

Chapter Four



Belongings

Identity and difference are not so much about categorical groupings as about processes of identification and differentiation. These processes are engaged for all of us, in different ways, with the desire to belong, to be part of some community, however provisional. Belonging invokes desire, and it is in this desire that much of the passion for difference resides. . . . [T]he question of where and to what I belong involves . . . a consideration of position and location. (Moore 1994c, 2)

belong: 1. (foll. by *to*) to be the property or possession (of). 2. (foll. by *to*) to be a member (of a club, etc.). 3. (foll. by *to*, *under*, *with*, etc.) to be classified (with) . . . 4. (foll. by *to*) to be a part or adjunct (of) . . . 5. to have a proper or usual place . . . 6. *Informal*. to be suitable or acceptable, esp. socially . . . **belonging:** . . . secure relationship, affinity . . . **belongings:** . . . the things that a person owns or has with him[/her]; possessions; effects. (*Collins English Dictionary*, 1985)

Five weeks after our arrival on Nuakata we prepared to move from the church grounds to our newly completed house at Gohiya—Wycliffe’s mother’s hamlet (*dalava*).¹ Although a small journey of maybe 800 meters, it represented a significant move, but not necessarily in ways I had anticipated. In asking to be housed in a hamlet we sought a more intimate appreciation of daily life on Nuakata, particularly, but by no means exclusively, the lives of women. By making the move to Gohiya, though, we not only sought to position ourselves optimally for the research but also hoped to find a place (a home), a sense of belonging among Wycliffe’s family, rather than living on the margins of the community beholden to everyone passing by the church. We yearned for intimacy with people, an intimacy that explored, tolerated, even celebrated,

the distinctions between us and them, while creating a space—a time and place—for an inclusive we to emerge. A romantic, utopian hope? Yes. But our hope nonetheless.

Ethnographers have long testified to their fictive kin status in the communities in which they have worked. Such status carries a power that extends beyond the ethnographic field, to the more academic reaches of the discipline. Intentional or not, testimonies to acceptance, to belonging—genuine participation, and not just observation—in the field are used to lend authenticity and authority to ethnographers' subsequent textual representations and interpretations.

This multifaceted hope for belonging, first ignited in Melbourne when the field and its people were still mere imaginings, was fanned on Nuakata by what can best be described as a fortuitous coincidence. Wycliffe's younger brother and older maternal cousin/brother were both named Roger. They were the only people so named on the island. From our earliest days on Nuakata, my husband Roger was instructed to address these men as *'waligeba* (namesake). At first this term merely seemed quaint to us. Surely, we thought, it simply made explicit the familiar and respectful practice of naming children after familial forebears, friends, or significant people, living or dead. During the building of our house, however, when Roger's senior *'waligeba* took him under his wing, taking great pains to explain and teach him various house-building skills, we began to suspect that this relationship was significant in ways not quite so familiar. Early discussions with Wycliffe about *susu*, clans, and names reinforced these thoughts, our hopes.

Susu Belonging

Wycliffe revealed that namesakes generally, but not always, belonged to the same *susu* and/or clan. By way of explanation, he added that *susu* means breast and breast-milk as well as mother's family. People who belong to the same *susu* share the same mother, while those belonging to the same clan—*bwasumo* (bird)—merely share the same maternal ancestors. Therefore, Wycliffe's mother, Eunice; her brother; her sister and her sister's children; and, indeed, Wycliffe's own brothers and sisters all belonged to the same *susu*, as did his adopted brother, Nowel. (When Nowel's natal mother, a member of Wycliffe's clan, became ill following his birth, Eunice breast-fed and subsequently cared for him.) Wycliffe's mother's brother's children, however, did not belong to his *susu*, for they

did not share the same mother. As such, these cousins could not claim a place on Wycliffe's mother's and maternal uncles' land. Only those who belonged to his *susu* could claim a place on *susu* land.

Paraphrased above, Wycliffe's succinct explanation of the meaning of *susu* was consistent with more detailed accounts given by some Massim ethnographers (Fortune [1932] 1989, 3–6, for Dobu; Macintyre 1983; 1988, 51–54, for Tubetube; and Thune 1980, 81, for Duau). Without directly stating it, Wycliffe implied that to share the same mother was to share common breast-milk, to be breast-fed from the same source. In both a literal and symbolic sense, breast-milk flows between mother and baby, feeding their relationship as she, too, had been fed and nurtured by her mother. The breast-feeding relationship is enacted down through and across the maternal generations, nurturing *susu* belonging and consolidating the recent ancestral past in present *susu* relations.

Accordingly, a person addresses his or her mother and mother's sisters as *hinagu* (my mother). When having to distinguish between mothers—if, for example, more than one are present at the same time—the terms *hinagu 'agu taulabalaba* (my birth mother),² *hinagu mwala'ina* (my big mother, i.e., mother's elder sister), or *hinagu habaluna* (my small mother, i.e., mother's younger sister) are used. However, people avoid using these more cumbersome terms in day-to-day conversation. Therefore, a mother's sister(s) would be considered mother(s) just as the children of these mothers are all considered brothers and sisters, for they have been breast-fed by the same grandmother or maternal source. For example, the same-sex siblings of one's birth mother or mother's sisters are called *tabigu* (my sister/my brother). Cross-sex siblings are addressed as *lougu* (my brother/my sister). An older sibling can address a younger sibling of different sex as *lougu tabigu*. Similarly the younger sibling can address the older sibling of the opposite sex as *lougu tuwagu*. In contrast, the (non-*susu*) children of a person's mother's brother (cross-cousins) are addressed as *nibaigu* (my cousin). The different terms for same-sex and cross-sex, younger and older siblings as opposed to the general term used for all cousins imply, without specifying, that sexual difference and age constitute significant dimensions of *susu* relations (see Munn 1986; M. Strathern 1988). It could be said, therefore, that maternal breast-milk and the breast-feeding relationship, more than blood or semen, underpin familial/*susu* belonging and relations on Nuakata. In this sense, someone's existence (especially outside the womb) is not independent from *susu* relations or *susu* belonging³—both are nurtured in infancy at the

mother's breast.⁴ It is in the places where people stay that *susu* relationships, *susu* identity, find expression and form. This aside, my reflection on Wycliffe's explanation reifies and idealizes the literal (substantive) significance of breast-milk and breast-feeding to *susu* belonging on Nuakata, for in practice—in daily living—many exceptions to these generalizations were accommodated. For example, unlike Nowel, most adopted children were taken into their new family after they had been weaned. In those instances when a child's adoptive mother came from the same clan—but not the same *susu*—as the birth mother, the child was generally considered to be a member of both its birth mother's and adoptive mother's *susu*. While the adoptive mother had not breast-fed the child, she had, by her distant maternal link to the child's birth mother and her feeding and nurturing role, rendered the child a member of her *susu*. Although unclear, it seemed that the adopted child was also entitled to claim land belonging to either its adoptive or natal mother's *susu*. In one example of which I am aware a female adopted by a woman belonging to the same clan as, but different *susu* than, her birth mother's was only given land belonging to her birth mother's *susu* when she herself had children. By claiming her place on this land she apparently forfeited her claim to a place on her then deceased adoptive mother's land. While an important means of establishing *susu* relations, the substantive breast-feeding relationship was clearly not the only means of establishing and feeding this form of belonging to the *susu* and *susu* land.

In explaining the significance of *susu*, Wycliffe implied that, as in other Massim communities, land and *susu* belonging are crucially linked on Nuakata (Fortune [1932] 1989; Macintyre 1983; Munn 1986; Thune 1980). People are born into, nurtured, and grow up within a matrilineal social environment—a dynamic world of *susu* relations grounded and expressed in domestic landscapes and living arrangements. Accordingly, everyone possesses a living place—a preconceived relational place in his or her *susu* and a place to live on *susu* land. It is through living on, and being sustained by, this land, together with other *susu* members, that someone's *susu* relations and belonging are continually defined and redefined throughout life. Further, it is through people's relationship to the land of their maternal forebears that continuity between past and present, the living and the dead, is maintained and remembered.⁵

While all members of a given *susu* share a common identity and a place on the land, it is usually women who continuously occupy it. They are also responsible for the day-to-day tending of both family gardens

and hamlet spaces. Given that women also cook the vast majority of a family's meals, wash clothes and dishes, and take primary responsibility for the care of children, it is not hard to see their relationship to the land and their role in everyday life as central, if undervalued. Women are the foundation of the matrilineage, but like many foundations their work is often unnoticed, if not invisible.

Men have a different place, position, or role in the matrilineage of their birth. Although many, like Noah, are considered controllers of *susu* land in their generation, they, together with their brothers, grow up in the full knowledge that much of their adult life will be spent living among nonkin (affines) in their wife's village. In this context they are always different, outsiders who gain respect, identity, and power among their affines through their work, namely, fishing, building houses, making copra, clearing and establishing new gardens, and caring for their families. While women also spend periods of time living with their affines, where they, too, must prove themselves through hard work, they usually spend the greater part of their domestic lives among kin on *susu* land. Where women provide stable points of reference for the matrilineage, men are more mobile, circulating and establishing themselves in other places, where they must attempt to balance affinal and matrilineal obligations to sisters and their offspring. When senior adult members of the matrilineage live in other places, day-to-day decisions that affect the *susu* and the organization of its land are made by the most senior members currently "staying" on the land. Decisions or disputes with far-reaching consequences are settled, where possible, by senior members of the *susu*, regardless of residence.

Wycliffe insisted that although people are entitled to a place on land belonging to their *susu*, they cannot simply assume a place on their birth father's land, particularly after his death. In granting permission for children to live and work on their father's *susu* land, members of his *susu* show respect for, and recognition of, the work contributed by the children's mother and maternal kin to his *susu*.⁶ In other words, unlike their place in their mother's *susu*, children's place, their belonging, in their father's *susu* is contingent upon the labors of their parents—particularly their mother's and, later, their own—on behalf of their father's *susu*.

While a person's relationships to the people and places of his or her matrilineal *susu* are the ground of that person's living and staying (*miyamiya*),⁷ his or her paternity and paternal kin are not irrelevant or unimportant. This point is reinforced by people's use of their father's first

name as surname. Only by the efforts of a birth father (*tamagu* ‘*agutaula-balaba*; literally, my father, the body/person that gave birth to me) to prepare the ground for his child (conception) can the child’s place and belonging with(in) its mother and her *susu* arise. The continuity of a *susu* and the belonging shared by its members is contingent upon the labors of affinal kin who support but do not belong to it. Unlike the relationship with a mother, who by bearing and breast-feeding nurtures and sustains the belonging to people and place shared between herself and her child, the father’s relationship is more tenuous, more contingent. As Fortune ([1932] 1989, 5–30) describes for Dobu, a man’s natural, obligatory, familial responsibility lies with his sister’s children rather than his own, for they belong to his *susu* (cf. Battaglia 1985).

In discussing the relationship of both mothers and fathers to their children, Wycliffe, his mother Eunice, and another woman, Malida, highlighted fathers’ caring for (*‘ita’avivini*) and giving (*mulolo*) to their children. For example, Wycliffe suggested that “a mother cares (*‘avala*) for her child—every time she washes the child, feeds him with good food and forbids him not to do those sorts of things (that will give him or her) a headache. A good mother always looks after baby in whatever he does, so he or she will not get accident or sickness.”

It is a mother’s role, together with other *susu* members, to feed and sustain her children. Eunice suggested that in the past “a mother had many children, but not so many that she made herself weak and therefore unable to look after (*‘avala*) them properly.” In contrast, Malida emphasized that a father is “kind, generous, caring (*‘ita’avivini*), tender-hearted and hard-working.” According to Wycliffe, “a father freely *gives* to his children.⁸ He is different to a mother. He always shows the child the things that are suitable for him/her. . . . He teaches him/her culture. He protects him/her from having sickness, makes sure that the child eats properly.”

While these accounts suggest that both mothers and fathers care for their children, the selective use of terms for a mother’s and father’s caring was instructive. The word *‘ita’avivini*—derived from *‘ita* (to see) and *‘avivini* (to care)—quite literally means “see and care.” This word is used to denote a father’s care for his children or a grandfather’s care for his affinal grandchildren. It is also commonly used to describe looking after things, such as a radio or bush knife. There is both a temporal and contingent dimension to this term. It implies a response to the visible, the apparent—a temporary response. In practice, many fathers on Nuakata

demonstrably cared and provided for their children on a day-to-day basis and assumed an active role in the decisions affecting their well-being. In contrast, *avala* (to bear, carry, give birth to) is generally used to describe women's (and in some instances men's) care for members of their *susu*. Rather than being a specific response to a visible need, the carrying and bearing of a mother is foundational, continuous.

There is a certain freedom and flexibility in the father-child relationship that is absent between mother and child. Unlike the response of a mother, whose daily care and nurture for her children is assumed, obligatory, for they simultaneously sustain herself, her children, and their *susu*, a father's response to his children is contingent. A father may express this negatively as indifference and disinterest, or positively through everyday activities associated with the care and nurture of his children. His children may help him with the same sense of spontaneity and affection shown to them. An example of the nature of this relationship was illustrated by Wycliffe's naming of his canoe. Soon after our arrival on Nuakata, Wycliffe built a new sailing canoe (*sailau*). When he finished it, he called it *gwama'idou*. Translated, this expression means "boy he cries." Wycliffe explained that when a child cries for fish his or her father sees his or her hunger and responds by taking to his canoe and finding fish for the child to eat. This is the love a father gives to his child(ren). Such a relationship creates interdependence and indebtedness. A father's love, his gift to his children and their *susu*, is acknowledged during life and especially upon his death by members of his wife's *susu*. For example, his care and support of his wife and children may entitle him to land use and influence among his affinal kin. Upon his death, his children and/or his widow express appreciation for his love/gifts by the presentation of reciprocal gifts (*mulolo*)⁹ to his *susu*. These gifts of yams (if available), rice, and pigs both formally and respectfully acknowledge a father's contribution to his children and affines while absolving their debt to his kin.

The differing relationships of mothers and fathers to their children are by no means unique to Nuakata. Thune (1980, 80–84) states that on northeast Duau a father's relationship with his child is described by a term that means both "voluntary or freely given love" and "to give gifts." This contrasts with the "required nurturance" provided by *susu*. Macintyre (1983, 51–53) indicates that the same distinction applies on Tubetube. Indeed, as on Nuakata, a linguistic/social distinction is made on Tubetube between a more permanent, maternal care that builds and

sustains and a more temporary yet altruistic form of care in which a father seeks to protect and preserve his children as he watches over them (see also Battaglia 1985).

Naming Place, Placing Names

That people's existence—their living and staying—on Nuakata is never disentangled from *susu* and clan belonging is further reinforced and expressed by people's names and the relational terms used to address them. Wycliffe indicated that two personal names were bestowed upon a child at birth: a *susu*/clan name that could only be spoken by members of the same clan and a public name that, with some important exceptions, everyone could use.¹⁰ Just as people's use of public and *susu*/clan names to address those belonging to their own clan named and gave voice to the vital source of belonging they shared so the silence accorded to those names by those from other clans gave silent respect to the distinctions between them.

Public names were often new or novel, taken from other sources beyond Nuakata,¹¹ for example, "Sydney" from Sydney Harbor bridge, or "Maino," representing the initials of five matrilineal family names. Arguably these distinctive public names anticipated individuality. Indeed, in some instances, they seemed to preempt the embodiment or practice of this individuality. For example, Wycliffe was named after the Wycliffe Bible translators (also known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics or SIL), who have been engaged in Bible translation work across the Masim for over three decades. Wycliffe's paternal grandfather had been a local pastor, who worked throughout the Bunama circuit of the United Church on nearby Normanby Island during the time Reverend Alfred Guy worked as a missionary at the Bunama Methodist mission around the turn of the century. Wycliffe's father, Noah, was a Christian actively involved in local and regional church affairs and committed to translating Methodist hymns into Alina Nu'ata. In naming his first-born son after the Bible translators, Noah had hoped Wycliffe would grow up to become involved in Bible translation work, thereby following in both his own and his father's footsteps. Whether by coincidence or coercion, this has, in fact, eventuated.

Although not a routine occurrence, any person could have his or her public name in common with one or possibly more members of his or her *susu*, living or dead. When this did occur, as with the two Rogers in

Wycliffe's mother's family, it was understood as a gesture of affection and respect for the living person whose name and matrilineage the newborn child shared. The subsequent relationship between living namesakes was grounded by this initial gesture made by the newborn's parents. Together with the name, this affection and respect constituted a significant part of the newborn's matrilineal inheritance. Like a seed planted in soil this inheritance, if nurtured, was grown, transformed, and revealed over time by the living *'walige*ha relationship.

While people did not always have their public name in common with a *susu*/clan member, they always shared their *susu*/clan names with a matrilineal forebear either living or, more often than not, dead.¹² Hence, *susu*/clan names were not randomly inherited. Named at birth, female children inherited the names of female forebears and male children inherited the names of male forebears, suggesting that the sexed form of the body was recognized and named at birth. Each name not only carried the memory, however vague, of the more senior or deceased forebear, it also denoted the relational place that the particular forebear occupied within the *susu* of his or her birth. For example, Wycliffe is the first-born child of his mother, Eunice, who is herself the fourth- and last-born child of her generation. Eunice has a brother and sister still living. Another sister died before reaching childbearing age. Unable to become pregnant, Eunice's living sister Malida (now deceased) first adopted the senior Roger and later Eunice's third- and fifth-born children: Jane and Douglas. As first-born boys in their generation of the *susu*, senior Roger and then Wycliffe are regarded as the senior members of the *susu*. Accordingly, Wycliffe was named after his mother's brother (MMB), a man who occupied a similar position of seniority in his generation. When their mothers' and grandmothers' generation have died out, Wycliffe and senior Roger are expected to assume primary responsibility for control of the land and any disputes arising among members of the *susu* or between their and others' *susu* from the same or different clans. Known, then, but rarely spoken, these *susu*/clan names recalled and made present particular living pasts of a given *susu*. Not only did this naming practice reinforce a sense of continuity between past and present generations of a given *susu*, but, equally, it gave living expression to the realized hopes for, or past anticipations of, future generations.

Another example is instructive. Two of Wycliffe's three sisters had children. Jane, the younger of the two with children, had one child named Sydney. About nine, he was the first-born boy and second-born

child of his generation. As such, he will be expected to assume some senior status among his generation of the *susu* when he becomes an adult and, more particularly, when he is among the oldest surviving generation. Geteli, the second-born child (and first-born female) of Eunice—and the older of Wycliffe's two sisters with children—had five children: four girls (Linda, Jesili, Viki, Maino) and a boy named Brian, the last-born. Brian shared his *susu* name with Wycliffe. By naming him in this way Geteli and her husband demonstrated respect for Wycliffe while also signaling Brian's potential place among his generation of the matrilineage. For example, while Geteli's first-born child (and the first-born child of her generation), Linda, aged eleven or twelve in 1993, will almost certainly have some senior status within her generation of the family, there was talk that Brian may also assume senior responsibilities, given that he was the first-born boy of the first-born woman in that generation of the *susu*. It remains for Brian to find, claim, and realize this relational place, identified and named at birth by his living matrilineal kin as his potential inheritance. He must grow and be grown into this relational place or role. Whether or not a given child assumes the relational place within his or her matrilineage foreshadowed by the *susu*/clan name bestowed upon it at birth is contingent upon many factors, including the child or adult's individual or particular qualities, where he or she lives during adult life, and who remains living in the generation (see Macintyre 1983).

For the most part, people's identification with familial land is prescribed by preexisting and predefined matrilineal kinship/clan relationships. In a very real sense this identity, at once familial and individual, social and cultural, is embodied—grounded upon the age, sex, position of a person in the nuclear and extended family (first-born, second-born, etc.), and his or her living relations. People are born into, nurtured within, and grow up amid a matrilineal social world—a dynamic world of social relations that are inscribed upon and expressed in the fluid organization of domestic landscapes and living arrangements. In such a world every person has a place—a place to live throughout his or her lifetime and a preconceived place in his or her wider maternal family or *susu/huhu*.

Given this understanding of these naming conventions, it made some sense to us that in sharing a nominal, if not a birthing and feeding, inheritance Roger—my husband—potentially belonged to his two namesakes' *susu*. It remained for him and the members of this *susu* to recognize this association. The questions that troubled Roger and me, especially early

on, were, Would this potential relationship be recognized, realized? If so, how? Would this relationship be directly acknowledged when we moved to Gohiya? Where, and with whom, would this place me? Did the instructions given to us about addressing each other have any bearing on these matters?

Naming Distinction(s)

Around the time Wycliffe instructed Roger to address his namesakes as *'waligeba*, his father Noah, among other senior people, suggested that Roger and I should address each other respectfully as *mwanegu* (my spouse). Noah explained that from the moment a marriage is declared by senior members of the woman's *susu* the newlywed couple should not address each other by name, even if they had always done so in the past. Rather, they should show respect for one another and for each other's *susu* by using the relational term.

Encouraged to address each other by the relational term, it was also explained to us that married couples do not generally touch each other or express physical affection for one another in public. The taboo on touching in public applied to unmarried and married, old and young couples alike. Eager to please, trying not to offend our hosts, we conformed to these practices. While we experienced the immediate distancing effect of these conventions in our own relationship, we remained uncertain of the significance of these practices for couples on Nuakata. After some months we realized that, although no couples flouted the convention about touching in public, many (especially younger couples) did not use the relational term *mwanegu* to address one another. Most circumvented this practice by using either nicknames or no names at all. When I questioned them about this, they explained that younger people found this term awkward and old-fashioned. Having grown up and gone to school together they (like us) were reluctant to speak with each other in such formal, respectful ways. Even so, they did not use their spouse's public name, and they always employed formal, relational terms of address when speaking with members of their spouse's *susu*.¹³

Wycliffe explained that a person (male or female) addresses the women that his or her spouse calls mother (*hinagu*) as *yagulanwa*. The men that his or her spouse calls father¹⁴ are addressed as *bwasiyagu*. A same-sex sibling of his or her spouse is called *yagu'iva*, and a cross-sex sibling is called *'agu yaiyewa*. He or she can only address those sisters-

and brothers-in-law who are not consanguineal relatives of his or her spouse's *susu* by their public names. This is permitted only when the particular in-law is not otherwise related to that person. When the spouse's sibling is still a child, the person addresses him/her as *natugu*, and he or she in turn is addressed by the child as *tamagu* (my father) or *binagu* (my mother) until the child reaches adulthood. Women who marry into a *susu* are called *hinevela*, men are called *wohiwa*. As with the naming conventions associated with use of *susu*/clan names the use of relational terms of address with one's in-laws and spouse expresses respect for and distinctions between people belonging to a *susu*/clan other than one's own.¹⁵ These inviolable naming conventions, (p)reserved for *susu* and affines, drew attention to the centrality of relational forms of belonging on Nuakata, reinforcing the notion that *susu* belonging is necessarily defined in contradistinction to affinal kin.¹⁶ A *susu* can only establish its unique identity in relation to and connection with other *susu*. Without these relations a *susu* cannot actually reproduce itself. Marriage to nonkin consolidates and further defines kin relationships by making the essentially dialectical relationship between identification and differentiation, similarity and difference visible, tangible.

For this reason marriage between people of the same clan, particularly those who can trace their descent from a shared ancestor, meets with strong disapproval and a loss of respect for the couple involved. Such marriages are regarded as incestuous, for rather than strengthening and regenerating the unique identity of the *susu*/clan they diminish it, forcing it to feed upon itself. To my knowledge there was only one marriage of this nature on Nuakata at the time of our stay. The couple in question had been married for ten years or so, and this despite attempts at the time of their marriage to prevent the relationship. Wycliffe's family were related as affines to the woman in this partnership, and while they liked her husband, they expressed their diminished respect for him by calling him by his name, rather than addressing him respectfully by the various terms to denote in-law/affinal relationships.

Making Place(s), Placing Belonging

Completion of our house not only brought to a close our very public sojourn at the church but also marked the end of an intense period of labor by Yalasi and some Bolime people on our behalf. Over a five-week period women wove the coconut palm mats for the external walls (*bili-*

bili) and ceiling of the house, while men collected and erected the necessary timbers from the bush: hardwoods for the stumps (*logidi*) and floor joists (*pulipuli*), split black or betel nut palm for the floor (*beva*), and saplings secured by vines (*'uwe* or *wetuhu*) for the rafters and wall braces. During this time we accompanied men on some of their many forays inland in search of bush materials. Beginning their treks on well-established trails, they soon left the paths behind and plunged deep into the bush, confidently forging ahead until they reached an area where specific trees or vines were known to be growing. Once located, these plants were chopped down, stripped of bark, then carried back aloft on men's shoulders through the tangle of undergrowth. What was to us a dense and seemingly impenetrable thicket of green and brown was a known, habitable, and negotiable world to our guides. These men knew the land, particularly their own *susu* and clan land, as I might know the streets, shops, houses, and gardens of a familiar urban landscape. They knew the land and its names just as many knew the names and something of the genealogy that connects each person to *susu*/clan land on the island.

All this constituted strenuous work in windless and oppressive February heat. As participant observers and direct beneficiaries of this collective labor we felt overwhelmed by people's generosity. Our completed house was a silent yet powerful testimony to this communal gift of labor and time, and to the relationships forged during and by its construction. The effort to build our house was made even more significant by the knowledge that men did not generally rely on group labor to build houses. It was considered an able man's responsibility to shelter himself and, where relevant, his spouse, children, and dependent (female or infirm) members of his *susu*. A man working alone on Nuakata would therefore find, chop, and carry the necessary timbers and vines from the bush and construct the house with only limited help from female kin (his spouse or members of his own *susu*) to make the walls and roof. For this reason new houses took many months, and in some instances years, to build. When a man sought help with the building of his house from male members of his *susu*, his wife and female kin were expected to provide meals for the workers. Where help was sought from non-*susu* men, payment of meals, tobacco, and money was made. Men were also primarily responsible for building other structures on Nuakata, including yam houses, shelves or tables for feasts or parties, small shelters for people to rest in their gardens, copra smoke houses, enclosures for pigs, canoes,

and so on. In the past men also built small, one-room houses for new mothers to stay for the first months of the newborn baby's life. Commenting on men's broader responsibility for building on Gawa Island to the north, Munn states that "it is essentially men who construct bounded . . . protective . . . spaces. . . . [W]omen are those protected by these masculine acts" (1986, 34). While men build essential, temporary dwellings on *susu* land, it is through women's labors in the garden, hamlet, and giving birth that the continuous occupation of this land by members of the *susu* is ensured.

To my knowledge, only church and school buildings, including pastors' and teachers' houses, have been built on Nuakata by unrecompensed communal labor. Home to communal activities or workers, these buildings were considered the responsibility of the community, particularly those who attended church or had children at school. Because my research activities were also believed to have a communal focus and benefit, the community as a whole agreed to build our house without cost. As it turned out, the people of Yalasi, coordinated by senior men living in or closely associated with Gohiya, assumed primary responsibility for the task. In building the house a sense of community—the community of Yalasi and Bolime, if not Nuakata—was re-created and reinforced. Once completed, however, the working group dissipated and returned to activities based in or around their own familial hamlets. With them went the visible, tangible, and practical sense of community created in the building work—so, too, our initial sense of belonging on Nuakata.

Although freely given, the gift of the house was made with some expectation of reciprocity. Along with their minimal daily payment of a small ration of tobacco in recognition of their efforts, people subsequently made requests for goods, knowing that their past labors obliged us to be generous. By freely responding to our state of dependence the workers staked a legitimate claim for our future assistance.¹⁷ Seen in this light, people's contribution to the building of the house was calculated and strategic. Indeed, some people subsequently sought to exploit their initial acts of generosity by returning to our house time and again, simply to ask for goods. Such a materialist interpretation of these events, though, belies or, at the very least, fails to capture the subtleties of the experience. Though valid, it offers a diminished explanation of the "spirit of the gift," failing to appreciate both the expectation and the intention of some of the gift-givers and recipients in anything other than logical, rational terms. For in building the house people recognized our

most basic need, and by satisfying that need honored us as they honored themselves. In this particular context, free giving was not an act that disavowed recognition and acknowledgment, but rather invited potential or ongoing interdependence. It remained for us to recognize their acts, to honor and, in some small way, reciprocate them.

Like many places throughout the Massim, houses on Nuakata were rectangular in shape and built on stumps (*logidi*) a meter or so above the ground, so that air could circulate freely through them. Ours was no exception. When high enough, the area underneath houses offered animals and people alike welcome respite from the sun or rain. Where possible, their gable roofs (*nuwanuwa*) were made of sewn sago palm leaves (*'atovi*) and their walls fashioned from the split stems of sago palms. These coverings were more durable than the coconut palm alternative, which lasted for only twelve to eighteen months. However, sago palm was not plentiful on the island, and people were often forced to use woven coconut palm as a more temporary covering for the outer walls and ceilings. Forced to survive high winds, tropical rain, intense heat, white ants, and the wear and tear associated with their human inhabitants, houses had a life span of five to ten years. While people repaired their houses, these repairs merely delayed rather than prevented their inevitable decay. Because Nuakatan houses were temporary sheltering places, left to wither away and rot when their useful life was over or when one of their occupants died, it was the land itself, rather than the structures built on it, that carried and sustained the shared, ongoing history of a given *susu*. In stories of the past, legends and ancestral histories, houses were merely incidental to the places and events described. In contrast, the land and its markers (distinctive trees, rocks, rock formations, caves, etc.) provided permanent sites of remembrance for a continuous past, present, and future history of *susu*, clans, and community.

Including an enclosed veranda, local houses commonly had three rooms separated by three-quarter-height internal sago palm walls. Therefore, with three rooms and a veranda, our house was by Nuakatan standards quite spacious. Despite our protests to the contrary, several senior men insisted that, like other *dimdim*, we needed a big house to store all our things. Moreover, they told us that, unlike Papuans, *dimdim* have a great need to be alone—a need that is satisfied by retreating inside their houses. Houses on Nuakata were used as sleeping, recuperative places rather than living, staying spaces. Most had a single open entrance (*'awa*), which could be covered by a woven coconut palm screen in the

event of bad weather or if the residents were away. Some had a sandbox hearth inside, which was lit when the sleepers were cold or sick. People rarely ventured into or gathered inside each other's houses. With the exception of those such as Wycliffe and his father, who worked inside on Bible and hymn translations, houses were rarely used as working places. People generally only remained within houses during the day to rest or take shelter. The area around rather than inside houses formed the living/staying space for each hamlet. As such, the external rather than the internal boundaries of Nuakatan houses provided a backdrop or context for people to sit, smoke, chew betel nut, talk, eat, rest, and muse.

As well as its distinct size and proposed use, there were other features that rendered our house slightly different from the usual Nuakatan dwellings. Where local houses had simple pole ladders (*'amwaha*, path) at their entrance (*'awa*, mouth), ours had flat wooden stairs, with a carefully fashioned balustrade, built to reassure and stabilize the passage of tentative *dimdim* feet. The stairs opened out onto a small porch especially designed to offer shelter for people awaiting permission to enter. At the entrance to the house there was a decorated half-door with an internal wooden latch, described to us as a deterrent to dogs, children, and other unwanted guests. Generally, only the small, single-room trade stores on Nuakata had wooden doors with padlocks. When we protested that "we don't need to keep the children out," others older and wiser pointed to the children's unguarded gaze—their unrestrained fascination with us and our things. While embarrassed at first by these conspicuous representations of our difference, we later conceded that all these concessions befitted our needs.

Responsibility for the design and construction of our house fell to an elderly man from a neighboring village, a boatbuilder affectionately known as Carpenter. He gained his nickname as a result of his training in carpentry during World War II. Showing us through the house the day before we took possession, Carpenter suggested that one room was for sleeping, one for storing our things, another for working. He strongly suggested that we place a curtain across the door of our bedroom and the storage area, so that all our things could remain hidden from view. While Nuakatan houses generally had concealed storage spaces within them, it was unusual for them to have whole rooms designated for this purpose. Apart from anything else, people did not generally have enough belongings to warrant this use of space, storing food, such as yams, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins, in yam houses on the edge of hamlets.

Sleeping Place(s)

As someone long used to a private, if not secluded, sleeping space the sleeping areas in Nuakatan houses were immediately noticeable to me. Like in so many so-called third world places, couples with children—be they parents and children, or grandparents and grandchildren—generally slept within a single room with few, if any, windows. These were highly restricted places. Unless otherwise granted permission by the adults sleeping in the house, no one other than *susu* members entered this space.¹⁸ People slept on individual sleeping mats woven from pandanus by adult women and older female adolescents. Few had sheets or mosquito nets to cover them. While most adults recognized the need to protect themselves and especially their children from mosquitoes,¹⁹ nets were generally not considered a spending priority for people's extremely limited funds.

Where possible and convenient, sexually active young men slept in bachelor houses, separate from their parents, with brothers or cousin brothers. Sexually active, unmarried young women often had their own rooms within familial houses or slept in enclosed cooking areas. More rarely they slept in otherwise vacant hamlet houses. These sleeping arrangements recognized and facilitated conventional sexual, relational practices between unmarried men and women, explained to me by young and old people alike. Their descriptions matched those of Fortune ([1932] 1989, 22) for Dobu and Munn for Gawa (1986, 35–36). Arriving under the cover of night, when the inhabitants of the hamlet had retired to sleep, a young man would quietly join his girlfriend in her room or place. He would stay with her until the early hours of the morning, stealing away before dawn when those sleeping in the hamlet stirred. There was much incentive for him to escape the hamlet undetected, because if caught by the young woman's mother or maternal kin he could be forced to compensate members of her *susu* with gifts (of yams or other highly valued food) or to marry the young woman. What was an unrestricted place for the young man by night was a highly restricted place by day. Occurring under the cover of darkness, in enclosed yet barely private rooms, the intimate relationships of the night between unmarried men and women were ostensibly invisible in the light of day. Discussed only with very close friends, these (sexual) relationships were unable to be acknowledged in any public place, day or night, without causing disrespect to the couple and their kin.²⁰

Like sexually active young women, newly married or childless couples such as Roger and I generally slept in their own room or, if possible, their own house in their respective natal hamlets. The need for a place—their own couple space—in each other's natal hamlet was deemed necessary, as young couples during the early years of marriage usually alternated their residence between their respective *susu* hamlets. Only when they had several children did they settle for more protracted periods of time on (generally) the wife's *susu* land. When I asked people to elaborate on the newlyweds' need for their own room or house when staying with kin, most looked at me as if I was stupid, their expressions implying, What can you be thinking—anyone and everyone knows young couples need their own, private space!

While certainly considered “important” at the time of our stay on Nuakata, newlyweds' need for a secluded place within each other's natal hamlet was, arguably, essential in the more distant past. Asked to remember aspects of this ill-defined “past,” Eunice confirmed what anthropologists have described for other parts of the Massim (Battaglia 1990, 31, 108–18; Fortune [1932] 1989, 6; Lepowsky 1993, 107–8). When staying with their in-laws, newly married young women were expected to prepare food, cook, collect firewood, sweep hamlet spaces, and provide garden produce for their senior female in-laws. Among other activities, young men were expected to prepare gardens, make houses, and provide fish. Both were expected to contribute to the gift exchanges of pigs and yams made by their affinal kin during mortuary feasts and to fully participate in other collective endeavors engaged in by their spouse's *susu*, such as making sago (*labiya*). During the first year or so of marriage the young man/woman could not eat in sight of his or her in-laws, and was not even entitled to share the food produced by them. Food had to be “stolen” or secreted away by the spouse, to be eaten in private. He or she was also not permitted inside the houses in the spouse's natal hamlet and was expected to tread carefully and cautiously on the in-laws' hamlet land.²¹ In short, marriage alone did not give newlyweds a respected relationship, place, and space among their affinal kin. This could only be gained by deferring and giving respect to their senior in-laws. After a year or so of marriage senior members of a *susu* would invite their new son- or daughter-in-law to eat with them. By permitting their young in-law to openly share food with them, senior in-laws declared the newlywed worthy of a legitimate place among their *susu*—as an insider/outsider prepared to work on behalf of the *susu*, rather than a stranger, neighbor, or

friend. From that moment on, the newlywed could begin to move more freely (although not without some restriction) around his or her spouse's *susu* hamlets.

Reflecting on the past relationships between newlyweds and their senior affinal kin, Eunice described them as onerous. While she acknowledged that many of these practices were continuing on Nuakata in modified ways, she implied that senior people's expectations of their junior in-laws had significantly altered over the years. A newlywed junior in-law was still expected to prove him- or herself to be hardworking and uncomplaining when staying in his or her spouse's natal hamlet, otherwise he or she would become the subject of covert (and at times overt) criticism and gossip. While a junior in-law was no longer expected to eat "stolen" food in a secluded place within an affinal hamlet during the first year or so of the marriage, he or she was generally expected to take food from the pot or communal dish after everyone else. He or she should never appear greedy. Similarly, while a junior in-law had far more freedom to move about and congregate with affinal kin within their hamlet(s), he or she was not allowed the same freedom and confidence to move about in hamlet houses as those *susu* members who belonged there. Although some of the expressions of respect had changed or been abandoned over the years, the need to maintain respect for senior affines, and indeed all senior people within the community, kin and nonkin, remained unchanged. Until new spouses had demonstrated respect for their senior in-laws by proving themselves to be hardworking and uncomplaining they occupied a marginal position, status, and praxis in their spouse's natal hamlet.²² When, later in the year, Nowel (Eunice's adopted son) and Susan married and came to live at Gohiya for a time, they had to negotiate and establish their place on Nowel's *susu* land in the ways Eunice had earlier described.

Several weeks prior to their marriage Wycliffe told us that when his father (Noah), returned from the church meeting at Bunama (southwest Normanby Island), Susan would come to live at Gohiya in recognition of their new, wedded status. While their intended marriage was news to us, it was not a complete surprise, for I had heard rumors from several women that Susan and Nowel were lovers. Several weeks earlier I had learned that Susan was pregnant. (She had one child by a previous marriage.) Wycliffe explained that "when they learned from Nowel that Susan was pregnant, his father, mother and Nowel's birth mother had met with Susan's relatives to discuss and organize the marriage." Neither

Susan nor Nowel was present at the meeting, and it was unclear to me what, if anything, they were told about its outcome. We were instructed to remain silent about these plans. Three or four days following Wycliffe's announcement, Noah returned from Bunama; still, though, no marriage occurred. Several weeks elapsed before Wycliffe arrived at our house early one morning with the news that "maybe Susan and Nowel got married last night."²³ He explained: "Yesterday as Susan was making her way back to her hamlet after church, Geteli (his sister) captured her. Susan was made to stay at Gogobohewa (Geteli's hamlet) until Nowel was brought there to take her back to Gohiya last night when it was dark." Once at Gohiya, Susan and Nowel slept together in the vacant house.

On the first day of their marriage Susan and Nowel remained together at Gohiya playing draughts all morning. This was a strange sight. Until that day Susan and Nowel had largely avoided or ignored each other in public. So this act in and of itself drew attention to their transformed relationship. In the early afternoon Nowel went off to work in his garden and Susan worked at Gohiya, preparing food for that hamlet's residents (i.e., her new in-laws). After the food preparation was completed, she swept the hamlet, washed dishes, collected firewood, and spent some time weaving new sleeping mats for herself and Nowel. When it became time to eat, she waited until everyone had sufficient food before taking some for herself. When I spoke with her later that day she explained that the marriage had occurred "according to custom." She had been surprised when Geteli "captured her," but she had been expecting something to happen—"either Nowel would have been forced to stay at her hamlet or she his." While she and Nowel had more or less chosen each other as marriage partners, they had not chosen the timing for this event. This decision rested with senior members of their respective *susu*.

Following their marriage, Susan and Nowel remained at Gohiya for five days. During this time Susan worked tirelessly around the hamlet, while Nowel went to his garden on a daily basis. Nowel's trips to the garden represented a significant change in his daily behavior. Until his marriage, Eunice had tended his garden. He had rarely ventured there, spending much of his days with his friends, playing soccer and volleyball, fishing, talking, making copra, looking for cuscus, and generally roaming about. All this changed immediately and dramatically after his marriage; so, too, his relationships with his friends and brothers. While he continued to talk and joke with them as before, he was no longer free to wan-

der around (*'ilowolowohi*) with them,²⁴ but rather was busy proving himself to be hardworking and responsible. No one found this dramatic change remarkable, although some young men with whom I spoke mourned the implications of his newfound marriage status for their friendship with him.

After their stay at Gohiya, Susan and Nowel moved to Susan's hamlet Pahilele, on the Bolime side of the island. They took with them a basket of yams, a stem of betel nut, and a rooster. These were gifts from Nowel's *susu* to Susan's. After these gifts were presented, a small party, arranged and attended by members of Susan's *susu*, was held for the newlywed couple. When Susan and Nowel returned to stay at Gohiya one month later, they brought with them a return gift for Nowel's *susu*, one that perfectly matched the original offering. Wycliffe stated that by matching the gifts equally the different *susu* showed respect for one another and recognized the mutually beneficial relationship created by the joining of one *susu* to another. Accordingly, for Susan's *susu*, not only did Susan and Nowel's marriage and pregnancy make it possible for Susan to reproduce a birth family of her own but, more important, it ensured the continuation of their *susu* in future generations. By making gardens, looking after children, and assisting members of Susan's *susu*, Nowel would also contribute to the care and sustenance of Susan's *susu*. For Nowel's *susu*, Nowel's labors with and for his in-laws could, if performed conscientiously, create a sense of indebtedness that his in-laws would feel compelled to recognize and redress. As Macintyre (1983) writes in connection with Tubetube, this sense of indebtedness may be counterbalanced by the bestowal of usufructuary land rights to the non-*susu* male—a gift that enhances his place among *susu* and affines alike. Susan's labors for Nowel's *susu* were also potentially significant, as they could relieve the burden of cooking, gardening, cleaning, and contributing to feasts carried by senior affines.

Talking Place(s)

Standing together with Carpenter on the veranda of our house the day before we moved, he explained that, unlike the rest of our house, it was a place for people to come and sit. Verandas were a common feature of Nuakatan houses, but generally only inclement weather rendered them communal spaces. Built for a communal purpose, it was perhaps not surprising, then, that—whatever the weather—our enclosed veranda was

subsequently used as a gathering place. And, unlike many other people—particularly older men, and women of all ages—the men who worked on the house subsequently felt free to congregate there without any sense of embarrassment, presumption or trespass. Similarly, young people also felt free to congregate on the verandas in the young men’s house at Gohiya, the junior pastor’s cookhouse at Asa’ailo church, or indeed other “bachelor” houses located elsewhere on the island. There they talked soccer, told stories, played cards or draughts, or listened to music with friends. Married people, whatever their age, shared no such ease inside the houses of their affines or friends. Their activities and freedom to associate wherever they wished seemed constrained by marital, affinal, and *susu* responsibilities. Those houses where married or senior adults and their children slept seemed highly restricted places. Only those who slept in them had freedom to move within their confines. Others, including other *susu* members, moved within them only upon invitation.

Cooking Place(s)

Once our house was completed and just before we moved in, a small three-walled kitchen (cooking shelter) was erected beside it. Built at ground level on a bed of dirty gray sand, this shelter was, at different times, claimed as a home by several flea-infested dogs and extravagantly colored snakes. Of these, the fleas were the most successful and persistent squatters. The floor was subsequently covered by crushed coral in an effort to still the fine clouds of dirt stirred up by the slightest movement of people or animals. Although small by Nuakatan standards, our cooking shelter was by no means unusual. Many hamlets had enclosed cooking houses, several, including Carpenter’s, with makeshift ovens made from concrete and/or tin drums. Cooking pots, enamel dishes, and an assortment of crockery were also stacked inside these areas on specially built shelves made from coconut palm. So, while our cooking house was not unusual, it was more common for people to cook outside on a fire lit between three stones, positioned in a sheltered area close to the house. Because the area close to the fire was often a focal point for people to come and sit, and because sparks from fires represent a threat to people’s houses, women kept these areas meticulously clean, constantly clearing away food scraps and other debris. Such cleaning efforts were complemented by scavenging hamlet pigs, dogs, chickens, and, occasionally, cats.

The decision as to where to place a cooking fire was generally made by the women of the hamlet. Rolling the three stones into a triangular configuration, roughly eight inches apart, they nonchalantly rocked them to and fro until satisfied that their position would ensure optimal heat and stability for the cooking pots. When Roger and I first attempted to position stones in this way, our efforts were met with laughter and disbelief by several onlooking women. Incredulous, they were at a loss to explain why such a simple activity, so taken for granted by them, was so difficult for us. What was a fluid, seemingly unthinking activity for them was for us a measured and quite difficult task—one requiring several attempts and much discussion. When we attempted to solicit these and other women's knowledge and expertise about making good fires, they only laughed more and urged us to watch and then copy them when they did it again. Where we attempted to extract and abstract knowledge, rules, and guidelines for making good fires, they simply urged us to make one—to know by doing (see Jackson 1989, 119–55). Much the same occurred when we initially attempted to light fires, scrape coconut flesh, when I peeled and cut vegetables or supported small baskets on or from my head. Our ways—more particularly my ways, for all these activities were typically engaged in by female children and young and older women on Nuakata—lacked local women's rhythm, style, and strength. My movements embodied the differences between us—differences in doing, living, and knowing that arose in the present, but embodied a distinct past and foreshadowed distinct futures. For example, I was told that I could not carry heavy baskets on my head for I had not done this as a small girl and young adult as local women had done. Therefore, I could not hope to carry heavy baskets at my age. Basket carrying aside, I could transcend some of the differences in doing, living, and knowing between myself and other women by making fires, collecting appropriate firewood, and, eventually, by making fires as they did. My participation in activities typically associated with women on Nuakata was encumbered by my ethnographic agenda to decipher or entice people to reveal the meaning or symbolic significance of the activity we were engaged in—to separate out what is known through the body and what is understood by the mind. This even when I, like Jackson, rejected a way of thinking about symbols that

ranks the idea over the event or object, while privileging the expert who deciphers the idea even though he or she may be quite unable to

use the object or participate in the “symbolic” event. In short, I object to the notion that one aspect of a symbol is prior to or foundational of the other. . . . In my view, utterances and body movements betoken the continuity of body-mind, and it is misleading to see the body as simply a representation of a prior idea or implicit cultural pattern. Persons actively body forth the world; their bodies are not passively shaped by or made to fit the world’s purposes. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can.’” (Jackson 1989, 136)

Seeing Places

Aware that “*dimdim* like windows,” Carpenter had asked us how many we wanted and where we would like them placed in the house. Mindful of the need for ventilation and, as he had discerned, wanting to look outward, to glimpse the beautiful view of ocean and trees, to observe what was going on around us, we asked for five windows. Carpenter’s expression of surprise indicated that we had asked for more than even he had anticipated, more than he considered necessary or appropriate. Local houses had few windows. Conversations with Eric (the island’s land mediator and a practitioner of local medicine) and Wycliffe suggested that this may be a legacy of the fragile yet lingering belief—perhaps more aptly described as a doubtful suspicion—that flying witches enter houses at night while people are sleeping, causing sickness to some or all of the inhabitants. This, I was told, was one reason why people preferred not to sleep alone. Eric and Wycliffe claimed that some people attempted to prevent these unwelcome intrusions by making protective magic to render their houses invisible to these malevolent spirits.

Wanting our house to be close to the beach, we had asked Carpenter and the other senior men to construct it about thirty meters from the water’s edge and with windows facing the sea. The other four houses in Gohiya at the time were clustered together close to the undergrowth, toward the foot of a large hill. Worried our house (if positioned where we had suggested) would be buffeted by cyclonic winds and lashed by rain coming in off the sea, the senior men decided to build it midway between the shore and the other houses. In the end, none of the windows faced the sea. When high winds and sheeting rain arrived sometime in April, we quickly understood why many of our requests about window placement had been ignored. We realized too that, as people live outside and around

rather than inside their houses, decisions about the number and placement of windows are not determined by the need to maximize natural light or provide the most favorable, unrestricted outlook from the house!

It was not until much later in the year, though, and in a very different context, that I began to appreciate how strange our request for a framed vision of the sea must have seemed to our hosts. Often when walking with people, resting on a ridge or saddle of a hill before making our descent, my companions invariably stood on the path, head down catching their breath, while I, more exhausted than they, would wander off to take in the view of the undergrowth below and the sea, dotted by distant islands, stretching out to the horizon. On one such occasion—a fine, sun-drenched day—Wycliffe, Roger, and I stood on the ridge overlooking the bejeweled waters of Hapela‘awa‘awa bay, on the northwest side of the island. The trees in the foreground acted as a frame to our view of the dazzling bay. Taken by the beauty of this scene, Roger and I were surprised when our exclamations to this effect were met with indifference from Wycliffe. The conversation that followed underscored the multidimensional nature of his (in)difference.

Wycliffe explained that people on Nuakata rarely noticed or drew attention to the beauty of the scene, partly because these scenes were familiar, and therefore unnoticed, but also because the word they might use to say that something looks good (*namwanamwa*) is not equivalent to the English word *beautiful*. Rather, it means “good, right, and proper relations,” something like “in harmony with.” Wycliffe implied that the view from afar, the view looking down upon—indeed, the whole idea of a detached view of a beautiful vista—was not highly valued on Nuakata. This, it seemed, was not their preferred perspective. He added that people would rather be paddling on the sea, or in it, fishing, diving, or (especially the children) swimming. Only then might they feel moved to exclaim of the sea that “its appearance is good” (*‘ana ‘ita namwanamwana*).

These reflections were as much a comment about a participatory relational aesthetics as they were a participatory knowledge and knowing. They brought to mind Jackson’s experience with his daughter when doing fieldwork in Firawa.

Not long after beginning fieldwork in Firawa in 1969, I, a creature of a deeply ingrained cultural habit, climbed the hill overlooking the village to *get things into perspective* by distancing myself from them. From the

hilltop, I surveyed the village, took panoramic photographs, and achieved my bird's-eye view, believing that my superior position would help me gain *insights* into the organization of the village, when, in fact, it was making me lose *touch* with it. Ten years later I was living in Firawa with my wife and daughter, Heidi. One evening Heidi and I climbed the hill above the village. No one else ever did . . . I asked Heidi what she thought of the view. "It's all right," she said, "except you can't see anyone in the village from here." And indeed there was no human movement visible; only the smoke from cooking fires. (1989, 8, emphasis in original)

Jackson notes that ten years together with long experience living with people in the village had given him a different orientation to both the village and to knowledge and knowing. In this time, and through his lived experiences with these people, he had "cease[d] to be a detached observer and become a part of Firawi" (Jackson 1989, 8). He "recognized the village as a second home," as a "*lived space*" that can be understood from within and among, rather than looking (down) upon it from above and afar (see de Certeau 1988). Following Dewey (1929), Bourdieu (1977), Fabian (1983), and Foucault (1980), among a coterie of others, he eschewed "the spectator theory of knowledge," the theory of knowledge that privileged vision as a means of knowing and controlling how and what can be known. Instead, he sought a means of understanding that relies on all five senses and arises from lived experience. He sought to reclaim an understanding of knowledge as a "mode of being-together-with" (Jackson 1989, 8), of living together with.

All this caused me to think again about windows, the way windows are used in Nuakatan houses and the way Roger and I used the windows in our house. As people rarely stayed in their houses during the day, there was little opportunity or inclination for them to look out from within on what was happening outside. Indeed, as Wycliffe's comments about the view suggested, this was clearly not their preferred perspective. But when, on the odd occasion, someone did look out from a window, his or her body would invariably be extended outside as far as possible, minimizing the distance between the self and the world outside and eliminating some of the restrictions to vision posed by the window frame. Necessary for ventilation, windows were also used to throw or pass things in and out of houses. As such, these framed spaces did not represent imper-

meable divisions between the inside and outside of the house. As our time on Nuakata progressed Roger and I also found ourselves using them in this way. In fact, apart from our early weeks at Gohiya, we rarely used our windows to look out at what was going on, preferring to move out of the house to look and/or participate in what was happening. Used for looking out upon the outside world, our windows positioned us inside and at a distance from the people and places beyond their frames. It seemed that our original desire for windows, reflecting an impulse to observe living places at a distance, to map rather than live in or embody the place, was receding.

Living Places

Known as *ba'uba'uyai*, the area in front of houses and adjacent to the path that circumnavigates the island was communal space where people gathered freely without inhibition or restraint. The area in front of our house and behind the other houses at Gohiya was no exception. A particularly large, sandy space, it was perfect for volleyball games, kick-to-kick soccer, or marbles. Later in the year some of the children played night chasy between the darkness and a beam of light cast onto the space by our Coleman lamp. When games of volleyball involving large numbers of young people occurred there, older men and women would posit themselves on the margins of this space, in the shade of a tree or under the young men's house at Gohiya. Seated there, talking, laughing, or making asides about the games, they invariably ground away at betel nuts using a diverse assortment of mortars and pestles, the slow, rhythmic pounding of nuts providing a counterpoint to the frenetic movement of the players.

In contrast to the *ba'uba'uyai* space in front of our house, the area behind it (close to a small creek) was not treated as a communal area. With the exception of Wycliffe's family, people only ventured there if Roger or I was present. Although perhaps more cautious and tentative in relation to our house and its immediate surrounds, people's movements in nonfamilial hamlets were marked by a similar observance of palpable yet invisible boundaries. For example, if the land between houses was a communal path, then people walking through the hamlet congregated in these areas without hesitation. However, in hamlets where this was not the case, generally only *susu*, affinal relatives, close friends, and in some

cases neighbors moved freely yet respectfully in these familiar spaces. Non-kin tended to wait for an invitation, be it verbal or nonverbal, to enter enclosed or semienclosed hamlet cooking areas. This was especially true when people were eating. Neighbors or visitors hovered around on the margins or wandered off, waiting for the meal's completion before joining them.

Clearly, these boundaries between the inside and outside of the house, the front and back of the hamlet, or between houses were not static or fixed. They remained permeable to *susu*, semipermeable to affinal kin, and a discernible restraint to all the other visitors who entered a given hamlet. But they reflect even more subtle matrilineal relationship divisions and distinctions than this suggests. As already alluded to, boundaries shift according to a person's age, current relational status, and also the particular occasion or time of day or year. Only the *susu* of a given hamlet can facilitate boundary crossings for nonkin visitors. Transgression of these boundaries by adults is most often expressed by gestures of disapproval and the language of silence. Children and visiting anthropologists alike learn these boundaries through experience, over time.

Battaglia (1990, 31) claims that on Sabarl, hamlet spaces and dwellings are gendered places. For example, she states that the interior of hamlet houses is "the domain of feminine activity and influence" as is the "shady underside of the house where women gather to talk and tend their children." In contrast, the "bright, hot exterior space, and all that is public, including the shell of the house" are said to have "masculine connotations" (1990, 32). On Nuakata I found no clear evidence of a simple public/private gendered division of space. Males and females alike moved through hamlet spaces with similar constraints and freedom. Certainly gardens were women's domain, the site of their knowledge, expertise, and work. Even these, though, were not exclusively female realms. Men always assisted in garden preparation, and many married men tended their own yam, sweet potato, or tapioca gardens. Perhaps it could be argued, however, that areas within a given hamlet are gendered spaces at specific times of the day or in specific contexts. For example, women rise early, often long before men, and wash dishes left from the meal on the previous night. Clothing may be washed, fires lit, and food prepared long before others rise. In this sense it is a female time of day, oriented around the hearth, the clothesline, and the shelf where dishes are stored. Similarly, during parties in which food is prepared, women hover around the rear of the hamlet, near the kitchen or hearth while the food is cooking.

Men usually stay well clear of these areas and activities, except if they are directly involved in killing, butchering, or cooking pigs.

Walking Place(s)

Paths (*'amwaha*)²⁵ lead into and out of hamlets in all directions. Some connect with the main path that traces its way around the island. Others lead directly to gardens, neighbor's hamlets, or areas where people defecate and urinate. Still other paths weave their way inland, over mountain saddles to the other sides of the island. People use communal paths linking the various sides of the island, even where these paths deviate through or cross hamlet land. Tracks linking neighboring hamlets are generally used by their respective inhabitants. Although other people are free to use these paths, they usually enter non-*susu* hamlets by the most communal route. Paths to gardens are used by the owners and custodians of the land (*susu* and their immediate affinal kin). Others are not strictly forbidden to venture on them, but they would rarely have good cause to take themselves to nonkin land. People say that in the past, and to a limited extent today, many people protected their gardens and the paths leading to them with magic. Non-kin outsiders must, therefore, approach these areas with some trepidation or, at the very least, respect for they risk persistent illness if they become ensnared in this magic. Paths leading up into the bush where people defecate or urinate are used by *susu* and affinal kin. Visitors may venture inland for these purposes, but they generally use communal land or return to their own land to relieve themselves.

And so, while paths connect or join people to places and one another, they also divide the social and physical landscape, testifying to matrilineal organization and communal relationships that inscribe differences on the land. Paths are boundary markers, but they are also transitional spaces. Distinctions between the four sides of the island, kin and nonkin, friend and acquaintance, neighbor and nonneighbor, communal and familial, are not only encoded on these pathways but also reinforced by people's movement along them. Paths that by day hold little fear for the traveler may become places of fear and dread for the lone walker at night. Movement, plays of light, smell, sounds, and undergrowth spill over into these cleared spaces posing an unseen, invisible threat. In this context fear is grounded in the belief, or surviving remnants of the belief, that witches roam these paths at night, seeking out and performing bad magic upon the vulnerable walker.

Moving Place(s): Making House(s) (a) Living Space

On the actual day of our move to Gohiya we rose early and hastily packed away our sleeping gear. By the time we had finished breakfast, a small crowd of helpers had arrived—members of Wycliffe’s family and their immediate neighbors. As box after box was carried out of the church house, a steady procession of our possessions trailed along the path to Gohiya. Embarrassed by this conspicuous display of material belongings, I hid inside the pastor’s house, ostensibly dismantling our mosquito net. As I fiddled with the net, an earlier conversation with Wycliffe gnawed away at me. When asked about the difference between Nuakatans and *dimdim* he commented with words to the effect that

during the 1940s a Papuan man was sentenced to death in Port Moresby. In his defence he produced two sweet potatoes: one brown, one white. Cutting them in half, showing them to the crowd, he said, “You see, both are red inside.” This is what I think about *dimdim* and Papuans—they are different on the outside, but on the inside they share the same blood. Apart from this, the main difference between *dimdim* and Papuans is things. *Dimdim* have more things for themselves. We sometimes call Papuans who get and keep things for themselves *dova dimdim* [like white people].

Wycliffe had stated what Carpenter had implied in the design of our house: that the way things are possessed constitutes the most significant difference between Papuans and *dimdim*. It is not merely that *dimdim* have more things, but, more important, that they get and keep, procure and store this “more” for themselves. Thinking about his comments later that day as we unpacked the boxes of food in the storage room and positioned the trunk of books on the veranda, I realized that in many ways our belongings both constituted and constrained our sense of belonging on Nuakata. Unsure of local food supplies and believing it presumptuous to expect people to feed us, we had arrived on Nuakata with enough rice, tinned fish, coffee, and tea to sustain ourselves for eight weeks.

As it turned out, our decision was vindicated, for a drought in the previous year had delivered an extremely poor harvest. For the first three months of our stay people mainly ate tapioca, coconut, and, in the first six weeks, a small amount of seasonal fruit. Fishing was irregular during this time. While seemingly necessary, our “things” effectively rendered us

independent, self-sufficient, and without genuine need of other people's support. In other words, our things assumed the place of people; they replaced or substituted for people, especially kin. Perhaps this explained why people had not yet questioned us about Australia and, more particularly, our families in Australia; why at times we felt like we were considered totally independent, autonomous people who had materialized from nowhere and no one in particular. Perhaps people believed that we treated our anonymous possessions as constitutive, inalienable, or indissociable aspects of our selves; that we possessed our things like they possess body parts, spirit, *susu*, clan, and affinal relationships. Our things, rather than the relationships that produced them, were our belongings. Relations with inanimate things rather than animate people defined and identified us; it seemed our things erased the desire, or at least need, for relationships. (Possession of this kind is not to be imagined as proprietary; see Strathern 1988, 158.) Although this was all mere speculation on my part, it served to remind me that if we were to realize our hope for a new-found sense of belonging, the way we negotiated our relationship to the things in our possession would be crucial.

Living at Gohiya at the time of our move was Wycliffe's mother, Eunice, a woman in her early fifties, birth mother of eight, adoptive mother of one, and the most senior member of the matrilineage staying in the hamlet.²⁶ The land at Gohiya belonged to her *susu* and, more broadly, the Bo'e or Black Crow clan—the smallest of the five clans represented on the island. Across the island there are seven hamlets currently located on Bo'e territorial land. Many years earlier Eunice's matrilineal forebears had secured the land at Gohiya by making a gift of pigs, yams, *mwali* (Kula arm shells), and *bagi* (Kula necklaces) to the original owners (see Macintyre 1983). It was unclear to me how binding this exchange would be in the future. While in the past this was a conventional means of transferring land between clans, the land mediator, Eric, informed me that arrangements such as these were now a common source of dispute and conflict between clans across Nuakata.

Eunice, her elder sister Malida, and elder brother Hosea were themselves the senior owners of significant tracts of Yalasi land. In 1991 they gave some of this land to the Yalasi church at Asa'ailo, and some had been acquired by other *susu*/clans, as Eunice's forebears had done for Gohiya. Eunice's *susu* occupied four hamlets on their land: Gogobohewa, where her brother lived; Gohiya; Hagovi 1, where Malida and her husband, Antiya, lived; and Hagovi 2. Of these, Gohiya—located in the

middle and separated from the others by a ten-minute walk and several neighboring hamlets on either side—was the focal hamlet, at least during our stay on Nuakata. This, though, was not the case in past generations. Eunice indicated that Gogobohewa was the place where the family first settled on the island—the place where memories of their forebears coalesced. Some of these memories she preferred to forget. Based at Gogobohewa, her mother’s generation were notorious sorcerers and witches, “humbug people” by Eunice’s account. In settling at Gohiya, and not Gogobohewa, Eunice had determined to put distance between herself and the past relationships and practices of some of her forebears.

Also living at Gohiya at the time of our move was Eunice’s husband, Noah, whose maternal and paternal kin came from Bunama on the south coast of Normanby Island. A church elder and former primary school teacher, he spent his days writing hymns, doing Bible translation work, attending church meetings, baby-sitting one or more of his grandchildren, and occasionally assisting his wife in one of her gardens. Although a senior member of his own matrilineage, Noah had lived at Gohiya for over thirty years. His story was by no means unusual among those men who had come to Nuakata to live when they married. Newly married couples generally move between the husband’s and the wife’s village for the first years of their marriage. They often stay for several months in one place, maybe longer, before shifting again. But when people such as Noah marry partners from other islands they tend to stay in each other’s place for extended periods of time before moving. This pattern may continue for many years until they have many children, at which point the couples tend to establish themselves on the land of the wife’s *susu*, either in an existing village or a new one.

Gohiya was then also home to three of Eunice and Noah’s six sons—Washington (twenty-seven, divorced);²⁷ Roger (Waligeha) (twenty-four); Nowel (twenty-three)—and their grandson, Sydney, aged nine. Noah, Eunice, and Sydney slept in one house, while the three young men slept in another. Eunice and Noah’s youngest child (a daughter, Eba, fifteen) was living on the mainland at Alotau, where she attended Cameron High School. Their second-born daughter Jane (twenty-eight) and her husband, John, were attending a Bible college at Bunama on Normanby Island. They returned to Gohiya during term holidays. At that time their seventh-born child—a son, Misaki (twenty-two)—was living with senior Waligeha, his wife Sinetana, and their daughter Viki (thirteen), a ten-minute walk away at Hagovi. For several weeks at a time the fifth-born

child of Eunice and Noah, Douglas (twenty-five)—together with his wife, Penina, and their two small children, Bunedia (six) and Jema (two)—would come to stay. And a month or so after our move, Wycliffe returned to Gohiya to live. Eunice gardened, cooked, and washed for them all!

These fluid living arrangements were by no means uncommon on Nuakata. Apart from the daily responsibilities and obligations associated with subsistence and child care, *susu* and affinal relationships ebb and flow with the weather and the seasons. The harvest of highly valued and storable root crops, such as yams, sweet potato, taro, and pumpkin, occurs in the months between July and September/October. At this time women are often assisted in their gardens ('*oyai*') by their spouses, older children, and other *susu* men. Prior to the harvest proper, husbands and/or *susu* men may build a new yam/food house to store the crop. In the months following the harvest, from October through January, new gardens are cleared, burned, and organized in preparation for the planting of the new crop. It is primarily men's responsibility to prepare new gardens, and as this involves extremely strenuous activity, *susu* and affinal men work together to clear the land—felling and burning the trees and undergrowth. Women assist the men as they work and also provide food for all the workers. At this time of year it is work that draws families together. December, January, and February are generally very hot, still months. Women rise even earlier than usual and go alone to their gardens, returning to the village before the hottest part of the day. Afternoons are often spent sitting in the shade talking and chewing betel nut with neighbors and kin. Children play together in the water, men may dive on the reefs, and, if there is a breeze, young men go sailing in their *sailau*, or sailing canoes. Cyclonic weather patterns are a feature of the months between April and October. This is also the season for the south-east wind—a wind that sweeps across both the Yalasi and Bolime sides of the island. During this time strong winds often prevent men from fishing, thereby significantly reducing the level of protein in people's diet.

In the days and weeks immediately following the move to Gohiya a tide of depression swept over Roger and me. Having anticipated intimacy with Wycliffe's family, that we would experience a newfound sense of belonging, we were initially disappointed. For at least two or three weeks we were given a wide and respectful berth by the older generation, particularly Wycliffe's mother and big mother who did not venture near our house. Not knowing our place with Wycliffe's mother and father, we in

turn remained at a distance, making only very tentative gestures toward them when they were sitting/staying close to their house at the rear of the hamlet. During this time Roger continued to be called *'waligeba* by Wycliffe's family and affines, and I became nameless to most adults, *dimdim* to the children, and on occasions *'waligeba* or *'waligeba mwana* (namesake's wife) to Wycliffe's kin. Our place, our belonging among Wycliffe's *susu*, remained undefined and undeclared. Still holding to a rather essentialist, proprietorial view of land and self, we had assumed that people's and, especially, our belonging resided in locating themselves/ourselves on the land, rather than in the living relationships between *susu* and affines forged on, in, and through the land.

No longer distracted by the house building and regular trips across to the aid post, I was also forced to confront the full irony of my situation. Doing a project primarily committed to the study of women, I found myself in a hamlet where I was one of two females! Added to this, my research assistant was a male, and I was potentially a fictive affine! Although I could see the humor of my situation, and although I knew that my plight was by no means uncommon for fieldworkers, this knowledge did not relieve my dilemma. I was uncertain what to do next. How and with whom could I do as women do on Nuakata?

For a long time after our move, Eunice's work, like the work of other women, remained more or less invisible to me. Rising around daybreak, she often greeted the day before her tardy and contrary roosters and long before others in the village. Staggering from my bed after these same perverse roosters had gathered under our house to announce a dawn already past, I would look out the window, only to catch sight of Eunice, bush knife in hand and *boha* (garden bag) on her back, setting out for one of her gardens. Behind her, washing would be done and left hanging limply on the line. The dishes from the evening meal would also be washed and stacked to dry. All this before her husband, five sons, and grandson had barely stirred. Not so in Geteli's hamlet Gogobohewa, a kilometer away. There Geteli and her husband, Justin, were woken early by the demands of a hungry breast-fed baby and four other small children. Where possible, one or occasionally both of them would steal away to their gardens around dawn, returning in the early morning before Linda, their eldest child, had left for school. When the weather was favorable, Justin often paddled his canoe out of the bay and fished while the water was still calm. Otherwise gardening was postponed to around 7:30 or 8:00 A.M., when the children had eaten and Noah, their maternal grandfather, was

able to look after the baby. While I often did not see Geteli trek to one of her gardens on the steep slopes at the back of Gohiya, the lilting sound of Noah singing a lullaby over and over again to the baby told me she was there.

Given Eunice's obvious work load, I was reluctant to add to her burden by trailing along beside her as she went about her daily tasks. And opportunities were few to accompany my immediate neighbors on their regular treks to the garden. Like Eunice, they rose around dawn and set out alone for their gardens to complete their work before the rising sun brought the full heat of the day. Paths that just prior to dawn carried a traffic of single young men returning from their sexual forays in the hamlets of their girlfriends were suddenly alive with young and old women intent upon the garden work that lay ahead of them. Many hours later these same women returned, often cast in a stoop by the weight of garden produce bursting from *boha'wo*, bags strung around their shoulders and foreheads. No one rushed to relieve their burden, for it was considered theirs alone to carry. Longing to accompany them to these invisible yet seemingly bountiful places and eager to learn about this pivotal aspect of their daily work I approached Geteli, who had befriended me, and asked if I could accompany her when she went to her gardens. Geteli was bemused by my request. "Why?" she said. "Because I want to see and understand your work," I managed to reply in faltering Alina Nu'ata. Geteli exclaimed with words to the effect, "But there is nothing to see!" Laughing, she agreed to take me several days later. That day came and went without the trip eventuating. My disappointment was relieved by the knowledge that, like Eunice, Geteli's heavy work load, caring for and feeding her five children, husband, maternal uncle Hosea, and elderly adoptive father, was constant. Her days were filled with gardening, food preparation, washing dishes and clothes in the creek, breast-feeding, and tending to the sporadic needs of her other children. Undeterred, I decided to make another arrangement with her; and I also decided to ask Sine-liko—a young woman who lived in a neighboring hamlet.