2 Kuot and its Speakers

This chapter provides mainly non-linguistic information about the speakers of Kuot, in terms of geography, history, social organisation, kinship and culture, as well as dialects of Kuot.

2.1 Geographic location

Kuot is spoken in some ten villages on the east and west coasts of North Central New Ireland, Papua New Guinea. When explorers first arrived in the area, there were Kuot villages on the west coast and in the mountains, but not on the east coast; the mountain population has since moved down to settle on the coasts. On the east coast, Kuot villages are interspersed and sometimes mixed with Nalik- and Nochi-speaking villages.

The main Kuot villages from north to south on the east coast (in fact north-east coast) are:

- Kama
- Bol (village shared with Nalik speakers)
- Fanafiliuo
- Liedan
- Kabil

and on the west (south-west) coast:

- Naiama
- Panaras
- Naliut
- Nakalakalap \{ (Neiruran)
- Patlangat
- Bimun

The villages range in size from around 80 people to some 500, with smaller hamlets besides. Since there is quite a number of people from other linguistic districts outside and within New Ireland living in the area, and since many children do not speak the language at all, determining how many people actually
speak Kuot is a difficult task. My tentative estimate is around 1,500 people who are reasonably fluent.¹

New Ireland Province extends from the equator to the 5th parallel south, and from the 149th to the 154th longitude east. The Kuot area is just south of the 3rd parallel, and the climate is tropical, with annual rainfall figures around 3.500 mm (138 inches). There is no very pronounced division of the year into dry and wet seasons in New Ireland.² Temperatures on the coast range between about 33°C (92°F) in the daytime and about 25°C (77°F) at night all year round.

The Schleinitz mountain range runs along all of central New Ireland, reaching heights of well over 800 metres (2600 feet) in the Kuot area. The mountains are steep on the west coast and start rising just a few tens of metres from the coast in many places, the highest peaks being only some 4 kilometres from the coast line (as measured on the map). The landscape then slopes gradually towards the east coast, where there is more flat ground with mangrove swamps near the coast.

New Ireland is a narrow island, and all major languages run across it from coast to coast (though at present the only villages in the mountains are in the Lelet plateau south of the Kuot area). Kuot borders in the south on Madak (more precisely the Lavatbura–Lamusong language within the Madak family), and in the north on Nalik. On the east coast, Kuot villages are interspersed with Nalik villages in the north and Nochi (Notsi) villages along the rest of the coast. (The Nalik territory does not reach across the island.)

### 2.2 Prehistory

Australia and New Guinea formed a single continent, Sahul, until about 8,000 years before present (BP). This continent appears to have been settled by about 55,000 years BP. However, New Ireland was never joined to other landmasses, even during glacial maximum some 18,000 years BP when sea levels were about 130 meters below their present levels. The first settlers must thus have had some sea-faring skills: even if there is two-way visibility between New Guinea and New Britain, the crossing has always been more than 50 km. Hu-

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¹ I have not been able to get data from the 2000 census. I am told that the census questionnaire does not contain questions about language and thus can only provide population information as a basis for an estimate of the number of speakers. In the 1990 information I have access to, the census data also was not fine-grained enough in terms of village names to give a good idea of the situation on the east coast where the territory is shared with other languages. In 1968, Lithgow & Claassen (1968: 3) give the number of speakers as 712. Chung & Chung (1996: 1) give the number as approximately 2,000. I believe both figures are based on censuses for the area, and although there is a general population increase, the dramatic growth indicated by these numbers may be partly an artefact of changing census division boundaries.

² For the first several months of my first long stay in the field, there was no rain at all, due to the occurrence in 1997 of the cyclical climatological disturbance known as el Niño.
man habitation in New Ireland is evidenced in the archaeological record from more than 35,000 years BP.

Sea levels stabilised near today’s levels around 6,000 years BP. Some 3,500 years ago the Austronesians arrived from the west, leaving traces in the form of pottery – hitherto unknown in the area – in particular the decorated Lapita pottery associated with the Austronesian cultural complex in Melanesia and large parts of Polynesia. They also brought pigs, dogs, chickens and rats (rattus exulans), and certain plants. From that time, village structures are clearly evidenced, and agriculture is indicated in pollen analyses and clay sedimentation in marches, pointing to more extensive uphill forest clearing.

Several factors make it difficult to form a picture of the life of the earliest inhabitants. First, not very much archaeological work has been carried out in the area, and much of it has centered on coastal sites which typically show early Austronesian settlement. The changing sea levels make it difficult to identify promising sites for pre-Austronesian inhabitants, and it is not even clear whether they lived in permanent settlements such as villages. Further, only stone artefacts were fully durable, since pottery disappeared for unknown reasons some 2,000–1,500 years ago, and there was no metal. In the ground, things have been preserved to an extent; mainly shell and bone scraps in middens.

Until recently it has only been possible to get a picture of protein subsistence as evidenced by bone and shell materials at the rock shelters, but new microscopic techniques are being developed for identifying very fine residues of plant material on tools (Spriggs 1997: 37–38). This is exciting, because knowing what the main carbohydrate sources were is likely to tell us much more about the lifestyle of these people. That is, if it can be shown that the species eaten are species which grow in the wild, the people are likely to have been hunters and gatherers. If, on the other hand, such species of e.g. taro were grown that are known to require a lot of tending, we can infer that the people probably kept gardens of some description, and that the population density could have been higher. The population density projected for the time of Austronesian arrival is important too for the contact scenarios we may want to propose.

The sites that have given the oldest dates are caves and rock shelters; the oldest being Matenkupkum in southern New Ireland with a date of 35,400 years BP, giving evidence of the exploitation of marine resources, and the use of simple stone tools. A similar pattern was found at Buang Merabak where the oldest date is 31,990 BP.³ Caves are useful because they are sheltered, but the deposits are often difficult to interpret, partly because it must be assumed that the caves were cleaned out from time to time, leaving very little evidence. Many caves also appear to have been used as temporary shelters for much of the time, perhaps on overnight hunting expeditions. Such use means that traces do not necessarily reflect everyday life. In some cases, however, there are cultural depos-

³ Matenkupkum results are from Gosden and Robertson (1991) and Buang Merabak from (Rosenfeld n.d.), both reported in Spriggs (1997: 35–37).
its, suggesting at least periodical use as primary habitation. Not far north of the present-day Kuot-speaking area, an overhanging rock shelter, Balof 2, gives a date of 14,240 BP, and further north Panakiwuk was dated at 15,140 BP. Not very much has been published about either site (Spriggs 1997: 48).4

Some development over time is shown in the archaeological record between initial settlement and Austronesian arrival. Around 20,000 years ago, the possum (Phalanger orientalis) and wallaby (Thylogale browni) and probably a rat (Rattus praetor) were introduced from New Guinea, the profile of species in shell middens changes, and the Canarium nut tree (Tok Pisin ‘galip’) was introduced. Obsidian (a volcanic glass-like stone that can produce very sharp edges when flaked) from New Britain circulated in the area, indicating the existence of trade routes. Manus and New Ireland were not in contact during this period, as evidenced by the distribution of introduced animals and the absence of Manus obsidian during this time, so any links to the New Guinea mainland would have been via New Britain.

It has been argued that agriculture was introduced into island Melanesia by the Austronesian arrivals (although independent early development of agriculture is attested for New Guinea island; e.g. Kirch (2000: 79–80)). There is evidence of pre-Austronesian arboriculture, the cultivation of trees such as Canarium, coconut, pandanus and others, but it remains unclear at present whether root crops such as taro were also cultivated (Kirch 2000: 80–82). In this part of the world, there is not necessariy a very sharp threshold between hunting and gathering and agriculture. Hunter-gatherers in all parts of the world engage in some crop-enhancing activities, encouraging the growth of particular plants by clearing, or replanting seeds in convenient locations, thereby also potentially causing genetic selection of plants with particular features. It should also be noted in this context that the kind of agriculture practiced in New Ireland is of the type known as swidden horticulture (or slash-and-burn), whereby an area is felled, left for regrowth to develop, burnt, planted, tended and harvested. At any time, several such areas are maintained, each at a different stage of the cycle, and the long fallow periods make for low population density. The climate allows for harvesting going on all year round. Crops are supplemented in some degree by gathering of wild nuts and vegetable leaves and the like. It is not difficult to imagine some fluidity in the proportions of such subsistence activities.5

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4 Two coastal sites on the New Ireland mainland very close to the present-day Kuot area have been excavated: Lesu (Lossu) and Lamou, but neither gives evidence of pre-Austronesian settlement (for Lesu, see White and Downie (1980); for Lemau see White (1992); preliminary excavations have also been carried out at Pinikindu but no dates were obtained (R. B. Clay 1974); there are also other Lapita sites further from the Kuot area).

5 This is in contrast to agriculture in a temperate zone such as Europe, where a reliance on cultivated crops for staple foods entails long-term storage of food and seed, and where soil types allow near-constant cultivation and therefore significantly higher population densities. This type of agriculture involves a much sharper break with non-
2.3 History

The New Guinea area was sighted a number of times by various seafarers, but New Ireland, New Hanover (Lavongai) and New Britain were thought to be one single landmass with New Guinea until 1700 when Dampier discovered the passage between New Britain and New Guinea now known as Dampier Strait (Norris 1994). He named the islands to his east Nova Britannia (New Britain), still thinking they were one. In 1767, Carteret noticed that New Ireland and New Hanover were separate from each other and from New Britain, and gave them their present names (or rather Nova Hibernia and New Hanover6). He seems to have been the first explorer to sail along the west coast of New Ireland, but did not land between Lamassa Bay and Dyalul.7

Other explorers followed, and during the second half of the 19th century, traffic increased in the area, with traders of many nationalities, missionaries, planters of coconuts for copra, prospectors for gold, and so forth. There was also a trade in native labour, known as blackbirding, for plantations in distant places such as Queensland, Fiji and Samoa. New Ireland was one major source of such labour.8 Something of a race ensued as different nations rushed to claim some of the territory for themselves. In 1884, Germany claimed approximately the northeastern quarter of New Guinea island, along with the Bismarck archipelago as far as Bougainville island (changing the name of New Ireland to Neu-Mecklenburg).9 The German government initially gave the trading company agricultural subsistence, in terms of settlement patterns, and of culture. Spriggs (1997: 31ff, 61ff and various places) has a similar argumentation. He draws a line between horticultural activities on the one hand, and agriculture on the other, where the latter impacts on the surrounding habitat to a point where naturally occurring resources are seriously depleted (p. 31). Presumably, the degree to which such impact is so destructive that it precludes further reliance on “bush food” as a primary source of livelihood must be bound up crucially with population density.

6 Presumably after the House of Hanover, the lineage of King George III who ruled England at the time.


8 Strauch remarks in 1875 of the natives of Lamassa in the south of New Ireland that they were clearly used to ships and that some of them even spoke English; this was a popular watering point already for early explorers (known e.g. as Carteret Bay and Port Sulphur). Although such familiarity with white sailors was clearly an exception, it seems likely that most people would at least have seen ships from a distance and perhaps some of their trade goods, and heard stories of the people on board those ships, and gradually themselves interact with the newcomers. From the same travels Strauch also records that the natives of the northern Madak-speaking area brought masks to sell on sighting the ship (Strauch 1877: 90). By 1909 Krämer-Bannow reports with surprise that the children of Konogogo on the west coast had never seen a white woman before she arrived there (Krämer-Bannow 1916: 169).

9 The south-eastern quarter of New Guinea was claimed by Britain, and the western half of New Guinea island was part of the Dutch East Indies. The northern parts of the Solomon Islands were initially claimed by Germany but gradually given over to Brit-
Neu-Guinea-Compagnie the task of administering the new colony, but later took over control and established government stations.

Early sources give a picture of endemic warfare between rival groups of natives, and of rampant cannibalism. The archaeological record shows that cannibalism was common in the area for a very long time, but it appears that the massive scale of warfare may have been an indirect result of white contact. The brief visits of the earliest explorers had led to the spread of diseases to which there was no resistance among local people, who died in large numbers; this in turn would have fired up accusations of witchcraft between different groups, with warring as a result (Spriggs 1997: 260).

The administration, the traders, and the missionaries all set about pacification, each in their own fashion, some of which involved demonstrations of the power of firearms. The German administrative centre moved from the north coast of New Guinea to New Britain around 1890, first to Kokopo (Herbertshöhe), and on to Rabaul (Simpsonhafen) in 1910. The territory had a governor from 1896–1914, named Albert Hahl, who was surprisingly pro-native given his time and his task. He endeavoured to make the natives trust and want the administration (mainly because this would make it so much more effective), stuck to his deals, and had no particular wish to suppress traditional customs or beliefs as long as peace was kept and there was no cannibalism. From his memoirs (Hahl 1980 [1937]), it is clear that the population welcomed the abolition of warfare, in that it gave them very much increased mobility and probably also because it encouraged traders and their goods, although they clearly did not appreciate all aspects of European dominance.

Several exploration expeditions were launched, in particular the Deutsche Marine-Expedition 1907–1909, the Hanseatische Südsee-Expedition in 1908, and

ish control. The Germans called the territory in their control Neu-Guinea, and it continued to be called New Guinea when under British/Australian administration. This is somewhat confusing, as New Guinea is also the geographical name of the main island, which encompasses the now Indonesian territory known in different times as West Papua, Irian Jaya, and West Irian, as well as the south-eastern corner which was administered by Australia. The two domains of the name New Guinea thus only partly overlap. The name Papua is not much better; it was used for the south-eastern quarter of New Guinea island; it is used in Papua New Guinea today for people from the south-east of New Guinea island; is sometimes used for the Indonesian half of New Guinea island; and it is used in adjectival form (Papuan) in linguistics for any language in the area which is not Austronesian.

Many reports claim that several missionaries and traders were also consumed (e.g. Robson (1994 [1965])), but Parkinson who lived and travelled widely in the area for thirty years in the late 19th and early 20th centuries could not find evidence that white people who had been killed would have been eaten (Parkinson 1999 [1907]: 119). He states (p. 118–119, 211–212) that cannibalism was widespread throughout the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands, although individual tribes in several areas did not eat human flesh and regarded their cannibalistic neighbours with contempt.
the Hamburger Südsee-Expedition in 1908–1910, whose purpose was to docu-
ment as much as possible about the region and its people.

The first government station in New Ireland (then Neu-Mecklenburg) was es-
tablished in 1900 on the island of Nusa, and moved across the harbour to the
present site of Kavieng (Käwieng) a few years later. Franz Buluminski was in
charge and had a road built down the east coast. It has since been extended, is
still called the Boluminski Highway, and remains one of the best roads in Papua
New Guinea. Villagers along the coast were required to build and maintain sec-
tions of the road. Although traders, planters and missionaries had been present
in various locations before then, the road meant that the villagers along it were
in more constant contact with Western influences than people elsewhere, except
for the west coast across from Kokopo/Rabaul which had quite a few Chinese
traders and some missions.

In 1914, the first world war broke out in Europe, and Germany was ousted from
the New Guinea territory. German property was expropriated and German mis-
sionaries deported. Because of the war, there was hardly any white presence left
in New Ireland, and hence no written records, when el Niño caused a serious
drought in 1914. Chinnery ([1930?): 45] summarises natives’ descriptions of a
situation of severe famine with great loss of life and dispersal of people, and
writes: “…there was practically no food procurable. The period of drought and
famine culminated in a series of destructive bush fires along the whole line of
coast, bush and mountain ranges, and, from the descriptions given to me, eve-
rything perished – wallabies, in fact, have scarcely been seen since.” It seems
likely that similar events in the past have constituted repeated bottleneck events
for human and animal populations alike.11

After the war Australia administered New Guinea as a mandated territory from
1921–1942, with Rabaul as headquarters. In 1942, Japan invaded Rabaul and
the rest of the territory. The time of the Japanese occupation was very hard on
the natives in many areas.12

At the end of the second world war in 1945, almost all documentation from
both the German and the Australian administrations was found to have been de-

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11 In an online text providing background information to the occurrence of el Niño in
Papua New Guinea in 1997, Bryant Allen writes: “In historical times, severe droughts
have occurred in PNG in 1885, 1896, 1902, 1910, 1914, 1940-41, 1955-56, 1961,
1965, 1972, 1982, 1987 and now again in 1997. These droughts are reported in the
colonial and mission literature as being associated with forest fires, ‘scarcity of food’,
‘semi-starvation’ and in isolated places ‘famine’. In 1914 it is believed that New Ire-
land was particularly badly affected, with many deaths occurring as a result.”

12 An accessible account of the occupation in New Ireland from the point of view of
the Australian plantation owner and business man Harry Murray is given in Murray
After the war there was a provisional administration until 1949, when present-day Papua New Guinea was combined into the single administrative unit of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, which remained in place until independence in September 1975. The Australians continued to carry out patrols, took censuses, tried to improve housing and crops and wrote reports. These were kept in Australia, but were returned to Papua New Guinea following independence.

2.3.1 Abandoning the mountains

Some time during the German period, inland settlements started being depopulated or even abandoned, their inhabitants taking up residence in existing coastal villages or establishing new ones. It is often suggested that this movement was forced by the German administration. I have not come across any official statement of such a policy. This does not mean that it did not exist, but it is difficult to see why a colonial power would want large tracts of the area to be uninhabited, except perhaps to have access to labour for plantations. Further, if the administration had really made up its mind to have everyone on the coast, one would expect the process to have been much quicker.

Instead, the relocation seems to have been a gradual affair, terminating some time after 1930. Acting District officer I.F.G. Down’s cover letter to patrol report No. 14 of 1949/50 mentions mountain peoples moving down between 1910 and 1930, i.e. well into the Australian administration. This tallies with the evidence of the oldest lady in Bimun, the only person still alive who was born in the old village in the mountains. She says that she was old enough to walk, but had to be carried for parts of the descent. She further said that she was about the age of a young woman who I estimated to be 18, when the second world war came to the Pacific in 1942. Roughly then, she would have been born in 1924 and perhaps three years old when the mountain village was finally abandoned, which means this would have happened around 1927. Powdermaker, writing of Nochi-speaking Lesu in 1929–1930 mentions bush villages, which are fairly certain to have been Kuot villages (Powdermaker 1971 [1933]), and says that most of the inhabitants had moved to the coast but that some still remained in

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13 An investigation in 1946 reported that “enquiries in New Britain and New Ireland revealed that the only property of the Civil Administration found since reoccupation were some library books in Rabaul. No other official documents were found.” (Hilary Rowell: Appendix 4 “A history of the PNG records” in Research Guide 4: Papua New Guinea Records 1883–1942, Microfilm collections, note 14; online publication by the National Archives of Australia (http://www.naa.gov.au/Publications/research_guides/guides/png/appendix4.htm, 20 April 2002)).

14 The records were photographed and are kept on microfiche in the National Archives of Australia, together with what remains of earlier documentation.

15 E.g. Capell 1971: 264. Spriggs also refers to the “colonial practices of forcing inland populations to move down to coastal areas where they could be more easily controlled” (Spriggs 1997: 263).
the hills. The government anthropologist Chinnery, travelling through the island in 1929 also visited a number of bush villages (Chinnery [1930?]).

By this time, the population was quite dependent on metal tools, and had also taken up wearing clothes. Contributing reasons for the move were probably better access to trade goods and employment possibilities at the plantations, and perhaps some measure of health care.

I also recorded an elder in Bimun giving the reasons for the move, and according to him the people had had enough of having to walk down to the coast at night a few times a year when the government patrol officer (‘kiap’) came by to take the census. The kiap would send a native police officer into the hills and summon the inhabitants to the coast. The bigmen of several villages in the mountains eventually got together and decided to give up the old site. The land for the new village of Bimun was bought from the neighbouring Madak clan Panus with whom trading and warring had variously been kept up in the past. To the best of my knowledge, Bimun is the only village on the west coast that was established in a new location at that time; on the east coast there were previously no Kuot villages so all those that are not mixed were founded then. Some families or groups of families will have taken up residence in already established locations on both coasts.

2.3.2 Population decline and increase

The German administrators and researchers soon noticed a population decline, and this remained a worry through decades of Australian administration, and occasioned several anthropological investigations. Many different explanations were advanced: too large a part of the fertile population (especially men) were away to work on plantations in other countries; mission-induced fears of having children out of wedlock led to frequent use of abortive herbs; mission-introduced bans on divorce and remarriage meant that unhappy unions could not be dissolved and happier ones formed; there was disease (especially among former mountain dwellers); and over and above all a general apathy among the population. Chinnery, summing up the evidence, adds as a cause for apathy the banning of promiscuous sexual unions, in particular those associated with the traditional nightly dances (bot), and he sympathetically quotes an elder complaining that the Missions tells married people that they must have more children, and asking how there can be children without sex life – there is no romance and adventure anymore, the young people feel shame and have no desire.17

16 Meyer (1932: 196) gives the total population of New Ireland and offshore islands as 44,600, 5,900 of whom were away working; i.e., some 13%, most of whom would be men of reproductive age. Blackbirding had been abolished since a few decades by then, but contract labour schemes still existed.

17 Parkinson (1999 [1907]: 120) makes the more general observation that “the South Sea tribes possess a certain weariness of life that robs them of the energy essential for living”. Acting District Officer Down’s short cover letter cited above also says, not without exasperation, of the former mountain people: “They do not swim, do not make canoes. They refuse to go back to the hills.”
Today the trend seems to have been turned, and fears of overpopulation are developing instead. The density of population is not high in absolute terms, but slash-and-burn agriculture requires a plot to lie fallow for 15–20 years for the bush to grow back, meaning that a rather large tract can only support a rather small number of people. The fallow periods are being shortened to 12 and 15 years in some areas, resulting in smaller yields.

Rural New Ireaders today live in a mixed economy with cash income mainly from cash crops such as copra, and quite a large component of subsistence farming. They own the land on which they live and from which they make their livelihood, and there is a large measure of self-determination in day-to-day activities. Food supplies appear to be sufficient and quite well balanced (cf. 2.8 below). People have access to schooling and health care, although these and other areas of infrastructure do leave some scope for improvement.

2.4 Ethnographic background and linguistic contact

Although the first white contact was relatively recent in New Ireland, it is hard to get a reliable picture of pre-contact life. Christianisation and pacification have had a large impact on the life and stated values of the Kuots. While speakers will not hesitate to tell you that their grandfathers were cannibals, pre-Christian life and many of the customs and traditions associated with it are regarded as bad today. The majority of the population are now devout Christians, former times are not much talked about, and many people have rather hazy ideas of what it was like. Most major rites, such as the malagan traditions for which central New Ireland is known (see 2.7.1 below), are gone today, as are most kinds of magic concerned with influencing the environment, like magic to make gardens grow (in particular taro gardens for ritual occasions), magic for hunting and fishing, rain magic and so forth. Other traditions are still carried out, such as the payment of bride price and a mourning period for the dead and burning of their personal belongings. There is also a widespread belief in sorcery, and a few people still have divination skills and knowledge of spells and counter-spells.

Some of these things will be described in a little more detail further on in this chapter, but first it will be useful to look at the basics of the social structure.

No anthropologist has made a long-term study of the Kuot, but some idea can be gained from sources on neighbouring peoples. The most relevant anthropo-

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18 Even a hundred years ago, aspects of Western material culture had penetrated quite far. Parkinson (1999 [1907]) writes that “[t]here are still, as much on New Britain as on New Ireland and Bougainville, tribes of whose language we do not know a single word, with whom we have never come into contact.” (p. xxxiii). Nonetheless, quite substantial changes had already taken place, as shown in the following observation from New Ireland: “[t]he stone axe has now completely disappeared and it is difficult to obtain blades” (p. 128). On the following pages he comments on the simplification of personal and artefact ornamentation stemming at least in part from the change in tools.
logical work from this area is by Hortense Powdermaker (Powdermaker 1971 [1933]), who did fieldwork in Nochi-speaking Lesu (Lossu) village on the east coast in 1929–1930. It appears that Kuot speakers had quite close contacts with Nochi speakers, and Powdermaker reports marriages between Lesu people and people from “bush villages”. There are also a number of lexical items shared between the two languages, and it appears that the Kuots have borrowed at least one entire ritual, namely that of girimisi, which is held to celebrate a woman’s first pregnancy. Given the readiness with which dances, songs and other cultural items are borrowed between groups according to Powdermaker, it is likely that there are many more things shared between Nochi and Kuot, and it seems to me that her account of the Nochi matches in most major aspects with what I have been able to glean on Kuot traditional life. It is also the case that Nochi villages separated the Kuots from the east coast, and it is highly probable that frequent swapping markets took place between the two populations occupying the different niches (see also 2.8 below).

In more recent times, work has been carried out with the Madak speakers of Pinikindu (B. J. Clay 1977, 1986), and the Madak-speaking people of the Lelet plateau (Eves 1998). Pinikindu is closer to the Kuot area than Lelet, but Lelet is interesting because its four villages are the only remaining mountain settlements in New Ireland. Unfortunately there is no space here to compare these analyses with my Kuot data. It would be interesting to do so, as there is evidence of contact between Madak and Kuot speakers going back quite some time. For instance, an elderly lady named Galeng grew up in Konos on the Madak-speaking east coast, and through kin contacts between Bimun and Konos her marriage to a Bimun man was arranged (probably around 1960). Her clan is a Kuot clan, Napagur, whose ancestral clan land is in Kun in the northern Kuot area. The multiple kin ties between these villages may be a recent development, but it should be noted that they are presently on both coasts and that Konos was previously a mountain village, as was Bimun (then Taula). Konobin was another Madak village in the mountains with which there seems to have been contacts (after moving to the coast its name changed to Sominim).

Ties with Nalik speakers to the north are also indicated by shared clans in the border regions. Jenny Xomerang of Nalik-speaking Madina village on the east coast told me that in her childhood in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s her late father, an important leader called Michael a Xomerang, sometimes met with Kuot leaders on the west coast, with whom he had kin ties, for ceremonial purposes, and that the Madina bigmen used to know some Kuot. There is further an oral tradition among the Nalik, to the effect that they originated further north, but displaced and assimilated the Kuot speakers. It is worth quoting Volker’s two paragraphs on the topic here:

Oral history states that the ancestors of the Naliks came from northern New Ireland, either Kavieng or Lavongai (New Hanover), moving ‘up’ towards central and southern New Ireland, and that as they moved, they encountered, and to some extent assimilated, the indigenous Kuots (a vun a bina, literally ‘the essence of the land’) of the interior, (p.c. Matthias Tovat and Maimai Michael a Xomerang). Legend relates that as these northern New Ireland groups moved,
they fell under the spell of the spirits (Tok Pisin *masalai*) of the different areas which they settled, so that their speech separated into the related, but different languages of northern New Ireland today.

Oral history also relates that originally most Naliks lived near Laefu, but as a result of the breaking of a customary incest taboo, there was civil war and division between different groups. This resulted in different groups moving out into new areas and assimilating the original Kuots through intermarriage. Even today the relatively small Laefu dialect is regarded as the oldest, if not most prestigious, dialect of Nalik (Volker 1998: 20).

This account is reconcilable with the fact that Kuots trace their ancestry to Kun in the north of their territory. Kuot shares quite a few items of general vocabulary with Nalik to the north and Nochi on the east coast, but hardly any with Madak to the south. This would indicate that ties were primarily to the north and east. But, intriguingly, there is more shared kinship terminology with Madak than with the other languages (see 2.6.2 below), suggesting intermarriage with Madak speakers. It is possible that the shared kin terminology represents a later development.

Nalik is part of a language network extending to the north, and Madak is part of a group to the south Ross (1994: 554). Nochi is believed to be a later arrival in the area as it is closely related to the language of the Tabar Islands, and because it does not share most of the areal phonological features (cf. 3.10). There is thus reason to believe that linguistic contact with speakers of Nalik and the Madak languages extends further back in time. On the other hand, contact with Nochi speakers may have been more intense as the populations occupied different niches on the east coast and would have been engaged in trade relations.

It is very difficult to say what the levels of interaction may have been in the past (and they may well have fluctuated over the centuries). If there was very intense contact, we might perhaps expect Kuot to be heavily influenced by neighbouring languages. We do find a fair amount of loan words but there is remarkably little structural similarity. However, many factors weigh into the actual result of a particular linguistic contact situation, such as the levels and extent of bilingualism, and the degree of confluence between linguistic boundaries and inter-group perceptions of cultural sameness or difference (see also 2.7.5 below).

More recently, Tok Pisin has spread through the area, and its influence is growing. Maps 49 and 50 in Wurm, Mühlhäusler and Tryon (1996), detail the spread of Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea, and show sporadic contact with Tok Pisin along the east coast and off-shore islands pre-1880. In most of the rest of the island, it is marked as having spread in the period 1920–1940.

### 2.5 Social organisation

Kuot society has very little inherent hierarchy, working largely on the same principles as societies described as ‘bigman’ societies elsewhere in Papua New Guinea and Melanesia. Such societies are characterized by the absence of royal or chiefly lineages with hereditary power. At any one time there is normally more than one bigman. A bigman comes into a leadership position through per-
sonal characteristics, such as wisdom in decisions as perceived by others, the ability to create and maintain relationships through distribution and exchange of wealth, and proving himself capable of organising ceremonial events. Once a leader, others follow his word but also expect to be looked after by him. We could say that prestige is gained by considered deployment of wealth, rather than its accumulation.\(^ {19} \)

The dominant units of social organisation are the clan and the village. There are always several clans in a village, and the concepts of clan and village are interlinked since all land is clan-owned. Clans own different sections of the land on which a village is built, and each clan also has sections of gardening land in the bush. Yet, determining to which village a person belongs is complex. This is because primary access to land is mediated through matrilineal descent, while post-marital settlement is virilocal (patrilocal). If a woman grows up on her own clan’s land, she is thus likely to move away on marriage, and her children will grow up on their father’s clan’s land, to which they have only secondary rights. Quite often, a person identifies both with the village where they grew up, and the village where their clan land is, and will give either as their place of origin (see also 2.7.5 below). Sometimes, of course, a person grows up on their own clan land or on another clan’s land in the same village, in which case the conflict does not arise.

The virilocal settlement pattern gives a different social structure to the village from the uxorilocal pattern described by Powdermaker for Nochi-speaking Lesu. In the Nochi case, there is in principle a lineage of women residing in the same area for generations, and men moving in on marriage. In the Kuot case, it gets more complicated, as there is no corresponding constant male kin group over the generations. The complexities resulting from the combination of virilocality with land rights transmitted in the female line, and the responses in terms of actual settlement relative to the stated principle were not investigated but may make an interesting topic for an anthropological study.

In former times, all villages had men’s houses, which were also important social units (see 2.9 below).

The household, normally each consisting of one nuclear family, is the smallest unit of social organisation.

\(^ {19} \) There was little durable wealth in the past. As far as I can make out, the only wealth was shell money (Kuot *tanop*, Tok Pisin ‘mis’), which in New Ireland are thin strands of tiny shell discs threaded onto a line, about 1.50m long, and magic spells and formulae of various kinds, and to an extent perhaps also living nut and fruit trees. All of these were inheritable either through mother’s brother or own father, so in that sense there was some hereditary basis for wealth, but a person’s position would still have to be consolidated through his actions. (Shell money would probably be obtained in other ways more often, its main use being in transactions between clans, as well as fines for breaking taboos, and payment for spells etc. Spells could thus be bought and sold, and constituted an asset also in that people would pay to have a spell performed.)
2.6 Kinship

Both the structure of kinship itself and the way in which it structures social interaction are different in New Ireland from what Western readers are likely to be familiar with. The structure of kin terminology is also quite different.

2.6.1 The structure of kinship

Kinship is matrilineal in all of New Ireland. That means that you belong to the same clan (butamat) as your mother, and since clans are by definition exogamous, your father is necessarily of a different clan. In all of Melanesia, matrilinearity is associated with areas of Austronesian settlement, i.e. coastal and island areas, while inland New Guinea is dominated by patrilineal descent reckoning. It is interesting to note that while Kuot speakers and their neighbours share the matrilineal kin system, Kuot differs from Nochi and Madak speakers in having preferred viriloclal settlement upon marriage (I have no corresponding information on Nalik). The term for clansman or clanswoman is pasənə (cf. 5.7.3).

In most of New Ireland, from the Nalik area and southwards, including the Kuot-speaking area, the clans are in turn grouped into two moieties which are also exogamous. That is, a person must choose a spouse not only from a different clan but from a clan of the other moiety. There is no word in Kuot corresponding to ‘moiety’, but the two moieties are referred to as ‘the big clan’ (butamat u-lo kan-i) and ‘the little clan’ (butamat u-lo kapp-io), respectively. The terms referring to size are simply conventional appellations, and do not bear any relation to actual size in membership or relative importance.

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20 The exception to the rule of matrilinearity is found in some patrilineal areas in the Solomon Islands, see e.g. Codrington (1969 [1891]: 22), who reports it with a great amount of bafflement.

21 Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) makes clear in several places that the Lesu people (Nochi) have uxorilocal (matrilocal) settlement upon marriage. Writing about the Madak (Mandak) in Pinikindu, Clay (1977: 21–22) says there is no stated residence rule, although couples would often prefer to live in the woman’s hamlet for a few years, and that it is almost impossible for a man to achieve a position of authority anywhere but in the village of his own clan or sub clan so the couple often move to the husband’s village at a later stage. It is not clear whether the virilocal preference of the Kuots can be taken as an indication that there was a patrilineal system of descent reckoning in pre-Austronesian times.

22 Another way of putting it is to say that butamat is ambiguous between ‘clan’ and ‘moiety’. The fact that there is no term for an important unit like moiety could be an indication that the Kuot speakers did not have this organisational unit in the past.

23 Moiety names to do with size are probably present elsewhere on the island as well, as the Tok Pisin names for the two moieties are ‘bikpisin’ (big bird) and ‘liklik pisin’ (little bird); on the other hand this could be because of the association with the eagle and fish hawk (see below).
As in other areas in New Ireland that have moieties, they are associated with the eagle (kǝkkǝŋ) and fish hawk (laragam) respectively. However, these terms are not the names of the moieties, nor could you refer to a person of ‘the little clan’ as a “fish hawk”. It is not clear to me what role these symbols may have had among the Kuots; it could be that they were used in traditional malagan carvings (see 2.7.12.7). The moieties of the Kuots’ immediate neighbours (Madak, Nalik and Nochi speakers) are perceived as being the same so that a person marrying in from those areas must follow the moiety lines, while someone from further afield simply gets associated with the opposite moiety from that of their intended spouse.

The moiety is the largest unit that an individual can call upon for help, for instance in collecting wealth to pay bride price (see 2.7.1 below). These are occasions which typically serve to show the strength of the moiety. The moiety is also the largest unit within which extension of kinship terms operates (see further 2.6.3 below).

To return to clans, first, the clan is the unit where extension of kinship terms is automatic (see 2.6.3). There is also a measure of equivalence between members of a clan, in that revenge for ill-doing could be taken out on the ill-doer or one of his clansmen or clanswomen. In the past, if bigmen meted out punishment for crimes against taboos etc., this too could be paid by anyone in the clan – even if the punishment was death (see further 2.7.1 below).

It is also the case that some clans within the moiety have closer associations with each other than others, and are perceived as being more closely related.

All of the higher-level clans trace their origins to the grounds near the former bush village Kun in the northern Kuot-speaking area (near present-day Liedan on the East Coast). They each have a small piece of ancestral land there, and it appears that there is frequently an association with snakes, that (at least in some cases) dwell in a hole on the clan land. Bimun is far from this area and on the other coast, and it was difficult to get a clear idea of the import of this information, as most people have not visited their clan land and young people do not have a good idea of its former ritual or cultural significance. I was able to collect only two myths of clan origins, for two different clans, both of which involved a woman finding the female child of a snake and rearing it, and the child then starting a new clan or subclan.

24 The eagle moiety is called kong kong in Nochi, clearly related, but the hawk is called telenga.

25 Powdermaker shows many Nochi clans having associations with snakes too (Powdermaker 1971 [1933]: 36–39). She was able to record only one story indicating descent from a clan animal; this in fact concerns a Kuot clan called Kaba, and appears to be one of the ones I also recorded (p. 39).
The clans divide into subclans (*ima*). Each clan and subclan has associations with particular land areas, and it appears that a new subclan is formed when a woman settles in a new area and her female descendants carry on the lineage. The name of the area is the name of the subclan. The establishment of subclans does not entail snakes or other non-human creatures (the text Boilei in the text appendix gives the story of the establishment of the subclan Boilei).

With the higher-level clans all having their ancestral ground in the bush around Kun, and branchings of clans being associated with the occupation of new territory, it seems that it should be possible to lay out a tree diagram of clan relatedness on the landscape and trace the dispersal of the Kuot people towards the south.

While clan and moiety membership are inflexible, in the sense that you are born into them and belong to them forever, other aspects of kinship can be manipulated to an extent. Two factors are at play: first, the Kuots do not keep track of genealogies going back more than a few generations, and second, in this small-scale society, any person is highly likely to have multiple kin ties to any other person, which can be stressed at different times.

The point about genealogies deserves elaboration. Access to resources is through clan membership; for instance the primary model for land ownership is that it is owned jointly by the matriclan. As clan membership is not contestable, and as long as there is consensus as to what areas of land belong to what clan, there is no need to “prove” your birthright through tracing your exact relationship to the initial settler of that land. Naturally, if there is disagreement about the rights to land, some proof needs to be presented, but it appears that this is in the form of stories detailing the settling of that land by ancestors. No such disputes occurred while I was there (probably since the land around Bimun has been cultivated by the Kuots for several generations and it is clear whose land is whose).

At any one time, at least one woman in each clan must bear the name of the clan (but not always of subclans as far as I am aware). I was not able to get any ideas around reasons for this. Most people have more than one name, and the woman bearing the clan name is sometimes known by that name, and sometimes by another name.

Clans or subclans facing extinction traditionally sometimes adopted a female child from another lineage so as to regrow the threatened branch. Adopting someone into a clan is a ceremonial event sometimes also performed for some-

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26 This word also means ‘river’, of the flat slow type of river found on the east coast rather than the cascading variety of the west coast which is called by the general term for ‘river’, *danuot*.

27 One elderly speaker expressed worries about the loss of stories in that they would not know what lands they had rights to e.g. if a forestry company would want to fell timber in the mountains. Normally, money would go to the owner clan jointly, but establishing ownership in lesser-used areas could be problematic today.
one marrying into the community from far away (for instance a Sepik woman married in Bimun was taken up into a Bimun clan) and involves the exchange of shell money.

Adoption is quite common also in the sense that a relative might take over a child, often just because they like that child, if the child and the parents agree. There is no formal ceremony marking long-term or permanent change of primary caretaker, and the birth parents remain recognized as such. Interestingly, there is a verb -paranje, which means either giving birth or taking care of a child in the long term. It is also common for a child to go and live with relatives for a short while, but this is perceived as different and is not covered by -paranje.

2.6.2 Kinship terminology

The kin terminology is also structured differently from what we are used to. In a European system, the term applied to a person is typically determined by that person’s gender, and it is typically unidirectional, so that your uncle does not call you ‘uncle’. Although a few kin terms in Kuot do have those properties, the majority are reciprocal, and many are not gendered. If we imagine a tree diagram of the kinship structure, we may say that the Kuot terms typically apply to the connecting lines, rather than to nodes. A single term applies to the relation as such, e.g. tata ‘maternal uncle – sister’s child’. A further difference comes from the unilaterality of kinship reckoning, so that for instance a maternal aunt and a paternal aunt are called by different terms and have very different roles. See also the kinship diagrams in Appendix IV.

Table 1 lists kin terms which are not reciprocal. I am not aware of any non-reciprocal terms for relations acquired through marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kuot</th>
<th>translation</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>moiety</th>
<th>comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSANGUINEAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naga</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>m/f → f</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>cf kakka ‘mum’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ira</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>m → m</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>cf mama, mamo, momo ‘dad’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lou</td>
<td>man’s sister</td>
<td>m → f</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>cf pappa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talou</td>
<td>man’s sister’s child</td>
<td>m → f/m</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>cf tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poi, pe</td>
<td>son or daughter</td>
<td>any combination</td>
<td>s/d</td>
<td>(diff. moiety from father)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the most important reciprocal terms are shown in Table 2, divided into consanguineal (by blood) and affinal (by marriage) reciprocal terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kuot</th>
<th>translation</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th>moiety</th>
<th>comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSANGUINEAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kakka</td>
<td>mum</td>
<td>m/f→f, f→m</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>limited reciprocity, see below; cf also naga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mama, mamo, momo</td>
<td>dad</td>
<td>m/f→m, m→m/f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>limited reciprocity, see below; cf also ira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Gender Changes</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tata</em></td>
<td>mat. uncle</td>
<td>m/f→m, m→m/f</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>the older member of the relation can use <em>talou</em> to/of the younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nabar</em></td>
<td>pat. aunt; also wife of <em>tata</em></td>
<td>m/f→f, f→m/f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>joking relationship (esp for male nephew)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>pappa</em></td>
<td>sibling</td>
<td>f→f, f→m</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>cf <em>lou</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kokup</em></td>
<td>same-sex cross-cousin</td>
<td>m→m, f→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>joking relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kokole</em></td>
<td>diff.-sex cross-cousin</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>strong taboo, address used to be in plural; also man’s mother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(i)aia, (i)eia</em></td>
<td>grand-relation</td>
<td>any combination</td>
<td>s/d</td>
<td>also siblings of grandparents, also great grandchildren; also woman’s parents-in-law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AFFINAL, FEMALE EGO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Gender Changes</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>lai</em></td>
<td>husband</td>
<td>f→m</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(i)aia, (i)eia</em></td>
<td>h’s parents</td>
<td>m/f→f, f→m/f</td>
<td>s/d</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>papa</em></td>
<td>h’s brother</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>louaga</em></td>
<td>h’s brother’s wife; h’s father’s sister, h’s mother’s brother’s wife, h’s sister’s son’s wife</td>
<td>f→f</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>–other woman who has married close male relative of my husband (his brother, or <em>tata</em>; see notes about <em>nabar</em> in 2.6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nemula</em></td>
<td>h’s sister</td>
<td>f→f</td>
<td>same(d)</td>
<td>also wife of h’s same-sex cross-cousin. Address: <em>makapien</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(lei)mason</em></td>
<td>h’s mother’s brother</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>big taboo (Bimun)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AFFINAL, MALE EGO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Gender Changes</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>kuala</em></td>
<td>wife</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kokole</em></td>
<td>w’s mother</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>big taboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>anmula</em></td>
<td>w’s father</td>
<td>m→m</td>
<td>same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mela</em></td>
<td>w’s brother</td>
<td>m→m</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>address: <em>makapien</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>papa</em></td>
<td>w’s sister</td>
<td>m→f</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>luop</em></td>
<td>w’s sister’s husband</td>
<td>m→m</td>
<td>same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tinmöai</em></td>
<td>w’s mother’s brother</td>
<td>m→m</td>
<td>diff</td>
<td>also (own) sister’s daughter’s husband; “<em>tata</em>-in-law”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms *kakka* ‘mum’ and *mama* (etc.) ‘dad’ (but not *naga* ‘mother’ and *ira* ‘father’) have a degree of reciprocity in that parents sometimes use them to their children. This happens when cuddling the child or speaking nicely to it. It is also used to children through extension of terms, e.g. children of same-sex siblings. It is not considered acceptable to order these around with full parental authority, so a request for the child to go and get something would be spoken...
quite softly (e.g. ‘kakka, go and ask tata John for a betel nut for me and bring it here’). You do not get the reciprocal use in scolding (‘how many times have I told you to go get water!’?). A child never uses poi ‘child’ to a parent.28

A point to be drawn from the reciprocal use of kakka is that the presence of a reciprocal kin term does not mean that there is a reciprocal kin relation: there is no question of a child having authority over a parent. Some other relations which are asymmetrical in spite of full reciprocity of terms are mentioned in 2.6.4 below.

Both in male and female terms for parents-in-law, there is a collapse with consanguineal terms. For the male, this is kokole ‘mother-in-law/female cross-cousin’, and for the female it is aia ‘parent-in-law/grand-relation’. The explanation would seem to be that traditionally, the preferred marriage for a male was with the daughter of his cross-cousin. His cross-cousin would then be his mother-in-law, and his parents would be of his wife’s grandparents’ generation. This principle was never actually stated to me in spite of efforts to establish principles of betrothal and marriage, but Chung (n.d.) mentions it, and Powdermaker (1971 [1933]: 147) does the same for the Nochi. (Cf. also remarks on marriage in 2.7.12.7 below.)

It should also be noted that the terms used for many relationships mediated by marriage depend on what relation existed between the two parties before the marriage, in particular perhaps within ego’s own moiety. In these situations speakers sometimes have a choice of terms, and different speakers choose differently, with a tendency to follow the marriage-based terms for close kin of the spouse, and the pre-marriage terms in other cases.

Some terms are best defined via other terms. For example, leinasoŋ is the wife of tata, and this specification does not take into account whether the tata in question is nephew or uncle to ego.

Many of the reciprocal terms have special dual and plural forms used for third person reference. The special duals and plurals contrast with regular duals and plurals (non-singulaires), in that the special forms refer to pairs or groups of individuals connected to each other by the kin term, while the regular forms refer to pairs or groups connected to an anchor29 who is not part of the group referred to. See 5.4.1 for the terms and forms.

The principles of the Kuot kin system become very much clearer when attention is paid to the moiety of each of the persons; the moieties are represented in different types of lines in Appendix IV. However, several terms are not limited to the same or to the opposite moiety from that of ego. This is not so surprising in the case of ‘grand-relation’; it seems to denote a relation two or more genera-

28 This asymmetry appears to be quite common in languages where parents can use ‘mommy’ or ‘daddy’ to a child, see e.g. Rieschild (1998).

29 See Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001) on using “anchor” rather than “ego” when the speaker and ego are not the same.
tions distant, and can apply to persons of either sex, and also of either moiety. What is more interesting is that a few terms primarily applied to specific relations of either the same or the different moiety can be used also of persons of the other moiety from the relation that is the more central to the term (such as nemula in Table 2).

As mentioned, kin terminology is an area of lexical diffusion in the area, presumably as a result of intermarriage between Kuot speakers and their neighbours. I have not had access to very extensive terminologies for the other languages, but some of the shared terms I have come across are given in Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Areal kinterms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuot</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mama, mamo, momo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>naga (num-)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kakka</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(i)aia, (i)eia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kokup</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(lei)nason</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kuala</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madak:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalik: mama (Chinnery; Volker has dama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara: nang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nochi: nagaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madak: kokup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madak: tata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madak: <em>(i)nason</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nochi: kuala/koala (old woman)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that there are several terms shared to the south (Madak, Barok), as other parts of the vocabulary have loans almost exclusively from Nalik to the north and Nochi on the east coast.

2.6.3 Extension of kin terms

As mentioned above, kin terms are automatically extended within the clan, so that mother’s sister is also ‘mother’. It follows that the children of mother’s sister (parallel cousins) are also siblings, and you may hear a mother say of her daughter that ‘she went to stay with another mother of hers’. In fact, it is more inclusive than that, so that all members of my clan and my generation are siblings, as well as the children of anyone that my mother calls ‘sister’, whatever the exact kin relation of the two women may be.

30 Similar terms are found in some Papuan languages of New Britain as well: Butam: *mamu*, Baining: *mam(ök)*, Ata: *mam-, ṃm*-.

31 The special dual and plural forms for ‘mother’ use a stem *num-* which is likely to be an older form (see 5.4.1).
Father’s brother is also father, his wife is also ‘mother’ and his children are siblings too. That mother and those siblings will be of the same moiety as ego, but not necessarily of the same clan. In the next generation, the children of all the people who are ego’s same-sex siblings by birth or extension are ego’s children.

A person thus has a large array of persons called by the terms for mother, father, siblings, and children, and all other relations mediated through these, such as mother’s brother, grandparents and so forth. But there is not equivalence between e.g. the biological mother and any other person referred to by the same term. Rather, a definite core – periphery principle is at work.³² Although a child is fed and looked after by many people on a casual basis, he or she sleeps in the house of the biological parents, and they are the only ones that may punish the child (although if another person functions as the primary care-taker at a particular time they take over those functions too). Further, mother’s sister is more mother-like than someone who is less closely related, although here it should be said that such relations are also pragmatically influenced by actual interaction so that a more “distant” mother living close by may develop a closer relation with the child than a mother’s sister who lives far away.

The core – periphery principle can also be seen in the level of strictness with which taboos pertaining to particular relationships are observed, going from strictest at the core to less strict in the periphery. This will be discussed further in 2.6.4.

The adverb puputira (possibly related to pupup- ‘straight’) has the sense ‘actual, real’ with kin terms, and is used to distinguish core from extended relations. For instance tata aŋ puputira (mother’s brother 3m.PossII.3s actual) means that the referent is not any brother of any mother of the person but his actual mother’s actual brother. To distinguish an actual sibling from a sibling by extension, expressions like ‘just one mother’ are also often used.

It seems clear to me that we really are looking at a system of extended terms, rather than at terms which are group appellations. That is, if they were group appellations, the definition of mother would be something like ‘a set of females of ego’s moiety, previous generation, including the one who gave birth to ego’. Given expressions like puputira and the relaxing of prescribed behaviour with “distant” instantiations of a relation, it is evident that the core relations are defining and others are extensions thereof. The definition of naga ‘mother’ is then something like ‘1. the woman who gave birth to and raised ego; 2. other women of the same generation and clan or moiety as naga’.³³
2.6.4 Kin-based prescribed behaviour

As set out above, Kuot society is non-hierarchical in structure, but that does not mean that there are no rules specifying different types of social interaction with different people; there are, and they are mostly defined by kinship.

Kuot kin relationships can be divided into three main categories, avoidance relationships, close and unrestrained relationships, and joking relationships. The system obviously deviates from those described in the standard anthropological literature on the matter, where avoidance relationships are usually contrasted with joking relationships, but without a third category explicitly described.

The strongest avoidance relations obtain between siblings of different sex, between cross-cousins of different sex, between a man and his mother-in-law, and between a woman and her husband’s maternal uncle. Close relations are the most clearly observed between siblings of the same sex, and also between e.g. a mother and her daughter. The joking relationship is found in two relations: that between a male child and his father’s sister (nabar) and that between cross-cousins of the same sex.

The types of relationships are expressed (or not expressed) in terms of behaviour such as pronouncing the name of a person, sitting (etc.) close to a person, joking with a person, touching a person’s skin and hair, and in some cases restrictions to do with a person’s property (house, clothes). Each type of relation will be characterised here, followed by a description of one of the most salient aspects of these relations, the name taboo.

**Close relations** are very relaxed. Children enjoy close relations with everyone for quite a number of years, and taboos and restrictions are only gradually introduced and appear not to be enforced until puberty. Close relations are same-sex sibling relations, parent – child relations, grandparent – grandchild relations and husband – wife relations; also, in the Bimun area, ego’s spouse’s same-sex sibling. When interacting, these people use each other’s names; they may sit, stand or lie much as they wish (and even fall asleep on the floor when visiting each other); they may touch each other (only within close relations will you see one looking for lice in the other’s hair) and look into each other’s eyes; they may joke with each other and speak freely on any topic; and they may share pieces of food or eat off the same plate, share betel nuts, take things from the other’s basket, etc. They may not deny the other anything asked of them (and often an item can be seen moving through the community along these lines, for instance a new cap or string bag). These interactions can be restricted if someone is nearby whose presence demands more decorous behaviour (see below).

**Avoidance relations** are talked about in terms of respect by speakers (the Kuot term for showing respect in this way is the class I verb *gogo*). In contrast to

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34 This word may be a loan, as it is mentioned by Parkinson (1999 [1907]: 121); there however it is given as the word for the pandanus hood that married New Ireland
the close relations just described, in e.g. a brother – sister relationship the two
may not use each other’s names, touch skin or hair or pass close enough to
smell each other, they should not talk together unless necessary and must never
mention anything to do with sex in each other’s presence (even directed at
someone else). A woman can give her brother food but they may never share
the same pieces or eat off the same plate, nor share the same piece of betel nut
or betel pepper. A man may not touch his sister’s clothes and must not pass un-
der the line where she dries her washing, or indeed under anything of hers, such
as her house. This part is not reciprocal; a woman can wash her brother’s
clothes and can pass under things belonging to him, but may not go onto his
house, nor sit on anything he has built, such as a bench. This restriction recurs
for a man’s mother-in-law, female cross-cousin and mother’s brother’s wife,
and it was often said in this connection that the man would have cut the wood in
the forest and carried it on his shoulders. A secondary reason (so ranked by
my informant on the topic) is that the man who built the house may want to
walk under it. The restrictions on houses and benches (etc.) can be temporarily
removed if the woman pays a little bit of money (ranging from perhaps 20 toea
to a few kina), for instance if a woman is caught out by rain on her way home or
for any other reason wants to use the house or, more commonly, the bench. It
can also be permanently eliminated ritually if for instance a man wants to “clear
the way” for his sister to go onto a house that he has built or use a bench: he
will put on a feast, she will also pay some money, and a clan leader will make
an announcement.

In the case of a man and his mother-in-law, which is the strongest taboo of all
for a married man, they are not supposed to have any contact. A man does not
enter a house where his mother-in-law is and vice versa. In a roundabout way
they can sometimes take part in the same conversation, for example if some
people are in a house and some sitting outside, both the son-in-law and the
mother-in-law may contribute to the conversation in a general way but never
address each other. A son-in-law is expected not to be loud or make any crude
comments in her presence, nor to laugh. If she is outside, he should spend as
little time as possible in her field of vision, and she equally avoids him in these
ways. As mentioned, the mother-in-law is not to go up into a house or sit on a
bench that her son-in-law has built.

A cooking house is exempt from the house taboo (possibly because it is not on
posts but directly on the ground), so the older woman is able to work with her
daughter in her daughter’s kitchen even if the daughter’s husband has built it.

women used to wear in the presence of married men. The hood is no longer used, but
is known in Tok Pisin as ‘karuka’ (Kuot kapot).

35 The exact significance of this expression is not quite clear. I attempted the
reformulation that he had built it with his strength; this however was neither refuted
nor particularly enthusiastically received.

36 The taboos to do with going onto houses is interesting as all available evidence indi-
cates that houses were built directly on the ground in former times. It seems that the
The strongest taboo for a married woman in Bimun is that concerning her husband’s mother’s brother (his tata).\(^{37}\) She may not go into a house where he is, and is expected to stay away from him for example in a crowd at a feast. She will not go into a house or onto the veranda of a house that the uncle has built. The same relation applies to the wife of the uncle vis-a-vis his sister’s son; since the two men are in an uncle – nephew relationship, the wife of each has to show respect for her husband’s maternal uncle/sister’s son in this way. (Two women married to men in a tata relationship, however, have a close relation and can call each other sister, or louaga.)

Other relations, although characterised as respect relations, only show some of the features associated with the strongest avoidance relations. Thus a woman can sit down near her brother’s wife (nemula) and talk with her, but may not joke, or touch her hair and skin. She is not supposed to go onto the house because of her brother, but there is also the consideration that the brother’s wife might like to go under the house. This particular relationship is not fully reciprocal, in that the man’s sister can use the name of his wife, and tell her to get things etc., but not vice versa.

There are two relationships defined by joking, kokup ‘same-sex cross-cousin’ and nabar ‘father’s sister’. With the first, it is not ordinary kidding, but teasing and playing tricks sometimes bordering on the nasty. The victim is not allowed to be upset. Teasing is often rude, and definitely respectless (like when one woman talked to her cross-cousin about a mat the latter had made which was not very straight: “This mat is like you, little on top [meaning the head] and big down below [meaning the behind]”). A kokup will sometimes steal his kokup’s copra, representing quite a lot of work, and sell it in town for his own benefit, and there is nothing the wronged party can do (except steal something else another time).

With nabar, the joking is sexual, in particular of course if the nephew is male. The jokes centre around the idea that the aunt and the nephew are married. The boy calls her husband luop, the term used for men who have married into the same matriline as ego. When the boy grows up and is married, his nabar and his wife will call each other louaga, the term for a woman who has married a close male relative of ego’s husband, and they will joke that they are both married to him. The boy’s nabar gives him food, and there appears to have been a whole house taboo is essentially an extension of the bench (etc.) taboo, and that the aspect of walking under/over the other has been added to that. There is not otherwise any emphasis on relative position in the vertical dimension. When I tried to look into that aspect by asking some women about it, the only result was the information that it is not considered seemly for a woman to climb betel palms when her brother is nearby. The explanation was volunteered that he might see under her laplap.

\(^{37}\) I am told this is different moving north within the Kuot area even only as far as Patlangat, where it would be a close relationship, allowing for jokes, and the two calling each other eia (grand-relation). The Bimun custom appears to be shared with the Madak to the south.
category of songs used primarily for the paternal aunties to sing while carrying parcels of food to the nephew (or indeed niece); the songs were called *sapda* and their purpose was to celebrate the nephew or niece.

It is interesting that both joking relations, the *nabar* and *kokup* relations, are close-kin cross-moiety relations. They can both be said to express dangerous forces: sexuality vis-a-vis a close relative (albeit of the opposite moiety), and rudeness and stealing and so forth on levels that are not acceptable anywhere else within the system; both forces that normally have to be contained.

The behavioural requirements of these different types of relationships lead to what superficially seems like inconsistent behaviour, as an individual may vary between easy-going, subdued and rude depending on who else is present.

Breeches of taboos in the past were punished differently depending on the nature of the crime. It was always the bigmen who determined the sentence. Smaller crimes, perhaps touching a distant sister’s hair, were fined, shell money and or pigs to be given to the injured party or his or her (male) relatives. Any sexual relations within the same clan were considered serious cases of incest and were sometimes punished by death, whereby the convicted person had to commit suicide (usually by hanging; see further 2.7 for comments on death).

There are some categories of people who are largely exempt from kin-based rules. Children were mentioned above. Crazy people also cannot be expected to always follow the established rules of society, nor foreigners from faraway places such as Australia or Sweden. Modern times have also brought situations in which many rules have to be suspended, such as the crowded transports to Kavieng. This has contributed to a general weakening of the rules, which have also been undermined by the acceptance of Christianity by the population, whereby the force of much everything related to custom has been diminished. The system operates and is very salient, but the force is lesser and the only punishment of breeches that I am aware of is social disapproval (which is of course not the least of motivations in human life).

A large number of relationships stem from birth, and more are added through marriage. Even given the prescribed behaviour concomitant with particular kin relations, personality and personal preferences are of course essential to the nature of the relationship that any individual actually has with another. As mentioned, locality also factors in, so that actual relationships are built and maintained through interaction, for which the persons need to be in the same place.

### 2.6.5 Name taboos and alternative forms of address

A component common to all relationships characterized by respect is the name taboo. Two people in such a relation are not to say the each other’s name, and if a woman’s brother’s name is John, she is not to use the name John of any other man by that name either. Instead appellations such as ‘the husband of Lin’ or ‘the father of Joel’ are used. A man can refer to his sister as ‘the mother of the children’, for instance when inquiring at her homestead of her whereabouts. Even in public addresses at village meetings, the announcer will use descrip-
tions such as ‘the in-law in Okoiok’ rather than reading out the name of a taboo relative from a list.

In the community, of course everybody knows what the relationships of others are, and that makes it easier to work out who is meant (as you will know who cannot be mentioned by a speaker), but there are still frequent misunderstandings, and it is common for an interlocutor to fill in the name if it is one that they are allowed to say. Sometimes a third party is called upon to pronounce the name of ‘the auntie in Kabil’ and so forth. Taking down a genealogy tends to involve a whole group of people and a fair amount of yelling across the village so that all names can be said.

The name taboos are mostly reciprocal, and mostly cover both address and third person mention, but there are a few exceptions. A woman can say the name of her brother’s wife (both to and about her), but not vice versa. A man may only say the name of a man married to his sister when that man is out of earshot.

Other alternative forms of address or mention for people whom one is allowed to address at all are by kin term (though not all terms appear to be used in this way), physical characteristics (e.g. *piek* ‘bald person’) or other properties (e.g. *ŋoŋ* ‘crazy person’), or function. Given the extremely low degree of professional specialisation in this society, function may have come in only in fairly recent times (e.g. *komiti* for the chairman of the village council, or *pasta* for the pastor).

Nicknames also exist, and are exempt from the taboo. For instance, one man has been known as *Sikarama* ‘dry twig’ ever since he was a child because he was so skinny, and people who are not allowed to pronounce his name quite happily use the nickname.

Name taboos are not entirely defining of the nature of the relationship, in several ways. First, the core – periphery principle set out in 2.6.3 means that more respectful behaviour is accorded a “real” brother than a “distant” brother (by a woman), but the name taboo still applies to both. While a woman avoids many types of interaction with her real brother, she may be heard telling a distant brother to stop telling lies and get on with the job, in direct address. Second, names are avoided (but not taboo) in several relationships which are not avoidance relationships, as a sign of respect. This applies from children to parents in most families, and from niece or nephew to maternal uncle. I have also heard a woman ask for her husband and a mother for her grown son in roundabout ways; these are just personal choices and subject to inter- and intra-speaker variation. A further feature of name taboos is that they apply more strictly to indigenous names than to so called Christian names (i.e. names having come in through Western mediation, ranging from Ezekiel to Benny, and from Ruth to Roslyn), but still speakers are very unwilling to use either.

A special relationship also holds between two persons called by the same name, and they are not to refuse each other anything. The namesake relation is called *bekula* and this term is often used in address between the two, stressing the bond.
A very interesting aspect of some of the respect relationships is non-singular address for singular referents. A man and his brother-in-law, and a woman and her sister-in-law generally address each other with the term *makapien*. This has the form of a regular dual, but there is no corresponding singular or non-singular (plural) form. Address traditionally was with dual cross-referencing on verbs, and this is still heard in some cases, or even with mixed second person singular and dual forms. Similarly, if a man had to address his female cross-cousin, he would use a plural form of the term *kokole: kokolaip*. The expression ‘mother of the children’ mentioned above was also frequently in the plural (*nagap meiam lop* ‘mothers of the children’, or using the name of a child e.g. *nagap iam Ruth* ‘mothers of Ruth’); correspondingly the woman could refer to her brother as *irap am Eskol* ‘fathers of Eskol’. It is possible that there were more such usages in the past. The ones given here are remembered and used occasionally, but are disappearing.

### 2.7 Other ethnographic notes

It is quite difficult to get a reliable picture of anything from the past, and accounts of almost any aspect of life often vary wildly between different speakers. What is presented here has been pieced together with the aid of accounts from different speakers, sometimes evaluated in the light of some of the historical and current information on neighbouring peoples (while trying not to be too influenced by these, as it is likely that there were differences), and also using plausibility as a criterion.38

#### 2.7.1 Rituals in life and death

*Malagan* (/malangan/malanggan/) is the term both for a cycle of ritual feasts and for dance masks and other carvings associated with them. It appears that this ritual complex is only a few centuries old, and that it may have originated in the Tabar island group (off the east coast of New Ireland). I showed some photos of masks and carvings in German collections, and they were identified by elderly speakers as Tabar or Madak style. It was claimed that Kuot had a style of its own, but I was not able to establish what characterised it. Given the low level of identification according to language it is likely that the spread of particular styles did not follow language boundaries. One speaker said that the Kuot carvings were like those of Amba (Aba, Hamba) village, which is a Nochi-speaking village on the east coast. Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) also describes how the rights to make particular malagan designs (each with its own name) were bought and sold between clans, and any particular design seems to have been able to move around quite a bit.39

38 For instance, one speaker claimed that women were secluded for a period of several years during puberty, and that they each ate one pig a day. This has to be rejected on grounds of implausibility, and other accounts by the same speaker were similarly fanciful and so had to be treated with some caution.

39 Similarly, dances (with songs) passed between different groups, and Krämer-Bannow reports one dance all the way from Rabaul having been performed in Madak-
As for the ceremonial cycle, this is described in some detail by Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) and Lewis (1969) for the Nochi, and since the ceremonies may be taken to have been very similar in all important respects, and since they are no longer practiced among the Kuots, I will only give the briefest summary here. Malagan feasts had multiple functions. They were the final ceremony in a sequence of mortuary rites, and at the same time the biggest feast associated with the initiation of adolescent boys. Various other outstanding matters for clans would be settled too. For a man, arranging a malagan feast was one of the most important ways of gaining prestige.

After death, bigmen and possibly any old people were cremated, but it is not clear what happened to ordinary people; in the mountains there appear to have been burials in the ground, and near the coast it is possible that some corpses were sunk at sea but I have no statement of the latter from the Kuots. In the case of important bigmen it appears that the skull was often kept in the men’s house and used in magic (taro and rain magic?) and perhaps other practices.

Preparations for the feast would start not long after the death. At a meeting various people would indicate how many pigs they intended to contribute by sticking the hard midrib (sokopit) of the coconut leaf in the ground. These people could be children, in-laws, uncles or others with a relation to the dead person. Failing to deliver when the time came caused social shame and derision of the worst degree. Piglets then had to be acquired and raised, and about six months before the ceremony, taro gardens would be cleared and planted, and magic made to ensure the growth. Malagan carvings were ordered and the carver began to carve them. At each stage of preparation, a small feast would be held. Weather magicians were paid to ensure good weather for the day or days of the feast.

After death, a person’s spirit roams around, and particularly in the first days or weeks may appear as a ghost, make noises such as knocking on the walls and bothering the living in general, visiting the places that the person used to visit in life. Various tests were carried out to check if the spirit was still around, such as throwing small pieces of food in the fire; if it crackled it meant that the spirit was present, “eating” the food. The mortuary feast finally removes the dead person’s spirit from among the living. According to Kuot informants, several speaking Lamasong as the emperor’s birthday was celebrated in 1909 (Krämer-Bannow 1916: 96–97).

40 More general works on the malagan traditions in north-central New Ireland include Gunn (1997), Hallinan (1990) Helfrich (1973), and Krämer (1925), all of which also have very good pictures of the associated artwork.

41 The sinking of corpses at sea in former times is mentioned by Jensen (1999: 125) writing about Madak speakers, by Krämer-Bannow (1916: 39) writing of an incident in Baranat near Muliaua in the south of New Ireland, and by Parkinson (1999 [1907]: 136) writing of Anir and Nissan islands off southern New Ireland.
deaths would often be covered by the same feast, including deaths in various clans, but different moieties would hold separate feasts.\footnote{I am not sure whether the separate feasts were held at the same time or on entirely separate occasions.}

One particular person would be in charge of the organisation. Accepting the pig’s head at a feast meant a promise to organise another feast within a few years time – again, failing to do so meant never being taken seriously again, and sometimes having nasty tricks played on one.\footnote{An analogy to accepting the pig’s head is found in turn-taking in the story telling that used to take place in the men’s houses. I was told that all stories had to end with a big feast (many of them still do), and the narrator would finish by saying “and the pig’s head goes to...”, naming the person to tell the next story. Although this context was more playful, the person named had better come up with something.}

At the same time, the young initiates are let out of their confinement. Information on their age varies; I was told that it concerned boys between the ages of perhaps seven and fifteen, who would be in seclusion together for a period of several weeks, perhaps up to a few months. During this period women would not be allowed to see them, and when they had to leave the specially built compound, they had to play a kind of flute. The Kuots also practiced circumcision, as did the Nochi (cf. \cite{1971[1933]}).\footnote{An informant said that only the Nochi and the Kuots used to practice circumcision. However, Friederici notes it in many areas in 1908, especially in the south since many areas further north were already missionised and the natives were wearing laplaps. Friederici preferred to call the practice incisio since it was a case of slitting the foreskin open in one place, rather than cutting around it and removing it altogether (1912: 44). Krämer (1925: 30) on the other hand describes how a ring is cut off. Strauch also noted some degree of circumcision in the Madak area in 1875, describing it as the foreskin being worn “pulled back” (1877: 91–92).}

A few more notes on death may be made here. It is possible to inherit acquired physical characteristics; for instance one man has a sort of dimple on his lower ribcage to the side, which is said to be from one of his forefathers who died of a spear wound in that spot. This is considered to be on a par with other character-
istics which are inherited, such as skin hue. To some extent, temperament may
be included here, and one little girl was sometimes playfully called by the name
of her great grandmother when she was being vain, as that grandmother was
known for always carrying a mirror. None of these matters are taken very seri-
ously by those I discussed them with, and I do not know what of it relates to
actual beliefs on the matter of inheritance, and what is just idle observation of
similarities (or whether these can be pried apart).

It does appear that death was not very much feared, as suicide was and is fairly
common (usually by hanging, or these days by overdosing on Chloroquine anti-
malarial tablets). As mentioned, suicide could also be ordered by the bigmen of
a village as the strongest form of punishment for breaking taboos. Interestingly,
the person whose death had been ordered in this manner could opt to kill a close
member of their clan, and this would be accepted as equivalent.\(^{46}\)

There is no taboo on talking of dead people, although whatever name taboos
existed before the death are still observed. After the death of an old man in
Bimun, his grandchildren were heard threatening each other that he would come
and haunt them at night, and even speculating as to how far his body would
have rotted after a week.

Some traditional customs are still carried out following a death. On discovery of
the body, the women rush to wail over it, sometimes throwing themselves onto
it. Each woman wails for perhaps half an hour, and as people arrive from other
villages through the day they sometimes wail a bit more. Men are less demon-
stratively sorrowful, but often cry silently, sometimes in private, sometimes
quite openly, if the death is that of a close relative. The body is washed, and
these days dressed and put in a coffin, and buried within one or two days. The
first night after the death there is a wake, and most of the people connected with
the dead person and many others stay up all night, singing.\(^{47}\)

For about a week after the death, there is “sitting on the ashes”, meaning that
people of the same moiety as the dead person and others closely associated with
him or her eat and sleep in or near the dead person’s homestead, cooking and
eating communally. When this first period of mourning is broken it is referred
to as “scattering the ashes”. I tried to find out whether this was in reference to
the funeral pyre that used to be made, but was told that it was to do rather with

\(^{46}\) I have a short and purportedly true narrative about a woman named Buŋmaun who
inadvertently saw the men carving malagans, and was ordered to go and kill herself
since there is a very strong taboo on women seeing the preparation of these carvings.
Instead she hanged her daughter. The person on whose ground the girl was hanged
then gave the woman that piece of land, as it is customary that land is given to the clan
of someone who dies on it.

\(^{47}\) Traditionally there were songs for the wake (\textit{lakobumas} for an important bigman,
other songs for a younger or less important person), songs for carrying the body
around the village, and songs for carrying it to the graveyard and possibly even more
categories to do with stages of death and burial (see also 2.10 below).
the hearth and home of the person. (There may be a connection also with the custom of burning possessions of the dead person, in particular clothes and such items that have been in close contact with the person’s skin.)

One of the children of the dead person will let his or her hair grow and not cut it until after a final ceremony.

In talking of ceremonies after the death of a person, frequent mention is also made of a separate occasion when a headstone (Tok Pisin ‘simen’ from English ‘cement’) is put on the grave. This seems not to have taken place in the past, even where there were graves. I have not been able to clarify whether this occasion has replaced aspects of the traditional malagan feast, but it seems that it is given a lot of importance, and also that a custom known as “paying off the father” (see below) takes place at this time. This would fit with the idea of “finishing off a person”, an expression sometimes used in connection with the final mortuary rites in other areas on the island (although I did not hear it from the Kuots).

**Paying the father** relates to the matrilineal clan structure whereby a person is of the same clan as their mother but the father is of a different clan. Anything that a father puts into the raising of his children is paid back to his clansmen by his children and their clansmen. I believe that this was traditionally done at the mortuary feast, but other notes say it would take place at the cement ceremony. At present, the custom persists but takes place while the father is still alive; in the one instance I witnessed it was an old lady who had brought up her two grandsons Sǝkot and Eremas after their parents (the old woman’s son and his wife) had died. She thus took the place of the father in the ceremony. The grown or adolescent children put in a lot of work to get the necessary wealth together, and members of their moiety contributed a little money too, members of the same clan probably a bit more. Pig and taro or sweet potato is prepared, and people gather together. When the money is going to be handed over, a chain of people is formed across the open space in front of the house, money is handed across, and an announcer shouts out expressions such as “Sǝkot paying for care”, “Eremas paying for sweat”, “Sǝkot paying for hard work” and so forth, as kina notes and shell money pass across. Then the money is counted, and the value of shell money and pigs added, and the total announced. Any coconut palms and other trees that the father may have planted for the children are to be paid for in the same way. A man who had not paid his father’s clan for coconuts was constantly finding his copra stolen and sold by the father’s clansmen and clanswomen; this was considered fair, and of his own doing.

Inherent in this practice seems to be a notion that a clan should be self-sufficient in vital force. A father is of a different clan, clearly indispensable for the propagation of his spouse’s clan but the energy and material resources that he takes to it have to be reimbursed, from her clan to his.

Perhaps following a similar logic, husband and wife pay each other off by staging a small feast. The wife’s and the husband’s feast are separate events, and
years may pass between them, and there are no rules governing the timing, but each will set the time as he or she sees fit.

Marriage is an area where it has been surprisingly difficult to get consistent information on traditional practices. It appears that there was infant betrothal, but my impression is that this was more in the nature of the parents and others talking about two babies born around the same time as future spouses, and that it was not binding. Some informants said that an exchange of small amounts of shell money took place to mark it. This would fit with other information to the effect that spouses were generally of much the same age. Marriage took place at a relatively late age, as I understand it perhaps 22 or even 25. The ages were defined for the man by him having fully developed beard growth, and for the woman by her breasts having “fallen down”. It was also mentioned that a woman should know all the jobs that women need to do, in terms of gardening and cooking and so forth.

There appears to have been considerable sexual freedom both before and during marriage, and Powdermaker describes a system where a married woman’s lover(s) would give her husband one strand of shell money when they had met. Some husbands were jealous, but many not. Unmarried women would keep the shell money themselves and some made quite a bit. From the same source, as from Chinnery and Krämer-Bannow and others, it is also evident that there was widespread knowledge of abortive plants among the women. While children by unmarried and sometimes quite young women today are not a cause of social stigma, the medical knowledge appears to be largely lost, and abortion is very heavily frowned upon by the church.

Some time before or within a few years after marriage bride price is paid to the woman’s lineage. The groom’s clansmen and other members of his moiety contribute to the total, which consists of cash, shell money and the value of pigs; occasionally also rented transport and other expenses that may have been incurred. In the two cases that I witnessed, the total came to around 1,200 kina and 1,300 kina respectively. The set-up is very similar to that described for children paying the father above, with groups from each lineage on either side of an open space, and money handed across from one to the other along a chain of people (who appear to have no particular role but just happen to be handy for the job).

In the Kuot area (unlike some parts of Papua New Guinea), the bride’s parents do not name a price. Rather, it is an occasion for the groom and his people to show their strength, and they collect the money and hand it over all in one go. These days, the woman also often pays the man, but this is said to be a recent

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48 This is a neutral way of giving a woman’s age; a young woman is one whose breasts “stand up”, while her maturation is expressed by the breasts “falling down”.

49 That a relatively late age is and was considered proper is supported by the indignation expressed by some Kuot women when shown a postcard picture of a Lavongai (New Hanover) bridal couple of around 15–16 years of age.
custom in this area. On the occasions I saw, at least once the woman handed over her assembled money (some 300 kina) following the paying of the bride price.

All these ritual exchanges are clan- and moiety-defining, and have the effect of showing the clan’s strength in numbers as well as wealth and ability to meet obligations. On each such occasion, there is a contact point between the two moieties through a small number of individuals, such as two spouses or a father and his children. On each, assets flow from many individuals within one moiety towards the contact person, proportionately to the distance of relation. After the transfer of the collected wealth to the other moiety, the assets are distributed through it, similarly in proportion to relatedness.\textsuperscript{50}

Personal \textit{exchange relationships} are quite different. I did not attempt an analysis of giving into open and controlled, but others have noted among neighbouring peoples that some kin relations entail symmetrical giving, where each item has to be returned in kind, while in others there is a more or less constant flow from each side, but without a repayment structure (e.g. Jensen (1999)).

Another custom used to be practiced at a woman’s first pregnancy. \textit{Girimisi} (as mentioned in 2.4) seems to have been borrowed from the Nochi, as there are no associated songs in Kuot, but a variety of songs in Tok Pisin and Nochi.\textsuperscript{51} This celebration had two stages: one when the pregnancy became publicly known (after about three months), and one when the child had been born, and involved women of opposite moieties pouring buckets of water over each other and throwing each other into the sea.

Another ceremonial occasion which is often forgotten is that of peace-making. I know very little about the nature of \textit{war}, but it is my impression that it was largely in the nature of repeated raids and ambushes. Eventually one group decided that it had lost too many people to sustain the war, and sent out a request for peace to the other group.\textsuperscript{52} As part of the peace process, settlements were made for all persons killed on each side, and compensation paid in shell money.

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\textsuperscript{50} Oddly, given the logic of this type of transaction, the bride’s father receives a fairly large proportion of the bride price, in spite of being of the same moiety as the groom.

\textsuperscript{51} A closely related ceremony is found among the Madak as well, called \textit{egirimis}; cf. Clay (1977: 108ff).

\textsuperscript{52} I have an account of a false request, which is said to have occurred between an enormous mountain village called Nalamana somewhat south of the present Kuot area but possibly belonging to it. Nalamana was at war with Panus (near Lemau), and Panus said that they were too few to fight this enormous village, and asked for peace, inviting the Nalamana to a huge feast. All who could walk came, and ate pig and taro and filled their baskets with food to take back. However, the food had been poisoned with magically treated lime powder, and within weeks every man woman and child in Nalamana had died. (I have no other mentions of this village and it may be altogether mythical, but the story tells us something about the customs around peace-making.)

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and pigs. Warfare and peace-making are cyclical, and are likely to alternate as relations between any two localised groups through history.

2.7.2 Spirits

There is definitely a belief in spiritual beings of various kinds, but it is in many ways not articulated and systematic. There are human-like bush spirits, spirits of dead humans, spiritual doubles of humans, spirits of certain animals, spirits belonging to particular features of the landscape such as rock outcrops, and probably many other spirits.

The bush spirits, gas, are very much like humans in appearance, motifs and so forth, but unkempt with long hair and beards, and supernaturally strong, and they can make themselves invisible or turn into animals such as birds and bats, or take the shape of particular humans. They live in holes in the ground or under rocks in the bush, and apart from the term gas, they are described as ‘man/woman from under the rocks’. There are many stories of interactions of gas with humans (I have recorded at least three purportedly true stories, one of which involved a male gas living and working in Panaras village for years within the last century). Marriage and interbreeding with humans are also sometimes reported, and gas frequently become attracted to humans of the opposite sex and follow them around, and sometimes have to be banished from the village by magic means, in other cases simply tolerated. If they trick a human into sexual intercourse, death mostly follows. In a way, the gas symbolise the untamed powers of the bush, opposed to the structured and controlled world of the village.\footnote{Creatures called gas exist among the Madak and Nochi too. The Madak version (la-gas) seems very similar to the Kuot one (Eves 1998: 155ff, passim), whereas the Nochi (gas) appears to map onto the spiritual double of the Kuots (see below; Powdymaker 1971 [1933]: 39), but is also a type of malagan (Lewis 1969). Gas seem to have been depicted in Kuot malagan carvings as well.}

Spirits of dead humans (muranǝma) roam for some time after death as mentioned above. I was told of the site of the old mountain village (Taula etc.) that whenever a new person comes and spends the night there, the ancestral spirits scream and shout and make lots of noise through the first night, to welcome the new arrival. It is not quite clear to me whether these are seen as the spirits of actual people who lived there in the past, as there is also a Tok Pisin expression ‘bigmen of the land’ which does not appear to apply to particular human spirits, but are rather something in the nature of the spiritual essence of the land.

There is further a category of human spirits called nema (Tok Pisin ‘birua’), comprising the spirits of people who died violently and prematurely. These are more likely to haunt the living and for a longer time, and resemble our Western concept of ghosts quite well. They also have associations with certain red fish, which are part of food taboos of required for certain ventures. There are probably many other associations of which I am not aware.
Each person further has a spiritual double. If you get a sudden stomach pain, it may be because your double was stabbed in the stomach, and if your double dies you die. I do not know of a name for this category.

*Murale* (m) and *murulaibun* (f) are terms for spirit places (Tok Pisin ‘bles masalai’) such as stones, typically outcrops of the raised reef bed (*barst*), some swampy areas and so forth. The word *murale* can also mean earth quake. I was not able to get a clear idea of the application of the male vs. female terms. The spirits inhabit these types of places and may affect humans that visit them. Thus a child’s nightmare was explained by his having played near such a place in the day, and the parents kept asking him who he had seen in his dream. Miscarriage and physical and mental handicaps are also often explained by the pregnant mother frequenting such a place, or leaving a very young baby there e.g. while working nearby. Dangerous and often deadly diseases can also be caused by these spirits, which on the whole appear to be rather malicious.

Coastal dwellers in most of New Ireland traditionally practiced the shark (*bioma*) fishing known as *shark calling*, using a rattle made from coconut shells (*girgir*) and a bait fish to attract the shark, then passing a noose (*kinen/kiner*) with a wooden “propeller” (*lakaseman*) over its head as it comes close to the canoe.\(^{54}\) In preparation for shark calling, a variety of taboos must be observed, such as sexual abstinence and avoidance of particular foods. It is still practiced in this way in some areas, famously so in Kontu a few kilometres south of Bimun.\(^{55}\) Spiritual connections with the shark are a part of this practice, but I am not aware of its exact nature as it was not practiced in Bimun (where shark was fished like other fish).

Snakes are thought to turn into humans sometimes – the skin of a snake is a sign that the snake has turned human and will return to its skin later. Pythons (*lamot, amora*) in particular were associated with mythical properties. As mentioned, there are also snakes associated with the clans (see 2.6.1 above).

Eagles are feared to an extent, as they are frequently the vehicles of spells sent out to find a target.

There are also numerous lesser spirits, only some of which were explained to me, and only two examples will be given here. When it rains after a long dry spell, people are advised to stay inside and not go walking around for a few hours. This is because the rain brings out the spirits of the ground, which can make you sick (this perception is probably connected with the smell of the earth which is brought out at such times). If a person wakes up with a stiff neck, it is because he or she has been out walking at night and got punched by a spirit.

\(^{54}\) A canoe with this equipment was depicted by Abel Tasman as early as 1643, and is reproduced in many places, e.g. Parkinson (1999 [1907]: 356).

\(^{55}\) The 1982 film *The Shark Callers of Kontu* by Dennis O’Rourke depicts the custom of shark-calling and highlights the tensions between life today and pre-Christian traditions.
The spirit of some living humans can leave the body, normally during sleep. Such sleep is very deep and very still. A sleeping person, even a child, is always awakened very gently, mostly by repeatedly calling the person’s name, as a person can die if he or she is awakened while the spirit is out. The more powerful of such spirits can take the form of a bird and travel long distances (for instance, eagles are a specialty of the Namatanai area further south, which is known for strong magic and sorcery).

### 2.7.3 Magic

“Magic” is used here to refer loosely to various ways of influencing the elements and other people by spells and so forth, including sorcery. The Kuot terms are the synonymous sǝŋa and taraŋ (both ‘poisen’ in Tok Pisin). There is also pupulu ‘black(f)’ which is primarily with women’s magic, although women have access to some other types of magic too.

Many types of magic were performed in the past; magic to make taro grow for a ritual feast (performed on round stones at the men’s house), magic to make or stop rain, magic to ensure the success of hunting (influencing the dogs), fishing, and war, love magic, magic to cause sickness, magic to cause sickness to anyone stealing from a magically protected (pase) betel palm, as well as counter-magic to the latter two, and probably many more kinds. Taro and rain magic were primarily associated with ritual feasts and have disappeared with the feasts and the men’s houses (although it was alleged that rain magic was attempted during the drought in 1997). I do not think that fishing and hunting magic is performed any longer. Crops of betel nuts and betel pepper are still protected in this way, causing a thief to suffer illness, usually severe internal pain at some time after the theft. The trees are normally marked with coconut leaves to warn people off. It is considered very irresponsible to perform this magic without having the counter-spell ready, and one father in a nearby village was said to have caused his son’s death by failing to mark a magically protected tree and then failing to have the counter-spell. Love magic is still carried out, and the belief in magic as the cause of severe sickness and death is still very strong. Only the death of a very old and weak person is considered natural.

A spell could be sent in different ways. Something personal would be obtained from a person against whom one has a grudge, such as hair, worn clothing, cigarette ends or food scraps (disposing of such items in water or fire prevents risk). Spells are said, and often fire is made over the object which will cause pain or death. I was told that this type of magic is not performed in the Kuot area nowadays.

A spell could be directed to a specific but indefinite person, if you are sure that someone has made magic against you but you do not know who. Divination uses hair too; hair (or other items like clothing) is taken from a dead person in suspicious cases, and brought to a diviner who can sometimes name a particular person, sometimes give a description, or otherwise confirm suspicion. A curse can then be dispatched to find and kill that person, often carried by an eagle, even if the identity of the person is not known by those who order the spell and pay for it being performed.
Another way of influencing other people was by reciting spells over the white lime powder which is used in betel chewing. The powder was blown onto food which was offered to the person, and a similar procedure was used to strengthen the dogs before hunting. Betel nuts and betel pepper can be tampered with as well.

A further method of transmitting a spell is by making tiny bundles with magically treated objects, and placing them where the intended victim is expected to step over them, such as at a doorway or under the ladder to a house, or on a path. It takes effect when stepped over. The drawback with this method is that it can catch the wrong person.

Other magic was used for protection against spells, such as a magically treated special type of red earth applied to the vagina against spells that you catch by stepping over them. Ginger had a variety of uses too, and there were doubtless many more.

Magic in all these forms is not a bounded system, distinct from other cultural practices. On the contrary, if it is known who caused a death by magic, that person (or one of his kinsmen) can be stabbed to death in revenge. Similarly, divination can be used to find out who committed non-magical crimes.

Individuals own magic, as hinted above. It can be inherited; in that case the stated preference is from maternal uncle to a man, keeping it in the family, but fathers also often pass it on to their sons. It can also be bought and sold, and an owner is paid to perform the magic on other people’s behalf (it would not work if given freely). Different kinds of magic may follow different patterns of ownership transfer.

2.7.4 Church and administration: today’s social arena

The first mission in the region was established by Wesleyan Rev. George Brown in the Duke of York islands in 1875 (and George Brown Day is now celebrated yearly in United Church parishes), and the Catholics established Vunapope near Kokopo in 1882. Mission stations were gradually established throughout the Bismarck Archipelago, and today there is hardly a village of more than 50 or 100 people that does not have a church. The main denominations are United Church (previously mainly Methodist), Roman Catholic, and in some districts also Seventh Day Adventists. Various smaller churches attract some followers too, such as the PNG Bible Church, but these do not have the established status of the major churches. There is further a stronghold of the Baha’i faith in Madina village (Nalik-speaking).

I think it is fair to say that the church has usurped the public arena to a very high degree. While the ceremonial feasts used to be the prime way for a man to gain prestige, the main forum is now the church, and being a church leader gives an amount of prestige to a person. The church is also the ceremonial focus of today, with opportunities for feasting at Christmas, Easter, George Brown Day and so on. Mother’s day, Father’s day and Children’s day have also been introduced as church events. There are further Youth fellowships and Women’s fellowships and other groupings which organise celebrations and fundraising.
events, and many of these bear some resemblance to traditional feasts at least in terms of masses of food being prepared and eaten, and songs sung (although these are not traditional songs). Marriages and baptism also occasion celebrations. Catholic parishes have more traditional elements in their church celebrations, such as traditional body decoration and the decking out of sculptures of Jesus with shell money – this is frowned upon by members of the United Church where only a minimum of traditional attributes are permitted.

Traditional ritual occasions drew people from wide and far.56 Church feasts also see several villages get together, but mostly within organised units such as Kontu Circuit which includes five villages, for example at New Years Eve in 2000, and at the ordination of a new pastor in Kontu in 1998. The inauguration of a new church building has people travelling wide and far, contributing songs and food to the occasion.

Friday is mission day, and people meet at the mission in the morning and are sent off to do work such as weeding the church compound, build a new house for the Sunday school or mend the roof of the pastor’s house, or work in gardens dedicated to church events, depending on what needs to be done.

Another forum for leadership is the local levels of government. Each village elects a member to the next level consisting of about seven villages, which in turn sends a representative to the local level government (which for Bimun is in Konos). A man who did not enjoy some respect would not be elected, but it does not seem to be a position with very high prestige.57

There are also some national feasts not organised by the church or independently in the village: Independence Day on 16th September and the Queen’s Birthday (as Papua New Guinea is part of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II is head of state, and her birthday is celebrated).

Every Monday morning (except sometimes when it is raining), village meetings are held all over Papua New Guinea, and attendance is compulsory. These are led by the chairman of the village committee. Mondays are dedicated to government work, and after general announcements, the day’s jobs are announced, and people are divided into work groups and dispatched to cut the grass at the school or repair the teacher’s house, or build a new cooking house at the hospital, etc.58

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56 Powdermaker notes people coming to a major feast from 25 to 30 miles away in 1930, and Lewis makes the same observation in 1954, noting also that the presence of the road and pacification probably meant participation from further away than in ancient times (Lewis 1969: 45).

57 It is also the case that any election procedure in Papua New Guinea involves more than the perceived competence of the candidate, due to the role of kin ties and other obligations.

58 Other tasks regarded as community responsibility can be handed out on these occasions too. To my embarrassment, the young lads were sent to dig a very big hole for a
Metal tools such as bush knives and metal fishhooks have made much work easier and faster (perhaps especially men’s work), while it can be argued that the modern-day commitments to church and community take time from the individual. Although both mission work and community work normally take up only half the day, and people are usually free to do their own work from around noon, it is often felt that it is too late in the day to go to the gardens by then. Sundays are days of rest in United Church villages (while Catholics often work after mass).

Neither of the new structures of church and local-level government accords the same prestige as bigmanship of days of yore. Elders sometimes explain that all the real bigmen are dead, and that they themselves are nothing. This perception is probably the result of a combination of factors, but it is central that traditional ritual life has largely gone, and with it the contexts that defined social entities.

2.7.5 Identity

The past couple of centuries have meant dramatically expanded horizons for the people of Melanesia. Still, villagers often have a very sketchy idea of the world outside of New Ireland and Papua New Guinea, largely because most people have not travelled far from their place of origin. Of the people now living in Bimun, all have been to the provincial capital Kavieng (only a handful of Kuots live there), and have visited other villages along the west coast, north within the Kuot area (not the least to visit the sub-health centre in Panaras) and south into the Madak area. Most have also visited other villages on the east coast but perhaps less often due to the structure of transport. Many young people have boarded at so called top-up schools for grades 6–8, and some have gone on to do grades 8–10 at one of the five provincial high schools. A number, mostly men, have studied or worked in other areas of Papua New Guinea. For example, my main informant Robert Sipa did one year of clerical (secretarial) studies in Lae in Morobe Province, and also toured in Sepik Province with a band for a short time. Others have worked in mining operations and other jobs (in particular perhaps Clemendy Towil who worked for years in the prospecting division at Ok Tedi mine, and then at the Lihir gold mine off New Ireland – he was quite happy to make conversation about the Mir space station).

There has also been an influx of people from other areas moving into New Ireland and into the Kuot area. Early on, the plantation managers imported labour from the Sepik region and elsewhere on New Guinea island (all subsumed under the local Tok Pisin expression ‘bikples’), and a number stayed on and married locally. Chinese traders also have a long history in the region, but I am not aware of any that live or have lived within the Kuot area.

Although most people’s life is village-based, there is thus by now a history of awareness of different ways and values. People know that the Madak call their grandparents by sibling terms, that New Guinea highlanders have patrilineal de-

toilet for me not long after my arrival, and when I returned for my second long stay in the field, the women had been set to weave mats for my house.
scent reckoning, that male highlanders wail at funerals, and so forth. Western life is less well understood, probably partly because many of the whites who have lived in the area, e.g. as plantation managers, led quite secluded lives. But although various differences were observed and commented upon, I never had the impression that they were used as defining for an us – them divide. This could be to do with relations being essentially peaceful and non-competitive at the present time.

Nor is language an identifying factor, and I have not come across any references to names for people or areas based on language (with the possible exception of the mysterious reference to “Guat” reported in 1.3). From all indications, contacts were not geographically extensive a hundred or so years ago, and it is quite possible that people did not even know the far boundary of their language area (then again, it seems that ceremonies were sometimes carried out on the ancestral clan land at Kun). A history of inter-language marriage as evidenced by shared clans and kin terms across language boundaries, is perhaps an indicator that language did not serve as a marker of identity; at least not to the exclusion of speakers of other languages. Powdermaker put the situation in 1930 like this:

New Ireland is divided into nine main linguistic units, which are further subdivided into smaller units based on differences in dialect. People who live twenty miles distant do not understand each other. There is no tribal, political, or other social relationship between these linguistic units. Even the villages of one linguistic section do not act as a unit. [...] there was fighting between the villages of the same linguistic unit. [...] It is merely a geographical area, separated from other areas by its language, but other than that it has no cohesion and does not even have a name. (Powdermaker 1971 [1933]: 31). 59

Language is defining for ethnicity in many parts of the world, but it is also a relation that Europeans with their nation-state ideology are prone to expect and to encourage. In New Ireland there appears to have been little basis for such an equation of language with ethnic group, and it seems that such ideas were largely created when the languages were named by the administration (cf. 1.3), their speakers called by the name of their language, and administrative units then aligned with these boundaries, schools named after them and so forth.

It could be argued that the lack of emblematic functions of language is a recent effect of the spread of Tok Pisin. However, it seems to me that languages would have names if they were important for identification, or that there would at least be perceptions of speakers of different language as culturally different. I heard no echoes of such notions.

Those speakers of other languages who know anything at all about Kuot consider it very very difficult. It is likely that few outsiders in the past learnt it well,

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59 The situation of the Nochi speakers among whom she worked was somewhat special, as it is a small language group of only five villages all on the east coast. She does note relations with interior people who would have been Kuot speakers but makes no comment on their language.
and that it was up to the Kuot speakers to maintain necessary levels of multi-
lingualism to maintain relations. It remains to be explained how Kuot has sur-
vived during the centuries if that was the situation. One explanation would be
that my conclusions about the low emblematicity of language are simply wrong,
or that the situation has changed quite recently. Another possibility is that Kuots
saw their language as usefully secret, since Austronesian speakers do not under-
stand it. Further, if the languages of the area were all of a roughly similar size,
and the groups of similar strength, there would be no reason to shift to a differ-
ent language. It could also be the case that multi-lingualism carried high social
prestige, a factor which may well contribute crucially to languages being kept
alive and kept apart.

The units that do appear to be identifying are the clan, moiety and the village, as
outlined above in 2.5 and 2.6. When there were still villages in the mountains,
there also seems to have been some identification according to bush/mountain
vs. coast. There is a word for costal people, *tubiebip* (only in the plural, and not
widely known now), but no word was known for mountain people.

### 2.8 Subsistence

The cash economy in New Ireland is not very strong, but is certainly present.
Cash comes primarily from copra production (the plantation at Patlangat has
reverted to the traditional land owners and many families have access to cocon-
uts there, and there are many other small areas of coconuts too), supplemented
to a small degree by cocoa. The women also sell betel nuts, betel peppers, root
crops and vegetables locally and on the market in Kavieng. The money is spent
on rice which complements garden-produced sweet potatoes as a staple, and
tinned meat and fish, biscuits and instant noodles, salt and sugar, clothes and
thongs, soap, tools (in particular bush knives, fish hooks and lines), cigarettes,
batteries for torches and the odd radio. The men sometimes spend quite a lot on
beer when they go to town to sell copra, but there was no alcohol on sale in
Bimun. I did not study cash spending in particular, but it seemed that a family
might sometimes spend only about 10 or 15 kina (approximately US$3–5) per
week for quite long periods, then perhaps more if going to town to get clothes
or saucepans etc. Money is also used in various ceremonial exchanges (see
2.7.1 above) and then sometimes appears in surprisingly large quantities, such
as 1,300 kina. People are also expected to pay tithe (a tenth of all earnings) and
other fees to the church, as well as school fees for school-age children.

Perhaps half of all meals have rice as the carbohydrate source, but other than
that there is quite a strong reliance on garden produce. In terms of protein, there
are pigs and poultry raised in the village and pigs hunted in the bush; and fish,
octopus, lobsters and other seafood.

As mentioned, the agricultural method is swidden (slash-and-burn) horticulture.
A plot is felled, left to get a little regrowth, burnt, fenced, planted, tended and
harvested. Men do the first stages, until the garden is divided into plots and
fenced against bush pigs (which often destroy gardens). The women plant, weed
and harvest, and carry the produce back to the village. Land areas are owned by
clans, and quite a large contiguous area is gardened by many members and associates of a clan at the same time. The next garden would then be prepared in a different part of the bush. At any one time, several such areas are in various stages of development, and the women take sweet potato creepers and taro suckers from a ripening garden to one that is being planted.

Traditionally, taro (bulalam, ua) was the staple food, and is still regarded as “real food”, about which you may hear lyrical descriptions of how wonderful it smells when cooking and so forth. Taro is clearly an ancient plant in the region, and with the Kuots, and it is associated with an extensive vocabulary for the different species, and for the different parts of the plant and ways of cooking it.

Yam is also a traditional crop, but interestingly, yam has a low cultural value with the Kuots, and is just considered “food”, in contra-distinction to taro. It grows wild in the area in both edible and non-edible species which are distinct from the cultivated ones, and so has probably been there for a very long time too; it also has an indigenous Kuot name (kamin). Wild yam (komes) was used as famine food in the past.

Taro is a very nutritious food, but is labour-intensive and gives a fairly low yield. Yam also requires quite a lot of tending. Today, therefore, few people grow them, in favour of the new staple crop: sweet potato. Sweet potato is a South American plant, and appears to have followed two routes into Papua New Guinea. Archaeological evidence in Polynesia suggests that the Austronesians travelled all the way to South America and brought back the sweet potato from there. It was present in Hawai’i, the Cook Islands and New Zealand nearly 1000 BP. But the pre-historic introduction did not make its way as far west as the Bismarck Archipelago. Instead, it appears to have come from southeast Asia where it had been brought by Portuguese and Spanish sea-farers, via the Indo-

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60 This is in contrast to the pattern described by Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) for the Nochi on the east coast, where a nuclear family would have a plot away from others, circulating contiguous plots so that the woman would be tending one plot while her husband prepared an adjacent plot for the next garden and so forth.

61 Looking at the distribution of species and genera within the family to which taro belongs, aroids (or Aracea), Hay (1990: 18) finds that at least one genus, that of Cyrtosperma, was present before the break-up of Gondwanaland (which eventually formed the continents of Africa, Antarctica, Australia (with New Guinea), India, Madagascar and South America).

62 The yam plant has extremely high cultural significance among many Austronesian speakers in the wider region (famously so in the Trobriand islands of Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea), but it does not register much interest with the Kuots. One of the vocabulary items that Austronesianists use for comparative purposes is the word for the stick that the yam creeper is trimmed along. I thus inquired as to the term for it in Kuot. It was just called ‘stick’ (pas).

The time of introduction of sweet potato in New Ireland is a difficult question, but it appears not to have a very long history there. It was clearly there 100 years ago, as it is mentioned by Krämer-Bannow (1916) who travelled there in 1908–1909, and also by Parkinson (1999 [1907]: 341). Yet, taro seems to have remained the main crop into the 1930’s, as Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) does not even mention sweet potato in the account of her stay in 1929–1930. It is hard to see why it would not have reached its present prominence earlier if it had been there for a long time. Another pointer to recent introduction is the fact that there is no Kuot name for it, and it is simply known by the Tok Pisin name ‘kaukau’. The fact that there is a multitude of species would suggest a longer history, but Parkinson mentions only two kinds, and the most likely explanation seems to be that people from New Guinea island who have settled in New Ireland have brought more and more varieties over the years.

Another recently introduced root crop is cassava (tapioca, manioc).

Bread fruit (gun, tree: ovəliobu) is eaten when in season. Sago (Kuot and Tok Pisin ‘saksak’) is processed and eaten primarily when there are shortages of other crops.

Various leaves are used as vegetables. Some of these are cultivated, such as the ‘aibika’ and the ‘aupa’ which are common all over Papua New Guinea, and pumpkin, of which the leaves are used as food more often than the fruits. Another is ‘kankong’. These appear to be recently introduced species. A type of fern (Kuot sagu) is collected along some riverbeds. Taro leaves were also an important vegetable when taro was more commonly grown. All are eaten cooked. I know of one indigenous type of cucumber (Kuot kaplo); now other cucumbers and squash are often planted, as well as several kinds of beans. Onions are popular but do not grow well on lower altitudes in the tropics; they are sometimes bought in the stores in Kavieng.

Ginger (lɔrəranɔ) and chilli are sometimes used for seasoning, but the food is usually very mild, and most people do not like even slightly hot food. In the past, ginger also had many magical uses.

Nut trees are often planted near the villages but nuts are collected from the bush as well, the main species being ‘galip’ (Canarium, tree: nəreobu, nut: kabo), ‘pau’ (Barringtonia, tree: ləga, nut: loganɔm) and ‘talis’ (the Java almond, Terminalia catappa, tree: təlinɔmə, nut: təlimunɔm). The coconut palm is very old in the Pacific and was of high value. My impression is that its cultural importance was much bigger in the old days – I was told that cutting down somebody’s coconut palm would be avenged with death. It is almost certainly a lar-

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63 The evidence is somewhat circumstantial, but the main indication is the increase in pig bone in middens in the New Guinea highlands around that time, marking the emergence of the pig-centred culture still present in that region. It is believed that this development was made possible by the high-yielding sweet potato.
ger part of the diet now that plantations have made it a very common tree. Again there is a large vocabulary, detailing the various stages of the fruit and its parts, as well as the parts of the leaves which also have many uses.

Bananas of many species grow near the houses and in the gardens. Some are used primarily for cooking, while others are eaten as fruit. They also play a part in food distributions at feasts, and are then collected by the stock, wrapped and buried in the sand on the beach for controlled maturing; in that way large quantities can be ready at the same time. There are many Kuot words for different kinds of bananas, as for the parts of the plant.

Sugarcane (nobam, sobuk) is an old plant, grown in the gardens. Pawpaw (papaya) is common both in gardens and around houses. I was told that the Kuot name tabekka is also the name in Lavongai in the north of the province, so this may be a loan. Other fruits are the ‘laulau’ (Malay apple, Eugenia, tree: kabio-bu, fruit: kabǝnǝm) and ‘ton’ (Pometia pinnata, tree: tamut, fruit: tanǝnǝm). Obviously introduced fruits are citrus (lemon, pomelo), guava, watermelon, and pineapple. The latter was probably introduced by the Germans, as the Kuots use the name nanas (from German ‘Ananas’; this has led some Kuot speakers to believe that it is a genuine Kuot word, since it is different from the English-derived ‘painap’ used in Tok Pisin).

In the gardens and around the villages, plants with big leaves for wrapping the food for cooking are also cultivated.

One type of food not matching one of our major food groups is clay. It appears that a particular kind of clay was cooked in the mumu and eaten in the past, and I was told that the people living near the Fangalawwa road crossing still get it from a source high up on the mountain and eat it. Strauch also reports, with great incredulity, coming across people in the north of New Ireland who were eating yellowish clay 64 (Strauch 1877: 89–90); Krämer (1925: 23) mentions hard red clay e.g. from Konobin, cooked with taro, as a favourite food of pregnant women.

Another non-negligible crop, though not food, is betel nuts (areca), of which there are many kinds, named in Kuot (the cover term for the fruit is karǝt and the tree bualǝma), and the betel pepper (muan).

Fruit and nut trees are individually owned by the person who planted them, or a person named by the planter. Trees growing wild may be harvested by those to whom the land belongs.

As for proteins, pig is the most esteemed food, but not actually consumed very often. Pigs can be raised in the village (they roam in the daytime and get fed in the village morning and night), and these are only slaughtered for very important feasts (the owner may not eat of his or her pig). Pigs can also be trapped or hunted with dogs and speared in the bush, in which case the meat is eaten over

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64 The German sources use the word Erde ‘earth’ rather than Ton ‘clay’, and in Tok Pisin ‘graun’ (ground) is used, but most likely it is in fact a type of clay.
the next one or two days. There is no differentiation in species between bush pigs and village pigs, and small bush pigs when caught are often brought to the village and raised there. The general name for pig is kumurot (a sow is kumbun); a feral pig can also be called dǝduama, and there are various other terms to do with the markings and colour of the skin and bristles. The various administrations have attempted to improve the local pig population through cross-breeding with introduced breeds, and any pig found in New Ireland today is bound to have a rather mixed genetic makeup.65

For a smaller feast, a hen (puraibun) or rooster (pura) will do. Only once in my time in New Ireland did we have poultry for a regular meal. The species used today are every bit as mixed as the pig species, for the same reason (in particular there have been attempts at cross-breeding the local poultry with Australorp). I did not see any effort directed at getting eggs from hens, although I was told that people sometimes seclude them to get the eggs (sǝgar, dǝgar); otherwise eggs are eaten when found.

Dogs are kept for hunting, but are not eaten (Kuot kapun[67] (m), laibun (f)). Cats are a recent introduction, much appreciated since they keep the mice and rat populations down, but they are also a nuisance as they steal food, and sometimes they are eaten themselves (there is a Kuot word olǝma which people say applied to a wild cat which is no longer there).

Other animals that were eaten in former days were possums (gǝs), fruit bats (flying foxes, maua), and many kinds of birds only some of which are still eaten, but only rarely. I have no information on the large rat species, so well loved by the Austronesians that they introduced it all over the Pacific (along with pigs and dogs). Hunting possum required special powers to make it easy to spot them, and one elderly speaker says his father performed magic on him and gave him the gift. To catch fruit bats, sometimes entire trees were felled, while the nocturnal bats were sleeping in it. Birds were caught in nets, but both birds and bats, and maybe possums were also shot with slingshots.68 I am told that snakes were also sometimes eaten. Wallabies (generic: arigariga, baby: kotarau, old: ainabun) appear to be extinct in New Ireland (possibly since the drought in 1914, see 2.3 above) and it is not clear how they were hunted.

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65 The people of the Bismarck Archipelago particularly appreciate the fat on the pig, and Hahl (1980 [1937]) reports great disappointment from locals when a nice-looking big pig of an introduced breed was slaughtered and was found to be all meat and hardly any fat.

66 This word is shared with Nochi.

67 This word is shared with Nochi, which however does not have the lenition of voiceless stops, so that it is pronounced [kapuna] there, rather than [kaBuna] as in Kuot.

68 There were never bows and arrows in New Ireland.
There is no doubt that human meat was also eaten in the past (cooked in the same way that pigs are cooked; in the case of women the grilled breasts appear to have been considered a delicacy).

The sea also provides many sources of protein. There are many kinds of fish at the reef drop-off, which are speared by the men with multi-pronged spears, and in some places driven into nets (depending on the underwater topography), and night fishing with coconut-frond torches or nowadays with underwater flashlights also takes place on moonless nights. Lobsters and crayfish are often also caught at night. Shark and other big fish are sometimes caught further out to sea. Women use small spears to catch a particular fish that burrows into the sand, as well as octopus and squid on the reef, and collect various kinds of crabs, mussels and molluscs. Children often catch small fish on the reef or fresh-water crayfish in the river and grill them over fires on the beach. There were no crocodiles where I was.

Tinned fish and meat are common today, and are sold in the village store.

The gardens are about one to one and a half hours from the village, and most of the way is hillside, especially on the west coast. Each woman will go to work in the garden a few times a week and then return carrying some 20 kilos of garden produce (mainly sweet potatoes) in a basket suspended from her head. Often there is firewood as well, in a bundle on top of the basket, sometimes shoots to be planted in a different garden, leaves for cooking, and occasionally a toddler on top of it all. It is not surprising that sore necks and knees are a common problem. People often like going to the gardens as it is higher up and therefore cooler, and they can treat themselves to sugarcane and fruits without having to carry them back to the village. There is also more privacy than in the village. Some families even have small houses or shelters at the main garden area for the year, and sometimes stay up there for a few days to work.

The main gardening tools are bush knives, and for the women a digging stick (maibu) used in planting and when harvesting root crops. Men use axes as well as the knives when preparing a garden. It is obvious that garden preparation was a much harder job before metal tools, and it took a long time. Vines were severed with shell knives, and trees ringbarked and left until the roots rotted.

In cooking, three methods were traditionally used: steaming in lengths of bamboo, grilling or roasting over fire, and mumu (Kuot iouna). Mumu is the Tok Pisin word for stone oven, which in island Melanesia is above ground. It con-

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69 Powdermaker reports that it was the men’s job to collect firewood in Lesu (Powdermaker 1971 [1933] passim) but in Bimun either men or women could do it, and the women did it more often, or sent children to collect it in nearby locations. Dry coconut husks are also used for fires.

70 A systematic overview of agricultural patterns in New Ireland (defined by types, combinations and proportions of crops, as well as cultivation intensity, length of fallow period, etc.) is provided by (Hide, Bourke, Allen, Akus, Fritsch, Grau, Hobsbawn, Igua, Kameata, Lyon & Miskaram 1996).
sists of a ring of round riverbed stones, inside of which the ground is covered with smaller stones. Firewood is heaped on these and fire made, and another set of stones is piled on top. When these are very hot, they are taken off, the fire put out, food wrapped in leaves put inside, and then the hot stones are put back. The whole thing is then covered with leaves and sacking. For very big mumus for feasts, which may contain entire pigs and about half a cubic metre of sweet potato and taro, sand is also heaped over the mumu. Depending on the size of the food parcels, cooking may take between 20 minutes (for a thin one with sago pudding for instance) to two or three hours, and probably longer. Sometimes the mumu is prepared in the evening and left overnight. This method of cooking is clearly very ancient, and Kuot has a large vocabulary dealing with it: the different types of stones, the sticks to move the hot stones, the stick to put out the fire, cooking things badly by using too many leaves etc. With the introduction of saucepans, boiling has also become a common way of cooking, often with coconut milk.

Two main meals a day are eaten, in the morning and in the afternoon. If people stay in the village in the daytime they may cook in the day or eat leftovers from the morning; if they go to the gardens they often eat fruits and sugar cane and such there. The daily eating is not a highly structured event, and the family unit often do not eat at the same time, although the mother usually tries to get all children fed at the same time.

In the past, swapping markets between mountain dwellers and coastal dwellers were common. The mountain people would bring taro and game such as possum, while the coastal people would contribute fish and shellfish, shells, seaweed, and saltwater which was transported in lengths of bamboo and used for cooking.71

2.9 Housing

Households consist of nuclear families, and normally even a single elderly parent will have their own house. Sleeping houses are on posts, but this appears to have been introduced by the Australian administration. There is frequent comment on the progress of that reform in government patrol reports. All depictions of New Ireland houses in Friederici (1912) and Krämer-Bannow (1916) show houses standing directly on the ground. Further indication is that there is no word for floor (nor for windows, also an introduced feature), while there is a word for the beams that form the rectangle on the ground which form the base of the walls if the house is not on posts.

71 Krämer-Bannow (1916: 92–94) describes such a market in Lamasong in the Madak-speaking area on the east coast, where the women from coastal Lamasong and Pinikindu (Panagundu) and people from the (then) inland villages of Konos (Kanos) and Konobin would meet and trade. From her description, there seemed to be fairly fixed exchange rates, where for instance a bundle of four taros would buy a biggish bundle of seaweed, or four or five crayfish, while a medium sized fish would fetch ten taros.
The house inside is often partitioned into rooms, and usually has a spacious veranda on the outside. Visitors may go onto the veranda unbidden but not enter the house. On the whole, not a very large part of life is lived inside the house, and the word that corresponds to ‘home’ in a cultural sense is the word that also means ‘homestead’ or ‘village’ (lakkuan). The ‘home’ is the whole little compound including cooking house and the space in front of the house where many everyday activities take place; e.g. tubers are peeled and mats are woven; toddlers play, and if there is no work, men and women (together or separately) often socialise in that space.

Cooking houses are still made directly on the ground, often with beach sand covering the ground as this is considered cleaner. There is normally a cooking house for each family. It is not certain that there used to be separate cooking houses in the days when sleeping houses were not built on posts, and particularly in the mountains where nights get cool, people would have wanted to sleep near the fire. In the Lelet plateau, this remains the pattern, and I have also seen that some elderly Kuot people on the coast make beds in the kitchen and sleep near the fire; most cooking houses have benches to sit on and to put things on, and these are often used by temporary visitors to sleep on.

The most common building materials are bamboo for the walls, cracked lengthways so as to form flat strips which are then applied to a frame, with an inner horizontal layer and an outer vertical layer. Internal partition walls are often woven from strips of the outer layer of the sago leaf stalk. Floors are made in the same way as bamboo walls, but from betel-palm trunks which are tougher, and only in one layer; alternatively the trunk of a related palm tree (‘libung, limbum’ in Tok Pisin) is made into strips of about 6 cm and laid parallel to form the floor. Roofing consists of sago leaves folded across strips of bamboo, sewn into place with vines. Houses from “bush materials” have a life expectancy of about five years.

Gradually, so called permanent houses are appearing, on steel posts and with corrugated iron roofs, plank floors, and plasterboard walls; even louvre windows. These are still not very common away from Kavieng, as they represent a great deal of money; more commonly various hybrids are seen, in particular corrugated iron roofs on bamboo-walled houses. Iron roofs are appreciated because the sago leaves get eaten by insects and require some maintenance not to leak, but sago roofs are appreciated as they keep the house cooler. There are also many other combinations of building styles, such as one house all in bush materials but with louvre windows.

The houses follow a general ground plan in being rectangular, but beyond that there is a great deal of individual variation in terms of proportions, placement of steps, and decorative elements, and sometimes even two-storey houses are found.

72 These are the windows made from parallel glass slats that can be opened like Venetian blinds, common in Australian-style building in the tropics.
The layout of the village is centred around a main square or open space, often with satellite smaller groupings adjacent to it. There are also some tiny settlements of only a few houses, and some people build their house in a solitary spot away from everyone else.

In the past a village had several men’s houses, usually belonging to a particular clan, possibly simply as a result of being build on clan-owned land – as far as I can make out access was open to men of other clans at least most of the time. Today, the houses of unmarried or widowed men are sometimes referred to as men’s houses, and it may be that it was traditionally not always a very imposing or large building. It has been difficult to get a reliable picture of the men’s houses, but it seems clear that they were generally surrounded by a low stone fence, that there may have been some graves within the fence, and that the words that translate as ‘men’s house’ (puoranǝma, lǝpuo, Tok Pisin ‘haus boi’) refer to the whole compound including the house, rather than the house itself. Within the fence, stones for taro magic, and skulls (?) and other implements for magic were kept, carvings for rituals were made there (or sometimes in special enclosures), and it was the centre of most of the male-dominated ceremonial activities (women had their own ceremonies but no “women’s houses”). The men would sleep in the men’s house or at least sometimes in their wives’ houses if married, and boys would spend increasing amounts of time there as well. A fire was kept there and the men did some of their own cooking; women also brought food to their sons, husbands or brothers in the men’s house. The restructuring of village life connected with the disappearance of men’s houses must have been quite extensive.

2.10 Dialects and other sub-types within the language

This study does not include detailed work on dialectal differences. I am aware only of a tendency for villages towards the north to differ in certain aspects from villages towards the south along the island. My own work was done in Bimun in the south and most of my material is from there, although material was collected also in Panaras in the north (and to some extent in Kabil which is in the south but on the opposite coast from Bimun).

The dialectal differences are fairly small, and there is no problem with mutual intelligibility between dialects (in the rest of this section I will use NK for northern Kuot and SK for southern Kuot). Some of the most salient differences of which I am aware are: The phonology differs in that NK does not allow /r/ in final position, while SK does (see 3.2.2.2). In terms of grammatical subsystems, the biggest difference is probably in the locationals and directionals, where more distinctions are made in NK; also some forms frequently have a final /s/ (NK tiros, takos ‘here’ = SK tiro, tako). NK extensively uses mani ‘what’ as a negation but SK only occasionally (cf. 1.1.7). There are also lexical differences:

73 Krämer (1925) gives a plan of the Madak-speaking village of Lamasong on the east coast (p. 21), and remarks that the men’s houses are small and nothing like the architectural wonders of New Guinea (p. 20).
sometimes an entirely different stem is used (e.g. NK *golai* ‘sick’ = SK *tafa*); in other cases there is a partial difference of meaning between the two dialects (e.g. *popori* NK ‘story’, SK ‘riddle’).

There does not appear to be a distinct boundary between these dialects. A bundle of features show some overlap in geographical extent, but isoglosses (or iso-traits) vary quite significantly, with Bimun as a centre for SK and Panaras as a centre for NK.

Speakers tell me that Kabil to the south on the east coast has the same dialect as Bimun to the south on the west coast. Differences are on a north-south axis (or rather NW–SE, along the island). There may have been a third factor in the past, namely mountain vs. coast (both Bimun and Kabil were originally bush villages). However, the number series from three villages reproduced by Kluge (1941; based on Friederici’s 1908 notes; cf. 1.3), show that numbers from the bush village Letatan in the southern area correspond quite well to those from Naiana, the northern-most Kuot village on the west coast, while those from the bush village Kun (Kul) in the north but on the east coast side of the mountains are somewhat different. This could be because the Kun people will have traded with non-Kuot coast dwellers on the east coast. Chinnery ([1930?]) travelled along the east coast with excursions inland, and recorded kin terms from the northern bush village Limalaua, and the southern bush village Letatan, and these overlap to a very large degree. Since he did not visit any west-coast villages, we do not know what the differences may have been on that dimension, but the data is consistent with the notion that mountain villages with coastal access to the east formed a partly separate continuum from those that traded with the west coast (which was also a Kuot area).

It is possible that there has been some dialect levelling because of people moving from the hills to the coast, and also through increased north–south mobility in modern times.

There are no distinct speech styles associated with the relative rank of the interlocutors (which is not surprising given that there is no inherent structure of rank in Kuot society). There is polite speech, such as is spoken in front of people with whom the speaker is in an avoidance relationship (see 2.6 above), but it does not have specialised vocabulary or other features making it a distinct form of the language.⁷⁴ It is characterised simply by absence of frivolous topics and words, by a soft and subdued voice quality, and a respectful demeanour in general.

There is also no specialised language for hunting or fishing or other particular activities (such as exist in many languages of Papua New Guinea), and as far as

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⁷⁴ This is in contrast to the quite elaborated systems that exist in some other languages whose speakers (like the Kuots) have kin-based avoidance relations, e.g., the Dyirbal “mother-in-law language”, which has a vocabulary entirely distinct from the everyday language (Dixon 1972: 32ff); nor is there anything like the Samoan respect vocabulary (e.g. Milner 1961).
I could establish there was none in the past. There are indeed notions of spirits in the bush or spirits of animals hunted, and there are practices to do with what one says and does not say when out on such activities – but there is no separate linguistic code.\(^{75}\)

**Child-directed speech** has some particular phonological and morphological features (see 3.8), as well as some specialised vocabulary, some of which is regional and some of which belongs to Kuot.

We may also touch briefly on songs here. We can identify three main categories of songs in Kuot culture. First, there is a great variety of named types of songs that were used in ritual activities of various sorts and usually had dances with them; second, a large number of stories have little songs in them; and third, there were everyday songs that people made up to comment on the day’s events or just to amuse themselves in general. Only the last category tends to be entirely in Kuot.

In ceremonial songs, there are very frequently formulaic stretches, similar across songs of a particular category, that are not meaningful in Kuot but function as a genre marker. For instance, in songs of the type *lakobuma*, sung at the wake for a dead bigman, the first line almost always begins with something like *t̂iŋalenagarevuŋu* (I do not segment this stretch, for lack of morphological information) or parts of it. I was told that the same sequence occurs in songs in other languages in the region as well. It could be that it is meaningful in one of the other languages, or in a now extinct language of the area.\(^{76}\) This type of song was not composed in the ordinary manner, but given to people in dreams.

As for songs in narratives, a good story should have a song, and most of them do. These are frequently not in Kuot. Sometimes speakers will recognise them as Nochi or Madak, for instance, but in other cases no one seems to know. This could be because of insufficient familiarity with non-adjacent languages, or because the song is in an extinct language, or because it simply is not in an actual language. The story songs differ from the ceremonial songs in that one usually does not find the recurring formulas, and also in that all or most of the song is often in the foreign language (or non-language).\(^{77}\) It is likely that the songs in

\(^{75}\) Interestingly Eves (1998: 161) mentions the existence of such a language in the Madak-speaking Lelet area, but gives no linguistic clues apart from stating that it was different from the vernacular. For an example of another such language in Papua New Guinea, see Franklin (1972), who gives more of a linguistic analysis of the “pandanus language” of the Kewa (Engan).

\(^{76}\) Codrington (1969 [1891]: 334ff) speaks of several Austronesian languages of Vanuatu (New Hebrides) having separate dialects for songs. This, however, is a different matter, as in Kuot ritual songs it is only a few phrases which are not transparent; the rest of the song is in Kuot, although in some cases it is archaic.

\(^{77}\) Powdermaker (1971 [1933]) gives a number of songs and spells, parts of which are not translatable in Nochi, hypothesising that they are in a forgotten language of the past. However, it is quite typical for spells to contain incomprehensible bits; i.e., the actual “mumbo jumbo” component. If words deriving from a different language are
stories were at one point meaningful, but that they became corrupted as the story moved away from the area where that language was spoken, through telling and retelling. This would tally with some stories having songs in Kuot, some in Nochi and so forth. The songs usually occur if somebody is about to die in the story; they sing, and others hurry to their rescue, they sing again and so forth, and the rescuing party or person arrives just as the unfortunate person dies.

Songs contain imagery which points to semantic connections not always obvious in the spoken language. The form of expression is often condensed, especially in the ritual songs, and the omissions can be telling in terms of the presuppositions present in the culture and therefore also to a degree in the language. Further, there are grammatical omissions that turn up in songs which do not tend to occur in the spoken language – this could be because of the archaic nature of some of the songs (representing earlier structures in the language), or it could simply be a form of poetic licence to do with the genre.

The everyday songs, ditties, were mainly in Kuot, and later sometimes partly or wholly in Tok Pisin.

Today, the Kuots still sing a lot, but the majority of songs are church songs; either Tok Pisin hymns or those from the Kuanua (Tolai language) hymnbook used by the United Church. Quite a number of the latter have been translated into Kuot by the Kuot Hymn Book Committee led by Chung (1994). The church singing style has impacted also on the performance of traditional songs, which used to be sung in unison, frequently to the beating of a log drum or length of bamboo, but which are now often sung (if at all) in parts, without percussion, and with a regularised rhythm and tonality.

2.11 Language health

I estimate that there will be only a few Kuot speakers in 50 years. My estimation is based mainly on the situation I was able to observe in Bimun village, but it does appear to be similar elsewhere.

Most elderly speakers are considered good speakers, and younger speakers will refer to them for some inquiries; primarily to the men but sometimes to the women if the question concerns things such as names for types of taro.

Speakers of about 30 years of age grew up with Kuot as the main language of the village; that is, there is likely to have been Tok Pisin and perhaps Madak elements, but at least on the west coast the play language of the children was Kuot as late as the 1960’s. These speakers are full speakers, although they may lack obsolete vocabulary items and are sometimes shy to record stories for fear of elders criticizing their language. Still, I believe the variation between the older generation and 30-year-olds is essentially within the natural development used, they are often much distorted (as with “hocus pocus” from the Latin mass) and this would generalise to New Ireland too.
that will occur in all languages, especially given the big changes to life style that have occurred over the last century. For example, the village has moved from the mountains to the coast, gardens are prepared using bush knives rather than stone axes and shell knives, and the main crop is sweet potato rather than taro. It is not surprising that younger people would not know specialised terminology for preparing a taro garden in the old way, etc. However, everyone in this region is also fully fluent in Tok Pisin, and this intermediary generation does mix a lot of Tok Pisin lexemes into their Kuot (and probably even more when the visiting linguist is not listening).

In the next age group down, among people of around 18 or 20 years of age, we find a reduced form of the language. These people understand Kuot without trouble, but do not speak it often themselves; when they do, it is usually primarily in order not to be understood by speakers of Austronesian languages. I was not able to study this variety in detail, but, there is a tendency to regularise forms and to use the productive verb class (class I) over other verb classes and adjectives. Occasionally other stems are regularised into class I; for instance the adjective marakkes- ‘stinging, smarting’ is used as a class I verb. There is also reduction of the lexicon on the pattern of Tok Pisin. As is typical of pidgins and creoles, Tok Pisin does not have a very large lexicon, and often several senses achieved by different lexemes in old languages are subsumed under one lexeme in the creole. Semi-speakers transfer this simpler lexical structure to Kuot. For example, I was told that people of this age typically use one and the same lexeme, class I isin, for both ‘search for’ and ‘find’, following Tok Pisin ‘painim’, whereas Kuot generally has isin for ‘search’ and class II -op for ‘find’.

Children, finally, are in general not learning Kuot. They often have a good passive knowledge and can follow the main content of other people’s conversations, but even in families with two perfectly fluent parents in the 30-year age group, the parents will speak Tok Pisin with the children. As far as I was able to make out, this does not reflect any political stance, or idea that Tok Pisin is the language of the nation or the future or suchlike.

It is interesting to compare this situation with Don Kulick’s (1992) study of language shift in Gapun village in the Sepik province of Papua New Guinea. He describes cultural conceptions where the vernacular (Taiap) is associated with the idea of ‘hed’, which is in turn associated with backwardness, lack of education, paganism and irresponsible or selfish behaviour. Tok Pisin on the other hand is connected with ‘save’, which is associated with modernity, education, Christianity and responsible and community-oriented behaviour. This only partly resonates with what I observed among the Kuots. First, although a dichotomy similar to ‘hed’ versus ‘save’ is present in some respects (and there are similarities such as women being culturally construed as irresponsible and men as responsible) behaviour is not discussed in those terms. Second, there is presently no association of Tok Pisin with progress, and only a very weak, if any, association of Kuot with backwardness. One old man of about 60 years asked me if Tok Pisin was spoken in the world generally and seemed to hope and perhaps believe that that was the case. His children grew up speaking Kuot. His
daughter was taught in English in school and knows that Tok Pisin is confined to Papua New Guinea. Yet, her children are growing up speaking Tok Pisin. Sometimes the argument is put forward that Kuot is too difficult for the children (this echoes the generally held opinion in the region that Kuot is a very difficult language; which is presumably because it has gender, cross-references objects as well as subjects, and has quite extensive agreement morphology, making it difficult for Austronesian speakers to acquire).

Some children do grow up with Kuot as their first language, for instance in the small village Okoiok not far from Bimun. As soon as the children are big enough to come and play in Bimun, around five or six years of age, they acquire Tok Pisin, and later they go to the local school which has children from both Madak and Kuot villages, and by then Tok Pisin is established as perhaps their strongest language, and definitely the one used in most interactions outside the family. (In the particular case of Okoiok, children are encouraged to keep speaking Kuot by a man who is in favour of the language surviving, and who, I am told, will chase the children with the cane if he hears them speaking Tok Pisin. That such measures are seen as necessary also says something about the chances this language has of surviving.)

In Bimun, my main informant Robert Sipa started making his two sons speak Kuot after working with me for a while. They were around three and five years old, and could speak it after about a year. They speak it with their parents, but of course Tok Pisin is the language used amongst the children in general. Unfortunately, efforts towards language preservation are the exception rather than the rule (although one would wish they did not involve the cane). One main reason is the lack of identifying, or emblematic, function of the language; the village and clan being the more important units. Most people are simply not concerned about the language; others sometimes express concern but no very viable initiatives have so far emerged. Further, the loss of many traditional contexts of language use surely plays a role; for example there are no feasts where oratory skills can be demonstrated; without the men’s houses there is rarely story telling; and the old songs are not often sung.

Another qualification to the rough picture concerns a gender-based difference, where it seems that women/girls in the two younger groups are often better at the language than the men/boys. For some reason it seems that mothers speak Kuot to their daughters more often than to their sons, and that fathers do not speak Kuot to their sons or daughters to any noticeable degree. However, mothers tend to speak Kuot to their young daughters primarily when scolding them, which presumably does not help to give the language positive connotations for the girl in question.

One positive factor that has come onto the scene in the last few years is the local language preschool, part of a nation-wide programme to give the first two years of schooling in the local language. Children are meant to learn to read and write in the vernacular, and then have a bridging year to English as the language of instruction. The Kuot preschool in Bimun has been in place for a couple of
years, the teachers being local women who have had a few weeks of training. The fact that the school is there may have some positive impact on the status of the language. (However, the orthography is problematic, and the mix of children having Kuot as the first language through to children not knowing it at all makes it a challenging teaching situation; further, many children do not attend regularly.)

2.12 Orthography

Most Kuot speakers are literate in the sense of knowing the alphabet and being able to read and write a little bit, but a newspaper is tough going. Younger people can often read Tok Pisin and English reasonably well, but it is not a writing culture. Information that you are told by another person is trusted over written information. Even personal names are often inconsistently spelt.

There is no very consistent orthography widely in use for Kuot. There are a few publications in Kuot, produced by the bible translators Chul-Hwa and Kyung-Ja Chung of the Summer Institute for Linguistics together with committees formed among Kuot speakers. The publications are the afore-mentioned hymnbook, and two gospels and other portions of the New Testament (*Marko ga 1, 2 Timoti 1994*) (*Bais ula mumuru ang Ioanes, ga 1, 2, 3 Babam ang Ioanes 1996*), as well as some literacy materials. The launch of a full bible translation is imminent at the time of writing.

The Chungs’ orthography writes the central vowel /ǝ/ as ‘a’ (collapsing it with the phoneme /a/), and is somewhat inconsistent in the spelling of lenited voiceless stops, in particular as regards the variant [y] of /k/, which is written ‘g’; while /g/ in my analysis is a separate phoneme.

Most speakers have learnt to write through the medium of English, and will use ‘v’ and ‘r’ for the lenited versions of /p/ and /t/ in most positions; sometimes ‘p’ and ‘t’ will be used word-initially even if the word follows after another word ending in a vowel. [y] on the other hand does not have a symbol in English (barring ‘g’ which is used for a different sound in the language), and people use ‘k’ to write it. There is no question that people are aware of the phonological relationship between the stops and their lenited variants, but people are used to ‘v’ and ‘r’ and are not happy with the idea of using ‘p’ and ‘t’ in positions where these sounds are lenited. Designing a practical orthography that takes into account both the speakers’ preferences and linguistic generalisations is not an easy task, and is not one of the aims of the present project.

Another area of inconsistency in native writing is that of affixes and clitics, where the former are only very rarely separated from their hosts in writing, whereas clitics may appear attached or unattached and are often inconsistent even within one text.