6. Navigating the Past

Gwia died in March 2008, of severe anaemia. He was probably in his early forties at the time. About 20 years earlier he had married Wuagodua. Their first two children died but, at the time of Gwia's death, there were four living children—two boys and two girls—and Wuagodua was four months pregnant. Gwia 'did not see the face' of Wuagodua’s last-born daughter, Jorah.

The marriage between Gwia and Wuagodua had not been reciprocated. There had been no exchange marriage that balanced their union, nor a payment of money or pigs that would serve in its place. Gwia’s clan affiliations had been with Demeti, Wuagodua’s with Yawuasoso. In lieu of an exchange marriage, Yawuasoso men had initially been given Jano, the second-youngest daughter of Wuagodua and Gwia. She was to become a ‘sister’ to those men and, later, be the exchange bride for one them when he married. Now, however, Yawuasoso laid claim to all the living children who had been born to Wuagodua before Gwia died. (They asserted no claim to Jorah because, having not been seen by her biological father, she was not considered to be properly of his clan; there was no need to claim her.) But were their claim to those children successful, Demeti would be left with no male representatives. Demeti was one of seven subclans within a greater assemblage—a major clan—known as Dobiti. As the oldest female representative of that larger assemblage, and the only living representative of one of the subgroups, Bosofi was concerned that Demeti might cease to exist. She lobbied her kin. They should give money and a pig to Yawuasoso to legitimise Gwia’s marriage, and thus retain their rights over his children (Fig. 6.1).
In February 2014, people assembled for the exchange. A large pig, provided by Bosofi, was tethered to a post and, after much manoeuvring back and forth, seeking position for a fatal shot, it was dispatched by one of Wuagodua’s clan brothers. It took some time to die. Dogs gathered as it thrashed on the ground. Martin blocked his ears; he did not want to hear the pig’s scream. Tinus nursed a small boy—Javan, the son of Dinosi—who had not before seen a pig being killed, and who watched in wide-eyed horror, begging his carer not to leave him.

The carcass of the pig was displayed in front of four bamboo poles, three of which were festooned with money that totalled PGK2,218 (Fig. 6.2).1 The pig was valued at PGK1,500.2 There were many speeches, by both men and women. The money and the pig were now being given to

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1 There was no occasion, in the years 1986 to 1999, when we observed money to be displayed in the course of an exchange (Minnegal and Dwyer 2007: 8, n. 7). However, Ernst (2008: 63–4) illustrates the public display of money as bride wealth among Febi people in 2008.

2 The monetary value placed on pigs depends on several different criteria. Domestic pigs are valued more highly than wild pigs of the same size, reflecting the work entailed in rearing the former. Butchered portions of wild pig—legs or shoulder—that reach Suabi from Strickland River communities sell at higher prices than equivalent portions hunted locally, reflecting the effort entailed in carrying the meat. Further, a domestic pig that is sold live is valued more highly than one of the same size that has been killed and butchered before sale and, though no money actually changes hands, a domestic pig that is included in a compensation payment is valued even more highly as an explicit expression of its ‘symbolic capital’.
Yawuasoso in compensation for the failed exchange of 20 years earlier. Gwia’s children would retain their Demeti heritage. But there was one exception. One Yawuasoso man, it was said, had misbehaved. His antisocial acts were not enunciated but everyone knew that he had raped a local woman and shot a white man. The community was shamed by the trouble he had caused. Gwia’s brothers insisted that they would give this man no money. That is why one bamboo pole was bare. In lieu of money, it was declared, Yawuasoso could keep the girl Jano, the second youngest of Wuagodua’s children.

It was time now to claim the money. A senior Yawuasoso man—Wuagodua’s classificatory father—took two poles that together displayed PGK1,218. A senior Koli man—his mother’s sister was mother to one of the Yawuasoso men—took the third of the poles that displayed money. He received PGK1,000. Then there was a pause. People waited. Would the empty pole be accepted? Would it be acknowledged that the man for whom it was marked—he was absent from the village—had been publicly declared persona non grata. Eventually, the man’s brother stepped forward and took the pole. The exchange was finalised. The future of Demeti had been secured.

The exchange of money and children described above brought closure to a long-standing dispute that had been the subject of negotiation at several recent locally convened court cases. A long-standing failure with respect to balancing a marriage had now been set to rights. The pig reinforced the sense of closure. It was cooked, butchered and widely distributed through the late afternoon on the day of the exchange. The sharing of its meat served to generate goodwill within the greater Suabi community, a community where a sense of camaraderie had been disrupted by the fact that past failures by some people had resurfaced in the present.

Why, though, had people waited 20 years to initiate and finalise this payment? In large part, it was money that was at stake. Or, rather, it was the perception of inequality generated by the fact that access to money was unequally distributed. Some people were employed, most were not. Two men—Bosofi’s son Paul, and the senior representative of the nominal clan Dobiti, Dinosi—had, through the past two months, worked for petroleum companies: the first as a trainee helicopter loadmaster, the second as a security officer for the Talisman campsite. Both were known to have been paid more than PGK1,500. Both were known to have obligations that they could not avoid without loss of face; Paul to his mother Bosofi, and Dinosi to all the members of the greater Dobiti assemblage. These two men contributed most of the money that changed hands that day.
The revisiting of that long-past failure was a response, then, to shifting realities in the present—shifts that had little to do with the actions of Gwia and his wife 20 years before. As people at Suabi seek to position themselves in relation to the opportunities offered by a world increasingly
shaped by global capital flows, they are selectively mobilising connections established long before. They will have always done so. But, in drawing on a past that played out in a very different world, they are rereading the events and understandings that shaped that past. At Suabi in 2014, this played out not only in the resolution of disputes through the new mechanism of village courts, but also in the reshaping of mythological pasts that accompanied the differentiations and amalgamations discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter focuses on these new ways of validating action in the present by selectively drawing on the past—by navigating a past that could always be read otherwise. The readings now being foregrounded, however, project into that past what are new interests and imperatives.

Courting Impropriety

Court cases were a regular feature of life at Suabi. The initiating causes were diverse: premarital sex, adultery, failed or unsatisfactory marriage exchanges, unresolved separations of husband and wife, repeated public fighting by a husband and wife, ongoing disputes between co-wives, fights between men, disputes over land, sorcery accusations, damage to gardens caused by a domestic pig, or concerns about the way in which money granted to the community had been spent, all featured as the basis for a court case. They could be initiated by a single offended party, by a group of people or by the community as a whole. They were adjudicated by the Suabi Councillor if he was in residence. In his absence, or when he himself was a protagonist, one of the men appointed as either ‘Law and Order Committee’ or ‘Corner Committee’ took the leading role. And, in their absence, other senior men chaired the court case. The cases might be resolved quickly, but more often, took many hours in a day and sometimes needed to be reconvened on a later occasion. They were public events. Everyone could come—men, women and children—and many did.

At most court cases, two styles of evidence were foregrounded. The first concerned the present—what had been seen and heard—and the second concerned the past—what was appropriate or inappropriate relative to past practices and present expectations. The following brief examples provide illustrations. We include cases that we witnessed, others that we were told about and some that are pending.
The Gwia court case described above foregrounded relationships that, in the past, had not been appropriately balanced. But, in the way it played out on a public stage, those who asserted offence displayed more concern for compensation than for restoration. Justice was to be measured in terms of money. Indeed, this was accepted by those who paid, for in refusing one claimant they effectively placed greater symbolic value on money than on the girl they handed over in lieu of money. Here, then, a resurrected past failure in relationships was resolved by means of the anonymising properties of money. Other cases reveal a similar approach. The first of the following three examples concerns inappropriate disposal of the dead, the second a failure to consult as expected, and the third an accusation of sorcery.

Kokobe’s husband Imoi was in the forest, well away from Suabi, when he died. People who were with him at the time carried the body to Suabi and placed it in a house. Imoi had died on the land of Dobiti people and it was men of that clan who, under customary practice, should have carried the body. But there were no Dobiti men present. The men who carried the body were of the wrong clans and, further, offended against convention by placing the body in the wrong house. A court case was convened and, for their failures with respect to custom, three senior Dobiti men incurred a joint fine of PGK800. The fact that present-day living arrangements, with few people resident in the forest and with travel to more distant locations common, made it increasingly improbable that customary practice could be followed had no bearing on the judgement. The men themselves accepted the finding of the court and, as a gesture of goodwill and enhanced community relations, increased their payment by PGK300.

In 2012, Noima took a second wife. He was an Awasoso man and his new wife—a Samo woman—was a widow. Her Yawuasoso husband had died about ten years earlier and, at his death, Elei had returned to her home village. Noima negotiated his marriage with her kin and not with her first husband’s kin. Biko was enraged. He was the most senior living Yawuasoso man and, though he was not from the same branch of that clan as the deceased man, considered that he should have been consulted. He collected his bow and arrows, ran to Owabi and fired at Noima. The arrow missed—as Biko probably intended that it should. He was publicly declaring that Noima had given serious offence and laying the groundwork for future compensation.

Uwago was very ill. A few years earlier, while gardening, she slipped and was seriously spiked in the groin by a length of wood. For a year or more she was house bound. When she needed the toilet she had to be carried
there on a stretcher. Now she had tuberculosis and was often a patient at the community health centre. On one such occasion, she woke in the morning to discover that she had been ‘turned around’ during the night; her feet were where her head had been. And she had dreamed of being visited by a man. It was this man who had turned her and, she asserted, was responsible for her illness. He had ensorcelled her. On that night, the elderly woman Ogu had also slept at the health centre. Thirty years earlier, Ogu had been married to Okaibo but the marriage was short-lived. But Ogu’s presence that night provided the link Uwago needed. She declared that it was Okaibo, acting in relation to his failed marriage, who had come to the health centre and turned her in her sleep as part of his ensorcelling technique. With her son she called for a court case. She presented her argument and sought monetary compensation. Others reported that doctors in Kiunga had declared that Uwago’s illness could not be cured, and that a Nomad-based spirit medium had failed to implicate Okaibo. The court concluded that Uwago’s case was based on mere suspicion; she had not actually seen Okaibo do anything. She had accused him unjustly. It was Uwago, and not Okaibo, who was required to make a small compensatory payment.

**Sexual Transgressions**

In various ways the cases summarised above either drew on the past for models that revealed ‘proper’ practice, or allocated responsibility for inappropriate behaviour on the basis of relationships—*oobi* identity, siblingship, marriage failure—that could be traced back into the past. The next three cases concern current relationships and seek resolution through an appeal to a more general sense of what constituted appropriate behaviour in the present. These cases were convened to investigate charges related to premarital sex or adultery. While such behaviours disrupted particular relationships, they had more far-reaching implications for the greater community. Here, then, though practices drawn from the distant past did not feature in the evidence and the arguments brought forward, the sense that community cohesion was central to resolution underlay judgements reached and penalties imposed. And irrespective of what was said at the cases—indeed, also of what was not said—expressions of community cohesion were irrevocably linked to the ethos of earlier times.

Here then, we offer one example of a dispute about premarital sex and two of disputes that asserted adultery. If premarital sexual relations led to marriage—an offer that was always put to the accused couple—discussion turned to the requirement that the marriage should be either
balanced by exchange or entail bridewealth. Where adultery was involved, however, negotiations to seek a resolution were again explicitly framed in monetary terms.

Bimadua arrived at her parents’ house at dawn. She had been in loco parentis to Awai and, the previous night, Awai and Bimadua’s brother Jason had slept together. People gathered as Bimadua, standing outside the house, told what had happened. Jason stood to one side, head bowed and silent. A court case was convened at once. Jason was ‘afraid to go to court’. Some older youths and young men went to speak for him. Awai’s parents demanded that the pair marry, but neither Awai nor Jason wanted this. Jason wanted to return to the Highlands and complete his secondary schooling and, anyway, his parents refused to help with bridewealth. Their son was being troublesome, they said; he was not contributing to the needs of his family, was not behaving as a son should, and thus did not deserve their assistance. His sister Bimadua, too, refused to help. By having sex with the girl while she was staying in his sister’s house, Jason had transgressed the implied ‘sibling’ relationship between them. Jason’s supporters argued against marriage. They revealed that Awai had ‘many boyfriends’, and proposed that in lieu of marriage both Jason and Awai should be fined PGK250. Both, they asserted, were to blame for what had happened. The court agreed to this proposal but Awai’s parents said that they did not have this much money. Instead, they offered a pig that was judged to be of the same value. Jason’s parents were obliged to follow suit.

Nick was an absent husband, more often at Kiunga or Port Moresby than at Suabi. He had left his wife and children behind. Sheri was working as ‘laundry girl’ at the Company camp but known to be having an affair with Kiovi. Nick learned of the affair, arrived by aeroplane from Kiunga, obtained a bushknife, located Kiovi and gave chase. He was intent on causing injury. Kiovi panicked and ran. People followed, watching and anxious. Nick’s classificatory brother Zavia approached from behind, put his hand on Nick’s shoulder, avoided a swing of the machete and, briefly, calmed him down. Kiovi disappeared from view. Nick grabbed a burning stick and set fire to the sago-thatch roof of Kiovi’s mother’s kitchen house. People tore the burning sections down and saved the building. It was several days before a court case could be convened, as people waited for Kiovi’s father to return from Kiunga. The presentation of evidence revealed that another young man, Salia, had been also having an affair with Sheri. Both men were required to pay Nick PGK1,000. With help from kin, and by borrowing from others, Kiovi produced the money. Salia handed over PGK400 and acknowledged his debt for the remainder. Sheri was required to pay for Nick’s return flight to Kiunga. But Nick also demanded a pig as part of his compensation payment. Kiovi’s father
resisted this demand on the grounds that Nick had attempted to burn his wife's kitchen house. But Nick's claim prevailed and, though thoroughly annoyed, Kiovi's mother sacrificed a large pig to finalise the arrangements. A few days later Nick departed, taking Sheri and their children with him.

Soon after Gowame left her husband and returned from Kiunga with their youngest child, it was rumoured that she had initiated an affair with Miwa, an unmarried man. The news reached her husband, Michael. He took time off from his long-term employment and came to Suabi. Court was convened. Was it true that Gowame had slept alone in her own house rather than with other women in a nearby family house? Where was Miwa late at night, when he was not sleeping in his father's house? Who was the man glimpsed by the river-bank at dawn? Was it Miwa, returning to his own home after their tryst? But nothing was established for certain. There were faults in Gowame's behaviour, all agreed; she should not have slept alone. After hours of discussion, however, the court concluded that there was no clear evidence of adultery, and that the case had been initiated on the basis of rumour alone. No action was taken against either Gowame or Miwa. The senior men who heard the case said that people in the community should cease spreading malicious gossip.

Marriage Exchanges

In the Gwia court case, and in some others summarised above, what had happened or not happened in the past served to rationalise an argument about what should happen in the present. One case, however, reversed this logic in refusing to concede responsibility for events in the past—events that in earlier days had had no significance but that now, in mimicry of other people's practices, had intruded upon local lifeways.

Martin and Tabua married in the late 1990s. At that time Martin could not provide an exchange sister to balance his marriage and, instead, paid PGK500 as bridewealth. In 2011, however, Tabua's classificatory brother asserted that Martin's payment had been merely a 'payment-in-part'. He directed attention to recent marriages where it was accepted that payments of several thousand kina were in order. Martin, he argued, had never fulfilled his obligations to Tabua's kin. His argument was supported by Tabua's stepfather, who considered that if further money was forthcoming then some of it was rightfully his. At the court case that ensued, the back-dated bridewealth was set at PGK4,000 with Martin allowed to pay in instalments. Fifteen years of inflation was ignored; present-day expectations were judged to be retrospectively valid and, hence, taken as evidence that Martin's initial payment could not have been other than a 'down payment'. Martin accepted this judgement.
But he rejected an additional claim based on a recently adopted practice among Febi, which they assert derives from the Highlands and which some Kubo people have argued they should also follow. This entails a premarital payment of some hundreds of kina to the prospective bride’s mother. The payment is referred to as ‘blood money’, and variously interpreted as compensation for either the loss of blood experienced by the mother at the time she gave birth or the effort entailed in caring for and rearing her daughter. It was suggested that Martin should give Tabua’s mother at least PGK200 as ‘blood money’. He refused, partly on the basis that he himself was not the cause of Duko losing blood when Tabua was born and partly on the basis of his strong allegiance to the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG). This new practice, he told us, was not Christian. It had been taken up by those who were aligned with the Christian Brethren Church but was not supported by ECPNG.

In the case of the improper treatment of Imoi’s body, people invoked customary practice in asserting their claim to monetary compensation. Invoking customary practice or, rather, an idealised view of customary practice was common in cases of adultery and those arising from disputes between husband and wife or co-wives. The antisocial behaviour was said to be at odds with the way things were in the past and, more often than not, it was a woman who was judged to have misbehaved. She had not behaved as ‘a good wife’ should. This remained the case even where the woman initiated an affair when her husband had been absent in Port Moresby for a year or more and was widely known to engage in sexual relations with other women. The distance entailed meant that his behaviour was irrelevant to local social relations. The behaviour of his wife in their home community was quite a different matter. It was not always the case, however, that women were the losers in these matters. Young women retained considerable autonomy with respect to accepting or rejecting suggestions that they marry particular men. Both Irene and Kalyn refused to marry men who had initiated favourable negotiations with their parents. They had no interest in assuming the role of second wife, in Kalyn’s case combined with relocation to Port Moresby, and their refusals were not challenged, though, in Irene’s case, a compensatory payment was made to the rejected prospective husband.

In the cases discussed to this point, information flowed freely. Many people reported details of what they personally had observed or heard, or presented interpretations of those observations. Others might question the validity of the evidence that was brought forward, and what was presented as evidence could at times be judged as no more than malicious
gossip. But suppressing information was sometimes an alternative strategy for influencing judgements, though it required skill. The court process needed to be manipulated by one protagonist or another to minimise the likelihood that alternative interpretations would be forthcoming. This was particularly evident when Clem’s intended marriage plans failed to come to fruition.

Clem was a widower, the father of five children who he had effectively abandoned. He was employed at Juha, earning money, and wanted to remarry. His local reputation was not good, however, so he looked further afield for a wife. He gave a young man, Leo, a few thousand kina, asking him to find a potential wife among families that Leo had come to know when he attended school in the Highlands. The money would cover travel and living expenses for Leo and allow for an initial small gift—‘blood money’—to the prospective bride’s mother. Leo was to report that Clem was a Juha landowner—rather stretching the definition—and, before long, would be in receipt of royalty payments. Bridewealth would then be paid. Leo was away for three weeks. He returned with Epe, a Highlands man who had supported him in past years, and Epe’s fifteen-year-old sister-in-law, Tuppy, as the prospective bride.

Clem was still at Juha when Epe and Tuppy arrived. It was two weeks before he returned. Tuppy asked many questions. What was Clem like, she wanted to know. Was he a young man like Leo? He wasn’t. She was not told about the five children, or the fact that Clem had sometimes struck his former wife. When Clem finally returned she was not impressed. But Clem was in a hurry; he was to return to Juha within a week. He set the day for the wedding and on that day purchased, killed and butchered a pig for a wedding feast. Everything was prepared. And then Tuppy announced that she did not want to marry Clem.

Clem was angry. A court case was convened. The adjudicators were unwilling to push Tuppy to do what she clearly did not want to do. She had the right to decide, they declared. She was given two alternatives to going ahead with the marriage: with her brother-in-law Epe she could raise the money—PGK4,652—to refund Clem’s expenses, or she could marry someone else in the Suabi community. Clem refused to accept the second option. Either Tuppy marry him, he insisted, or she must repay his money and leave Suabi. If she would not marry him then he did not want to see her face.

Neither Tuppy nor Epe had the money that was demanded. Nor could they raise it without returning to the Highlands. But they weren’t trusted to do the latter. They were stuck in Suabi.
Two weeks later there was a second court case, this time called by Leo’s mother, Waiyo. It was necessary, she argued, to resolve the problem. If Tuppy would not marry Clem, and would not marry someone else in the local community, then for everyone’s peace of mind she should leave Suabi as soon as possible. Waiyo was very forceful. Other women, too, were very much to the fore in presenting arguments. They implied that the problem had been caused by Clem’s desires and haste. He had not gone about seeking a wife in an appropriate manner. He himself should have gone to the Highlands, rather than delegating Leo. Clem, once more, stated his case: Tuppy should marry him or refund his expenses and go. Tuppy was asked, yet again, whether she wanted to marry Clem. She did not. Did she want to marry someone else at Suabi, Leo perhaps? She did not. She just wanted to return to her family. Then, Waiyo, argued, she should go at once. People at Suabi should raise the money for her airfare to Mount Hagen. A flight to Tari would have been much cheaper but, for a young woman on her own, travelling by bus from Tari to Mount Hagen was dangerous. No one disputed that. Tuppy should go. But, Waiyo added, Epe should stay. His presence at Suabi was to be the guarantee that repayment to Clem would be eventually forthcoming. Thus it was agreed. People at the hearing contributed money. Leo himself was the first with a substantial offer—PGK400 of the PGK700 that was needed.

Waiyo had acted with haste, for good reason. She knew, but many did not, that Leo and Tuppy had had sexual relations. She did not want that behaviour to continue. And she certainly did not want Clem to know. She called the court case before the information could spread. She talked over the top of the senior males who adjudicated the case. And she achieved what she wanted. By suppressing the full story she protected her son’s interests and put in place the departure of a young woman who now, after denying Clem but having sex with Leo, was a potential threat to the latter. Epe remained and, with help from Suabi residents, found employment at Juha.

While there was certainly appeal to expectations of ‘proper’ practice in Waiyo’s argument, it was of little direct relevance to her motivations. She was deeply concerned with concealing aspects of the present. But where the past is the focus, the discussion at one event may lay the ground for future cases. The exchange of money for children that opened this chapter was a case in point. Two Yawuasoso households hosted the day’s activities. A man from one of those households shot the pig, a man from the other received most of the money. On that day these two households worked together. But they heard and, indeed, contributed to talk of failed marital exchange. They, and their guests, were reminded
of another marriage that had not been reciprocated. This was the union of Wuagodua’s parents, a marriage between classificatory brother and sister since both were Yawuasoso. The marriage was against convention; to Kubo it was incestuous. Such a marriage cannot be reciprocated—the ‘sister’ lost cannot be replaced—without compounding the transgression. Now, however, after a lapse of at least 35 years, there was talk that payment was due to the woman’s brothers. Their claim gained more force because, in 2013, in preparation for clan vetting, the senior men of Yawuasoso chose to upgrade three subclans to the rank of major clans. Under this restructure the marriage was no longer between people of the same clan, it was no longer incestuous and it was no longer advisable to refrain from controversy by ignoring past misdemeanours. Many who spoke to us expected that this matter would soon be aired in court, with the two households who had collaborated in hosting the exchange for Wuagodua’s children now on opposing sides.

Affiliations

Among Kubo, the Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas (PNG LNG) Project has prompted a reconfiguring of social categories. This, in turn, as seen in the previous example, has provided opportunities to resolve long-standing tensions concerning marriages judged to have been incestuous and, hence, at that time, unable to be balanced by sister exchange. Here, then, people at Suabi were navigating the past through reimagining relationships with and between collectivities, not just between individuals. Such reimaginings could be expressed with respect to both marriages and the use of land. In both cases, however, there was some awkwardness and uncertainty about how to reshape the past in ways that were appropriate to the present.

At Suabi, in the years 2011 to 2014, issues of rights to land featured in many conversations. These concerns were stimulated by the heightened focus on the future incorporation of Land Groups. It was early days, however, and few people knew precisely what land was being ‘claimed’ by others. In only one case, and it had not yet come to court by mid-2014, was a pending dispute aired publicly. For the first time, and in contrast to the 1999 dispute at Mome Hafi (Chapter 2), the claim was asserted solely on the basis of past genealogical connections. It was more than 35 years since any of the claimants, or their forebears, had used the land.
In 1986–87, at Gwaimasi, we learned that a stretch of land on the east side of the Strickland River just across from the village had, formerly, been occupied by a branch of Kesomo clan. We were told that there were no living members of this branch, and the land was regularly used for hunting, gardening and sago processing by members of Gomososo clan. By 2014, however, members of another branch of Kesomo whose land was some distance away at the headwaters of Toio Stream laid claim to that land, naming the ‘landowners’ as Ia Hafi Kesomo—Ia Hafi marks the junction of Ia Creek with the Strickland—and asserting that a recently deceased Gwaimasi woman, Fafobia, had been the last representative of this group. Ia Hafi Kesomo was not mentioned in the booklet *The Origin of Kesomo* compiled by Henick Taprin in 2007–08 but, under the name ‘Iyohafitie’, was listed and accepted as a subclan of Kesomo at the 2013 clan vetting meeting. From 1986 to 1999 we were never in doubt about Fafobia’s membership within Gomososo. It was expected by people at Suabi that the grievance developing between Kesomo and Gomososo would eventually need to be settled in a local court hearing. But people were aware that, on one side, the protagonists would assert their rights by reference to genealogical connections (perhaps fabricated) while on the other side, the protagonists would assert their rights by reference to their use of the land for more than three decades. Non-Kesomo people who discussed this case with us considered that rights through ongoing use had more validity than distant genealogical links and, while acknowledging uncertainty about the eventual outcome, suggested that ‘government’ would see it this way too. The eventual outcome of this case may well set the scene for airing analogous differences in the future.

In 2012, Alex assisted in the preparation of a list of members for an Incorporated Land Group (ILG) that people planned to register for the clan Osomei. On that list, Alex took Bugawo as his father’s name. His earliest memories were of these associations. But now Levai spoke to him, reminding him of his past. Alex’s biological father had died soon after Alex was born, and his mother had then married Bugawo. Levai was a senior Busuo man and, he said, Alex’s birth affiliations were to another branch of Busuo with land to the west of Suabi, far from Osomei land. Indeed, Alex’s branch of Busuo was the originating branch and Alex was the only surviving adult male. Levai argued that Alex should lay claim to this land by reasserting his biological father’s name, Gubia, and devising his own Busuo ILG list. From that time onward, Alex presented himself as Gubia’s son and in 2014 drew up a separate ILG list to represent the interests of his branch of Busuo.
Past genealogical connections that, sometimes for decades, had lost salience often became important tools in either asserting rights to ILG membership or rationalising inclusion within an ILG list. For example, in the mid-1960s, at the time when the government station at Nomad was well established, an unmarried Yawuasoso man named Moiyo attended a feast hosted by a Samo community. In the course of his visit, he had an affair with a young woman who became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Moiyo departed. The young woman married and her son Hobesa grew up as Samo. In 2014, Yawuasoso people were drawing up ILG lists and needed names that they felt could legitimately be taken to represent newly devised subclans to be associated with land in the Juha area. Yameka told the story of his father’s past adventures, so Hobesa was invited to represent and prepare his own ILG list for one of those subclans.

In the 1940s, as a child, Sinage’s father and another boy were accused of sorcery. Their affiliations at that time were with the Febi clan, Gumitie. The boys were banished instead of being killed. Sinage’s father was invited to stay with Strickland River Headubi people. They gave him land that had formerly been occupied by a clan named Bigiti but that no longer had living members; we were told that they had been raided and killed by head-hunters who came up the Strickland River from the vicinity of Lake Murray. Sinage’s father did not return to his natal land. When he died his widow remarried a Headubi man and Sinage grew up identifying with this oobi. He married a Gomososo woman and lived with her brothers—one of whom married his Headubi classificatory half-sister—at Sesani and then Gwaimasi. In the 1980s and 1990s, he identified as both Headubi and Bigiti, never as Gumitie. By 2013, however, his children—the oldest daughter was then about 33 and the oldest living son was 26—identified variously as Headubi, Bigiti or Gumitie. As Wage told us, it depended on where he was and who he was with. When they visited Suabi, they now chose to stay with Gumitie ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’. In earlier years they had not done this. In 2014, Wage and one of his brothers each drew up an ILG list supposedly for two distinct groups within Bidibi, a subclan of Gumitie. At the Siabi clan vetting meeting, however, Wage and his immediate kin did not receive the support they expected from those with whom they now asserted affiliation. While the name Bidibi appeared on the list of recognised clans, as a subclan within both Gumitie and Hwotie, the named representatives did not include Wage, his father or his brother.
In addition, people sometimes drew on mythological connections to establish rights or to justify amalgamation. For example, Headubi people who live south of Suabi had been invited to affiliate with Andibi, in the Suabi group. But Headubi people to the north, in Febi territory, were seeking to fill out their own lists and suggested it would be more appropriate to align with them. Their argument prevailed. The origin stories of both groups were similar. They had descended from ‘dog’. The southern group told of a time in the past when, near the Strickland River, which they took to be the origin place of all Headubi, dogs were fighting over a bitch in heat. One dog, chased by the others, fled into a cave. It emerged on a small island in the Damami River, 25 km to the southeast. That dog’s descendants are the Damami River Headubi whose logo depicts this tale. Another dog, perhaps fleeing the same fight, emerged from a hole near Tobi, where the Febi Headubi now live. Martin told us of seeing that hole not long ago.

Again, Osumitie had been listed as legitimate landowners in the Juha area—recorded as Febi rather than Kubo—but there were no living members of that clan. People from neighbouring clans, outside the domain of primary landowners, feared that they would be excluded from sharing in the benefits to flow from the PNG LNG Project. At the Siabi clan vetting meeting, Department of Petroleum and Energy officers suggested that the land of Osumitie was without people, so should not be included in the distribution of benefits. ‘We are here,’ Martin called. ‘We are fire clan.’ And he named six groups that he asserted were subclans within the major clan Osumitie, groups that were united in being the first people to find fire and use it for cooking, and were additionally united in sharing a ‘special place’: a toi sa, a ‘forbidden place’ where the spirits of the dead reside. Martin was stretching a point. At best, only four of these named groups had rights to either the origin story as he told it or to the toi sa. At worst, it was only two, which in our previous understanding had together constituted a stand-alone oobi to which Martin belonged. One of the two groups that were clearly outsiders—invitees—has close agnatic connections with one of the insider groups. The other, Dobiti, is an amalgam of seven named groups—one of which retains the name Dobiti—that, 20 years earlier, we knew as four stand-alone oobis. These groups tell how fire reached them from the north and assert that they share a number of ‘special places’: one associated with a root that kills fish and can kill people, one where people can ask the spirits to send sickness to someone that is doing them harm, one where an old woman
hid fire before a palm cockatoo stole it and spread it to everyone, and a fourth where, if a person visits and sleeps, a waterfall spirit may foretell the future. Dinosi told us that he himself went there, and dreamed that he would never be a good hunter. So now he doesn’t try to hunt pigs—he admitted on a different occasion that he was scared to do so—but, instead, hunts smaller animals: birds and fish. Primary responsibility for the care of these places usually belongs to just one of the seven groups but all, more than people from other groups, have access rights to them.

Further, in at least one case, options were kept thoroughly open by blending the mythological with overt commercial possibilities. Men from Yudo clan, well to the south of Suabi, tell us that long ago two brothers went diving in a secret place and saw a gudgeon of a type named *sa*. One of the brothers shot at the fish, but missed and his arrow stuck in a log. He dived under the log, came up on the other side and found that he was now in a large lake. He was frightened, dived back and returned to the secret place. But he could not get out of the water because he had turned to stone. He called to his brother who came running, saw what had happened and wanted to lift his stone-brother out of the water and carry him home. The stone-brother said to leave him in the water and bring food. And that is what happened. To this day the stone-brother is still in the water at that secret place. When the stream floods the stone-brother becomes light and floats to the surface of the hole in which he lives. Around him float leaves of many different kinds of food plants: bananas, sago, yams and taro. The leaves are from the food that his brother brought to him. But when the water level drops the stone-brother gets heavy and sinks out of sight.

In 2014, we were visited by two Yudo men who reported their own recent experiences—experiences that, in part, recapitulated the mythological tale of the stone-brother. They went diving for fish at the secret place. One of them pursued a *sa* that went under a rock. It seemed to be hidden by bark. The man put his hand under the rock and started to pull the bark out. At first it was very heavy but as it came up to the surface of the water it became much lighter. It looked like a piece of wood, but closer inspection revealed it to be a ‘stone’ that was shaped like a man, with distorted trunk and head, foreshortened limbs, no feet or hands, and an indentation in its belly where its navel would be. The two men kept the stone and took it to Testabi where they lived. On the night that they did this there was much lightning and thunder and, in the storm, the ‘stone’ called like a frog. Children were frightened and could not sleep.
The Yudo men were very enterprising. We did not see the stone-man but we did see photographs of it. The ‘body’ was as large as that of a man. But it was clearly not heavy. It was decorated with brown lines that radiated out from the ‘navel’ and criss-crossed the appendages; marks that bore some resemblance to the body painting on Kubo dancers or Samo initiates (Shaw 1990: see plates following p. 114). The lake in the origin story was said to be Lake Yubi far away in Yawuasoso land and the re-emergence of this story was intended to link Yudo—‘stone clan’—with Juha landowners and, hence, legitimise a claim to future benefits from the production of gas. Some Yawuasoso people said they had never before heard this story. But the Yudo men had additional commercial interests. At their home village they were charging an admission fee before letting people see the stone-man. And they were offering it for sale to white people who heard the story, recognised its significance, and might make a satisfactory offer of money.

Distinctions

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Yudo men—in mobilising stories and symbols drawn from the past to not only negotiate affiliations with distant clans but also render these symbols themselves negotiable for money—hints at an emerging objectification of the past that renders its expressions both ownable and alienable. By mid-2014, though people at Suabi had not registered any ILGs, they had drawn up many plans and named many potential groups. They were, in this sense, corporatising social identity. And, like knowledgeable corporate citizens, they sought to enhance potential visibility by creating logos that would serve as iconic representations of those newly formed groups. They were branding identity (Klein 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). The design of these logos provided yet another domain in which people at Suabi selectively drew on the past to facilitate access to a desired future.

People here were familiar with logos. The ECPNG mission had been based at Suabi for 25 years, planes from various airlines touched down at the Suabi airstrip and, from time to time, oil and gas companies established base camps or undertook exploration nearby. Nearly all these groups self-brand with a logo that captures some essence of their aims and purpose. Documents produced by the nation state, the provinces and government departments are commonly embellished with a logo (Fig. 6.3a).
At a smaller scale, a number of organisations established by Papua New Guinean nationals intrude in various ways on the lives of people living at Suabi. The Gigira Development Corporation, established by Huli-speakers in 1991, provides a variety of services—labour, security, cartage—to companies associated with the PNG LNG Project and, from time to time, has employed men from Suabi. It is named for Mount Gigira, at the headwaters of Baiya River. A myth and ancient prophesy tell that, within the mountain, there is a perpetual fire and that the time will come when a man with ‘orange legs’ will try to take the fire from those who rightfully own it (Cuthbert 2009; Bashir 2010c). The corporation logo features the mountain (Fig. 6.4a). Juha Resource Development Corporation Ltd, established in the mid-2000s with the intention of accessing business and infrastructure grants associated with the PNG LNG Project, identifies as ‘the umbrella company representing seven [Hela] tribal groups of the Juha LNG Project’. The company logo features Mount Gigira, the founding

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3 In other versions of the Gigira myth, the man who comes from the outside is described as ‘white-legged’ or red-legged (Garnaut 2015; Michael Main, personal communication, 31 October 2015).

ancestor Hela, and gas flaring from both Hela’s head and representations of well heads (Fig. 6.4b). By at least mid-2008, Gas Resource Juha Limited had been established by one Febi man under the patronage of several Huli men. The company mimicked the aims and intentions of Gigira Development Corporation and Juha Resource Development Corporation Ltd. For a brief period, in the later 2000s, it provided employment for a few Suabi men but, by 2010, it was no longer active. The logo is shown as Figure 6.4c.

![Logos: (a) Gigira Development Corporation; (b) Juha Resource Development Corporation Ltd; (c) Gas Resource Juha Limited.](image)

By 2011, then, people living at Suabi appreciated the importance of logos with respect to enhancing visibility and were familiar with a range of logos that might serve as models for those that they themselves created. They drew logos, or planned to draw logos, to represent ILGs, Business Groups, women’s groups, schools and church groups. With the exception of the single Church logo that we saw—an open Bible and a cross (Fig. 6.5a)—these depicted local resources, subsistence activities or mythological origin stories. For example, two logos drawn for the Suabi Community School feature, centrally, a length of partially rolled bark. Towards each end there is an arm band—a decorated dobe of the kind that men wear when they dance—and, held in place by one of these, a cassowary bone dagger. Two stone axes hang over the roll of bark, and emerging from it are two hunting arrows, a bow, a hand of bananas and a sprouting yam (Fig. 6.5b).
In 2013–14, a number of young women at Suabi felt frustrated that they were poorly represented in the plans to form Business Groups that men were drawing up. They were seldom represented in either the intended aims or the organising committees of those groups. Some women chose to initiate a similar process without input from men. Four such groups were named Yanowosu Young Girls, Tobi C.B.C. Women Group, Juha Mama Group and, from a different Kubo community, Kusobi Women’s Business Group. The aims of these groups were modest. They planned to seek funds for the purchase of sewing machines, cloth, needles and cotton that would allow them to establish businesses through which they would sell clothes at local markets. One group planned, in addition, to develop a commercial agricultural venture through which rice would be sold to local buyers. This group—Kusobi Women’s Business Group—stated that it had been established ‘due to major LNG projects that is coming up in area’.

Yanowosu Young Girls was initiated by five women, married and unmarried, twenty to mid-thirties in age, affiliated with three different clans—Yawuasoso, Nomo and, by marriage, Osumitie. Several had completed Grade 9 at school. The name of the group combines the initial letters of the three clan names (‘Ya’, ‘No’ and ‘Osu’). The logo features

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5 C.B.C. is the Christian Brethren Church which, since the mid or late 1980s, has been established at several Febi communities.
a variety of palm characteristic of higher altitudes (Yawuasoso) and fire, which is said to have originated with Osumitie but is also mythologically important to Nomo (Fig. 6.6a).

Figure 6.6: Logos: (a) Yanowosu Young Girls; (b) Juha Mama Group; (c) Tobi C.B.C. Women Group; (d) Kusobi Women’s Business Group.

Sources: Originals provided to authors for preparation as electronic images. Reproduced with permission.

Note: The outlines and words on (a), (b) and (c) were completed by the authors according to the instructions of members of each of those groups.

Membership of both the Juha Mama Group and Tobi C.B.C. Women Group was restricted to women born to, or married into, particular broadly defined, higher altitude Febi clans and the key symbols used in their logos were, respectively, a variety of black palm and a variety of fruit pandanus said to be ‘held by’ members of those clans (Figs 6.6b and 6.6c). The fruit pandanus depicted had originated at lower altitudes but when mythologically transplanted to the mountains the fruit that it produced changed colour from day to day—sometimes red, sometimes
green and sometimes yellow. There were spirit connotations and some older women were unsure that it was a wise choice for a logo; this was a *masalai* pandanus, they warned, and thus dangerous.

The Kusobi Women’s Business Group was formed in 2013 by women living at Kusobi village and affiliated by birth or marriage with four Kubo clans. The logo for this group featured an eagle and a stone that are implicated in an origin myth of the primary clan—Seaso—with which the women concerned were affiliated (Fig. 6.6d). These symbols were used also by male members of the same clan when preparing an ILG list.

On 23 February 2008, men from Suabi, representing at least seven clans, registered ABBA Co-operation Limited. In the course of the next two years, with outside assistance, they submitted an elaborate application for PGK5,000,000 as a ‘seeding grant’ with the aim of developing commercial enterprises in, among other areas, agriculture and livestock, aquaculture and the supply of educational materials. The company was awarded PGK20,000. This money was used to support several men who relocated to Port Moresby. None of the commercial enterprises came to fruition. ABBA Co-operation Limited was extant, but not functioning, in the years 2011–14. It did not have a logo.

The work entailed in drawing up membership lists for ILGs was, for the most part, done by men. It was men too who chose the logo that would represent these groups. Elements from myths—gendered stones, forbidden places, mythologically significant plants and animals and landscape features (rivers and mountains)—were prioritised in the logos that we saw or were told about. An ancestral crocodile for the subclan Dobasoso (Fig. 6.7a), a bat implicated in the enmity of two clans for Osomei (Fig. 6.7b), the dog that emerged from a cave on an island in the Damami River for Headubi (Fig. 6.7c) and a varanid lizard (Wabogosai) and palm (Kowa) for Mithy (Fig. 6.7d). In the last case, the name of the lizard was taken as the name of the intended ILG. It is a small lizard that shows its forked tongue if it ‘is happy to see you’. The upper half of the logo features the small black palm that splits into male and female trunks. The male trunk is identified with Wabogosai and, in the background of the palm, there are two mountains where the spirits of dead Mithy people reside, where Kowa grows and Wabogosai lives.
Navigating the Future

Figure 6.7: Logos: (a) Dobasoso subclan; (b) Osomei ILG; (c) Heyadibi clan; (d) Wabogosai ILG; (e) Seaso clan; (f) Tihin Holdings Ltd.
Sources: Originals provided to authors for preparation as electronic images. Reproduced with permission.

Tihin Holdings Ltd was a Business Group that men of Seaso clan planned to register. Their elaborate documentation took the form of an application for funds to build a classroom and two houses for teachers at Kusobi, a guest house and nature lodge at Suabi, and the wherewithal to initiate a commercial venture in ‘handy craft’ and artefacts. The logo that accompanied this proposal featured two named stones, one representing a son and father, the other representing a daughter and mother and both implicated in the origin of the clan (Fig. 6.7f). These men had drawn another logo—an eagle and stone—that they intended to use when registering a clan-based ILG (Fig. 6.7e; see also Fig. 6.6d).

The Osomei clan logo shown as Figure 6.7b was drawn in 2012. In 2014 it was revised. Alex, the community health worker, had purchased a laptop computer and, from time to time, was granted access to the internet by the medical officer at the Company camp. He used these facilities when redesigning the logo. And he told the following mythological story:

Flying foxes lived in a cave in limestone country. In the hours before dawn, returning to their sleeping cave, they cross a saddle in a ridge. Here men would build platforms and, using switches, knock down the
bats as they flew across the saddle. One day, when he and his family wanted to eat flying fox, Sada built a platform intending to hunt before dawn the next morning. He went home to wait for the right time. In the meantime, however, another man, Kodo, came along, saw the platform and decided to use it. When Sada arrived he saw that someone had usurped his platform. He called out, asking who was there. He got no reply. He was angry and shot Kodo, killing him. That was the start of fighting between those clans.6

Alex’s redrawn logo—it was not finished when we saw it—was circular. Framing the circle were the words ‘Fighting for Flying Fox’. In the centre, Alex was inserting part of a painting that showed ‘dark skinned warriors’ carrying a man trussed to a pole in the way that Kubo people carry a dead pig. There could be little doubt that the victorious warriors had cannibalism in mind. Alex had found the painting on Wikipedia, under the caption ‘Cannibalism’. The new logo did not include an image of a bat (compare with Fig. 6.7b).7

Zavia had not yet produced a logo for the subclan of which he was to be key representative. But he knew what he wanted though he said that he himself was no artist and would find someone else to draw it to his description. It was a bit complicated, he told us. He wanted to show a lake, a big tree, a boy on one side and a girl on the other, a bird on top, a frog down below and perhaps an old man. These, he said, would tell the origin story of the subclan Tafenden within the clan Mogotie. The story was as follows:

There was a brother and a sister and an old man. The children used small bows to hunt grasshoppers and geckos, which they then cooked. The old man told them not to do this, and pissed on the fire to stop them. The children went out again. When they returned with their catch and saw the fire was out, they started to cry. The old man then began to make fire again, in the ‘traditional’ way. As he rubbed stick and string together, there was an earthquake. The ground cracked and water started

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6 The enmity was between the Kubo clan Osomei and a Bedamuni clan. In the course of a revenge attack some Osomei people fled underground and emerged at a cave on Gomososo land near the Strickland River. They and their descendants became known as Woson, though, through long-term association with Gomososo, they were accepted as ‘brothers’ to members of this clan. Another underground passage from Doitafa cave also connected the lands of Gomososo and Dumiti clans until a time when it was closed by a tree fall that a bird failed to prevent (Dwyer and Minnegal 2007: 551; Minnegal and Dwyer 2011a: 327, n. 2).

7 The bat shown in Fig. 6.7b is a cave-dwelling microchiropteran within either the family Hipposideridae or the family Rhinolophidae. The relevant myth, however, is about a species of megachiropteran—a cave-dwelling bat of the genus Dobsonia in the family Pteropodidae.
to come up. The boy and the girl were swept away. They swam and swam but the water kept coming and kept getting wider. It was becoming a lake. At last the children came to a big tree. They climbed into the branches. The boy climbed to the top. The girl stayed in lower branches just above the water. Now the lake was very wide and they could not see land. They were frightened. Then the old man—their grandfather—came out of the water. He told them not to be frightened. They should come into the water with him because there they would find many good things: sago and bananas and all sorts of other plants that provided food for people. But the children would not go with the old man. So he returned to the water by himself. He collected leaves from all kinds of plants—from bananas, sago, fruit pandanus and others. He brought these to show to the children so that they would understand that he was not tricking them. Again, he asked them to come into the water with him. But the children still said ‘no’. Then the boy turned into a bird (Kuauwe) and the girl became a frog (Tiando).

The lake that comes into being in the course of this story is Lake Yubi on the land of Yawuasoso. Kuauwe is the butcher bird whose dawn call signals that dances that have continued through the night may now come to an end. And the old man, Zavia told us, was named Dibodoin but his own origin place was not in the mountains where the lake was formed.

Dibodoin originally lived down below, where the swamps are, not far from the Strickland River, on the land that is occupied by a different branch of Yawuasoso. It was another man—Kofainsa—who originally lived in the mountains. But these men changed places, each taking resources from one area and distributing them to the other. Dibodoin travelled from the swamps to the mountains. As he travelled he discarded bits of his clothing and some of his possessions. His nose-plug was tossed aside. It grew into a very big bamboo. His clothes, which were made from bark, were also thrown aside. They became different kinds of trees. And some sago flour that he carried was poured onto the ground near the place where Lake Yubi formed. It grew into a kind of sago palm. Food resources that you would otherwise expect to find only in the lowlands were carried into the mountains, and distributed there, by Dibodoin.8

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8 Kubo and Febi people continue to move plants from one place to another. At Suabi we were shown plants that had been transplanted to the village from the high mountains beyond the altitudinal zone where people lived and from Kiunga, Highland and coastal towns. Selection of plants for transplanting was motivated by both utilitarian and aesthetic reasons.
For Zavia, all these people and events, either explicitly or by the visual prompts provided, would be expressed by his intended logo. Some were given wider expression. Zavia had assigned the names of the two mythological figures, Dibodoin and Kofainsa, to two boys when he drew up his list of ILG members. He had assigned the latter to a boy from the Strickland River branch of Yawuasoso, and thereby—since the original Kofainsa had migrated from mountains to lowlands—tied that boy more strongly to Zavia’s own mountain branch of the clan.

In 2014, Zavia was about twenty-eight years old. He had grown up through years when origin stories were declining in relevance, when his adult kin were moving towards new ways of understanding the world, when their focus was often with Christianity, Bible stories, sin and its consequences, and the possible arrival of a petroleum or logging company that would enhance material well-being. It was only recently that he and his age mates—the young men and women who could write, read to a limited extent and grapple with the requirements of bureaucracy—came to appreciate the importance of the past in asserting rights to the future. They turned to their parents to hear and learn the stories. As one young man told us, he had spent so many years away from the village at high school that he did not know these stories. Did we know the stories of his clan, he asked. We ourselves had first come to the land of Kubo people around, or before, the time that most of the more formally educated people had been born.

The stories that Zavia planned to represent in his logo were, however, those of all Febi and Kubo Yawuasoso. Zavia was appropriating those stories to a named subsection of a section of that greater clan. In doing so, he was laying claim to symbols that actually belonged to many more people. Other subclans in Yawuasoso, he told us, would need to devise different logos. Choosing a logo was not easy and had potential consequences for other people. Members of Nomo clan, for example, had not yet settled on a design for a logo to represent a company they planned to establish. They wanted to find a ‘common element’—an animal, perhaps, or their toi sa (forbidden place) that spoke to their uniqueness. They chose not to use their toi sa because, they argued, some Highlanders assert that their own ancestors came from that place and so they might have a claim to the company. They thought of using ‘fire’, since they too are a ‘fire clan’, but Martin had already taken ‘fire’ to represent his own clan. And they thought of using ‘pig’—one Nomo story tells of a pig entering a cave and emerging in the land of Bedamuni people—but, again,
learned that they had been pre-empted by another group. Similarly, the
decision by Damami River Headubi to use ‘dog’ in their logo (Fig. 6.7c)
had implications for others in the constellation of the six clans identified
as Headubi, all with origins traced to dogs, holding non-contiguous areas
of land within Kubo, Febi and Konai territories.

As Zavia’s account and those of Nomo and Headubi people illustrate,
origin stories are not discrete. They are not specific to bounded sets of
people. Like clans’ lands as they were in the past, these stories flowed
into one another; they grew, diverged and borrowed from each another.
They separated some people and united others, but the similarities that
emerged and the differences created through the telling of these stories
were always in flux. As Frederick Barth (1987) argued, cosmologies are
not fixed, they are made. ‘There were never any land boundaries in place
to separate the four Kesomo sons from each other’ Henick Taprin wrote in
*The Origin of Kesomo* (2007/8: 6). Now, however, as with land, people
are beginning to creatively define the limits of the cosmological; they are
bounding it, declaring selected stories or selected constructions of stories
to be properly and exclusively their own.9

## Distributions

In late February 2014, representatives of Talisman—the company then
using the exploration camp at Suabi—arrived by helicopter to make
what they considered the ‘final payment’ for rent and for environmental
damage caused by their recent activities. The latter arose from felling trees
and loss of gardens in and near the area where the camp was established.
In at least one case, the garden in question had been prepared and planted
in the hope of harvesting money, rather than food plants, if Company did
in fact arrive.

The payment for rent—PGK6,400—was received by Ifan, one of the
senior men in the seven clans that were considered by local people as the
deserving recipients of the money. These clans were Andibi, Baiyameti,

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9  Lihir Islanders take the rock Ailaya as both an origin place and a final resting place for human
and spirit forms (Bainton et al. 2012: 33). The appropriation of the Aiyala by several Liherian groups
(e.g. on a logo of a local cultural heritage organisation, and on the front of a new business centre) has
generated concern over possible implications for access to wealth from the Lihir gold mine. Holly
Wardlow (2004: 54) records use of the mythologically important Mount Kare python as the logo
of a Huli-owned trade store.
Domiti, Gobogometi, Osomei, Sisiti and Wamiti. It was people from these groups who, in the early 1980s, came together to form Suabi. Only three of them qualify as genuine landowners of parts of the land on which the airstrip and its approaches were made, and probably only one—with a single living representative—as a genuine landowner of the area utilised by the exploration camp.

The payment for environmental damage included PGK2,945 for felled trees and PGK1,370 for loss of gardens. The money was received by Kamuna, the local Mission Aviation Fellowship agent, whose classificatory mother had lost a small garden as a result of Company activities. The package containing the money named three clans as intended recipients: Domiti, Osomei and Sisiti. But members of two other clans, Wamiti and Djagososo, had also lost gardens; they had been ‘forgotten’ we were told.

Ifan and Kamuna called a meeting at which people discussed ways in which the money should be distributed. This was no simple matter. Some argued that the compensation money should be shared equally to all clans represented in the Suabi community. It was, after all, merely fortuitous that, when Company arrived, particular people had established gardens on that land; had Company come earlier or later it would have been others whose gardens had been lost. This suggestion was not adopted. Different people had different sorts of claims, and drew on historical connections to support those claims. While it was accepted that the primary claimants to rent money were members of the seven clans listed above—it was their forebears who had established Suabi and, 30 years earlier, contributed most work to making the airstrip—two of those named groups are, in other contexts, treated as subclans of a greater entity, Nomo. It was felt, therefore, that some money should flow to members of other groupings within Nomo. And, again, though Kamuna himself had not lost trees or gardens he had assumed responsibility for keeping the money secure, for calling the meeting, and for providing the venue at which it was held. For these contributions he received PGK100. Present circumstances and remembered pasts came together as people decided who should and who should not receive a share of the money.

The meeting was held that night, but not everyone had attended. The task, the next morning, was to deliver allocated shares to people or groups who had not been present. Ifan distributed rent money. But he was anxious. He wanted to get the job done quickly so that those who were to
receive, but had not come to the meeting, would soon know that they had been included. He was concerned too that some who did receive might feel they merited more than they got, and that some who did not receive might be offended. He did not like handling money of this sort, he told us. He was in favour of giving equal shares to everyone; then he would not have his current responsibility. If he delivered money to people who were dissatisfied then they could be cross with him. They could take him to court though this would not resolve the issue. Even if they won they would remain cross. They could wish him harm. He could be ensorcelled. In the present world of money, paper and writing, he told us, there were new forms of sorcery to worry about. You might be walking alone to a garden or bush house, perhaps, or even in the village. Someone comes towards you, crosses paths with you. They stop and talk. But their talk is *gaiman*—it is ‘grease talk’, it is false. They are distracting you while others, who you do not see, creep up behind you and ‘kill’ you. You are dead but you are not yet finished. You go home and, only later, get ill and finally die. It was not the same in the past, Ifan complained. Then, sorcerers worked alone. You would see the sorcerer face-to-face—just one—and there was a chance you could elude him. Now they roam in groups, and you do not recognise them for what they are. You no longer have a chance. And, perhaps, the sorcerers themselves do not know what they are doing. They may be young men or young women who have found paper on the ground. They have picked up the paper, read the words on it, and their minds are taken over. They become a new kind of sorcerer. When money comes from outside, when it is necessary to share it responsibly and fairly, there is always a concern with sorcery, with new forms of sorcery, adaptations of past forms that have emerged in, and been accommodated to, new contexts.

Ifan had favoured an earlier style of distribution, where all—perhaps not each person but certainly each household, or *oobi*—would share equally in the benefits derived from the land. But a new logic was intruding now, with money at stake. Evaluating differences in ownership and entitlement was an increasing concern at Suabi. But while ‘fairness’ might now be read differently, past understandings continue to permeate both its importance and the anticipated consequences for failing to meet these new expectations.
In resolving disputes, accommodating marriage arrangements and concerns about sorcery to new ways of living, drawing up ILG lists that reshape social arrangements, devising logos that will stand for newly conceived groups of people, and finding ways in which money may be distributed more fairly across the community, Kubo and Febi people draw selectively from their remembered pasts, both secular and sacred—often foregrounding some details while suppressing others—to fit their lives to an ever-changing present. In striving to achieve these ends—in ‘the forging of new futures’—they engage in creative work whereby present conditions may be transcended and histories rendered effective (Bell 2016: 22). To people at Suabi, however, the present is deeply imbued with desires that are oriented towards a future, a future in which ‘development’ comes, in which they are no longer ‘remote’ and forgotten, and in which wealth that is perceived as ‘rightfully’ theirs is given material expression either in the form of extractable resources—gas, oil, minerals, timber—on their own lands or rights to the benefits expected from such resources on the lands of their immediate neighbours. In the final analysis, Kubo and Febi people draw on their remembered history of engagement with land and with each other as part of a strategy for navigating the future.