he became pastor at Suabi, and was eventually
appointed to oversee all ECPNG matters in the area occupied by Kubo,
Samo and Gebusi speakers. He travels quite often, providing support
to church groups throughout this area (often walking a day or more
each way to distant communities) or meeting with senior ECPNG
representatives at Rumginae. He considers that his own skills within the
church are not really those of a pastor, that he is not good working with
the local community, talking to people in their houses about their life
problems. His wife, Taba, is better at this. His skill, he said, and the way
he could best serve the church, was as a teacher travelling throughout
the region that he oversaw and providing guidance with mission-related
secular and sacred matters. For several years, at Suabi, Martin has run
a Bible school with an enrolment of about ten young men and women
who come, variously, from Kubo, Samo, Gebusi and Bedamuni language
groups. He felt strongly that when pastors were telling Bible stories they
should draw on both the content and style of the local stories of people.
The people would then be better placed to understand the message the
story was intended to convey. He said that when the first missionaries and
pastors came they taught people to sing hymns, they preached about God
but the people did not really understand, did not ‘feel’ the words. But that
is changing. Now people are encouraged to ‘sing their own feelings’, not
just words from a book.

As Easter approached in 2014, Pastor Martin encouraged women from
each Corner to ‘sing their own feelings’. We arrived late at the Sunday
morning service and, as we crossed the grass to reach the church, heard
women singing. We were transported 28 years into the past, for the way
in which they sang was the way in which they had once sung at gatherings
when men, painted and costumed, danced through the night. The sounds
were subdued and mournful, emotionally charged, quite unlike the way
in which hymns were usually performed. Their words were not those of
the past—they sang ‘Jesus is dead’ and not, as they might once have done,
‘at the mouth of Bo, a scrub fowl is calling’, meaning that a particular man
was calling at that place or had seen a scrub fowl at that place—but the
style of performance was from that earlier time. And once again, as with
the drama presented at the school graduation ceremony, it was teenage
and older women who reached beyond now conventional practices and
expectations to, in the one case, critique future threats to community
well-being or, in the other case, conjure memories from a supposedly
abandoned, even forbidden, past.
Expressing Community: The Past in the Present

At Gwaimasi, in 1986–87, wild pigs, cassowaries or large hauls of fish or cave bats were always shared by all those present at the village. When the food was cooked, people were called to each bring a plate. And everyone did so, young children, but not nursing infants, included. Everyone received essentially identical portions—a cut of meat, a portion of fat, skin, a section of entrails and so forth. The same principle patterned the distribution at feasts when visitors attended. Distribution of food was often a lengthy process, with observers drawing attention to any imbalances in the distribution. By 1995, however, a shift had occurred so that now feast food was often shared to ‘groups’ rather than individuals, with the identification of those groups based on oobi or village affiliation. But insistence on the equivalence of those shares with respect to size and composition persisted (Minnegal and Dwyer 1999: 70, 2007: 19).

At Suabi, in 2011–14, this principle of identity in sharing continued to be expressed at all feasts. There were many of these. They celebrated marriages and school graduations, resolved court cases, or marked the capture of a wild pig, departures, the conclusion of a working bee, and occasions of ‘fellowship’ for Mission adherents. If there were few people then everyone received a separate plate of food. If there were many, the distribution was to groups—to households if those who attended were from a single Corner, to wider assemblies if the feast brought people from different Corners or villages together. Rice and a ‘soup’ of vegetables, tinned meat (usually fish) and noodles were expected on such occasions. These were cooked at different households, then carried to the place where people gathered and the distribution occurred. Ten, 20 or even more pots of rice and soup might be provided. And, without fail, each plate—that of an individual or that of a group—received a portion from every one of those pots, though the content of each was effectively the same. What mattered, it seemed, was that all who attended received a share from each household that had cooked food and contributed to the occasion.

In earlier writing we argued that ‘under the influence of monetisation Kubo … moved from an emphasis on equivalence in exchanges to a recognition of substitutability’ in which the commonalities between things ‘rather than their individual qualities … increased in importance’ (Minnegal and Dwyer 1999: 70). By 1995, for example, people accepted
that a pig could be exchanged for money and, when this occurred, it was the size and condition of the pig that determined its price rather than that it was a particular pig with a particular history. Increasingly, through the next ten to 15 years, money was depersonalised so that, by 2011, people were thoroughly familiar with the commensurability of different monetary tokens and freely exchanged money for desired goods. As Martin said when problematising ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and asking when it was appropriate or inappropriate to eat pig or contribute to buying pig, ‘a pig is just a pig’. There was something deeper, he was suggesting, that should guide a Christian’s decision. But, at mission feasts, where his own role was always prominent, Martin did not behave as though ‘a pot of rice is just a pot of rice’. At feasts, more than on any other occasion, there remained an emphasis on equivalence—on publicly acknowledging the contributions of particular individuals or particular households—in the exchanges that occurred.

Social change is never absolute. The past is never put entirely aside. Constructions of identity run deep. And practices that fulfilled some needs in the past may continue to have relevance in the present. Such practices may be mundane or sacred. Among Kubo people, through the 1990s, the number of people who smoked declined notably and in our own later visits to Gwaimasi there was no one, other than us, who smoked. But this reduction had a cost, for the exchange of smoke—where one man drew smoke into a bamboo pipe and gave that smoke to another man—was a usual, and appreciated, greeting ceremony. Men ‘ate smoke’ together. By 2011 there had been a resurgence of smoking. It was common among men who had spent time away, employed by exploration companies, and among older youths who had been to schools in the Highlands. Some men grew their own tobacco, others bought trade tobacco and a few sometimes bought pre-rolled cigarettes. Men returning from Kiunga might carry a newspaper and sell pages that were then used to roll cigarettes. And, often, two men—especially a host and visitor—would express their enjoyment of each other’s company by ‘eating smoke’ together.

More striking, however, was a resurgence of customary ways in which to treat people who were sick and may have been ensorcelled. In the first few months of 2014, three curing dances were held; the first on behalf

17 Knauft (1987: 75–80) wrote that for Gebusi the sharing of tobacco was ‘the sine qua non of male social life’. Tobacco use, he said, was brought to its fullest expression at ceremonial gatherings, and in ritual fights was consciously used to forestall anger.
of a woman who had been sick for some time, the second and third, a month apart, on behalf of a man who had been attacked by an ‘assault warrior’—a hugai (Fig. 4.4). A sick child was included in the second ceremony; a sibling had recently died and the parents, anxiously, were seeking to protect the living, to offset the likelihood that this other child would be subject to the same spiritual attack. At each ceremony a spirit medium from an outside community officiated and one or two men danced through the night to the beat of a drum. The medium called upon benign spirits to dispel others that caused harm. The dancers attracted their attention. The chosen venues were distant from the ECPNG church; some people were deeply concerned that the performances were not Christian and felt they should not have taken place.

Figure 4.4: Curing dance at Suabi.
Source: Photograph by Peter D. Dwyer, 2012.

There had been three curing dances at Gwaimasi in 1986–87, one following a séance, and at intercommunity feasts all-night dances were an integral part of events. But we had seen none of these on later visits. At Suabi, as at other communities to the south, traditional dress and dance had become relegated to daytime performances at Independence
Day celebrations. These were occasions for performing ‘cultural’ identity, competing with groups from other places to put on the most colourful and ‘authentic’ show, often for prize money. Negotiating relations with those others, or with the spirit world, were no longer the point of the exercise. In late 2012, however, for the first time in many years, men again danced through the night at Owabi during a major feast that drew together visitors from all Kubo communities, as well as Febi, Samo, Bedamuni and others from further afield. More dances were held during smaller feasts the following year. There remained an element of ‘performance’ about these events, but that performance was now for each other, it was not primarily for consumption by outsiders.

Circulating Money

Through the past 20 years money, and the desire for money, have become more important to Kubo and Febi people and have increasingly shaped both practice and understandings. But the amount of money entering the community is not great. Expectations of future windfalls greatly exceed the current reality. In four-and-a-half months from mid-December 2013 to May 2014 a minimum of PGK250,000 reached the community as cash, with about one half of this paid as wages to men and women employed on a casual basis at the local base camp or as labourers on seismic lines in the vicinity of Juha (Table 4.2). While we may have been unaware of some payments to the community, gossip about money is commonplace and it is unlikely that the maximum reached PGK300,000. Three elementary school teachers and the community health worker received, in total, approximately PGK41,000 and small contributions were made to the local ECPNG pastor and the man who acted as agent for Mission Aviation Fellowship. Grants from government contributed another PGK80,000, most of which was spent on local employment. Talisman made a one-off payment for rent and environmental damage associated with the camp established near the airstrip. And, finally, some cash payments were received from us and, probably, as remittances from the two men who held permanent positions—one as a community health worker, the other as a loadmaster for Pacific Helicopters—beyond Suabi during that period.18 The estimated total is equivalent to PGK75.9

18 Our own primary cash inputs to the Suabi community were in 2012 when we purchased and paid for upgrading a recently built house. We often reciprocated assistance by way of gifts and, in this
per person per month, roughly the same as our estimate of per person annual income at Gwaimasi in 1986–87. At Suabi, however, in contrast to Gwaimasi, the distribution of money was markedly uneven across community members with a very marked bias against women.

Table 4.2: Money entering the Suabi community between 19 December 2013 and 5 May 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of money</th>
<th>Estimated amount (PGK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local employment*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas and Oil</td>
<td>125,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Health</td>
<td>41,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>261,115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ work.
Note: ‘Other’ combines remittances and our own payments; * = estimate.

Moreover, there is little consistency from year to year in the amounts of money, or the sources of money, entering the Suabi community. In the years 2012 and 2013, the only grant received at Suabi was of a few thousand kina to support the elementary school. The money received by elementary school teachers in 2014 covered the previous three years of employment. Employment of local people by exploration companies was virtually non-existent in the years 2009 to 2012, and was much higher in the closing months of 2013 than in the early months of 2014.\(^{19}\)

Substantial amounts of money were spent buying trade store goods at Kiunga and shipping them by plane to Suabi. Food items predominated, with rice accounting for an outlay of at least PGK12,000 through the four-and-a-half-month sample period.\(^{20}\) Most rice and other food items were

\[^{19}\] Late in 2011 we spent one month at Suabi. For some time before that, monetary returns to the community had been very low. Some people hoped that our presence would compensate for this but our needs were relatively modest. On one occasion some men complained that we had not provided long-term employment for any men. Several women responded vigorously to the effect that while it was true that our contributions did not match those of visiting petroleum companies, at least we dispersed payments to men, women and children in ways that the companies did not.

\[^{20}\] Our estimate of the outlay on rice is based on counting bales of rice—20 kg per bale—offloaded from planes, and aggregates retail and freight charges.
resold within the community with a small mark-up in retail price, though in cases where the original buyer had personally made the purchase in Kiunga—some orders were placed by mobile telephone—it was rare that the mark-up was sufficient to cover the buyer’s airfares. The primary outlay was, however, air transport to and from Kiunga, Highland towns and, in a few cases, Port Moresby. In four-and-a-half months, the 143 residents at Suabi Corner—19 per cent of the Suabi population—spent a minimum of PGK23,910 on airfares to and from Kiunga and Mount Hagen, plus an additional PGK10,000 on two charter flights. The estimate excludes additional charges for excess freight. For the community as a whole, more than one third of the money entering Suabi through that period was spent on travel. Other notable expenditures that removed money from the local community were purchases of mobile phone Flex Cards and contributions to the needs of youths and young men who left Suabi to further their education.21

Though much of the money that entered the community was rapidly spent, a considerable amount was held—preferably, but not always successfully, secretly—with the intention of servicing a variety of social needs internal to the community. On a few occasions, when money that had been held secretly was lost, the amount entailed was discussed openly though often with some scepticism. Yameka, for example, carried his money with him when he left the village with his family to work in gardens or cut firewood. One day, returning home in the late afternoon, his small sons tipped the canoe over. Yameka’s possessions, including several hundred kina that he had carried, were lost. Fiabo also lost perhaps as much as PGK1,000 when, in daylight hours, a mentally-handicapped

21 Mobile phones were not available at Suabi until 2011 when Digicel built towers at Nomad and Mougulu. The former, though closer to Suabi, was initially faulty and could not be accessed from Suabi until late in 2013. The latter, 27 km to the southeast of Suabi, was more reliable, though reception could be assured only at night and only from a high hill that entailed a two-hour walk and an overnight stay. In 2013 the Nomad tower was upgraded, reception improved and people made calls just on dark from the top of a ridge at Owabi Corner. Recharging telephone batteries was problematic. At first, the ECPNG Mission provided this service via a solar-charged battery and at a cost of PGK1 per recharge. In 2012–13 we provided this service to many people at no cost, but the demands on our own limited solar power meant that the practice could not be sustained. In 2013–14, some people had access to small, portable LED-light lamps that had been provided by ExxonMobil and could be used to charge phones. Others prevailed upon workers at the base camp to recharge their phones. Camp managers turned a blind eye to this use of company resources, though they were sometimes irritated when they felt the demand was excessive or too many unauthorised people were moving through the camp. In the absence of the preceding possibilities, some people had devised their own rechargers using a series of D-cell (1.5 volts) torch batteries.
man burned down his house. Two primary categories of social needs entailed exchanges of money—locally-convened court cases and marriages. Both had the effect of redistributing money across the community, and both revealed inflationary effects across time and considerable ambiguity with respect to both value and sustainability. On the last count, on the one hand, people were conscious of the fact that monetary returns to the community varied through time and increases to fines or bridewealth in the present might not be able to be met in the future and, on the other, most were convinced that in the near future they would be in receipt of huge benefits from the PNG LNG Project.

**Court Cases**

Local court cases are discussed in Chapter 6, but one example may suffice to illustrate ambiguities with respect to appropriate value.

In 2012, Dougal initiated an affair with a young woman who had a small child and was considered to be married to that child’s father, Asnah. Elena lived in Asnah’s father’s house, though Asnah was absent at school in the Highlands and some people knew that he had no intention of committing to the marriage. Elena became pregnant to Dougal and they lived together as a married couple. In December, Asnah returned to Suabi and, though he was Dougal’s clan brother, called for him to face a court. After two hours hearing and discussing ‘evidence’ Dougal was fined PGK5,000. The fault at issue was the harm that Dougal had done to Asnah by marrying his wife. There was no discussion of arrangements for the child of Asnah and Elena; that was for the future. Dougal responded to the announced fine by saying that he did not have PGK5,000, and could not pay that amount. Without further discussion, the men who had imposed the fine immediately revised it to PGK1,000. Dougal accepted this. Now, however, people who had attended the court case—including one man who was married to Asnah’s sister—handed over money to ‘help’ Dougal. The amount contributed was PGK935. This was judged to be sufficient.

---

22 Fiabo’s house was burned down in December 2011. This was the third house burned by Orry over a period of four or five years. It was understood that in some way—he was described in Tok Pisin as *longlong* (stupid or crazy)—Orry was not responsible for his own actions. People did not know how to handle him. Some older youths suggested he should be killed and quite strong efforts had to be made to discourage them from doing so. After Fiabo’s house was burned, police in Kiunga were contacted by phone. They were unwilling to come to Suabi, and suggested that Orry be brought to Kiunga where they would question him. Two weeks later Orry was encouraged to accompany two men who were walking to Kiunga. He was not delivered to the police, but has lived there ever since.
and given to Asnah. The man who had run the court case, the locally-appointed Law and Order Committee, now spoke strongly to Dougal. Different people had helped Dougal by contributing different amounts of money. Some had contributed less than PGK20. Dougal could forget these; he need not reciprocate them. But others had contributed PGK20, PGK50 or even PGK100. These should not be forgotten and should be repaid in the future. The court case was now over. The key protagonists shook hands.

At Suabi, many people were fined for one reason or another. But there was no consistency in the amount of either an initially suggested or finally accepted fine. The initial suggestion was influenced by thoughts of how much money the ‘erring’ person was likely to currently hold or be able to access in the future through employment or networks. There was no sense that a particular category of ‘wrong’ merited a fine of a particular amount. Indeed, the list of 40 Liklik los bilong Papua New Guinea was unhelpful for it had nothing to say about the kinds of ‘wrongs’ that were aired most often at village courts—sexual misdemeanours and accusations of sorcery. But the court case described above revealed more than ambiguities with respect to value. At one level, the structure of the court mimicked people’s understanding of procedures followed at government level. One man acted as ‘magistrate’, ‘evidence’ was heard and assessed and, if warranted, a penalty was imposed. The epistemological underpinnings of the structure were categorical. At another level, however, pre-existing relational imperatives were never foregone. Anyone, whether male or female, was free to present and interpret ‘evidence’ and, with rare exceptions, was not silenced by the man acting as ‘magistrate’. More significantly, however, once the amount of a fine had been settled—a settlement to which the ‘offender’ could contribute—many people asserted their existing or desired connections with the guilty party by contributing to the amount of money required. They were seen to contribute though, often, they concealed the amount. Some contributed despite the fact that their kinship affiliations were with the aggrieved party, and others despite the fact that as committed Christians they strongly disapproved of the offence now judged to have been committed. The resolution of the court case was understood to have righted the wrong and, though other interpretations might emerge in the future, it was necessary to reaffirm relationships and the sense of generosity that bound the community. This was an opportunity, too, to create situations of perceived debt that would both ensure ongoing reciprocity and reduce the likelihood of ensorcelment.
Marriage Exchanges

To 1986–87, most marriages among Kubo entailed the immediate exchange of ‘sisters’ by the soon-to-be husbands. Where immediate exchange had not occurred because a couple eloped, or because one of the men was without an eligible and willing ‘sister’, a variety of strategies were employed to create balance at some time in the future. A relatively common solution to the problem was for the couple to give a daughter to the woman’s parents, as a ‘sister’ whom one of her brothers might exchange for a wife in the future. At that time, there was no suggestion of adopting the widespread PNG practice of bridewealth. But this was soon to change. In early 1988, Daledi and Gufu eloped. They slept overnight at a small garden house south of Gwaimasi and the next morning built a raft, travelled down the Strickland River and temporarily relocated to the longhouse at Gugwusu. Daledi’s only sister was already married and he was without an alternative. Gufu’s classificatory father demanded monetary compensation, and by 1991 had received PGK480. Increasingly, through the 1990s, monetary payments were demanded or offered where immediate exchange could not be arranged, and by the end of that decade payments in the order of PGK500 had become commonplace. By the mid-2000s, with exploration companies in residence at Suabi, many men employed, more knowledge of Highland practices, and a few outsiders marrying Kubo women, giving bridewealth became a common alternative to sibling-exchange and amounts given rapidly inflated. By 2011, both were presented as acceptable Kubo and Febi practices. Some people preferred one practice; some preferred the other.

Increased access to money was one reason for the emergence of bridewealth as a legitimate basis for negotiating a marriage, but demographic changes were perhaps of greater importance. Men and women now lived longer. In 1986–87, in the communities around Gwaimasi, we knew few people in their forties. When Sinage and Tobu, Uhabo and Monu were negotiating their marriages in the mid-70s, their parents were already dead. By the time we returned to Suabi in 2011, however, parents were very likely to be alive when their sons or daughters married. Being elderly, however, they were less likely to have been employed than their offspring. They tended to favour bridewealth because, in this case, they would receive part
of the payment in return for the effort they had contributed to raising
their daughter. They argued in favour of bridewealth as a mechanism for
personally accessing money.23

In the years 2011 to 2014 negotiated bridewealth was of the order of
PGK4,000 to PGK5,000 among Kubo residents of Suabi, but considerably
higher among Febi residents. In one case, a young Gebusi woman who
visited her sister and brother-in-law while they attended Bible school
at Suabi agreed to marry a Febi man. Arrangements were negotiated
with her parents at Yehebi by the mission radio. The parents opted for
bridewealth; they had no son eligible for marriage. The bridewealth was
set at PGK8,000 though the money was not immediately available and
was to be paid at some time in the future. Horace was also a Febi man.
He had two wives but had not provided an exchange ‘sister’ or bridewealth
for either of them. His case was taken to court where it was determined
that, for the first of those wives, he should pay PGK10,000 together with
two pigs each valued at PGK1,000 plus some ‘coins’ to produce a total
equivalent to PGK12,400. Horace did not have that amount of money
available, so again, though the price was set, payment was delayed to
a future time. No decision was reached with respect to his second wife.

The inflation in bridewealth observed at Suabi is, in large measure, driven
by the understandings, expectations and desires of Febi residents. They,
more than Kubo residents, are confident of future monetary benefits
from the gas wells at Juha. They have a long history of acting as middle-
men in trade networks between lowland and Highland language groups
(Goldman 2009: 2–38), have lengthy exposure to and, on the basis of
some marriages contracted with northern neighbours (Bogaia, Duna
and Huli), experience of bridewealth as an alternative to exchange of
sisters. Further, in the past decade a number of Febi men have sought
to establish affinal connections with Highlanders by seeking brides from

23  Jorgensen (1993: 69) discussed changing marriage practices among Telefol in response to the
government station established at Telefomin in the 1950s, the Ok Tedi mine from the 1980s, and
associated monetisation. He noted the ‘extractive intent’ of parents demanding bridewealth from
outsider men who sought to marry their daughters. In addition, however, by the 1970s, the inclusion
of money in bridewealth transactions had an effect that differed markedly from the situation observed
at Suabi. In customary Telefol practice, the parents of a bride-to-be had the initiative in selecting
a suitable candidate spouse. The preferred arrangement entailed village endogamy. Increasingly, this
broke down as young women actively pursued marriages with outsiders. The outcome was to reduce
the network of community members with a stake in the exchanges entailed by the marriage, whereas
at Suabi the shift to bridewealth has led to expansion in the network of those interested in the
outcome of marriage negotiations.
that region. Indeed, some Highlanders have encouraged the practice as a means of establishing their own rights to future benefits from Juha. In one case, the councillor for a small Febi community used the entirety of a PGK20,000 government grant—officially made to facilitate clearing land for an airstrip—as the down payment on a Highland bride. In 2014, several men at Suabi indicated that they had agreed to pay PGK20,000 or PGK30,000 for such brides. To this time, however, the only men who might have this kind of money available are the few who are nominated recipients of outside grants and are willing to redirect funds received to satisfy personal desires.

Marriage and Adoption

In 2014, the Suabi population included 22 widows, five divorced women, seven men with two wives each and many children who had been adopted. These statistics are underlain by changes in the organisation of both marriages and families. There were, of course, widows, divorced women, men with multiple wives and adopted children in earlier years. But the underlying reasons are altering. In the 1980s and 1990s, polygamous marriages usually took place when a women’s husband died and she remarried a man who was classificatory brother to her deceased husband. Indeed, if a man had an affair with his brother’s wife, he might be rebuked by being reminded that his brother was ‘not dead yet’; he should be patient, knowing that she would become his wife if and when his brother died. Missionaries discouraged multiple marriages but, we were told, did not object to remarriage after a spouse had died. In the early 1980s, when Gisio’s first husband died, she was keen to marry his brother but had recently ‘become Christian’ and sought approval from the local missionary before doing so. Until a decade or so ago, therefore, it was only older men who might have two wives. By 2014, however, at least four of the second marriages—none were leviratic—had occurred within the previous six or seven years and there were other men, quite recently married, who openly discussed their desire to find second wives. For both men and women there are now fewer constraints on sexual relations than had been the case earlier and this, combined with more people living in close proximity and more men likely to be absent for lengthy periods, has enhanced the likelihood of both adulterous and premarital liaisons. Three case histories are summarised in Figure 4.5.
Dougal married for the first time in the early 1990s, when he eloped with Gwaitidia, a young widow from his own clan. His behaviour was the subject of much disapproving gossip throughout Kubo territory. Gwaitidia’s first husband had died shortly before she gave birth to a son. In late 2000 or early 2001, Dougal initiated an affair with a recently widowed woman, with the outcomes that his wife left him and a daughter was born to the widow. During this period Dougal’s father died, and soon afterwards he married his father’s widow, Beso. It was rumoured that Dougal and Beso were sexual partners before the death of Dougal’s father. In 2008, at the birth of her second child to Dougal, Beso haemorrhaged and, after ten days, died. Dougal now invited Gwaitidia to re-establish their earlier relationship. She refused and, in early 2012, he initiated the relationship with Elena which led to the court case and PGK1,000 fine.
discussed above. All Dougal’s marriages were initiated as elopements—one to a clan sister, one to his father’s wife and the third to his clan brother’s wife. None had received prior community approval and all remain subjects of unresolved tensions.

Gowati’s first marriage was in January 1987. She was about 13 years old and, at marriage, relocated from Gwaimasi to Suabi. She had three children with her first husband, initiated an affair with a widower, married him and had three more children. When her second husband died she initiated an affair with a third man, who died in 2011 when she was pregnant with his third child. After his death, her third husband was diagnosed as the sorcerer responsible for some earlier deaths in the community. Because she did not want her last child to know that his father had been a sorcerer, she gave him to another couple. Her three husbands were from different clans. Her first marriage was balanced by an immediate exchange of a young woman from Suabi to Gwaimasi, but her later marriages were not reciprocated and remained subject to negotiation. One daughter to her second husband was ‘given’ to her Gwaimasi kin as a future exchange ‘sister’ but, by 2014, some of those people said that they now had enough ‘sisters’ of their own. They wanted to return the girl and receive a monetary payment instead.

Ogabo’s first husband was killed in 1991 when, during a storm, a tree fell onto the forest shelter where he and some companions were sleeping while on their way back to Suabi from a feast. A few years later, after an affair with a young man, she married Hami, a widower with whom she had two sons before, in May 2000, he too died. Ogabo’s marriage to Hami was not leviratic, with the outcome, after several years of dispute, that her first two children were eventually claimed by, and relocated to live with, their father’s ‘brother’. Soon after Hami died, Ogabo gave birth to a daughter as the outcome of an affair with Dougal. That child’s paternity is well known but is not acknowledged by Dougal and is not a topic of public conversation. She is ambiguously placed with respect to both living arrangements and clan affiliation.

Only two of the 11 male–female relationships—the first marriages of Gowati and Ogabo—highlighted in these case histories conform to Kubo ideals and expectations. The majority are, as yet, unresolved with respect to either an exchange that would balance the marriage, a monetary payment that would stand in its stead or, where an affair led to the birth of a child, serve as compensation to those who were cuckolded.
Dougal, Gowati and Ogabo have been able to act in the ways they did because pre-existing sanctions—communal pressures to conform—have become less stringent and less effective, and because most people now feel that where relationships have been jeopardised by non-customary behaviour they can be eventually restored, at least on the surface, by an exchange of money. The case histories also illustrate the fact that there is now less concern to meet the expectations of immediacy than prevailed in the past.  

In the years 2011 to 2014 there were ten marriages at Suabi. One was constructed as balancing a marriage that had occurred a year earlier, in 2012. None of the others was balanced by providing an exchange ‘sister’ and, to May 2014, none of these had been reciprocated by payment of bridewealth. In all but three cases both the man and the woman were residents of Suabi. The three exceptions were marriages with, respectively, Samo, Gebusi and Konai women, one of whom was a widow who became second wife to a Suabi man. In one of these three cases the young woman was pregnant at the time of the marriage, though this was not known to her husband-to-be. When she gave birth her husband threatened to kill the infant by throwing him into the river. He did not want to support another man’s child, though he did not contemplate divorcing his wife. His sister and brother attempted to dissuade him, arguing that the male child would be of his ‘clan’ and, hence, secure the future of that clan. He did not change his position, so his older sister took the child and gave it to her married daughter to raise.

Adoption has always been common among Kubo. Lifespans were relatively short, and many children lost one or both parents when they were young. When this happened they were immediately accommodated within other families, usually those of close kin—commonly that of their father’s brother who, if it was the child’s father that had died, may well have married his brother’s wife. In the then-prevailing circumstances of a fragile demography, with high death rates of both adults and children, rapid and unambiguous adoption of orphaned children

---

24 The shift toward bridewealth in negotiating marriages, and the increased range of people—particularly the bride’s brothers and parents—seeking a share of that money, placed greater pressure on young women with respect to marital choices. At the same time, however, the freedom of women had been enhanced with respect to acceptance of births that occurred outside of marriage and in reduced expectations that widows would remarry. Two long-term widows and one recent widow were the only adult members of one Suabi household. An earlier recognition that a young woman could veto the suggestion that she marry a particular man still obtained in the years 2011–14.
helped ensure that future marriage partners would be available for the adopter’s own biological children (Minnegal and Dwyer 2006: 121–22). The kidnapping of children in association with raids in which adults were killed served the same purpose. By contrast, however, children born to unmarried women were frequently killed at birth—a practice continuing into at least the late 1980s. The rationale in such cases was, in part, that the marriage prospects for a young unmarried woman with a child were unfavourable and, in part, that the child had no acceptable status as a member of an oobi.

By 2011, the frequency of births to unmarried Kubo and Febi women had increased substantially but, though sometimes threatened, infanticide was no longer practised. In some cases the unmarried mother raised the child herself, but more often, after weaning, it was cared for, and effectively adopted, by the young woman’s parents. Adoption was very common. As before, orphaned children were adopted. In one case, noted above, adoption was intended to remove a child from learning that his deceased father was a sorcerer—a decision legitimised, in part, by the fact that the father had died before the child was born, so ‘had not seen’ the child and thus made it his own. And married couples whose families included more sons than daughters often sought to balance sex ratio by adoption (compare Demian 2006). In 2013, a man who had several sons paid PGK200 for the female child born of an affair by a divorced woman. By this time, however, adults lived longer and the survival rate of children was much higher than had been the case 20 or 30 years earlier. Family sizes had increased dramatically. And, further, many first marriages occurred after the young man and woman had initiated sexual relations. In a statistical sense there was less need to pattern adoptions with regard to future opportunities for sibling-exchange marriage. The increasing shift to giving bridewealth reinforced this change. What has emerged, however, is an emphasis on clan interests rather than family interests, an emphasis that has the effect that social reproduction and biological reproduction are less tightly coupled than they were in the past (Minnegal and

---

25 In the past, not all infants born to unwed mothers were killed at birth. One woman, who we have known since 1987, was born out of wedlock in the early 1970s. She was raised by her father’s parents. Though for many years she was spoken of as being sister to her father, he now acknowledges her, with some pride, as his daughter. The same man has adopted a child born out of wedlock to his son and, again with pleasure, told us that she calls him ade—father.
Dwyer 2006). Adoption provides opportunities to strengthen a clan, directly in a numerical sense where the adoptee is male and indirectly through future affinal connections where the adoptee is female.

Finally, the reduced concern with ensuring immediate exchange in patterning marriages, combined with the fact that life spans were extended, influenced the living arrangements of newly married couples and the personal relationships that these facilitated. The earlier ideal, and common practice, was that men who had exchanged ‘sisters’ lived together in the same house, in neighbouring houses or at least in the same small community. The men would work gardens together or hunt and fish together and their wives would often collaborate in sago processing ventures. Through their earliest years, the children of each couple would be closely associated with their mother’s brother—their babo—and, if the child was a boy, it was this man who would be his primary sponsor at the time he was initiated. The relationship was close and long-lasting. Preferred living arrangements ensured these outcomes.

But where the exchange of ‘sisters’ is greatly delayed, or has been replaced by payment of bridewealth, these living arrangements are less easy to put in place. At Suabi, it was common that newly married couples lived with, or alongside, the parents or older brothers of the husband. Less often they would live with, or alongside, the wife’s parents. Clusters of houses were often those of extended families, unlike the mixed-oobi pattern that characterised communities like Gwaimasi in the past. A concern to support ageing parents, combined with the expectations and subtle demands of those parents, reinforced this emerging spatial organisation. The babo relationship—mother’s brother, sister’s son (MB/ZS)—remained important, but was less often given expression in everyday interactions, and less likely to being focused on a particular MB or ZS out of all those who might be similarly classed. And where a newly married man chose to live with his parents there was the potential that his wife would be disadvantaged—imagining, sometimes with good reason, that her autonomy was jeopardised by the demands of an ever-present mother-in-law. This was Alice’s experience in the months before she and Jeff fought.
Three Decades of Change

In the years to 1999, at Kubo communities on the Strickland River, we observed an ongoing erosion of the relational imperatives that informed and patterned people’s lives, and the infiltration of categorical ways of knowing the world. Women, pigs and land were being progressively revalued as ‘things’ in their own right—as instances within broader categories—rather than, as had been the case, according to the relational connections within which they were embedded. We have argued that the logic of money—as trope—was extrapolated to these domains of people’s lives (see Chapter 2). That extrapolation was, in large part, figurative. No one was making the connection that we have made and, by and large, the changes observed, in discourse and in practice, concerned issues of exchange that were central to ways in which identity was understood and expressed.

Emerging in parallel with these shifts in the way the world was known was an increasing emphasis on the individual that was expressed in the size, structure and privacy of houses and the material items that a person possessed. Here, money facilitated the changes; it did not provide the logic upon which those changes were built. Money provided access to new kinds of material goods, and that access was differentially distributed. There had been no such differential when people could take what they needed or wanted from the forest. A desire to hold what you had infiltrated a pre-existing ethos of sharing all that was available.

By 2011–14 these changes had consolidated. There was now little ambiguity about exchanging women or pigs for money but, though money might be expected for the use of land by outsiders, no one yet spoke of the value of land per se in monetary terms. The way in which the external and internal structure of houses enhanced privacy for all occupants, or for individuals within that collective, was heightened relative to earlier years. But, of greater significance, and as revealed throughout this chapter, categorical ways of knowing were now manifest in day-to-day living—in, for example, the way time was structured, the ways people dressed to reflect desired status, the surface formality of court cases and, so frequently, in foregoing the relational concomitants of a person’s name or kinship by addressing them, or referring to them, according to a ‘modern’ assigned role—Medic (Community Health Worker), Tisa (Teacher), Het Tisa (Head Teacher), Kaunsil (Village Councillor), Agent, Pastor and
so forth. Their place in the ‘modern’ world—the category which they represented—and, by implication, the responsibilities that inhered in that position, was foregrounded.

Through a period of 28 years Kubo and Febi people have come to know the world in new ways. At the same time, however, the ‘things’ that they know have also changed. It is these changes that will be emphasised in the next chapters as we show how a deep concern to facilitate access to future financial benefits has set the scene for emergence of new social forms.26

26 Much of what we have described in this chapter differs in significant ways from patterns observed by Bruce Knauff at Nomad. Knauff conducted detailed ethnographic work with Gebusi, who live to the immediate south of Nomad (see Figure 1.3), in 1980–82 and subsequent work, which emphasised change, in 1998, 2008 and 2013 (Knauff 1985, 2002b, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2016). By 1998, the community with which Knauff had first worked had relocated to the government station at Nomad where, by and large, the resident Gebusi people were compliant with the ordered and bureaucratic impositions of policing, schooling and Christian worship that prevailed there (Knauff 2002b). By 2013, the airstrip at Nomad was no longer operating, and government staff had departed. Local people were reorienting their attention to the bush (Knauff 2016). Money was scarce, the local market little used, communal sports largely abandoned, and school attendance low. There was little theft, people no longer wanted wristwatches or bothered to keep track of hours in the day. All, it seems, still identified as Christian, though some people were beginning to explore alternative versions of Christianity and enthusiasm for church services had declined. The expectations of bridewealth that emerged in marriage negotiations through the 1990s had abated and exchange of sisters, though perhaps through ‘more diverse paths of kinship connection’ (2016: 166), was again being used to legitimise marriages. Many of these changes may lie in Suabi’s future, should the promises of PNG LNG and other resource developments fail to materialise and the exploration that is feeding money and dreams into the community dissipate. But some changes Knauff described among Gebusi ring less true for Kubo. He wrote of gender relations becoming less fraught, with the wife-beating prevalent among Gebusi in the 1980s now less common. But Kubo men did not beat their wives in 1986–87. The only incidents of domestic violence we saw in 15 months were an occasion when a man struck his wife after he returned from an unsuccessful hunt and another, undoubtedly mutual, which resulted in scratches to the woman’s finger and the man’s nose. In seven months at Suabi, we knew of one case when a man returned drunk from Kiunga, and beat his wife for suspected adultery while he was away, leaving her with noticeable bruises; his behaviour was widely condemned. When Alice and Jeff fought, Jeff punched a banana stem, not his wife, and it was he, not her, who displayed (probably fictitious) signs of injury as a result. And while Knauff commented that ‘shamanism, traditional spiritualism, and sorcery violence’ had not re-emerged among Gebusi (2016: 135), at Suabi the former, expressed as curing dances, had re-emerged by 2014 and the latter two have remained though in somewhat modified form. Kubo no longer physically kill sorcerers—though we suspect one such killing did occur at a Febi community in about 2011, in mountains to the northwest—but they still hold sorcery divinations; several men we knew had undergone such tests in the past two or three years after being accused of particular deaths. Sorcerers, now, are killed by spirit-beings that mediums, often for commission, send out to avenge a death. In 2013, we attended the burial of a sorcerer, diagnosed as such because of the manner of his death. Another man, who we had known well at Gwaimasi, died in 2014 and was recognised post-mortem as the sorcerer responsible for the death of his own young son.