

## *Chapter One*



# Tracing Nuakata

## *Arriving*

As the plane began its descent toward Gurney airstrip on the outskirts of Alotau, I pressed my face to the glass straining to catch a glimpse of the view. The Owen Stanley Ranges stretched out to the west, while directly below us, at their foothills, oil palm plantations gave the landscape a strange uniformity, broken only by small village settlements and the eddies of dust churned by cars rocketing along unmade roads. To the east, coconut palms bordered Milne Bay, visible only as a sliver bathed in afternoon sun. After a year of frustration waiting for the research visa it was difficult to believe that we were finally arriving in Milne Bay Province. And difficult, too, to match my porthole impressions with those given to me by my father. Some fifty years earlier, in the dead of a stormy night, he had looked out from the airforce plane to see darkness punctuated by a row of lights. Believing it was the Gurney airstrip, the pilot descended, only to discover that the lights were hurricane lamps shining from within American army tents. The plane crash-landed at the end of the row. Remarkably, no lives were lost. A young and nervous conscript, this was the inauspicious beginning to my father's nine months' stay in Milne Bay, remembered mainly for rain, mud, malaria, and "friendly natives." How strange it was to find myself retracing his footsteps and in circumstances so utterly removed from his own. Given the circumstances of my arrival, how would I remember Milne Bay and some of its people?

Waiting for us at the airport was Linda, a missionary based at Diwala, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Translators) compound on the outskirts of Alotau. As for many anthropologists, the relationships between ourselves and some local missionaries proved crucial

to the fieldwork. In our case, their practical and emotional support was invaluable and gratefully received. With these people we subsequently exchanged experiences and some shared understanding of daily life in remote and unfamiliar rural/island communities, negotiating the lack of familiar food and resources, the trials of language learning, sickness, and homesickness. But these were also disturbing and confronting alliances. While friendly and respectful, these relationships were haunted by a largely unspoken sense of mutual suspicion—a suspicion between anthropologists and missionaries with long-standing historical antecedents and well-rehearsed themes. Offspring of colonialism, each has cast the other as the errant sibling. Accordingly, each of the eight or so missionaries with whom we had significant contact articulated variations of the following refrain:

Anthropologists often have a remarkable understanding of the culture of the people with whom they work. This is astounding, given their relatively short periods of time in the field compared with missionaries, their inadequate knowledge of the language, and their lack of substantial or ongoing practical and material commitment to the people with whom they work. Anthropologists use their research to further their careers, often showing little concern for the consequences of their research in the places where they do fieldwork. They sometimes attempt to revive extant cultural knowledge and practices of, for example, witchcraft and sorcery, thereby legitimating the (demonic and) potentially deadly practices which missionaries and government service providers have worked long and hard to eradicate.<sup>1</sup> This is indicative of a moral relativism which is reinforced by romanticized views of local people and their cultural practices. They perceive change and development as necessarily negative. Finally, many anthropologists have betrayed the friendships and support they have received from missionaries, by criticizing their work in their texts.

Recognizing these comments as truisms that preclude subtle debate, it was only through subsequent conversations and experience with local people that we realized that our own refrain on Melanesian missionaries was also simplistic:<sup>2</sup>

There is much to be admired about the long-standing commitment of missionaries to the people with whom they work, including their

knowledge of the local language, and their efforts to provide practical assistance to the communities with which they work. However, they continue to enliven prejudicial and disempowering colonial relationships by foisting their evangelical agendas on people. Often patronizing, if not at times racist, they show only selective interest in, and respect for, local cultural knowledge and practice.

Not only did we harbor ahistorical and deterministic ideas about the colonizing role of contemporary foreign missionaries, but we also had not been willing to believe that the Milne Bay churches have “in many ways . . . ceased to be an alien presence” (Thune 1990, 104).<sup>3</sup>

Several days after our arrival in Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province, we met with the provincial secretary to seek approval to conduct fieldwork on one of three previously nominated islands. He was a genial man who made us feel immediately welcome. A public servant and political appointee of the national government, he was suspended three weeks later in the wake of political conflict between the provincial and national governments. Anxious, expecting to be told where I was permitted to conduct research, we were somewhat surprised by the conversation that unfolded: “So, where do you want to go?”

“If possible, we would like to go to Nuakata.”

“Nuakata?—Nuakata?” He reached for a map. Like most local people we had met in Alotau, the Provincial Secretary had not even heard of Nuakata. As he placed the map on the coffee table between us, I pointed to a small speck at latitude 10°17′S and longitude 151°01′E, and repeated a well-practiced line: “It is a small island that lies in the Goschen Strait of the Solomon Sea, between East Cape [the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea] and Normanby Island. It is roughly thirty miles from Alotau and fifteen kilometers east of East Cape.”

“So why do you want to go to Nuakata in particular?”

“I would like to study health, particularly women’s health in relation to pregnancy and birth. Because Nuakata is relatively close to Alotau, it is ideal for researching the relationship between mainland, Western-style medical services and traditional medicine. Anthropologists who have worked in this region say that little is known about the island. Given Nuakata’s location, it has a surprisingly marginal status in the Province.”

The conversation continued for a while, before the secretary extended his best wishes for the research, directed us to meet with a senior administrator in the health department, and bid us farewell. Final provincial

approval had been granted, and we were free to travel to Nuakata and seek permission from the local community.

Our conversation with the health department administrator assumed a different tenor. Present with us in the tiny office were two senior health department officials, summoned to attend the meeting. Sandwiched between them, all of us facing the administrator, I could hear myself and then Roger speaking as if to persuade and convince. The administrator assumed control, plying me with questions about my research intentions. To my surprise, he revealed that he had lived on Nuakata when he was a child. He had not been back since that time; indeed, he had not been back to his mother's village on a nearby island for over twenty-five years. He told us that his education had taken him far afield to universities in places beyond Papua New Guinea. It had given him many things, both material and intellectual. Although irrevocably changed by the paths he had taken, his longing for the people and places of his childhood had never been extinguished. But the changes in him, his material and intellectual wants and needs, had become immovable obstacles blocking his return to the village. His was a homeless longing. Could we understand this? Could we write of this dilemma?

Returning to my proposed research he voiced his deep suspicion of anthropologists: "Many do not use their research findings to help the people they have lived with and many never return to the places once they have left." As evidence of this, he spoke of Malinowski and several unnamed German anthropologists who had worked on the Trobriand Islands. I was stuck for words. An inexperienced, though not uninformed or disempowered ethnographer, I was made to contemplate and bear the practical and discursive "sins" of my mostly nameless anthropological forebears. They resounded in my mind like a list of prior convictions read before a court: accessory-after-the-fact to Western colonialism through the production of orientalist, essentialist, and primitivist texts (Carrier 1992; Young 1992, 195); failure to inform participants of the purpose and outcome of study; failure to observe a duty of care for the living dilemmas faced by informants.

Although aware of my potentially compromised and compromising endeavor, I remained convinced of the need to tell the story of the encounter between small-scale, materially impoverished societies and those powerful societies conventionally, but problematically, termed the West (Gewertz and Errington 1991a, 3; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Taussig 1993). It was my intention to research and write on Nuakata and its peo-

ple in a way that might value and promote their attempts to maintain autonomy in the midst of economic globalization (Gewertz and Errington 1991a). But faced with the administrator's accusations, my well-meaning (and what I later recognized as misplaced) intentions seemed like a lame offering. At the same time I wondered about the administrator's suspicion of anthropologists. Was his inability to return to his village relevant? Had his education and life-style removed him from his past, his kin, his people? Did we share different, yet related, struggles to make our work and research helpful to local people? Perhaps we were both engaged in compromising endeavors?

Searching for an adequate response, I agreed that some ethnographers had failed the people with whom they researched and voiced my hope that I would be different. At this point the administrator invited the senior health department officials to speak. Both bore obvious ill-feeling, greeting my proposed research with a disinterest that bordered on cynicism, even contempt. Staring at me, pausing as if for effect, one finally asked, "I know what we'll get out of it, but what will *you* get out of it?" "A Ph.D.," was my faltering reply. When I tentatively suggested a meeting with them to discuss regional health matters both agreed, but claimed they were too busy to make immediate plans. Faced with this perceived hostility I did not pursue further contact with them.

The tension was relieved by the arrival of Jennifer Henry, the health extension officer for Alotau District, including Nuakata. Jennifer was directed to assist us with our preparations to go to Nuakata. Having agreed to meet with the administrator before we returned to Australia, we departed with Jennifer, who talked with us for an hour or so—just long enough for the tension associated with the previous meeting to ebb away. My memory of that exchange proved harder to dispel. It remained indelibly etched into my mind—as a caution, a dare that challenges me anew as I write. Ironically, when the time came for us to leave Papua New Guinea, the administrator had been replaced by someone who showed only polite interest in my research.

During our conversation Jennifer told us that her mother came from Nuakata. Wanting to see her and needing to settle a long-running land dispute at the Nuakata aid post, she offered to accompany us to the island, so that I could seek permission to do the fieldwork. We could travel there on her brothers' *subu*—two canoes covered and joined by a flat wooden shelf and powered by a small outboard motor. We leaped at the offer. Two weeks later, in the midafternoon of 23 January 1993, we

set out for Nuakata together with Jennifer and her infant daughter, her cousin-sister Anne, and fifteen or so Nuakatan women and children, who had been in Alotau selling garden produce at the market. Among them only Anne and Jennifer seemed to speak English. Together with their baggage, all the women and children squeezed under a tentlike canopy erected toward the bow of the boat. Keen to catch the view, we perched ourselves near the stern on top of several bags of betel nut. As the *subu* pulled away from the dock Roger and I felt a surge of nervous excitement. The waiting and anticipating was nearly over. Nuakata was before us, some eight or nine hours away.

Leaving Alotau behind we began our slow journey out along the bay. Ahead of us on the water was a small motorized workboat, one of many that regularly ply the waters between the mainland and the eighty-three or so islands that constitute what anthropologists term the Massim area of Milne Bay Province. I use the term *boat* reluctantly, for this vessel, like so many we had seen at Alotau's Sanderson Bay wharf, was a miserable imitation of a small seagoing craft. Fashioned with seaworthy intent, its flaking paint, rotting timbers, and exhausted diesel engine had long defeated this promise. Later when we traveled on similar vessels—overloaded with cargoes of people and goods—we discovered that life jackets, flares, life rafts, and buoys were nonexistent. Island people face considerable risks when they undertake these boat journeys to visit relatives living on the mainland, seek hospital care, and buy and sell goods in Alotau's market, supermarkets, and hardware stores. These risks were underlined for us when, several months later, during a violent cyclonic storm two boats sank. Many passengers drowned; others were taken by sharks.

Traveling close to the bay's western shoreline, we could see many small villages nestled in among the green, all set against the lush and imposing backdrop of the Owen Stanley Ranges. As night descended our attention returned to the boat. We marveled at the captain's knowledge of the sea. Steering without compass, chart, or light he guided the *subu* onward, his task eventually made easier by the rising moon and a vast canopy of stars. Casting my eyes skyward, smelling the sea, listening to the waves wash against the bow, I felt a sense of disbelief. Could this moment be mine? Could Roger and I really be living this enchanting journey?

Several hours later, Nuakata came into view as a shadow on the horizon. Its central volcanic mountain, Tanalabwa, rising 309 meters above sea level, formed a gray outline against the night sky. Its western and

eastern slopes were visible as tracings that gently ambled down to the sea. In the foreground and to the west of Nuakata were three small islands: Pahilele, Iabama, and to the southwest Hana Kuba Kuba. Later we learned that Iabama and Pahilele belong to East Cape, and the fifteen people living on Pahilele speak Tewala, the East Cape language. Hana Kuba Kuba belongs to Nuakata but, like Iabama, it is uninhabited. Around midnight we approached the northwestern side of Nuakata, entering the still waters of Halewa Una bay. Unable to see the shore in the dark, the captain steered the boat toward a distant fire burning on the beach—a beacon, anticipating our arrival. As the boat approached the shore we could see several people waiting in the shadows. Once ashore Roger and I were directed to sleep in a disused trade store in Jennifer’s mother’s hamlet, Hapela’awa’awa.

We woke early the next morning to discover our sense of enchantment had dissipated. A feeling of apprehension had taken its place. Would we be fed? Where should we wash? How should I seek permission to do the research? With these anxieties, I tentatively stepped out into the day. To my surprise the hamlet was completely deserted save for pigs, roosters, and dogs. Not knowing what to do, I set out in search of a creek to wash. There I found Jennifer washing clothes. Neither of us said much. For my part I felt quite disoriented. Was it culturally sensitive to wash in front of her? Why was she not talking? Had I done something wrong? Sensing my uncertainty Jennifer instructed me to wash. Embarrassed, childlike in my hesitancy, I obliged, but my unease remained.

Upon returning to the hamlet I retreated inside the trade store to find Roger fully dressed and waiting. His foray outside had yielded results similar to mine. Finding the captain of the *subu* sitting smoking with a group of young men, down by the shore, he had sat down with them. They had continued to talk and laugh among themselves, largely ignoring his efforts to communicate. Finally, feeling totally out of place, he had drifted back to the hamlet. With this news I suddenly burst out crying. It all seemed too difficult. Why were these people so unfriendly? How could we live with them for a year?

Our second day on Nuakata was as exhilarating as the first was distressing. Beginning at Hapela’awa’awa and heading west we walked around the entire island, visiting most hamlets before concluding our circumnavigation at the aid post. Moses, the community health worker, accompanied us on our journey, which culminated in a community meeting at the aid post later in the afternoon. Fluent in English, Moses acted

as our guide and adviser. We had been directed to choose a place to live, in the event that the community allowed us to stay. As we walked from hamlet to hamlet people received us warmly, inviting us to rest, while offering us green coconuts, watermelon, mango, or pineapple to eat. We welcomed these friendly gestures—grateful for their hospitality and refreshment on such a hot and humid day.

In making this trek we followed a well-defined path that, for the most part, traced the shoreline of the island—a round-trip of roughly fourteen kilometers that took six hours by foot.<sup>4</sup> We left this path at points, weaving our way along short trails that led to inland hamlets, each providing a home to no more than ten to fifteen people. These hamlets comprised two or three bush material houses, built on stumps one to two meters above the ground. Most hamlets were located less than 500 meters from the shore. As we walked from place to place we were not only struck by the changing land- and seascapes but also by each hamlet's distinctive outlook and appearance. Many were tucked away in lush bush surrounds. Some backed onto mosquito-infested mangrove swamps. Others, located fifty meters or so from narrow shorelines, had unimpeded views of the sea and neighboring islands. People clearly brought their own distinctive ways and material means to these living spaces. Some hamlets had beautiful gardens, others large houses, while others still had more modest dwellings that stood alone amid large cleared spaces.

As we moved along the main path encircling Nuakata, Moses stopped at various places to point out particular rocks or trees that functioned as boundary markers for four identified sides of the island—Bwauli, Bomatu, Bolime, and Yalasi—named after the four prevailing winds that blow across its shores. The division of the island into sides occurred in 1984 when the island's sports association decided to institute a round-robin soccer, netball, and volleyball competition. The community decided on these geographical divisions as a basis for team membership. Over the ensuing years these geographical divisions have assumed wider social significance, providing an organizational basis for communal work, local markets, and church activities.

Hapela'awa'awa, the hamlet where we began our journey, was on the northwestern side known as Bwauli, where the aid post, the main United Church at Alogau, and one of the island's three freshwater streams were located. Its bay, Halewa Una, was also the main point of arrival and departure for visiting boats. As we passed from Bwauli to Bomatu, the northwest side of Nuakata, the towering mountains of south Normanby



Island were clearly visible in the distance. Moses told us that on fine days people could sail between Nuakata and Normanby Island on their *sailau*, or sailing canoes, a journey taking three to four hours with good wind.

Leaving Bomatu behind us we moved on to Bolime, the southeastern side of the island. We had not walked far before coming across the Community Primary School, which comprised two fibro-cement and several bush material classrooms. At the rear of the classrooms was a freshwater stream, which provided a constant source of water for the schoolchildren and the three teaching staff and their families who lived on site. Near the stream was a path that scaled Mount Tanalabwa and connected the Bolime and Bwauli sides of the island. In front of the classrooms was a large grassy field used for playing soccer and volleyball. The grass was periodically slashed by older children and adults alike, equipped with their long bush knives known as *'elepa*. There was also a clay netball court full of potholes and covered with pebbles and small rocks. Down by the shore and stretching out over the shallows were two sea toilets used by the children attending the school.

Two small islands, Daiwali and Boirama, located between one and two kilometers from Nuakata, are clearly visible from all points along the Bolime shoreline. Moses indicated that although they “belonged to Nuakata,” only one family was living on Daiwali at that time, and no one lived on Boirama, as it had no freshwater supply. Later we learned that Australian army troops had been stationed on Daiwali during World War II—abandoned equipment testament to their stay.

The saddle of a small hill marks the boundary between Bolime and the southwest side of the island, Yalasi. There we came upon the island's second and only other United Church, located at a place named Asa'ailo. Unlike the church at Alogau, which was little more than a concrete shell, the church building at Asa'ailo, complete with painted altar rail, pulpit, and lectern, was largely built from bush materials. A concrete monument set in a garden of straggly flowers recorded the gift of this land to the church by local landowners. The church was built in 1991 by people from the Yalasi and Bolime sides of the island as part of the centenary celebrations marking the establishment of the first Methodist mission in Milne Bay Province. Until then the people of Yalasi and Bolime worshipped together with people from Bwauli and Bomatu at Alogau.

At the rear of Asa'ailo is another freshwater stream, which services many hamlets on the Yalasi side. From various points on the Yalasi side it is possible to see East Cape and the islands of Bwasilaki and Sideia. But

like the view of Normanby Island from Bwauli and Bomatu, we later discovered that these isles—which act as a visible reminder of the world beyond Nuakata’s shores—are often rendered invisible and unreachable by fierce storms, clouds, or haze.

Much of our conversation on the journey around the island focused on where we might live. Wanting to gain some insight into people’s use of the aid post located on the Bwauli side, I felt it was important to live some distance away from it, preferably on a different side of the island. Believing it was far too presumptuous to nominate where we would live, we appealed to Moses for advice, indicating that wherever we lived I would need someone, preferably a woman, to help us learn the language and assist with the research.

Moses strongly recommended that we live with a family on the Yalasi side, explaining that “they are good people, well educated” and the oldest son, Wycliffe, would be a suitable language teacher. When we met Wycliffe at the Asa’ailo church, it was clear that Moses had already spoken with him about these two related possibilities. Quietly spoken and reserved, Wycliffe offered us a place to stay on his family’s land. He assumed that “like other white people” we would want to live at a secluded site. After much discussion we convinced him that we wanted to live with local people. Finally it was decided that we could stay in his mother’s hamlet, Gohiya, some 500 meters from the Asa’ailo church.

As we continued our journey, weaving our way back toward Bwauli and the aid post, we noticed the small ribbed carcasses of abandoned diesel engine boats—three in all, scattered along the Yalasi shoreline. Apparently the owners had “eaten their money,” channeling their profits into food and things rather than boat maintenance. Eventually, unable to afford the necessary repairs to their wooden craft, they had sold their engines and abandoned their hulls, leaving Nuakata without a small motorized boat, a two-way radio, or practical means of transport and communication with the mainland in the event of an emergency. Nuakata was not only without a workboat but—with the exception of three individually owned large sailing canoes, able to carry up to five passengers—most canoes on the island could support only one or two people. Local people were forced to depend upon boats owned and operated by people from East Cape and Normanby Island to service their more major transport needs. When we had lived on Nuakata for some time, it became clear that, although the island lies in the well-traveled waters between Normanby and East Cape, workboats generally bypass it en

route to other destinations. Workboats traveling from Alotau to Normanby, Fergusson, or Goodenough Island often break their journey at East Cape before heading north along the west coast, or east to the southern coast, of Normanby Island. Nuakata represents a significant detour, one avoided by captains unless guaranteed enough paying passengers and cargo to warrant the trip. For Roger and me at least, these rotting boats dotted along the shoreline were like monuments to the island's more affluent and independent recent past.

When we arrived at the aid post in the midafternoon, a large crowd had already gathered for the community meeting, convened to discuss the land dispute at the aid post and my request to stay and research on Nuakata. When the time came to discuss the latter, Jennifer, Anne, and later Moses spoke on our behalf, translating and explaining my intention to research women's health. As with the subsequent discussion of the aid post business, a decision was reached by consensus, with people (male and female, young and old) rising to question or make an uninterrupted comment on the matter at hand.

Discussion of our request was punctuated by laughter. As little of this was translated, we watched it all with bemused smiles. At one point Wycliffe's father looked to Roger and commented in the local language, "We know what *she* will do, but what will *he* be doing?" When the chorus of laughter subsided, Roger explained through Jennifer that he hoped to write a book. What people understood of our intentions was impossible to tell. Nonetheless they allowed us to stay and insisted they would build a house for us free of charge. We were instructed to return to Nuakata in two weeks with our possessions. Humbled, grateful, I was once again moved to tears.

When the meeting was over, Roger and I returned to Hapela'awa'awa for a swim. As I lay floating, face down in the warm water, I felt a sense of equilibrium return to my body, my thinking. For the first time I was able to reflect on the emotional roller coaster of the last three days—the ride from enchantment to disenchantment to reenchantment. How quickly the sense of wonder and promise felt on the journey was swamped by our anxiety and acute sensitivity to the differences between us and local people. And how quickly these feelings had eased when the community agreed to accommodate us in spite of, and quite possibly because of, these differences. Amid these floating thoughts Pratt's (1986) reflections on arrival tropes in travel writing and ethnographies came to mind. Prior to our journey to Nuakata I was determined not to include

an arrival story in the vaguely imagined ethnography. As Pratt observes, ethnographers have long used personal arrival narratives as “emblematic self-portraits,” voyages of self-discovery “to position the reader for” and lend authenticity to the quasi-scientific, “objectified description” that follows. I had accepted her challenge “to liberate oneself from them, not by doing away with tropes (which is not possible) but by appropriating and inventing new ones (which is)” (1986, 50). But having “arrived” on Nuakata—having glimpsed what I imagined some immigrants feel in their journeys to new lands—my intention seemed like a potentially disingenuous gesture to nonconformism, a denial of the ethnographic process, the ethnographer’s spatial and relational journey to self-understanding and, more important, understanding and accommodation of the similarities to and differences from the people with whom she lives and works. Once again, the imagined field, the imagined text, was overturned by lived experience on Nuakata.

### *Language*

When we arrived back in Alotau we returned to Diwala. Among those who had arrived there in our absence was Daphne Lithgow. Together with her husband David she had been working in Milne Bay as a missionary-linguist for over thirty years. Daphne Lithgow informed us that the language of Nuakata, Alina Nu’ata, is a dialect of Auhelawa, spoken by approximately 1,000 people from the Kurada and Bwasiyaiyai regions of southeast Normanby Island. Using local translators to assist her, she was developing an Auhelawa dictionary and several anthologies of local stories. These texts were intended for use in national government-sponsored preschools, operative throughout the region, including Nuakata. The programs aim to facilitate children’s literacy in their local language. At that time, David Lithgow, together with local translators, was also translating the Bible into Auhelawa.

Wycliffe and his father, Noah, both of whom were engaged in Bible translation work, later articulated a contrary understanding of Alina Nu’ata as similar to, but different from, Auhelawa. They did not consider it a subordinated form or “dialect” of Auhelawa, just as they did not believe Nuakata to be a dependent branch or offshoot of the Kurada or Bwasiyaiyai communities on south Normanby Island. It was their hope that SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) would produce storybooks for children written in Alina Nu’ata, so that the linguistic differences and shades of meaning unique to their language could be preserved. Although

involved with the Bible translation, they, like most local people I subsequently spoke with, considered it unnecessary to translate the New Testament into Auhelawa. As church services and regional church meetings (*kwato*) are conducted in Dobu, the long-established lingua franca in the region, people on Nuakata are keen to maintain fluency and literacy in this language.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Dobu, many people from Nuakata speak three or four regional languages, commonly the languages of East Cape, Bunama, Duau, Ware, and Tubetube. As English is the language of instruction in community schools throughout Papua New Guinea, younger generations on Nuakata also speak English with varying degrees of fluency. David Lithgow indicated that few people within the Milne Bay region, outside of Bwasiyaiyai, Kurada, and Nuakata, are familiar with either Auhelawa or Alina Nu'ata. By way of explanation he stated, "native speakers are few and not particularly influential in the region, and certain aspects of the language are considered difficult to learn." He added that the low regional profile of these places and languages could be related to the minimal involvement of their peoples in the regional Kula trade (see Macintyre 1983). When I later questioned older Nuakatan men, they indicated that for the past seventy to eighty years Nuakata had not played a significant role in the Kula. Only two or three men had ever been involved, and the sole surviving Nuakatan participant withdrew from these exchanges over twenty years ago due to his age and transport difficulties. His children have expressed no interest in continuing his long-standing trading relationships.

From a linguist's perspective, the Auhelawa language belongs to the Papuan Tip cluster of the Oceanic group of Austronesian languages (Lithgow 1976; Ross 1988). Among the characteristic features of this cluster are subject-object-verb clauses and locative postpositions that indicate the direction and location of a subject's actions. One of the most distinctive aspects of these languages is their relatively complex possessive pronominal system that enables the expression of finely differentiated relationships between people and between people and things. Unlike English, which has only one simple form of possessive pronoun, these languages have three. The pronominal system differentiates possessive relationships according to the varying degrees of relatedness to the subject. For example, the closest, most fundamental relationships, those that are considered constitutive and integral to the subject, are indicated with a possessive pronominal suffix on the noun. These relationships include family members, both maternal and affinal, body parts, and some

thoughts and feelings—what Young (1983) terms inalienable aspects of the person; for example, *tamagu* (my father), *mehena* (his or her eyes). A second class, or group of things, such as food or animals that can be consumed and transformed by the person or body, is indicated by a specific possessive pronoun positioned prior to the noun; for example, *'agu maheya* (my pig), *'adi niu* (their coconut). These pronouns may also be used in connection to a person's garden or objects of status and wealth such as armbands—indeed, any substance, object, or thing that is considered in some ways constitutive of the person. For people, objects, or animals regarded as detachable from the person, a third, standard form of personal pronoun is used; for example, *yagu 'elepa* (my bush knife). Food or animals that are intended as gifts, and therefore will not be consumed by their owner or kin, are classified with these standard pronouns.

A unique and significant feature of Auhelawa and Alina Nu'ata is its use of suffixes on nouns and adjectives, as well as verbs (Petaliyaki and Lithgow n.d.). These suffixes function as time markers, providing the listener with specific contextual information about the temporal status of the person, object, action, or state being discussed. When an action, thing, person, or state occurred and whether or not it was completed in that time is emphasized. In Auhelawa and Alina Nu'ata there are three forms of the conjunction “and” that are also selectively used to indicate whether the conjoined ideas, events, or actions occurred in the past, present, or future.

Another noted feature of Papuan Tip languages, including Auhelawa and Alina Nu'ata, is the large variety of verbs to express location or the position of people and bodies in space. In accounting for this phenomenon Lithgow, following Cappell, describes them as “event dominated” languages (1976, 162). However, when I became more familiar with Alina Nu'ata, this description seemed inadequate, for it glosses over the emphasis given to the spatial, temporal, and substantive relations between subject and object, speaker and listener. These characteristic features of Auhelawa and Alina Nu'ata seemed particularly pertinent to my consideration of notions of the person on Nuakata.

### *Practicing Method*

On our return to Nuakata at the beginning of February we discovered that work on our house had not begun. During the next five weeks, while it was being built, we stayed at the Asa'ailo church. At night we slept in

one room of the junior missionary's two-room house. We began daily language sessions with Wycliffe, which continued for several months. Needing broader assistance with the research, I asked Wycliffe if he would also be prepared to help me with translations of tapes, discuss customary knowledge and practices, and facilitate interviews with relevant local people.

Both of us were hesitant at first to make this commitment. Wycliffe later revealed that he was initially unsure of Roger and me. Accustomed to reserved and deferential relationships with *dimdim* (white people), he was highly ambivalent about having sustained contact with them. Like many people on Nuakata, he was publicly polite and respectful with *dimdim*, but privately amused by and critical of our ways of relating to people. For my part, in asking Wycliffe to be my research assistant, I was faced with a dilemma. While convinced that a female research assistant would facilitate my research with local women, allaying any embarrassment, I had the strong impression that translating and mediating *dimdim*'s agendas was considered Wycliffe's talent and lot in the community. In asking someone else to be my research assistant I risked causing widespread offense.

Experience proved these initial impressions correct. Wycliffe's knowledge of the community and long-standing interest in local knowledge and practices continually astounded me. Indeed, his knowledge and interest in "customary" matters was considered exceptional in his generation. Ethnographically inclined, Wycliffe explained local knowledge and practices carefully, methodically. He often seemed to anticipate the direction of my research, preempting my assumptions. He was also aware of my shortcomings as an ethnographer, successfully subverting my efforts to orchestrate premature discussions of local knowledge and practices. Curious about everything, I was like a precocious child who demands to know without due respect for the necessary time, place, and experiential/relational context for knowing. As I became more accustomed to the rhythms of daily living on Nuakata I tempered my research enthusiasms, becoming less directive and more content to wait for understanding to unfold. Although Wycliffe collaborated with the research and was keen for me to understand local knowledge and practices, it was clear to him that the research agenda was mine, my story of Nuakata largely shaped by my own questions and concerns, which he dutifully translated, discussed, and challenged (see Carrier 1992, 18–19).

Despite Wycliffe's qualities as a teacher and translator, the decision

not to have a female assistant certainly had repercussions for the research—repercussions that Wycliffe himself anticipated. All my taped conversations and interviews with women, even in the early days when my language skills were very limited, were conducted without his direct assistance. My questions to women about their experience and understanding of pregnancy and birth, among other issues, were therefore restricted in scope. Most women with whom I spoke refused to allow me to tape our conversations. Some discussed personal issues with me in confidence, stressing that they did not wish Wycliffe to listen to, or assist me with, the translation of their taped conversations. Some women would not speak to me at all, fearing that, through Wycliffe and me, their opinion and experience might become public knowledge. Many deferred to older women’s expertise in matters of contraception, pregnancy, and birth, claiming that they might not know the “proper” answer. On issues not specifically related to women, most women deferred to men.

Our decision to live among Wycliffe’s family in his parents’ hamlet, Gohiya, also had a significant impact on the research. Wycliffe was the eldest of nine children—six males and three females, offspring of his mother, Eunice, and father, Noah. During our time on Nuakata Wycliffe and his brothers and sisters had one living maternal uncle, Hosea; a maternal aunt or “big mother,” Malida; and her husband, Antiya. Antiya was a highly respected elder in the church and the wider community. Unable to have children themselves, he and Malida had adopted a son, Roger (who was then married with one living child), and two of Wycliffe’s siblings. Of Wycliffe’s siblings, three were already married (Geteli, Jane, Douglisi) with nine children among them. One subsequently married during our time on Nuakata. With the exception of two of his three sisters, Jane and Eba, all of his siblings lived on Nuakata. Jane was attending Bible College on Normanby Island with her husband, John; and Eba—the youngest child in his family—was attending secondary school at Alotau.

This brief sketch of Wycliffe’s family may seem peripheral to the research methods—the means of “going after” or “proceeding” to know—I employed on Nuakata. However, as I will demonstrate throughout this book, the understanding gained through participant observation and reflection is contingent. The dynamic relationships between myself and specific local people constitute a vital context for my understanding of Nuakatan knowledges and practices (see Lutz 1988). Our day-to-day life revolved around the people living at Gohiya and our



near neighbors. We also had regular encounters with most people living on the Yalasi side. We had less frequent and intense contact with other sections of the island's population. More than anyone else's, then, it is Wycliffe's matrilineal and affinal families' knowledge of Nuakatan practices that I now bear witness to in the text.

### *Mapping Nuakata, Past and Present*

Along with language learning, much of our time during our early weeks on Nuakata was spent trying to ascribe order to the unfamiliar land and seascapes of the island and its surrounds. Like our colonizing forebears, we found both purpose and solace in these seemingly quintessential anthropological tasks—preparing a census, detailing place names on a map, and eliciting information about Nuakata's territorial boundaries. Wycliffe and a band of curious male onlookers humored our initial efforts to circumscribe and know their land, patiently supplying place-names on request. Most had seen maps of the world and Papua New Guinea during their primary education. But the enlarged map of Nuakata and surrounding isles was treated like a curio—a fascinating yet poor substitute for experiential knowledge of regional weather patterns and local terrain. The map did not locate good soil for gardens, suitable trees or vines for making canoes and houses, or waters where fish are plentiful. Nor did it reveal who owned land on Nuakata, or who was entitled to occupy and work on given plots of land with impunity. People's low opinion of the map was only confirmed when they discovered several errors. The names of the islands Daiwali and Boirama were reversed, some of the contours of the Nuakata shoreline were compromised, and the position of its outlying reefs was slightly incorrect. Although marked, three small uninhabited islands belonging to Nuakata—Pali, Panamoi-moi, and Awane, lying in the waters southeast of Boirama—were also unnamed and incorrectly located.

This emphasis on lived and living knowledge of the land and sea is hardly surprising in a subsistence-based community. People on Nuakata rely on their garden produce, fishing, and chicken and pig rearing for all basic food requirements, occasionally supplementing their diet with rice, sugar, tea, and tinned meat. Due to the island's soil quality, Nuakatans, unlike their northern and mainland neighbors, have been unable to generate cash income from the sale of *dimdim*-style cash crops (carrots, English potatoes, and onions). All families on the island produced and sold

local cash crops (copra, smoked fish, sea slugs, woven bags and mats, betel nut, pineapples, watermelons, mangoes, scones, etc.) at the markets in Alotau, East Cape, and, more recently, Nuakata itself. However, they did so on such a small scale that the income generated by these enterprises was minimal.

Despite their perceived irrelevance to local people, I persisted with these diverse mapping ventures for some weeks, reluctant to abandon these pseudoscientific forms of knowing. Together with his father, Noah; maternal uncle, Hosea; and mother's sister's husband, Antiya, Wycliffe continued to provide assistance. These men revealed that Nuakata's regional waters encircle the island and its major reefs, stretching to the perimeter of the islands of Pahilele and Iabama to the southwest, up beyond Diligaoli and Fallows Reef to the north, around to the outer reaches of Gallows Reef in the east and just past its three small islands in the southeast.

At my request Wycliffe located and named the island's occupied hamlets on a hand-drawn map. Of the fifty-nine identified hamlets, seventeen were located on the Bwauli (northwest) side, nine on the Bomatu (northeast), fifteen on the Bolime (southeast), and eighteen on the Yalasi (southwest) sides of the island. Wycliffe explained—and I paraphrase here—that each hamlet comprises members of a given *hubu* (mother's family) and, where relevant, their spouses. Family members who are connected to one another through a shared mother and grandmother constitute a *hubu*. While the Alina Nu'ata term for mother's family is *hubu*, people on Nuakata generally use the term *susu*, which is used by many other people in Milne Bay.

Able to remember hamlet names at will, Wycliffe could also recall the names and approximate ages of all the people occupying these hamlets. Indeed, he could name the family members, for at least three generations, of every *susu* on the island. For the most part I relied on his comprehensive knowledge of the genealogies of people living and staying on Nuakata to prepare an island census. At the time of the census 385 people—180 females and 205 males—were living there.<sup>6</sup> Of the four sides, Bwauli had the highest population with 130 people, followed by Yalasi with 89, Bolime with 86, and Bomatu/Daiwali combined with 80 people.

As Wycliffe and I worked together preparing genograms he commented, "People and land not only belong to a given *susu* but they also belong to one of five *bwasumo* (birds)"—what I translate here, following convention, as (matri)clans. Five clans are represented on Nuakata: Lili'o

(Parrot), Bo'e (Black Crane), Ao'ao (Crow), Eलो,7 and Manihubu (Eagle). At that time nearly half of the population on the island belonged to the Eलो clan. I subsequently discovered that the shared maternal ancestry between *susu* belonging to the same clan was generally assumed, rather than known or remembered. In fact, these were often pragmatic alliances rather than certain, substantive matrilineal allegiances. Nonetheless, clan affiliations were considered vital on Nuakata, for people from the same clan have reciprocal obligations to one another, which are realized during celebrations and mourning (as detailed in chap. 6).

Like the term *susu*, the use of birds to denote clans on Nuakata exemplifies a practice that, by both local and related ethnographic accounts, is common throughout the Massim region. In a region both linked and separated by sea, where people have a long-standing history of trade, intermarriage, and warfare (Fortune [1932] 1989; Macintyre 1983; Munn 1986), it is perhaps not surprising that birds became the totemic emblems of the various matrilineal clans. For—like the people they represent—birds are migratory, traveling between land and sea, crossing boundaries as they seek sustenance and kin. These clan affiliations ensure that wherever people travel in the region they will be received as kin among those who share the same or linked totem. Therefore, matrilineal clans and their totemic emblems have provided, and continue to provide, a means of defining similarity and difference between people in the region who might otherwise have no other apparent connection to one another. As on Tubetube, “today there is no intrinsic cultural significance in totems; they function as metonyms for groups or individuals and are used like names” (Macintyre 1983, 28).

Current knowledge and practices associated with these bird totems on Nuakata is seemingly a pale reflection of the totemic system that existed in the region in the past. While I have implied that birds “represent” or act as a metaphor for people’s shared ancestral past, Fortune suggests that for the Dobuans of the late 1920s this shared ancestry, this “common ancestress,” was quite literally “a bird,” and “not a human being” ([1932] 1989, 31). As Seligman and Field observe for Tubetube (in Macintyre 1983, 26–28), so Fortune notes for Dobu: each bird had an associated fish, snake, and plant totem ([1932] 1989, 36). While free to do as they wished with their own totems, they were not allowed to eat their spouse’s or father’s totemic bird, fish, or snake, or use the associated plant for firewood (36). Such acts were not only considered disrespectful, but they were also seen as explicitly aggressive—an incitement to fight (Macintyre

1983). Only remnants of these beliefs and practices exist on Nuakata. People vaguely recalled that fish and animal totems were linked to bird totems, although no one with whom I spoke could remember them.

### *Early Settlers*

Discussions with Wycliffe about the people and places of Nuakata led to conversations with his family about past settlement of the island. They told us that Nuakata was settled at Gaimanugini hamlet in Gudi bay, on the Yalasi side, during the latter half of the nineteenth century—possibly during the 1860s or 1870s. Men from the Kurada region of Normanby Island came in their canoes to fish on the reefs surrounding Nuakata. Finding a plentiful supply of fish on the reefs, fertile soil and a good water supply on the island, they decided to settle there with their families. The first settlers belonged to the Lili'o clan. According to Wycliffe's mother, people belonging to her clan, the Bo'e clan from the Siga Siga region of Duau on Normanby Island, were next to arrive. But Eunice's claim was contested by other people who commented that representatives of Ao'ao and then Manehubu followed Lili'o clanspeople.

Whatever the order of arrival, all agree that the people staying at Gaimanugini were soon joined on the island by people from Duau, Bwasiyaiyai, Bunama, and other regions of Normanby Island. Soon after the various clans arrived, everyone gathered together for a feast. Following the feast they walked together around the island, settling upon the boundaries for their respective clan lands. Each clan tells its own story of land settlement on Nuakata. These clan stories, rather than the more disconnected history of Nuakatan settlement, hold precedence in people's memory of the past. Other stories about the early settlers survive only as fragmentary narratives—snapshots of a past that seemingly holds little interest for the current generations. We were told that many of the elders who knew stories about these early settlers had recently died, taking with them their knowledge and memories of that past.

While many people claimed to have no knowledge of their early forebears, others (generally men in their fifties and sixties) stated with confidence that the early settlers were strong people—fierce warriors who instilled fear into all who visited their shores. Because their strength and warfaring prowess was renowned in the region, few people from distant places dared to engage them in warfare. Some people insist that although they were formidable warriors, their ancestors did not initiate warfare in

the region. Another surviving narrative about the early settlers relates to cannibalism. According to Yamesi (the father of Wycliffe's brother-in-law), sometime during the 1880s Nuakata suffered a severe famine, which led to the emergence of cannibalism on the island. People ate their young children first. Later they went to war with neighboring places, killing and eating their victims.

Local stories certainly assume a long past history of habitation—a history that predates remembered ancestors. One such story refers to the island of Koyagaugau (or Dawson Island), which lies in the waters to the east of Nuakata. Antiya told us that Koyagaugau belongs to Nuakata because an underground, undersea pathway links the two islands. This pathway was primarily used by wild pigs during the time of the early settlers; however, prior to this, it was also used by people from both places. Antiya almost single-handedly eradicated all the wild pigs from the island twenty or so years ago. Since that time the pathway has closed.

Along with accounts of land division, warfare, and cannibalism, people readily remembered stories of Christianity and the early Milne Bay Wesleyan Methodist Church. Celebrations on Nuakata, in October 1991, to mark the one-hundred-year involvement of the Milne Bay United (formerly Wesleyan Methodist) Church in the region have ensured that these stories remain fresh in the thoughts of both young and old alike. The celebrations on Nuakata were preceded by regional centenary celebrations, which reached their climax on Dobu Island on 19 and 20 June 1991. On this occasion people from all over the region, together with former missionaries and church representatives from England and Australia, gathered to celebrate the role of the church and the work of its early colonial missionaries in particular.<sup>8</sup> Attention was focused on the pioneering work of its first, most visible European representative, Reverend Bromilow. Under the auspices of the London Missionary Society, Reverend Bromilow, who had arrived “together with his wife and daughter, four other Australian missionaries and 22 teachers and their wives from Fiji, Tonga and Samoa,” established the first Milne Bay mission on Dobu in 1891 (Bromilow 1929; M. Young 1989b, 110).<sup>9</sup> Polynesian missionaries subsequently moved throughout the Massim, staking out and claiming religious territories with words and churches. By mission, anthropological, and historical accounts these colonial representatives were powerful influences for change in the region (Macintyre 1983, 280–89; 1989b, 1990; M. Young 1977, 1989b, 1990, 1996).<sup>10</sup> Each year, as part of the annual commemorative service on Nuakata, to mark Reverend Bromilow's

work, one of the church elders speaks to the children about the missionary's heroic achievements. Emphasis is given to his role in eradicating cannibalism and instituting the current moral order.<sup>11</sup> We later attended one such service, where Reverend Bromilow was depicted as a savior who rescued people from savagery and depravity.<sup>12</sup>

### *Nuakata United Church*

Several church elders told me that the Methodist Church first settled at Nuakata on the Bomatu side in 1892. An altar was built, and open air church services were held. The first church building was constructed in the late 1960s at Alogau hamlet on the Bwauli side. It remains today as a solid, concrete vestige of a colonial past still present.

While other organizations existed on Nuakata (e.g., the sports and youth associations, the ward authority), the United Church was, during our time there, the most visible influence on communal life. Even activities existing outside the church were brought into its temporal and spatial realms of influence when their details were announced in the notices given at the conclusion of church services. With the possible exception of the primary school, the church grounds were the only true communal spaces on the island, hosting a variety of communal activities, including feasts, working bees, the two island preschools, and meetings of nonchurch organizations. More than any other organization or activity, the church and its calendar effectively demarcated time on Nuakata into days, weeks, months, and years, rendering Sunday a non-work day distinct from other days, Wednesday Women's Fellowship day, and Saturday a time of preparation for the rest day to follow. During our time on Nuakata the church acquired a clock, so that the starting and finishing times of church services and meetings could be minuted in the records. Easter, Christmas Day, Bromilow and Harvest Day, and *mulolo* (gift-giving) were celebrated communal events in the church calendar. No other activities on the island, even mortuary ceremonies, soccer, and netball grand finals, attracted such widespread communal participation and support. Unlike these other events (with the exception of school terms), people were compelled to celebrate these ecclesiastical occasions on specifically designated days and dates.

Clearly established organizational hierarchies existed within the United Church on Nuakata. The main church, located on the Bwauli side of the island, was staffed by a full-time, fully qualified (six-year trained)

national pastor. In contrast, the Yalasi church was staffed by a half-time pastor/missionary (*misinali*)—a nineteen-year-old man who had completed half (three years) of his training and was accountable to the senior pastor. Following usual United Church practice in the region, the pastor and junior pastor did not come from Nuakata, but were assigned there for three-year terms. Coming as outsiders to the community, with tenuous local clan allegiances and often no knowledge of the local language, these pastors remained marginal to the day-to-day life and work of the community (Thune 1990). Despite this, they wielded considerable power and influence in the community. As they had limited clan responsibilities and obligations, they did not participate in customary exchange activities. Their gardens and church or house grounds were initially established by local men and regularly tended by local women. They were not obliged to assist in preparation for communal feasts; however, they always presided at the main table, were given the best food to eat, and returned to their houses laden with gifts. These men, particularly the qualified pastor, assumed and were assigned “big man” (*taubada mwala'ina*) status in the community; however, they did not have the obligation of wealth redistribution that a “big man” incurs. With an annual income of roughly 600 Australian dollars, they were wealthy by normal village standards.

When asked about their primary responsibilities, both junior and senior pastor alike commented that it was their role to attend meetings and report to the regional church about the activities of the church on Nuakata. They regarded themselves as religious and moral custodians and administrators. Interestingly, the pastors did not consider preaching to be only their responsibility. In theory, at least, this role was open to male and female, young and old alike, but in practice women rarely preached, instead doing much of the invisible work for the church: preparing flowers, making gardens, cleaning the church and its grounds. Their energies were focused on the Women's Fellowship meetings that took place every Wednesday for Bible study and church fund-raising activities.<sup>13</sup>

Church laity are divided into nonmembers and members (*ekelesiya*), who meet at the conclusion of each weekly service. Members are privy to knowledge and decision-making power in relation to church activities. As with preaching, both men and women are entitled to hold office-bearing positions in the church, however, in practice this, too, is a male domain. There are two levels of membership. The higher level entitles the

person to preach regularly, but lower level members are accorded seniority and status within the church.

The hierarchical organization of the local church merely reflects established hierarchies in the regional and national church—a level of organization that is not dissimilar to its now defunct Australian antecedent, the Methodist Church. The Nuakata United Churches constitute one section of the Bunama circuit—a circuit that encompasses Bunama, Bwasiyaiyai, and Kurada on the southern coast, and Sewa Bay on the southwest coast of Normanby Island. All the pastors working in this circuit—all men, to my knowledge—are Papua New Guinean nationals from Milne Bay Province. One qualified minister, also a Papua New Guinean national based at Bunama, administers the circuit. He alone is authorized to marry, christen or baptize, and administer the sacraments to people. A full circuit meeting, known as *kwato*, is held every three months, during which time participants from the youth groups, Women's Fellowships, Sunday schools, sporting associations, and *ekelesiya* of all member churches meet to discuss regional church activities and community. Matters of policy in relation to common or shared events in the church calendar are decided at these meetings.

The United Church, therefore, not only provided a focus for community life on Nuakata, it also provided an important context for wider regional contact. Throughout the year the various groups within the circuit gather in varying locations for specific projects or events. In 1993 there were six young people from Nuakata attending the Bwaluwada Bible College (representing one-third of the class) and two others attending an independent Bible college (Tewala Bible College) in Alotau. Some will become pastors within the circuit. As there is no scope for paid employment on Nuakata apart from cash cropping, and employment prospects on the mainland are severely limited, a career as a pastor in the United Church is a good option for some. People are given the prospect of paid, high-status employment in various locations at the end of their studies. The five Bible college students with whom I spoke indicated that apart from issues of faith, these factors influenced their decision to enroll. Several people commented that they welcome the challenge of further study—a challenge denied to them by the national education system, which sees only a very small percentage of sixth-grade students pass exams enabling them to continue their education at secondary schools on the mainland.

My initial efforts to chart Nuakata's land, sea, and familial boundaries



prompted general discussion with Wycliffe, Antiya, and Noah about Nuakata's place—its social and political status within the region. These men, together with the island's elected ward councillor, indicated that Nuakata is a member of the Maramatana local council, which is responsible for administration of funds to local communities within its constituency. This local council represents people from Nuakata and the northern, or Rabaraba, side of the mainland coast, from the tip of East Cape to Yawoda. Like all the elected representatives to the council, these men were baffled by Nuakata's inclusion in the Maramatana constituency. With social, familial, linguistic, and geographical links to East Cape and Normanby Island, Nuakata could be more appropriately included in either the southeastern mainland coast (from Alotau to East Cape) or the southern Normanby Island councils. This was further highlighted by the inclusion of Nuakata in the Alotau district health department division—representing the communities along the southeastern coast between Alotau and East Cape. Although marginalized in this council, the ward councillor, together with the group of senior men that constituted Nuakata's ward authority, decided that it was still in Nuakata's best interests to remain in this constituency.

While familial allegiances across the island and region appeared strong, Nuakata's alliances with state, local council, and church organizations were seemingly disparate and arguably tenuous. Organized sporting events (e.g., round-robin netball, soccer, and volleyball carnivals) or church gatherings, which might otherwise occur with some frequency and regularity, were invariably canceled, postponed, or restricted by transport difficulties. It seemed that without a reliable, independent form of transport Nuakata was destined to be trapped in the shadows of its larger neighbors, East Cape and Normanby Island.



Fig. 1. Duwadawali Bay, Nuakata



Fig. 2. Roger, Wycliffe, and Shelley at Gohiya