

THE MEN'S HOUSE

Agency, ritual and meaning in Eastern Highlands architecture – Papua New Guinea

by Zachary R Jones

“Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

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ABSTRACT

80 years since the arrival of Europeans to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, new questions are being asked about the importance and significance of the once thriving 'men's house.' A communal living space occupied by men, common throughout the Eastern Highlands Province. Local elders are quick to point out, that upon the arrival of Europeans and with them colonial systems of governing and influences of western thought, the tradition of the men's house essentially disappeared overnight, and with it, many claim, the very center point of Highland social interaction. Intricately linked with a system of leadership along with local beliefs and knowledge systems played out through ritual and ceremony within and around the men's house, this paper seeks to explore some of the fundamental aspects of this architectural piece within Eastern Highlands Province, focusing on its role as index and agent within and between communities. In the 1950's competing forms of architectural space and power; government posts, church buildings and schools had an overwhelming effect on the men's house bringing about abrupt changes in traditional forms of community leadership, socialization and local knowledge systems. Looking at other similar examples of shared indexes of agency around the world, I will show the importance of these buildings and the seminal role they have played throughout history in the formation, maintenance, wellbeing and adaptation of community and personhood.

KEY WORDS: men's house, *communitas*, index of agency, personhood, network, house society, relations, politics



Fig 1. Traditional fire lighting - *Sendeni, Obura Wonenara*

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CHAPTER 1 ~ INTRODUCTION

The men's house in Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea

Perched high above the valley floor in the morning mist of the highland mountains, smoke seeping slowly from its wet thatched roofing; pigs rooting around the base of its bamboo woven walls, damp and dirty from rain drops sliding from the tips of jagged overhanging grass to the ground below, sat the men's house. Though hardly differentiated by other grass-thatched houses around it, its understated prominence was well understood by those that used it – its meaning clear. The space around it, cleanly swept and fenced, the ground giving way to new shoots of sweet potato, interspersed with long stocks of sugar cane – a gift to all who might come to its door, a taste of the life-blood of local masculinity. Who knew of its relevance to the local people that used it, who might have ever suggested it had significance; simple, plain, functional – yet profoundly relational. It was, by no fault of its own, on the threshold of change unprecedented in highlands history.

Highland life and its relatively isolated existence began a rapid change just after the Second World War. By the 1950's Australian colonial systems were beginning to take root in many areas and as a result, many local systems of governing, leadership, organization, socialization and local knowledge were being deeply impacted (Salsibury 1962). Religious mission's and business enterprise of the outside world were not far behind the Colonial establishment. Rapidly these institutions and their respective ideologies started to replace indigenous understandings and traditions (cf Clark 2000, Knauff 1999). Ethnographers were also soon to be found throughout the region, some approaches to recording taking on more popular Durkheimian - structuralist themes (Hogbin (eds)1973) with few focusing on 'relational' aspects of culture. ¹ Of the many ethnographical accounts completed in the Highlands region



Fig 2. New men's house - Kamenave, Duna Valley

¹ Examples would be Reads study of the Gahuku Gahma (1952 &1954), Rappaport (1967) Strathern 1980,1988

of Papua New Guinea, many are descriptive in nature and lack depth, have touched only minimally on the role of the men's house in Highland culture or ignored it altogether (Herdt 1998). To this day we lack clear understanding as to how this men's space was apart of the wider Highlands social system and have very little documentation of it; description, pictures, drawings or otherwise.²

If the men's house is mentioned in Eastern Highland ethnography, it will commonly take up half a page of description, focusing on its importance as a 'war house', a place where men would prepare for battle, and boys would go through traditional rites of passage, transitioning over into the world of men (Allen 1967). Early Ethnology in the Highlands gave little attention to the social aspects of ritual interaction or ceremony in any meaningful way of which the men's house was a key component, and of course – the structure itself was conspicuously overlooked. Herdt (1998) points to the issues of language as one explanation of conspicuously missing detailed anthropological facts. The Highlands region were of the non-Austronesia language group making study, and subsequent 'analysis' of these sorts of cultural manifestations difficult in the short amount of time that most field positions often allowed (1998:xviii).

Similar 'communal' men's houses, for example the long house as it is commonly called in other areas of Melanesia and South East Asia (cf Waterson 1990, Bateson 1936) have been studied extensively in the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea by Tuzin (1976,1980,1997). Tuzin conducted in-depth studies of what is commonly known as the 'haus tambaran' in his work among the Ilahita Arapesh capturing the imagination and interests of anthropologists, explorers and tourists alike for its high sweeping roofs, detailed artistic designs and the complex social process that were apart of its creation and maintenance. But no similar studies of like detail were conducted in the highlands region. In the past, and in some cases, presently, the "materiality and agency" of architecture, as Vellinga has termed it and specifically the house, has not been well studied, overlooked and often left 'undocumented' in many cases around the world (Vellinga 2007:764).

In 1970 Donald Tuzin embarked on a study into the leadership and 'governance' processes of the Ilahita Arapesh in relationship to the local men's house – the 'Haus Tambaran'. He was one of the first in Papua New Guinea to take seriously the 'materiality' of local architecture and its agency powers in local leadership and socialization. Perplexed at how many of the Sepik groups were able to function

² Some exceptions to this rule in Eastern Highlands would be Reads study of the Gahuku Gahma (1952 &1954) and Rappaport (1967) Watson (1983)

as an organized 'unit' in the absence of concrete patterns and positions of leadership or social organization, Tuzin came to discover that through the agency of the men's house ('Haus Tambaran') an interconnected network, layers of social organization were working together to form a coherent entity, in what he describes as "moities, sub-moities, initiation classes and age-sets"(Tuzin:1976:211) rather than a concrete, unilateral or kin based systems of organization suggested by many previous ethnologists.

In the highlands region around about that same time, similar approaches to understanding kinship in less structured ways were starting to develop. As a result terms like 'loosely structured', structurally flexible and 'quasi-unilineal' in the 1960's and 70's began to be used more frequently as anthropologists came to grips with the realization that Highlands groups indeed did not fit the typical African ethnography molds (Hogbin 1973). As we will see from the case studies and literature, similar 'structural' conclusions discovered by Tuzin among the Arapesh, can be found among many highlands groups - sub-classes of organization working simultaneously to achieve a dynamic community whole through the agency of the men's house.

Gregory Bateson's study of the Naven rituals of the Iatmul in the Sepik region drew similar conclusions to those of Tuzin of the different interconnected layers of social organization. Bateson developed no definitive conclusions to his observations, but showed how meaning of the rituals were related to the broader social order. He delineated his observations into categories of 'eidon' and 'ethos', ethos being the "emotional emphases of a culture as a whole, and eidon - the "desires" and "needs" of the individual and their relationship to the 'details' of 'culture' - the "affective function" (Bateson 1936:32). He stated that in order to understand the significance of the 'eidon' of a people, we should start with the 'ethos' - "The details of the cultural structure are to be first studied and from these the 'eidon' is deduced" (1936:33).

In 1982 Levi-Strauss' was equally perplexed at the social interactions between Kwakiutl aborigines, challenging his own 'structuralist' approaches to kinship. He was forced to look more seriously at the architecture that appeared in so many ways, to inform social interactions and in many cases subvert structuralist explanations for his kin-ship based assumptions. He later termed these 'situations' as 'house societies,' becoming the starting point for many in anthropology to re-look at the way kinship is defined, what it means to be 'related' in the context of family, clan, tribe and society, and to take seriously a more complete view of an anthropology of architecture. This was the first time in more than 30 years that anthropology took seriously the ways in which they had been (in Levi-Strauss'

mind) narrowly defining 'relatedness'. Although he never ended up defining or developing a robust theory around his concept of 'house societies', a number of anthropologists since then have looked at ways to incorporate a more complete understanding of the house in relationship to ideas about social structure, relatedness and affinity (cf Waterson 1990, Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995, Howell 1995, Fox 1993). Building on Levi-Strauss's ideas of 'house society' (1982) and on the relationships between 'persons' and 'things' (Bourdieu 1977 & 1979, Miller 1998), these writers and many others, have expanded the field of research and understanding of the role the house can play in many societies and the relationships and interactions which take place within their walls. It is based on these studies and research about 'houses and house societies' and 'alternative' understandings of relatedness, that I believe the architecture of the men's house was grossly overlooked and therefore I will look towards these writers and others to seek out a fresh approach to the anthropology of architecture in the Eastern Highlands.

In the work that follows, I will propose a less 'functionalist' view of the men's house (in contrast to some early highland ethnography) and in the analysis will position this men's space in the framework of agency theory, using an example from Gell (1998) of the Maori meeting house and a term he used descriptive of its relationship to its users – "collective indexes of agency". To do so, I propose a shift away from structuralist, 'Durkheimian' approaches to ritual function, gender antagonisms, rites of passages and their relationship to the social structure in some previous studies. Alternatively, focus will be shifted to a more detailed understanding of the "processes and practices of relationships" (Senft 2009:5) and the role of the men's house in those interactions. I will show that the nature of these interactions made manifest through the spatial index of the men's house played a fundamental role in communication and the maintenance of community relationships over time and how its replacement had broader implications, personally, interpersonally and across social, clan and tribal boundaries. Understanding the men's house as fundamental spatial index requires, among other things, a detailed look at its relative 'position' to both the community which it served and its relationship and 'agency' characteristics presented in its interaction with other men's houses within the clan and tribe.

My research into the men's house of Eastern Highlands was initiated after about eighteen months of working for the Provincial Government among remote tribes across the province. Discussions around government services and development projects were always precursors to engaged and animated dialogue regarding the once functioning men's house. I did not set out to intentionally research

this structure as I was primarily there for work related activities. But with repeated discussions with different tribes about the men's house, my interest began to grow which ultimately led to a more methodologically oriented enquiry. Before I left the country, I decided to go back to the groups I had been working with to seek validation from the older members of the community who had grown up in the men's house in order to gain a first hand account and a better understanding of this long since practiced tradition. By all accounts as I was to later find out, this 'simple' structure, so often overlooked by anthropologists turned out to be integrated into pre European Highland life in a multifaceted, multidimensional and relationally complex way.

Aims & Objectives

Through the data collected from four Highland clans and relevant anthropological literature, I will present data supporting the men's house as a central index for community life and socialization. I will also show its ability as an active agent of community / clan organization and tribal affairs. I will reveal how this unique space and its architectural characteristics had profound 'relational' abilities to the people it served, and the impact of its replacement by the colonial government and missions and their associated architecture, had direct implications on traditional forms of leadership, power relations, socialization and local knowledge systems.

Research Questions

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What was the relationship between the individual person, the lineage, and the men's house?

What was the relationship between the men's house and other men's houses, within clans and between tribes?

What were the effects on the community and clan with its replacement by external agents?

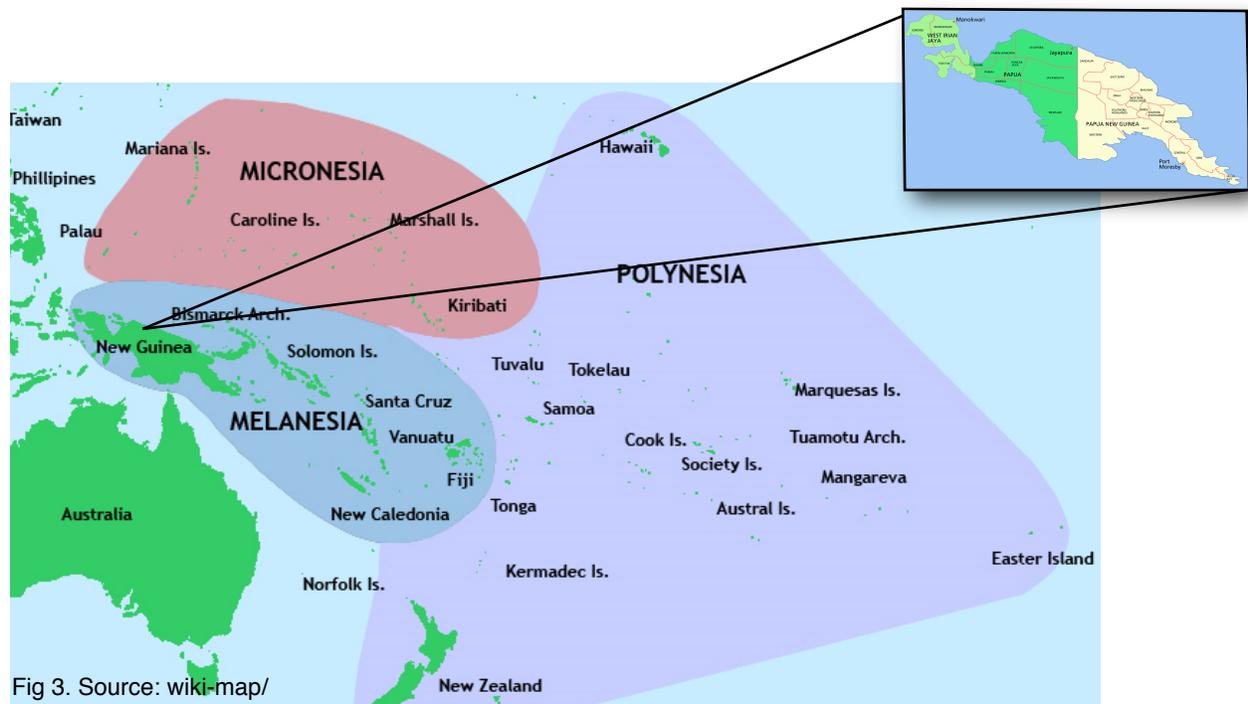
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In the following chapter the research questions will be placed in context as we explore literature on the subject of the men's house, the relationship between people and things, and ideas around social relationships as they relate to the physical structures in which highlanders interacted with and in, setting the tone for the remainder of the paper. Chapter 3 reviews the methodology utilized in this research and outlines how data was collected during interviews with community elders in four locations around the Eastern Highlands. Chapter 4 goes in-depth into the case study findings during which I will supplement the case study data with other relevant anthropological cases from the area, citing other examples when necessary in order to either highlight or contrast my own findings. In Chapter 5, I will place the knowledge we have of the men's house in the context of agency and index theory, exploring its indexical qualities in relationship to the social community and emphasizing the role of the men's house as part of a wider social network with in the Highlands. Final conclusions are presented in Chapter 6 as the research questions are answered and space is given to understanding new forms of 'indexes of agency' currently taking shape in Eastern Highlands.

CHAPTER 2 ~ LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing the research

Early explorers into the area divided the many islands of Oceania into four main 'culture' areas; Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, and Australia. Although these classifications do not enable us to classify definitively the cultural traditions and belief systems one might encounter within its boundary, they are accepted as reasonable geographic starting points for further, more detailed enquiry and specification. My area of interest falls in the area know as Melanesia, more specifically, the Core Highlands and specifically the Eastern Highlands region of the Island of Papua New Guinea. This region is incredibly diverse; culturally, geographically and ecologically.

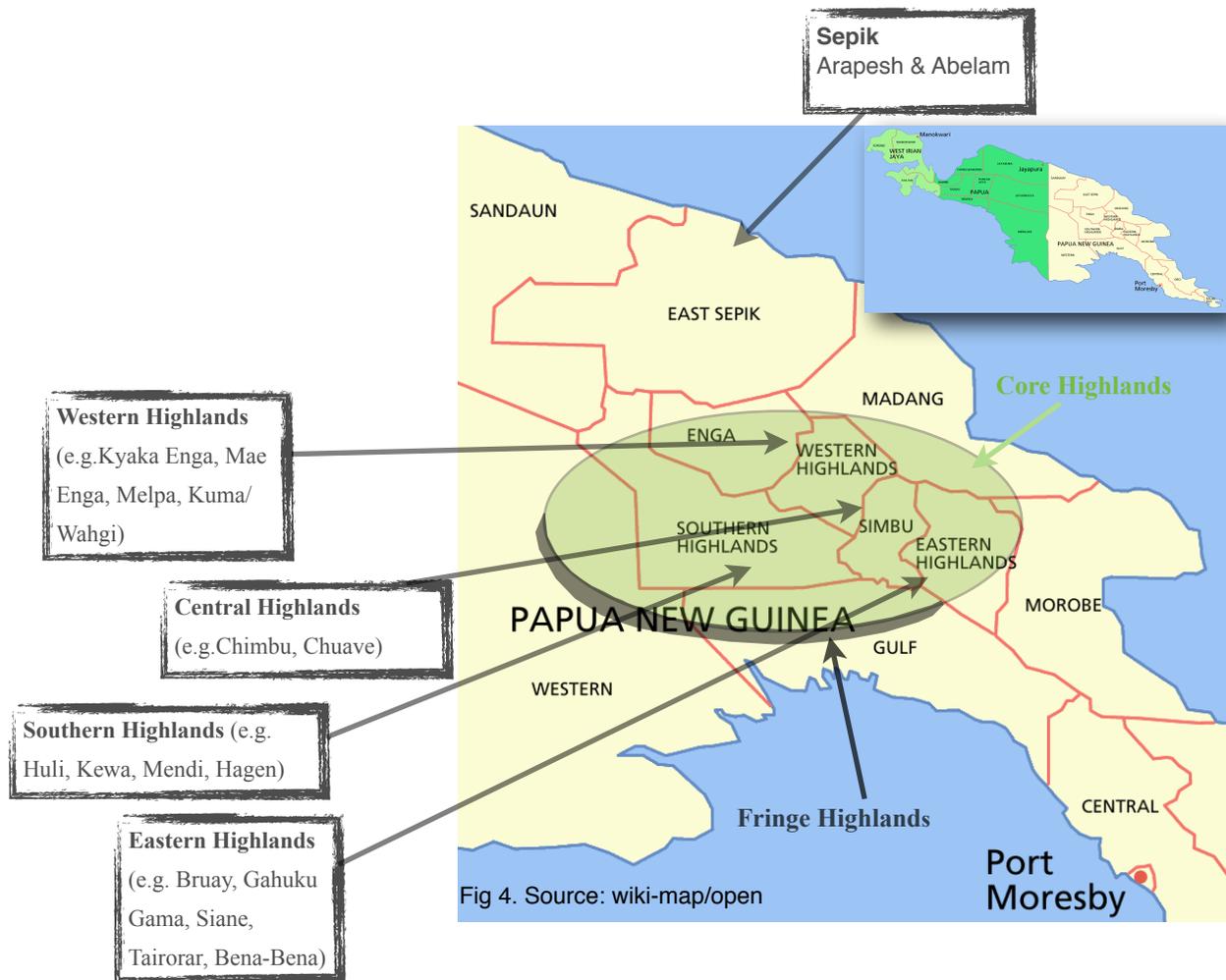


The Eastern Highlands was first explored in the early 1930's by M.J.Leahy and M.Dwyer in search of gold deposits (Salisbury 1962). Their first prospecting sites were up the Bena-Bena river, just east of Goroka, where I resided. The only tools discovered at the time of initial contact (1933) were stone axes for chopping wood and sharpened sticks for digging. That was less than 80 years ago.

Melanesia has been more studied over the last hundred years than most any other place on the planet (Knauff 1999). As a result of being the most culturally and linguistically diverse region on earth with 25% of the worlds languages, defining and redefining of areas and groups plagues the highlands

anthropological discussions. Due to its slow ‘discovery,’ complex geography, and more groups still being ‘discovered’ what were previously well delineated ‘culture’ patterns are constantly being cut, redrawn, and reorganized in a “mass of complex variations” (Feil 1987:xi). Given the rich diversity of the highlands region there is the danger of generalizing when looking at different groups of people, even when, geographically they are in close proximity. So a brief description of the geographical zones that make up the Eastern half of this Papuan mainland will be necessary in order to better understand the context and location of the ethnography that will be discussed.

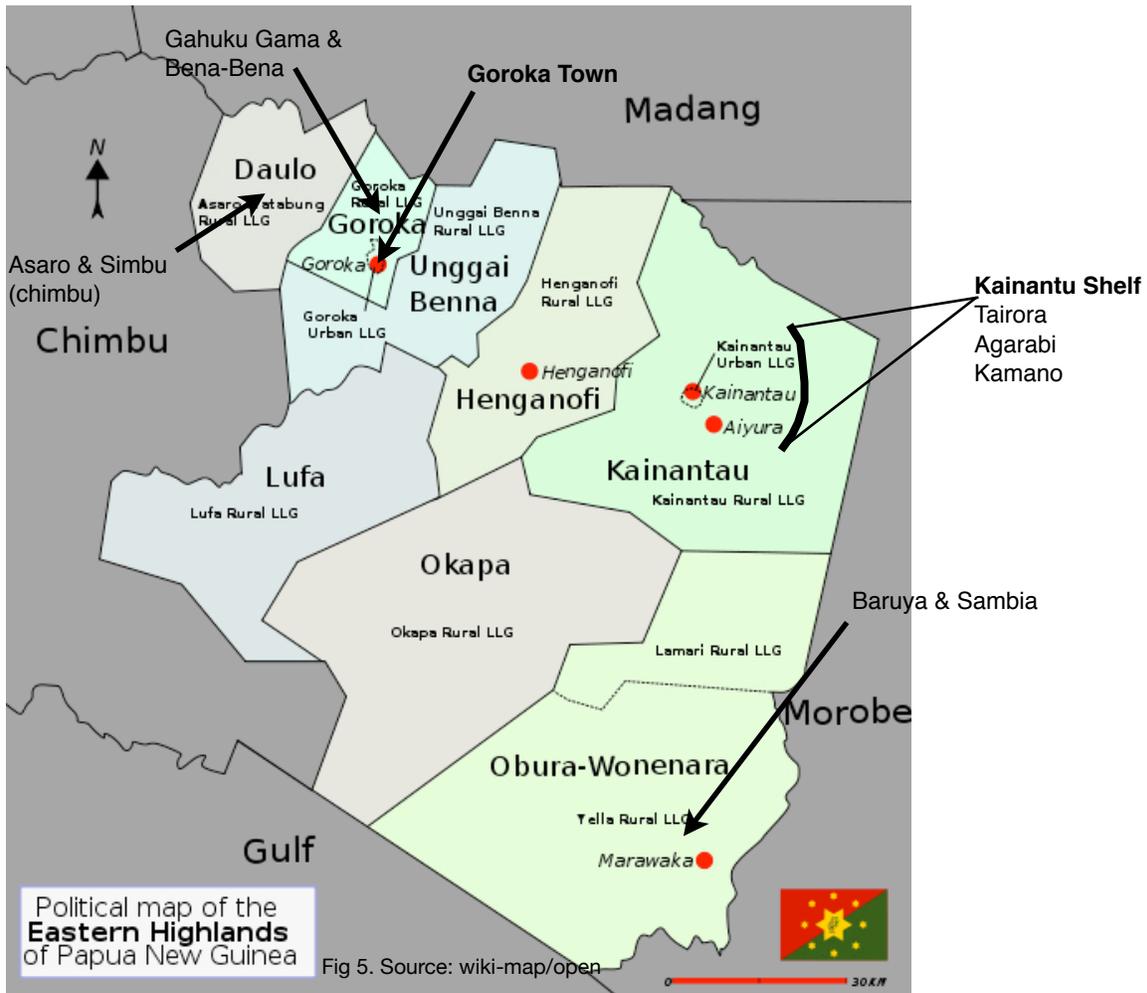
It is common when discussing the highlands area (which at the time of initial exploration was estimated to be approximately 1 million in population) to structure it into ‘zones’. Respectively these are shown in Figure 4 below:



The area in light green has been termed by Hays (1993) as 'Core Highlands', occupying relative altitudinal positions of somewhere between 900m and 2100m, as apposed to what is often termed as the 'Fringe Highlands' (shaded black crescent below the light green) which include people groups such as the Fore, Mountain –Ok, and Duna, who share equal similarities between both the 'Core Highlanders' and those of the Fringe (Clark 2000:38).

Fringe societies tend to be more dispersed in population and ritually more elaborate in body decoration and large scale exchange ceremonies (Clark 2000, Strathern 1980,1988) but there is often overlap between 'boundaries' and the culture found between them, therefore they should not be taken as definitive (Knauft 1993, Brown 1978, Weiner 1988). When referring to Eastern and Western Highlands the many differences among tribes in both locations tend to be in variations (more or less emphasis) on common themes rather than distinct 'cultural' differences, although there are some distinctions that need to and will be made clear as we go on. It is common to classify the Eastern Highlands groups as 'low production' and the Western Highlands as generally 'high production' with a history of more intense cultivation practices and the material culture that appears to support it.

Turning our attention to Figure 5. below we will look specifically at the Eastern Highlands Province, our area of research. The far Eastern end of the Highlands is termed the 'Kainantu Shelf', residing here are groups such as the Tairora, Agarabi and Kamano, to name just three. At the very southern end of the province groups like the Sambia, studied by Herdt (1982) the Baruya studied by Godelier (1986) and others are found. In proximity to Goroka town, the more central/northern part of the province you have the Gahuka Gama, Bena-Bena (studied extensively by Read 1952,1965), and to the west Asaro and further on, the Simbu.



For the most part examples and cases studies will reflect the literature collected around the Eastern Highlands. For some comparisons, one or two examples will be taken from the Western, Southern Highlands and Sepik region along the coast. Despite some similarities to the Eastern Highlands, Southern and Western Highland groups generally have slightly different political and leadership structures and placing greater importance on methods and process of exchange which has diverse cultural manifestations and implications on ideas of relatedness between people and between groups in those areas. Therefore a degree of awareness needs to be used in drawing examples from these regions but they will be helpful and mostly relevant for an over all perspective. In two cases I have taken examples from the Sepik region, from work conducted by Donald Tuzin among the Iahita Arapesh, in order to highlight some architectural and social examples.

As stated earlier, the Eastern Highlands societies have social and cultural patterns typical of 'low production' societies: egalitarian governance structures, antagonistic male/female relations, endemic warfare, varying degrees of despotic and 'bigman' leadership structures. In connection with the low production agriculture (most literature suggests) greater emphasis is placed on complex initiation sequences and rituals and the maintenance of gender inequalities as compared with the Western Highlands where in some cases initiation and age-grade rites of passage are almost non-existent. In comparison greater emphasis is placed on exchange ceremonies in the Southern and Western provinces and leadership is mostly individual focused in the form of a 'bigman' (or single leader) rather than egalitarian and shared amongst a group of men or elders as is typical of the Eastern Highlands. Social instability was also more widespread in Eastern Highlands compared with the western highlands and methods of dealing with it largely underdeveloped (Feil 1987:62-63). Reading of earlier ethnographical accounts suggests Eastern Highlands tribes had smaller populations, impermanent settlements who for the most part kept to themselves. Warfare was often seen as a normal way of life for many tribes of the Eastern Highlands, with settlement layout often reflecting a 'defensive' design, with palisaded, nucleated housing patterns (Read 1954). Further to the West villages became more spread out and less 'structured' around warfare, defense of property and land.

The way in which Eastern Highlands groups are organized socially has been of great debate among anthropologists in the area for many years. Hobgin (1973 eds) says that in some cases it has become necessary to use "terms such as 'sub-clans', 'sub-sub-clans,' sub-clan sections and men's houses groups, avoiding reference to minimal, major and maximal lineages" Although being predominately patrilineal organized, there are many other ways in which groups seem to define and organize themselves, where patrilineal descent is seen as secondary, and certainly not the most important. It is not uncommon to find average sized groups who do not place significance on the identification with a common ancestor, and may not even claim unilateral descent. Genealogical tracing or knowledge in many cases may not even exceed four generations (Hobgin (eds) 1973:148-49). At its smallest core the 'hamlet' or 'lineage will contain a nucleus of agnatically related men (1973:42) often focused and living within the local men's house (Salisbury 1962:16). Polite is also a common term among ethnologists when referring to the smallest unit of the clan, who are effectively, economically independent and self governing (Hobgin(eds)1973:143).

Early ethnographical accounts used the term “Big Man” to describe most Highlands leadership and governance systems. “New Guinea Highlands leadership, in the form of the ‘Big Man’ (and all its regional manifestations), is a community wide acceptance of the network of relationships of a given individual rather than a political appointment (Sahlins 1963). More recently however, other terms have been employed in a more ‘regional’ approach to classify and differentiate between Highland areas because of such broad differences among certain groups. Big Men, Despot, Great Man, Huge Man, Egalitarian, have all been terms used across the highlands to describe any number of highland leaders. Within the Eastern Highlands leadership is often shared by a group of men, focused around the men’s house. Leaders were typically chosen on strength, fighting ability and oratory eloquence, in contrast to the Western Highlands where ‘bigmanship’ was awarded on the basis of wealth transactions and an ability to influence through social relationships (Strathern1988).

In any given men’s house within Eastern Highlands, there may be a number of ‘big men’ who share the decision making, look after ritual and initiation ceremonies, organize work groups, arrange marriages etc. This distinction between Eastern and Western forms of leadership is an important one however, because as a result of the emphasis on Eastern Highlands leaders as ‘warriors’ their relationship to the men’s house has been largely seen in the context of war and conflict, while other aspects of its relationship to the community, overlooked.

The “corporateness” of war (Fiel 1987:67) was largely an Eastern Highlands phenomenon. Read (1955) comments that in Bena Bena, “the stated aims of warfare were the complete and total destruction of the enemy if possible” (1955:253) The intensity of war throughout the highlands is well documented, but as to how far back this situation stretches, and can be seen as ‘normal’ at the time of ‘first contact,’ is not well understood and there is little to no evidence to be conclusive. Other researchers have presented alternative views. Rappaport (1967) showed that in fact it was ritual that played a large part in limiting the frequency of fighting among the Tsembaga of the Jimi Valley (west and south of Goroka). He posits that in fact it is the ritual cycle that “plays an important part in regulating the relationships of these groups with both the nonhuman components of their immediate environments and the human components of their less immediate environments” (1967:17). Tuzin (1997) established that it was the ‘male house groups’ and through them, the unification of male solidarity and aggressiveness, which were part and parcel of maintaining other important aspects of the Iahita ethics and values. Read in his research among the Gahuku Gama (what is now Goroka) says this about the ‘men’s club’ :

Traditionally, the clubhouse had been the focus of male dominance, the inviolate center that every boy entered after he had passed through the painful rites of initiation. But there had been many changes by the time I arrived in the valley. Lutheran missionaries had been working in the area for at least twelve years. They had not gathered many converts nor effected any fundamental changes in religious thought, but they had introduced ideas that were influential because of their association with the dominant white minority, and they had denigrated the more conspicuous and accessible forms of pagan belief and practice. [associated with the men's house]...the sacred flutes had been burned in public, the ritual associated with them abandoned, and with it the principal supernatural justification for the men's organization (Read 1965:96).

In Reads early accounts of the Gahuku Gama he describes the men's house as being in decline throughout the valley, and that often in the course of his ethnographical work, his house was used in place of the traditional men's gathering place (men's house). At the time, the traditional meetinghouse he describes was oval rather than round, and two to three times as large as the ordinary round dwellings.

Their thatched roofs rose to a series of peaks, each of which supported a wooden pole surmounted by a clump of orchids." He goes onto say that it was through the men's organization that the Gahuku maintained and perpetuated the "religious symbols and esoteric rituals associated with them, controlled subsistence activities, settled disputes," and was the key organizing structure of important community events and rituals (Read 1965:96).

"Men's house decisions were group decisions" (Read 1965:148) and must be unanimous - one man cannot be seen to trump the decisions of other members. Leadership status is open to anyone, it is not inherited, nor is it really appointed. Among the Baruya in the southern part of Eastern Highlands, leadership is made, cultured, bred and created within the structure of the men's house over years of a boy's life (cf Godelier 1986). A boy learns the role and skill of a leader by living full time in the men's house, and being around and influenced by key figures within the community of men (Heider 1979:71) "Everything concerning the collective life of the village centered upon this place where his father slept" (Read 1965: 111).

Within any group or village, there could be more than one 'men's house' depending on the political organization and population of the given clan. In larger tribes, each composed of a number of clans living with in close proximity, and not necessarily originating from the same tribe, all warfare is

generally forbidden and groups will work closely together in times of initiation, men's house construction, gardening, government work and other customary undertakings (Salisbury 1962:13-14). Each of these clans is broken up into smaller units of sub-clans, down to villages, hamlets, and lineages. At the smallest 'unit' of organization is the men's house, which is the hub of village life and epicenter of group decision-making. It is here where boys were initiated at different stages in life and come to reside from about the ages of seven to ten until they are married. Groups of boys from different clans were often initiated together, and as a result would spend most of their time together until marriage. Final initiation ceremonies mark the final stages of manhood to marriage, granting one sexual access to his wife. He would then establish a residence outside of the men's house where his wife, children and pigs will reside, but he would predominately with the other men inside the men's house (Read 1986:118). Watson (1983) comments among the Tairora, "The men of a lineage tend to share the same men's house in more cases than not; but in more cases than not they probably also share the men's house with 'other' men" (1983:206).

Almost all Eastern Highlands ritual activities were centered around the men's house, with many tribes sharing similar patterns of initiation cycles, content and duration. These rituals were inherently linked with local knowledge transmission and were the way in which 'local' knowledge was passed on. Knowledge and secrets about male/female relations, sacred objects (like the sacred flute, see Read 1952) ecological and ritual knowledge, aspects of tribal war were all part of male socialization and the introduction into the men's house. Ritual Highland life was inherently linked to the maintenance of social networks through the complex initiation ceremonies, shared food, self-decoration and singing (Schroeder 1992:183). In contrast to earlier 'interpretations' of ritual by anthropologists, more recent studies of 'ritual' have begun to divorce it from its often-narrow religious affiliation in an attempt to more fully understand its relationship to "community and individual practice, creative improvisation, and peoples participation in newly emergent communities of practice." This is only largely possible by a shift away from viewing such interactions as "old Durkheimian 'things' of society, but as processes and practices of relationships" (Sneft & Basso 2009:4-5).

Houses, Kinship & Relations

As we have mentioned, strict kinship classifications within the Highlands appeared to have been problematic for many ethnographers forcing many to search for other, more 'Highlands descriptive' terms. 'Fluid' ideas of relatedness in Highlands have forced ethnographers to look at other areas of

social life in order to conceptualize 'new' kinship classifications within Eastern Highlands. As I mentioned in the introduction it was Levi-Strauss (1982) who first challenged anthropologists to take different approach when attempting to understand relationships between people which fell 'outside' the more rigid kinship classifications, and appeared to be related to interactions within and around the 'simple structures' of society - houses. Building on the work of Levi-Strauss, further expanding on ideas of relatedness through interactions within houses and between houses, Waterson 1990, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, Joyce and Gillespie 2000 (among others) have widely expanded the literature base. Joyce & Gillespie (2000) have challenged researchers to take a more "processional rather than a classificatory approach to kinship" (2000:1) in an attempt to better understand the depth and meaning of relationships within a specific group, how where those relationships are acted out.

In their approach to "kin or kin-like" rules of relatedness, they look at groups of people and their immediate relationship to their "joint localization to a house". Understanding the house in relationships to people, challenges us to look more closely at the relationship people have to the 'things' around them, to the house, and to 'reframe the way we see material objects, structures, and environment and the role they play in social interaction. The house then becomes more than an object, and is more fully understood as "localizing force within a physical landscape and a multidimensional social network." This approach underlines the importance and 'social power,' tangible, fixed and or mobile objects can have on "social memory" (2000:19).

In this way houses take on a more 'embodied' form, an agency framework is produced which is able to link the material, architectural characteristics with the social interaction that are played out within its walls. The house then is seen as "projecting an outward façade of unity" enabling the masking of "underlying tensions and conflicting loyalties" which may exist. Specific to the highlands in their research, is the association of egalitarian societies with relatively uniform architecture and a number of different houses and families are seen (or in the case of the Highlands) are actually termed as 'one-house.'³ These types of situations, in part, tend to form "perspectives in which economic and political factors are held stable" (Joyce & Gillespie 2000:7) As we will see in the case studies to follow, political organization was a big factor in the agency of the men's house in its role at the community level, but also in its extension to other men's houses within the clan and beyond tribal boundaries in negotiations of

³ The majority of people represented in the past by a 'single men's house' is currently referred to as a 'haus-line', or 'house lineage', usually not exceeding more than four generations, and ethnographically referred to as a 'four patrilineage descent group' (Read 1955:252).

ritual and ceremonial occasions, marriages, mediations and alliances between groups, etc. Boon (1990) makes an interesting remark specifically relevant to the importance men's house played in networks of political influence across tribal boundaries. He states, "houses muddle conventional analytic distinctions of clan, lineage, guild, warna, jati, party, etc...Paramount is the fact that 'house' can relate to 'house' even across presumed boundaries of society, nation, or other construction" (Boon 1990b:439n as quoted in Joyce & Gillespie:2000:42).

This brings us further along in understanding the deeper threads of agent characteristics the men's house exhibited within the community and subsequently the networking abilities it had to transcend clan and tribal boundaries in its political extensions. Further exploration regarding the specific agency of objects, Vellinga says "will go a long way in explaining the centrality of architecture in contemporary processes of social, political and ethnic identifications" (2007:763). Agency theory through the work of Alfred Gell (1998) draws interesting conclusions on the Maori meetinghouses, in what he terms as "the collective indexes of agency." These "collective indexes of agency" had both local indexical abilities and 'extra-tribal' networking leverage. John Law uses agency and its relationship to networks to expand on previous theories of actor networks. Carsten (2000) also touches on theories of networks to flush out ideas around 'kin-ties' creating links, acting as mediators or nodes as 'information highways' of diverse meanings..."networks are not just relations between persons...[but] vehicles mobilized to carry messages and the resultant passages and translations which co-mobilize different orders of phenomena" (Carsten (eds) 2000:162).

In sum, the "house" should motivate an investigation of the interconnected pragmatic actions and strategic motivations that link persons over time to and through objects or places and thereby serve to define a social group, enable its relations with other persons and groups, and facilitate its social (and accompanying material) reproduction" (Joyce and Gillespie 2000:50). Thus placing the men's house in the framework of its own 'social category' may help to understand more fully how it was supportive and constitutive of complex relational ties, both personal and political within the Eastern Highlands.

Colonial and Mission Influence

In order to understand the context in which the men's house was first impacted, it will be important to set the social and political scene which was starting to develop in the 1950's with the arrival of Europeans. The colonial administration, influence of business and missions, the impact of capitalism and finally the formation of the State of Papua New Guinea in 1975 all had significant and wide-ranging

impacts on local culture. I do not wish to paint a simplistic 'past' and 'present' view of the effects of colonialism, however it is important to show that the scale, swiftness and varying outside influence with in the highlands, was to say the least, impressive.

Over the years a number of anthropologists have returned to their original field sites to record changes over time from outside influences. Many of the accounts recorded share similar themes of change (Clark 2000, Read 1986, Robbins 2005, Knauft 2011). Outside influence and its intensity varied across Melanesia, coastal area's being colonized first, in some cases more than two-hundred years before the Highlands region. But the typical progression in the Highlands was initially government, predominately Australian colonizers (although earlier on there were records of German influence in some of lower lying coastal/fringe highland regions) closely followed by Christian missions, and business. A quick review of the literature of the effects of change over time show that it was a confusing mix of ideologies, doctrines, methodologies, intentions and outcomes, all of which had their effects in different ways on varying aspects of highland belief systems, cultural traditions and its architecture.

Promises of wide spread development from the colonizing forces is a common thread in the literature. Early patrols known as 'kiaps' set up government outposts in many of the highland valleys in which to conduct censuses, provide minor health services and to organize work groups for road construction and other administration projects. It was, in many cases a heavy handed, paternalistic approach "people must be politically, economically and socially adjusted" (Pangia PR1/70;PR3/71-72, as quoted in Clark 2000:82). In many areas people were set to work, building roads, bridges, aid-posts, schools etc, in preparation for the liberation of their "primitive past". It is believed the willingness in such activities came from an association of work related activities in relationship to traditional ceremonial practices that were believed to be the precursor to blessings bestowed from above, it was a ritual response to development (Clark 2000).

Ultimately this 'work for the Whiteman' would lead to the acquisition of similar wealth and possessions. (Clark 2000) Followed by the propaganda of development and 'liberation', the government set out to change political and decision making systems within each community and unite the country under one system. Once kiaps had been brought in and established a government outpost, efforts were made to appoint a tul-tul and lulluai in each community, acting as a local 'democratic' committee (the tul-tul) and the head of the committee, the councilor (the lulluai) This system was set up to replace the traditional processes of governance, which at the time focused primarily around the men's house. The

missions were not far behind the colonizing forces, with their own set of rules, traditions and agenda's, and quickly saw the 'cult house' (men's house) as something which needed to be 'dealt' with and ultimately replaced with a church building (Strathern 2004:154). In a matter of years a multi-tiered, multi-functioning (and I use the term loosely) church/state - governance and leadership structure replaced the traditional systems in most communities.

Representing the newly structured government at the community level was the administration appointed 'tul-tul'. Although they were selected by the community, they were often not the true, traditional leaders but village elders. For fear of being held responsible for 'political' friction between the government and the village, when the government leaders were appointed, and minor leaders pushed forward to take the Luluai's cap" (Levine 1996;eds). One the administration structure was 'set in place', the colonial courts were established and often seen as a method of subverting the traditional egalitarian decision making process within the men's association, as they operated outside the traditional system. (Read 1986: 227). Corporations were not far behind work of the missions and government agents in an attempt to work with the government to fulfill its goals of economic adjustment, but also for their own gain and to take advantage of the wealth of resources which had just been opened up to the outside world.

With the lure of new forms of wealth accumulation young boys and men were often persuaded in work groups to leave their village and to find employment on the plantations along the coast. As a result many of the traditional practices involving youth and younger men were delayed or no longer carried out. One community member remarked that it was not the changing ritual and ceremonial cycles that was the predominate issue, but rather "the absence of a majority of the young men tends to make village life very "dead" (Armstrong 1917-1922). When Read (1965) started his study among the Gahuku, many young men had already been lured away to work and travel. Among the leaders, there seemed little point in maintaining many of the traditions in the absence of boys to be initiated, and therefore almost impossible to "maintain the system of control and surveillance that had been a major function of the men's association" (1965:97).

Many colonial records point out how easily Highlanders were willing to cast aside some of their own beliefs in exchange for imported ones. Read observed among the Gauku, how willing they appeared to abandon, traditions or institutions without much coercion, "even those aspects of society that might have seemed fundamental to an outsider." During the first years of colonial influence they "set

their sights on acquiring the material elements of the alien culture.” Read suggests in a similar way, one must look at this aspect of Gahuku culture from a pragmatic point of view rather than one of a “shattering conversion” (Read:1986:84). Strathern says this about the Duna of the Southern Highlands

The same domain of agency that can lead to change can also lead to a rejection of, or resistance to, changes that are disadvantageous, unwelcome, externally imposed, or greatly out of accordance with local values. An open-ended approach to culture therefore leaves us in a good position to understand either change or resistance to it. We do not assume, by this approach, that the people are fully cognizant of the ramifying effects of all changes on their lives (Strathern A&Stewart P. 2004:122).

Since independence in 1975, and the exiting of the colonial authority life for many Highlanders has become more “lawless”, government systems corrupted, non existent or completely ineffective, court systems incredibly lax and inconsistent. Unfortunately for the traditional leaders, their influence and positions weakened by years of colonial methods and control, remain in a position of powerlessness. In the absence of a formal rule of law, and a weakened traditional governing system, communities are beginning to feel the negative implications of the relatively recent colonial past. “Pacification begins to appear as a historical mirage or interlude rather than a permanent institutional change”(Strathern A and Stewart P 2004:129). A merely twelve years after independence, many of the Simbu elders were dissatisfied with their post-colonial life. They thought highly of past leadership and “distrusted the new leaders” (Brown 1995:231). With declining government systems and court authorities, combined with traditional systems which are fragmented, no longer understood or empowered, many feel that the only way forward, is to look backward toward the traditional systems of leadership, governance and rituals which were integrated into the shared space of the men’s house.

CHAPTER 3 ~ METHODOLOGY

Background

The earliest ethnographic recording did not start in the highlands until well into the late 40's early 50's. Ritual action and the relationship these actions had to the local men's house were virtually ignored. By the 1960's and 70's, the Australian administration had been firmly established and their influence was soon over-riding many traditional methods of governance. Over those 30 years the general decline and demise of secret male societies and traditional initiations and rites of passage was occurring with little or no documentation. As a result the earlier ethnographical accounts and approach left us without a comprehensive understanding of the "cultural and psychological elements of New Guinea cults"(Langness 1967). Therefore we proceed with some degree of awareness that we know very little about the tradition of the men's house in its pre-colonial form. To what extent the ethnography and anthropological documentation on the men's house, its associated customs, and its relationship to the community and its clan during the time of its documentation is accurate, cannot be stated with certainty.

Understanding the past can be a highly speculative undertaking. The research conducted among the four tribes was based on the memories and stories of elders who were part of the men's house over 60 years ago. Direct observation had to be replaced by previous research, memory, comparisons and analogy, cross-referenced, with earlier ethnographical accounts. There is little detailed or analytical research to be found on the men's house in the Eastern Highlands. Feil (1987) makes the observation that in Melanesian ethnography, the tendency is to place too much emphasis on certain cultural aspects that may be of particular interest to the observer and more or less ignore other aspects that may actually have great significance to a balanced and comprehensive view of the group being observed. He says "even a cursory reading of highland ethnography reveals that certain topics have caught the imagination of observers more 'mundane' items have been bypassed" (1987:11).

Sherry Ortner (1973) and her article on 'Key Symbols' challenged me to look deeper into the men's house tradition. She outlines five reasonably reliable indicators of cultural interest that may lead the researcher to identifying a 'key symbol' within a particular group of people:

- Local informant tells you that X is culturally important
- Local informant seems positively or negatively aroused about X, rather than indifferent
- X comes up in many different contexts (behavior or systematic)
- There is greater cultural elaboration surrounding X
- There are greater cultural restrictions surrounding X – either in sheer number of rules, or severity of sanctions regarding its misuse (Ortner 1973:1339).

My work with the provincial government in various communities around the Eastern Highlands, repeatedly confirmed these five characteristics surrounding the men's house, which led me to start a more systematic enquiry into the tradition. Based on this early work she later goes on to develop theories of agency, of which I will look at later as these relate to the interaction that took place in and around the men's house. However I will also turn to Gell (1998) to develop this theory later in the analysis section.

Site Selection

The research conducted and data collected consists in large part from group interviews conducted in four sites within the Eastern Highlands. Each group studied was a different language group and tribe in close proximity to each other (approx. 1hr drive). These sites were chosen based on contacts I had established in these areas, who confirmed elders of the cohort I was seeking were alive, willing and available to speak with me on matters of the men's house tradition. The four sites were accessible by four-wheel drive, within a two-hour drive of Goroka town where I was based. My focus on these four sites was not comparative, but rather I set out in search of commonalities between the four tribes, and develop a 'common language' about this tradition in hopes of drawing conclusions about the relationship between the community and the men's house in general across Eastern Highlands.

In addition to the four planned research sites, work also afforded interesting interactions across the province with different leaders from diverse tribes. Over a two-year period I spent much of my time talking with communities and leaders about development issues in remote corners the province and why



Fig 6. Community discussion - Duna Valley, Henganofi

from their perspective the government was ineffective in its service delivery. These types of interactions brought up many discussions on the structure of traditional leadership focused around the men's house, through which I was able to gather and record some interesting insights. Below is a detailed map of Eastern Highlands Province with the names of the four planned research sites, the district in which they now lie, the name of the clan, and the name of the

men's house in the local dialect. Also included are blue triangles where other data was collected on work related trips to these areas over that two year period (see Fig 7.below)

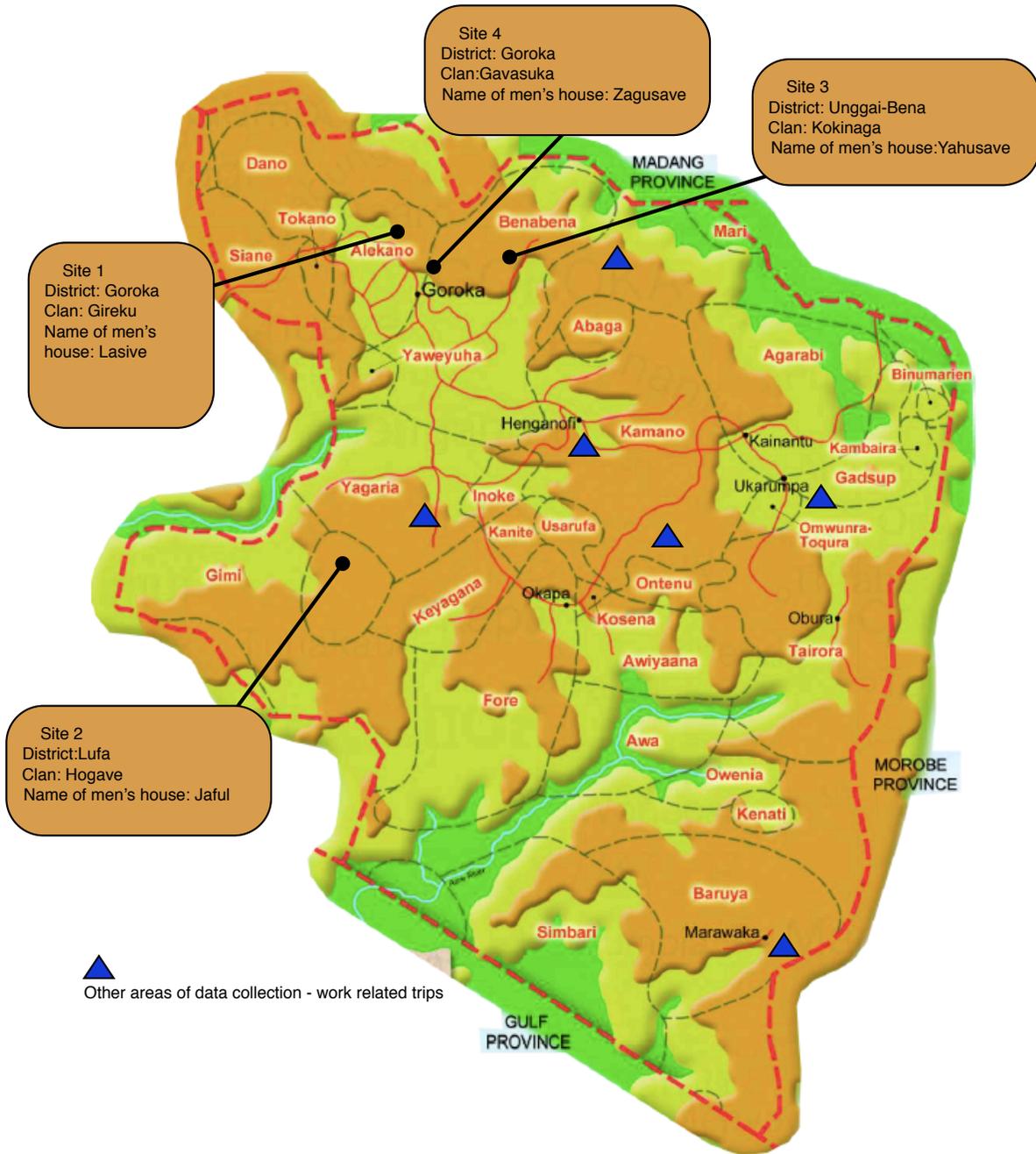


Fig 7. EHP - Data Collection Sites. Source: Wikimaps Opensource

The informants interviewed in this process were adult males in their 70's or older. Informants were chosen based on their age and 'status' within the community; to what Maurice Godelier (1986) termed "Great Men" in his study of the Baruya, in the far southern end of the province. These men were well respected, and seen to hold at some point in the past a prominent position within the community. This put the majority of men who had direct experience in the men's house (age 10 and up at the time) in



Fig 8. Interviews with Elders - *Gireku, Goroka*

their mid 70's. For the most part the interview cohort consisted of the elder leaders and their sons who were usually in their 50's. The sons had a heightened ability to draw out the relevant information based on their fathers experience, and were also familiar with the local dialect and so were able to better articulate my questions to them in a way they would

understand.

The elders' sons would translate my questions from pidgin english or english depending on the situation into the local dialect. The son's often had creative insight into their father's experience, new how to better frame my questions, and often had the perspective of a western education with which to contrast their experience. Among the sites it had been well over 60 years since the last ceremony had been held in the men's house, which for the average memory is a long time. Many of the men who grew up in the men's house had long since passed away, those that were still alive at times struggled with particular details. One aspect of research that came to light in the data collection process was, so much of what was practiced in and around this tradition, so much of what gave meaning to their experiences in the men's house, was not easily articulated through the spoken or written word. It was something felt, something lived, something experienced, something hard to put into words. Bateson (1972) comments that many of these 'eidons' happenings of a group are so 'unconscious' and have long since become habits that to that these cultural patterns be somehow explained or articulated to the researcher is naive. That if fact, many of our 'actions' are organized in our relationship to those (people) around us and to that (cultural artefacts/environment) which surrounds us, not easily described in formal language.

CHAPTER 4 ~ CASE STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS

Social Organization

Gireku, Hogave, Kokinaga and Gavasuka share common cultural traits, but are distinct tribes representing four different language groups. Language groups in the Eastern Highlands can be and often are split into different tribes and clans. The Tribe generally does not operate as one autonomous ‘unit,’ rather political autonomy is assumed by each clan, and more specifically, each patrilineal ‘line,’ the men’s house group making up the core and smallest unit of a lineage. Read calls the smallest social unit among the Gahuku-Gama the “four generation patrilineage” which distinguishes them from other groups



Fig 9. Kivinka patrilineage - Duna Valley, Henganofi

around them (Read 1955:252). The term haus-line, ‘line’, village or community are often used synonymously. Villages are made up of a number of houses, spatially organized around a central men’s house. Among the Siane, slightly south of my research area, Salisbury commented that they had a term for this group – “nenta wenena”, which translated means, ‘close people’. Or in the case of the Gahuku-Gama, this

group is called ‘ha’makoko dzuha’none; translated as “the people of one root”. These groups possess local rights to land, share in communal gardening and house building and own sacred flutes and their respective songs (Berndt 1954:27).

In some cases these village groups may be living in close proximity, but may in fact not be from the same tribe. Geographically close villages of a different clan or tribe, may or may not form political alliances, but there is usually a common agreement for peace and cooperation (Berndt 1954). Among the Siane, and most Eastern Highlands groups, the clan is the term normally applied to describe the largest ‘political’ unit. “When referring to an area occupied by a particular group, the word ‘numuna or ‘house’ is used: one says “I am going to Waifo house”, to express the idea of membership”(Salisbury

1962:14). In some cases he reports that groups may also be identified by the name of the most important person, who is the recognized 'leader' of a specific men's house.

Hobgin makes a clarification with respect to descent; even at a 'groups' maximum size they may or may not have a common ancestor, and may not even claim unilateral descent. There seems to be a relatively flexible view to relatedness and membership to any given group. Agnatic, or patrilineal descent is not often adhered to and many non-agnates are common within the group. Individuals may be accepted into the community based on matrilineal ties, 'captives' from defeated tribes are often seen over time as 'related' and affinal relationships common (Hobgin 1973). Although the patrilineage does not have a distinct name apart from the clan to which it belongs, it is not uncommon for this group to be called by the last name of the eldest leader, who would be the head, or spokes person for the local men's house, as leadership was not hereditary, but shared by a group of men who resided in the men's house. Leadership structures are discussed in more detail below.

The village or 'line' then, can be seen as the smallest autonomous social unit (and the women and children it represents) or put another way – the smallest 'corporate group' which culminates in communal sleeping among its male members in the men's house. Throughout the Eastern Highlands as Allan (1967) summarizes "patrilineal descent, patri-virilocal residence, clan-perish exogamy and egalitarianism are strongly emphasized"(1967:29) Allan (1967) looked at 11 communities in the highlands region and made this general statement about the smallest unit of highland society; "The local community is small in scale, exhibits considerable autonomy and solidarity, and most of the male members believe they are agnatically related to one another" (1967:28). Complex male initiations culminating in the separation of males in the men's house furthers the social divisions and dichotomies between males and females, men and boys, initiated and un-initiated.

Spatially, villages and clans tend to situate themselves on ridge tops, and seldom in the valleys. Organization is what I might term - 'longitudinally nucleated', in other words there is usually a 'core-center' stretched out in a linear fashion, anywhere from 200m to 1km along the ridge. This is common throughout the Eastern Highlands, and was used previously as a mechanism for defense because it positioned the clan at a vantage point looking over the valley. In the center of the community it is typical to find at least one men's house (Salisbury 1962:11) and its respective fenced off gathering place out front - this forms the center of village social life (Salisbury 1962:12). For example at a wedding ceremony



Fig 10. Gatsup Community - Gatsup, Kainantu

all members of one clan will parade into a neighboring community to congregate at the principle men's house to conduct the ceremony and exchange. The women's dwellings will be spaced in close proximity to the men's house. In the case of the Baruya clan (cf Godelier 1998) with whom I worked, as of 2012, they still occupied 2 men's houses at diagonals to each

other with the majority of the community filling in the middle spaces. In matters of dispute, initiation ceremonies, feasts, life cycle rituals, communal work sessions, and warfare, all center around the men's house.

Space in Context

Construction knowledge of the men's house in all four locations was passed on through the communal decision of rebuilding and reconstruction. The typical men's house would last 3-7 years depending on the location (areas with less rain would extend the life of the building) Once the decision was made to re-construct, the community would request help from other clans and sub-clans to assist in construction materials. Youth from that particular village would be instructed by local elders in the traditions and methods of construction. Often the men's house would be re-built in the same location, re-using the center pole, which had minor sacred affiliations in some cases. Watson (1983) says among the Tairora that the center pole symbolized a connection to the ancestors, called by a term meaning 'our ancestor' it was seen to "support everything else". Specifics of the men's house location or orientation and 'sacred' material or ceremonies in its construction were by all accounts, of little concern. Cardinal factors in the placement of the men's house did not appear to be a consideration. In Hogave the elders commented that the men's house was always the biggest house in the community, with a certain prominence that people recognized. Watson comments that although central, it was always slightly isolated from other houses, its surrounding area, sacred and private for males and the initiants. Sometimes separated from the other houses by high hedges, a "symbolic barrier" between the masculine "quarter" and the rest of the community (Watson 1983:63) In some cases there was talk of detailed carvings along the upright posts on the external side of the building, especially around the

entrance, but I could find no record or photographs to validate this. Across the four sites that were studied, I was able to gather few details of significant interest in relation to the construction of the men's house. Typical construction techniques would have looked similar to the picture to the left. The majority



Fig 11. Common house construction technique - Duna Valley, Henganofi

of construction details gathered and emphasis were centered on the delegation of tasks more than about the task or method itself. As I mentioned above in some cases it would be neighboring sub-clans that would help with the gathering of material and bring it to the spot where the new men's house was to be constructed. Women were responsible for the collection of the 'kunai' grass used to cover the roof. It was layered in a 'thatching' method with lateral smaller

pieces of wood running and fastened perpendicular to the rafters. The one and only account of the men's house being constructed I was able to find was by Schafer in 1945 in his article titled - 'House Settlement'. It is a unique piece of literature in highlands anthropology and details accounts of settlement patterns and methods of the men's house construction in the Wahgi Valley, 50km North of my research area. (See Appendix A for description)

These sketches (below fig 13.) represent two common forms of the men's house found across the Highlands, though they may vary slightly in detail in certain locations. The Hogave elders mentioned that in some cases it may be common to find carvings on the posts - either side of the entry, similar to shapes and designs carved into the spears and arrow heads used in warfare. While no 'official' documentation exists, based on arrow heads which are still carved and used today, the door carvings might have looked something like the picture at right. Hogave elders also mentioned that in some cases they recall men's houses as having up to six fireplaces in a row down the center, and two doors, one at either end of the structure.



Fig 12. Carved spear Goroka, EHP

post carvings placed on either side of the door, here & here.

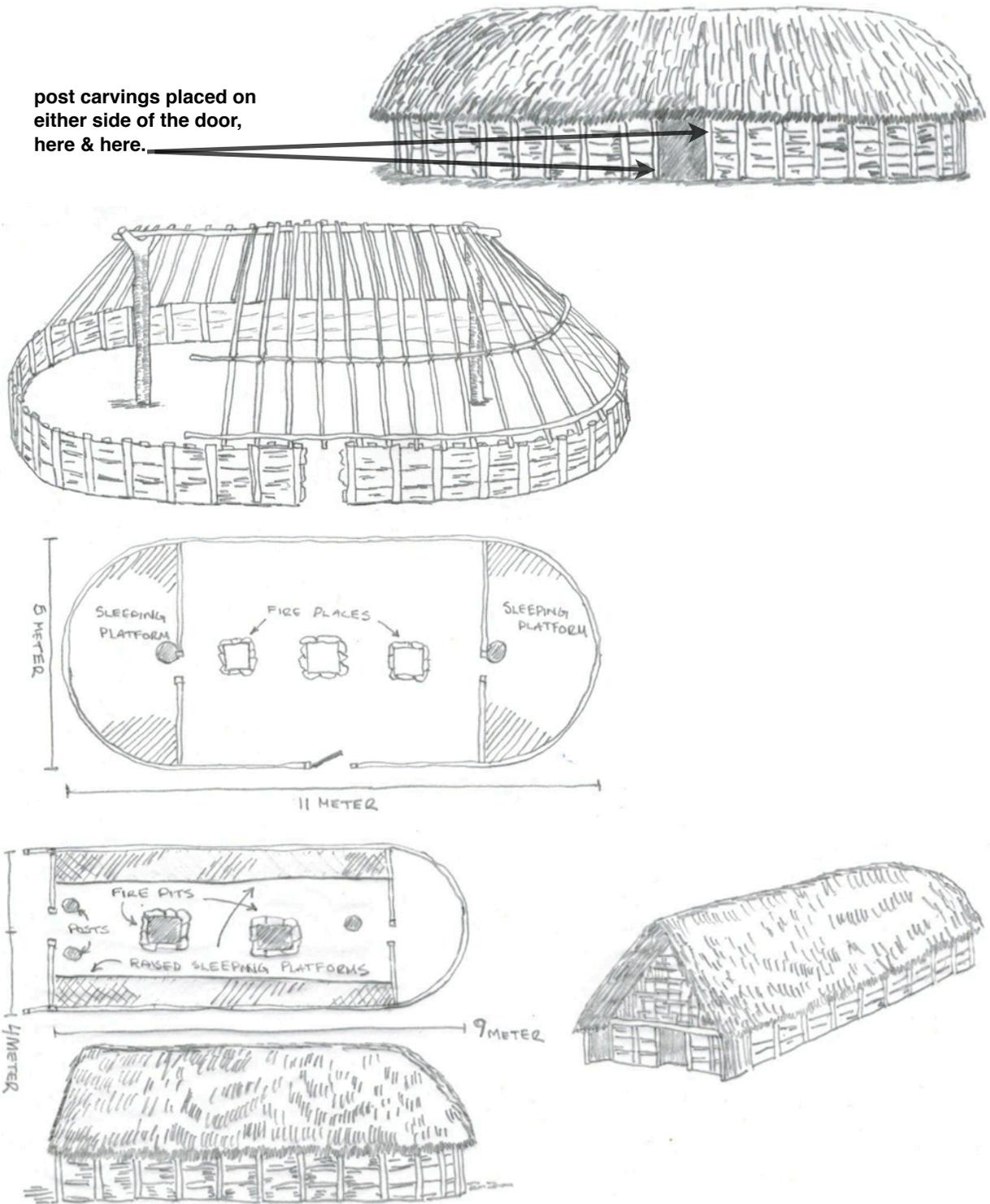


Fig 13. Traditional Men's house form. Source: reproduced from Meiser (1939). *Anthropos*

Contrast the two men's house forms above with the typical residential space occupied by women and children in Figure 14 below. The figure on the left is still a commonly used roof system, the one on the right a more traditional form. Of great importance in both floor plans is the centrality of the fire pit, to this day it remains a focus point for social interaction across the highlands.

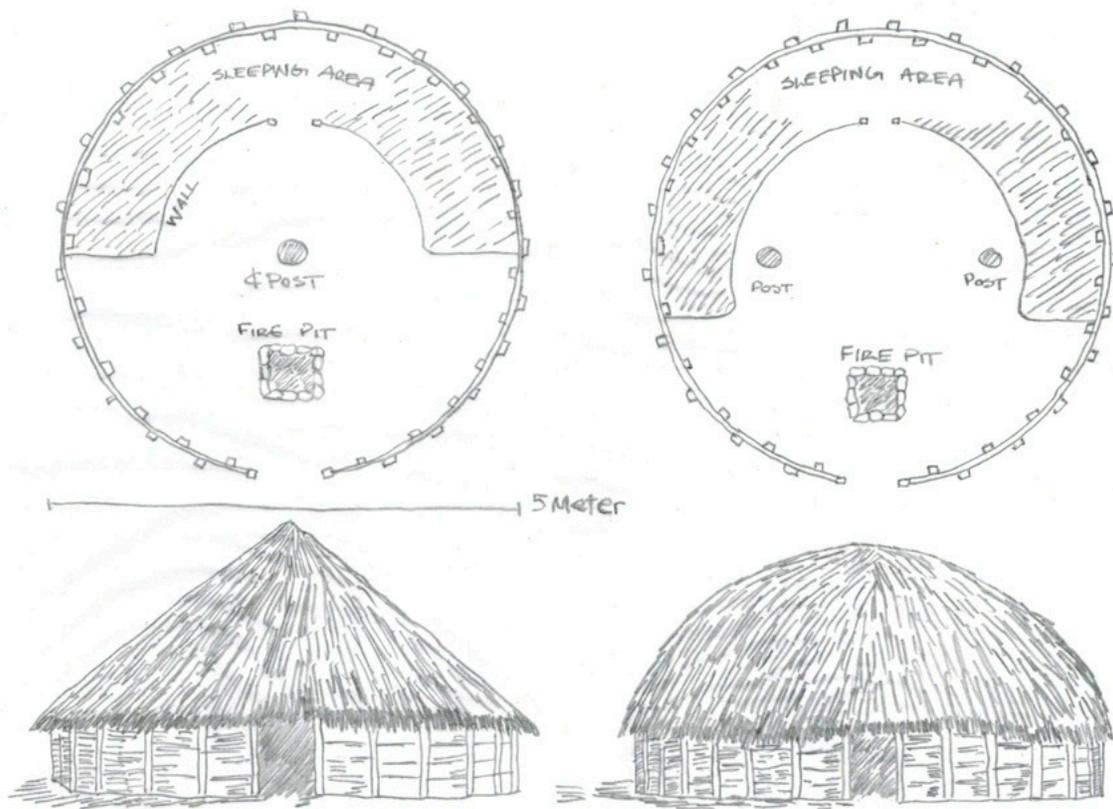


Fig 14. Traditional residential house form. Source: reproduced from Meiser (1939). *Anthropos*

One component of the men's house construction process that was articulated to be of importance was that of the first fire lighting. I was fortunate to experience the act of traditional fire lighting by the Kokinaga clan that to this day is well remembered. It is the official ceremonial act that established the opening of a new men's house within the community. It was an interesting experience, transitioning from a dialogue 'about' the men's house, to a reenactment of what it meant to the Kokinaga members acted out in a 'ritual' presentation. The shift in energy was palpable, their actions



Fig 15. Traditional fire lighting ceremony (re-enactment) - Kokinaga, Unggai



imbued with meaning and intent, something felt by the group as a whole, acted out with purpose and feeling. This ritual act of fire lighting done on the back of one of the members 'men's house members', using bamboo, a small stick, and dry grass, impressed upon me that so much of what occurred among these men through ritual processes within the men's house, is not easily articulated by 'rational' explanation. It was on so many levels, a lived experience.

Having worked among and related to many different tribes within the Eastern Highlands over the course of two years, this event



was something I had not ‘experienced’ before, there was a sense of camaraderie in this ritual act of fire making, pleasure, meaning and mutual agreement that this act was something ‘good’, something even ‘sacred’? ‘Social acts’ such as this fire ritual are profound in ways that are hard to express by the participants that engage them. But what was clear was that this interaction clearly gave the opportunity for individuals to become “spontaneously involved” producing as a result a “firm sense of reality” (Goffman 1972:135). “This kind of feeling is not a trivial thing, regardless of the package in which it comes.”

Initiation Ceremonies and Rites

We have discussed briefly above the physical relationship of the men’s house to both the social structure and overall settlement patterns, we will now go into more detail as to how this space was used by the group which it served. Introduction into the men’s house started early, with boys between the ages of seven and ten taken from their mothers and initiated into the men’s house (Read 1965, Salisbury 1962, Allen 1967, Herdt 1998). The men’s house was a central focus for initiation ceremonies and age associated rites. For issue of space and time I cannot go into detail on the specifics of male initiation in the Eastern Highlands, but writing on the subject can be found by Herdt 1998, Godelier 1986, Salisbury 1962, Read 1965. Herdt says that the initiation ceremonies in the Eastern Highlands “appear to comprise species of a genus distinctive in important ways from those in other parts of Melanesia and other regions of the tribal world (Herdt 1998:5). Both puberty rites and initiation ceremonies had distinct flavors, but were inherently intertwined, the men’s house providing the framework for these processes and events to unfold (Herdt 1998:51).



Fig 16. Group of ‘age-mates’ - Gatsup, Kainantu

In many cases the initiation ceremonies would include boys of the same age group from surrounding clans. They will have likely all grown up together, and will often call each other by a term which means ‘my age mate’ (Salisbury 1962:16). Among the Siane this term resembles the term for brother, to the extent that during the initiation ceremonies they are referred to as, and refer

to each other as ‘brothers’, no differentiation is made based on kinship. Puberty rites and initiations are

linked to both gender and maleness, adult hood and marriage, hunting and secret knowledge and unlike for females, maleness is not biologically given, but is 'granted' through ritual initiations over a period of two to three months initially, but in most cases continues over the course of many years until marriage. Male initiations are of great secrecy, to women and small children, little is revealed. To the initiate esoteric knowledge is granted at specific times over the long period of his socialization within the men's house and through "specific initiation ceremonies" (Schroeder 1992:52).

Among the majority of Eastern Highlands clans, initiation ceremonies focus around the mythology of the sacred flute and their related clan-based songs (cf Allen 1967, Read 1965). Both are



Fig 17. Traditional men's house 'artefacts' - Sendini, Obura Wonenara

inherently related to issues of both gender relations, esoteric knowledge, and power between the ritual expert or elder, and the initiate. Male initiation ceremonies were seen to be of extreme importance for developing male solidarity within the men's house, which was a powerful tool for ensuring cooperation in tribal warfare, acquiring strength, and other male activities. These initiations should be seen

as a process of creation, rather than a process of induction as these rites and ceremonies were not onetime events but were carried out over many years. Unlike the female, maleness is not biologically transmitted and must be achieved through ritual over time (Schroeder 1992:52).

Keesing (1982, quoted in Schroeder 1992) pointed to ritual as having an over all net positive effect on group solidarity and political order. Where men had to ritually 'created', women did not. Another key component of the men's house was the maintenance of the male/female divisions. Men's status in the community greatly depended the leveraging of women's work and therefore bonds between mother and son had to be broken as soon as possible, in order to cleanse young boys of female pollutants and socialize them as soon as possible. Allen (1967) maintains that the process of initiation, specifically puberty rites, the first ceremonial activity which young boys partake, is most "pronounced in those societies in which the status of women is sufficiently high to constitute a threat to overt male dominance" (1962:26). Placing these ideas in perspective, Moore (1986) observed among the Marakwet

of Kenya, that what is ‘male’ and what is ‘female’ can be understood as conceptualizations of division between the ‘social’ and the ‘individual’ meted out in their material ‘local’ ways. The Marakwet saw the community as a whole responsible for “maintaining the balance of the world”(1986:118), but the burden of responsibility falling on the shoulders of its male members. In divisions of age, sex or production we can see the production of power relations being made manifest in the men’s house space. Among the Marakwet Moore also shows how spatial arrangements of things are able to lay the framework for “power relations between different groups, and become in themselves, an active instrument in the production and reproduction of social order” (1989:28).

Puberty rites and initiation into the men’s house was carried out in a number of ways, as we said earlier, through physical separation early in childhood and through a number of complex ritual



Fig 18. Sacred flute player and flute (reproduction) - Goroka, EHP

ceremonies. Cane swallowing, piercing of different parts of the body, blood letting through the nose, where all part of this cleansing and an attempt to make boys into men (Schroeder 1992,Read 1952). Among the Kokinaga, boys were taken as young as five to have their noses pierced, then three to four years later the septum is pierced. It is not until middle teens that boys are kept in seclusion for a number of months and undergo more traumatizing rituals which positions them as ‘real men’ in the community. They also confirmed that the youths were then given the secrets to the ‘nama’ flutes and related songs, which help maintained the connection to ancestors over time (Herdt 1981 Read 1952). Herdt (1998) says that anthropologist lost valuable opportunities for recording and delineating the ‘living meanings’

attached to the Flutes and songs of the Eastern Highlands. Tuzin in his study of the House Tambaran where they share similar traditions around sacred flutes and songs, suggests that the playing of the flute in ritual settings is a “supremely sacred act”. It is when the power of the Tambaran is made “manifest, created through the agency of men, who by the same token, become godlike by virtue of the power they momentarily command” (Tuzin 1980:57).

“The majority of initiation stages in the Highlands may be understood in three ways: first in terms of the relationship between men and women; secondly meta-physically in the production of strong men

who are capable of warfare and protection of the group; and thirdly as a method for maintaining the relational and cultural equilibrium of the community” (Berndt 1962:107). The men’s house played a large



Fig 19. Warrior with shield and spear – Goroka, EHP

roll in the production of warriors and the defense of villages, women and children. In understanding the prominence of warfare within the Highlands, some have suggested it be seen as men’s house groups protecting the means of production. In ‘Rituals of Manhood’ Herdt says this about the relationship of the men’s groups and tribal fighting:

If men in their men’s’ houses were defending territory, they were also – through marriage, exchange, peacemaking and regional military alliance – maintaining a wider framework of political order, however fragile and transitory. Here we must raise our view above the level of the local community” for what men produce, with the pigs that are the embodiments of women’s labor...is a political order, of peace as well as

of war. And this political order extends across regional zones, within which broadly common cultural systems – and the shared secrets of men – create a kind of super-community united by implicit commitment. Affines, enemies, allies, and coconspirators to deception sustained and reproduced a political order in which murder and ceremonial exchange, arrows and pearl shells, were the media of diplomacy...for what men produce – as women cannot – is men (Herdt 1998:22-23).

Men who declined to take part in initiation ceremonies (it was a choice, although most participated) in some cases jeopardized their own health and well being (Knauff 1999:44). Among the Bena, the Kokinaga elders said initiation ceremonies were a mandatory process, and there were repercussions for not participating. While in other cases in the highlands, it was a perfectly acceptable to choose not to participate (Berndt 1962:111). The initiate was not reported to be harassed or punished, but rather his decision being seen as one possible outcome or life choice. Both Read (1955) and the Kokinaga elders interviewed, describe in similar detail, the community feast and celebration that is held on the completion of the first stages of initiation seclusion in the men’s house. Feasting, singing and dancing and elaborate feasts, bringing together both the immediate village and other clans from around the area. Read comments the importance of this period in the instruction of the child with respect to

kinship obligations as well as a defining moment in the recognition of the physical body as an important aspect of man's nature (Read:1955:268). Men, once initiated, will eat, sleep and live separately from women in the men's house. It is the epicenter of clan social life, "it distinguishes the participant as a social category and indicates their solidarity" to the men's house group (Turner 1967).

Courting among the Bena-Bena was also recorded to take place in the men's house as much as twice a month. The unmarried men and women from different clans would meet in a cleanly swept men's house. With the central fire built, both male and female would line up on the floor of either side of the men's house. Girls who fancied a particular male would call and sing to, and he would eventually come over where they would flirt and kiss. This lasts for an hour or two, interactions would often end in intercourse, and the process is repeated three or four times during the night (Langness 1967:167). Langness records that pregnancy was relatively uncommon.

Another 'unusual' account by Watson (1983) highlighting the 'fluidity' of relations between groups and specifically in this case between male and female was a ritual called 'hampu'. It was 'magical' ceremony carried out by a group of men to draw women, married or unmarried away from another community, "ostensibly offering", he says away around "affinal reciprocities" since women are said to leave secretly without consent of their male kinsmen (1983:213).

Leadership & Governance

Leadership was egalitarian in nature but male dominated. Hobgin has termed this men's house group as, "a nucleus of agnatically related men" (1973:42) who make the decisions and negotiates the affairs for a particular lineage. Salisbury (1962:16) proposes this type of social organization appears to theoretically meet the characteristics of what Smith (1956) terms, 'segmentary lineage systems' a system found often in societies where a centralized power is not functioning, "lineages are local groupings discharging political functions within their area" (Smith 1956:42). He places political primacy on the lineage over kinship, and further links the way in which individual lineages organize themselves politically or organizationally, the broader "corporate character" of the different groups that combine or interact with each other. "Such specialized conceptions of kinship, lineage, corporate group, government, political system, social structure, descent, segmentation, and territorial organization are clearly units in a system of interconnected definitions" (Smith 1956:42).

He further goes on to say that in ‘segmentary societies’ individual units will extend theoretically to maximal lineages or clans, as there is no overriding governmental or organizational structure to bring them together under one authority. This comment will have implications later on in the way in which the men’s house is framed in relation to other men’s houses. Throughout the highlands contrasting cultural traits, emphasizes on what constitute ‘kin’ and distinct languages, blend and merge between villages, clans, and tribes and how they are ‘politically’ represented. The problem then begins to surface, as we seek to understand how they come together hierarchically or in what way do they distribute or assign, ‘major’ power in and amongst ‘minor’ power groups. This dichotomy led Smith to break down the segmentation further into ‘formal’ and ‘dynamic groupings’ (Smith 1959). Watson (1983) says this of the Tairora leadership:

“Tairora social process produces no cleanly carpentered societal edifice, but one full of cul-de-sacs and crude angles, with odd posts and studs, and beams of many different sizes, reflecting a liberal and pragmatic use of rules and rights rather than any rigid or simple adherence - that least of all - to asserted principle. Such a system can hardly be said to call forth tis leadership with any simple summons” (Watson 1983:236).



Fig 20. Men standing in front of men’s house (re-enactment) - Sendini, Obura Wonenara

There is general agreement across the academic writing on the Highlands of the inherent lack of centralized authority. Since leadership, and by extension governance, was not hereditary, leadership was achieved through a show of strength, wealth accumulation, local knowledge or as a result of ones fighting ability. Some areas with in the Eastern Highlands tend to be more prone to despotic and warrior type leadership, this is not necessarily a-typical and some disagreement among ethnographers exists on this point. Hogbin argues, that the extent to which leaders were selected based on strength and fighting ability alone, has been somewhat exaggerated in some cases (Hogbin (eds)1973:153).

(contrast with Salisbury 1964)

With a lack of empirical evidence, these conflicting views have left scholars divided on an agreed term which typified Highland leadership before the introduction of the West Minister system by the Australians in the 1950's which had drastic effects on its leadership structures (Strathern & Stewart 2004). At the time of ethnographical recording within the Eastern Highlands, warfare had been recorded as being a common practice among many groups but "the largest units that make war do not always coincide with the largest units that act for other public purposes" (Hogbin (eds)1973:153). Although warfare is common throughout the anthropological literature, it remains not well understood in its relationship to the overall organization and social structure of most Highland groups.

Political in the majority of the Highlands refers directly to its immediate public affairs – between lineages, men's house to men's house. In the far East of the Province among the Baruya, Godelier recorded a three tier system of shared leadership; war leaders - aoulatta, shamans - koulaka, and cassowary hunters – kayareumala. To differentiate this structure from the big man term more widely understood, he termed these leaders; 'Great Men' . Literature shows this remote corner of the province to be a relatively unique example, using three distinct terms for these positions of leadership, and that they fulfilled specific roles with in the men's house. This example illustrates how leadership among many groups is shared and ultimate authority was not granted to one individual - authority of any one man is limited.



Fig 21. Group of men holding bows and arrows - Kamila, Okapa

Decisions of local matters are therefore most often decided by consensus of men from a particular men's house, usually in the form of long discussions and debate (Sahlins 1963). The Kokinaga were quick to point out how important the years spent in the men's house were to the production and mentoring of future leaders, and how the men's house provided the environment and the space for this process to occur. As result, the leader or group of leaders over the years in the men's house

would emerge as those who stood out as strong warriors, keepers of wisdom and knowledge and those who were good at mediating disputes. Hogbin (1973) encourages us to think of leadership in this context

as that which organizes the flow and activities of the community rather than one who rules by decisive measure. Watson (1983) refers to the local 'leader' as an "instrument of the local group" negotiating the issues of politics, recruitment, defense and marriage (1983:234). He positions the local "strong man" (or strong men as is sometimes the case) at the "heart of a continuing dialectical movement whose strophes are initiated at the level of the local group, their effects ramifying throughout the phratry and the alliance networks of the social field (1983:235). As a general rule, elders or older men, will not often be selected as the spokes person or serve as a central leadership figure within the men's house, but will however be consulted on matters of community, clan and tribal importance.

As we have discussed above, the initiation ceremonies are central to the men's house organization, and subsequently to its leadership abilities and maintenance. Herdt suggests that in fact these initiations ceremonies must be seen 'multi-dimensionally', politics and leadership playing a secondary and an equally important role. Inter and intra clan decisions to maintain regular initiation ceremonies and maintain secret knowledge systems may in fact help preserve a "fragile super community" enabling leaders and elders to continue to maintain and negotiate larger "political networks" preparing ground for future peace talks, marriages and maintaining networks of exchange and dialogue (Herdt 1998:35). Hogbin points out that in their complexity, these societies cannot be analyzed in terms of existing theories of political organization as such theories do not allow for a degree of flexibility unprecedented in the ethnographic literature.



Fig 22. Gireku elders during interviews - Goroka, EHP

Among the Gireku, the elders were quick to point out the similarities between the role the men's house played with in the community and that of the Parliament building in the capital city of Port Moresby. "we discuss community affairs, solve matters of dispute and prepare to fight others and defend ourselves." They further commented that law and order problems are much worse now than they used to be. One elder

said "in the past we had Lasive law, the social problems were not as great". The Hogave elders called the men's house "bikpela haus", which directly translated means 'big house', or 'important house'. Like the House of Parliament - "It is the most important house in the community, there is no other 'house'".

The men's house by all accounts appeared to have provided strategic space through which future leaders were mentored, taught and observed. The men's house not only provided the necessary context in which to impart traditional wisdom and knowledge, but also it provided an environment for the youth to be mentored into positions of authority. Through this communal living among men over years of a young boys life, the lines between the 'domestic' and the 'political' (Carsten 2000) through the index of the men's house become even more blurred and not easily delineated.

Dispute resolution

Within the mens' house, no disputes remain unsettled. One of the terms which I was exposed to many times was the word 'pasim tok', which translated means, 'to decide', but with more authority. Not just decide, but to make it 'law'. What was said in the men's house was the final authority. During



Fig 23. Men's house at night - Kemenave, Henganofi

overnight work trips many of my discussions with clans across the highlands regarding service delivery and development issues were deliberated well into the night. As I lay awake in an adjacent hut, I could often here the singing, laughing and low mur-mur of voices, silhouettes illuminated by the central fire in the men's house as the men discussed and debated these important matters.⁴ The Kokinaga further commented; "everything of importance was discussed in the men's house."

The term 'Pasim Tok' among highlanders is used to articulate that a resolution has been agreed upon, but it can also be referred to as the 'process' of decision making. What was talked about and agreed upon in the men's house was decisive and were grave consequences (usually ending in death) for those of the clan that went against the decisions formulated in the men's house. "Yahusave talk is powerful", they said, "It had authority." Among the Okiek of Kenya during dispute mitigation they employ a phrase that means "finishing words." Community issues were discussed openly and resolved; "men's meetings create a record and witness who remember history and other case precedents" (Senft & Basso 2009:184).

⁴ In this particular case, it was a men's house that was reconstructed at the site of a village community center. This men's house was used for many different community events and critical discussions by local leaders.

Among the Duna Strathern and Stewart (2004) write that leaders of the men's house were called "men of

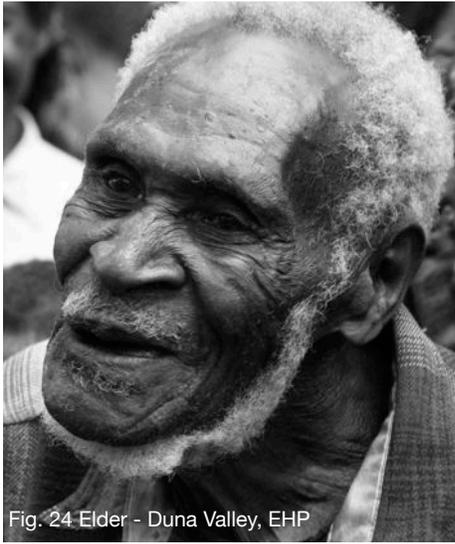


Fig. 24 Elder - Duna Valley, EHP

speech". Prior to the administration leaders made 'tambaka' in an attempt to settle major disputes. This process was termed 'wei wiya' – "putting the fight to sleep". Local leaders over time were able to hold records of such speeches and special knowledge, and also, a history of past disputes resolution as reference, to be drawn upon in future discussion (2004:69). This process can be seen as a method for maintaining continuity, and fair decision making over time. Gell (1998) showed how the Maori meetinghouse in a similar way was able to hold the 'collective' memory of its participants through its agency characteristics when he termed the meeting house as "memory in objectified form" (1998:257).

The inquiry from all four sites was unanimous on the emphasis placed on the men's house providing a key space for dispute and conflict resolution. Clan and tribal issues were addressed and dwelt with swiftly and efficiently within the men's house. If neighboring clans had issues with one another, common practice was to make formal claim at the door of the men's house, upon which a meeting would be scheduled and the matter in question dealt with immediately. In the Hogave district disputes



Fig 25. Food preparation in ground oven - Kokinaga, Unggai Bena

related to issues outside the community would require different men's house groups being called together to a central location to hear, mediate, and give advice on the issue. Once the matter under discussion was settled, food would be equally distributed among individual men's house group representatives. It was then that the decision was presented to the rest of the community, as public engagement, often some singing

and dancing would follow and they would disperse to their respective clans. It was both a space for resolution and for the maintenance of relationship with other communities. Its 'structure' and adjacent 'public' space was said to be "neutral ground."

Knowledge Transfer

In Barth's (1987) study of the Baktaman and other Mountain OK groups (Fringe Highlands) he seeks a more comprehensive understanding of what he calls, the 'tradition' of knowledge. Barth's main focus is to understand the 'body' of knowledge they contain and how they explain its "pattern of distribution, creativity, transmission and change" (Barth 1987:6). Rather than understanding these systems as cognitive and lineal, he emphasizes the importance of 'process' and how it is linked to storage and retention, but also reproduction. By whom and under what circumstances - who is reproducing it in the ceremonial situation. "The performance of ritual events is embedded in a system of knowledge that has ramifications for many cultural domains beyond the initiation cycle itself. The ritual sequence commences with the expression of a few basic ideas that, as the initiation process progresses, it gradually acquires many layers of meaning - rituals within the context of an unfolding system of knowledge is what is key here" (Herdt et al., 1998:240). In this way, knowledge and ritual can more easily be seen as a "performative medium for social changes" emphasizing personal "creativity and physicality." Ritual then, "does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold their world" (Steward & Strathern 2010:73) and ultimately their knowledge systems. This process of communication and knowledge sharing through ritual within groups and between generations can be seen as both restorative and creative invention of existing and new systems of thought.

Bourdieu makes a similar connection between space syntax and knowledge systems in his study of the Kabyle house, what he terms, "look and learn" methods of socialization (Bourdieu 1977:87).



Fig 26. Five men watching - Someo, Duna

Kokinaga articulated how difficult it was for the youth who went away to school, either government or mission run, to re-integrate back into the community. The knowledge learned outside the community did not fit well within the social context in which they grew up. They contrasted 'school knowledge' with the men's house, when they said "*the Yausave was the place where wisdom and knowledge were gained*

from the elders." This local knowledge in contrast with that of the administration was almost always learned through ritual reenactment and was always in a relational context with others, rather than cognitive and impersonal. Among the Gireku, all knowledge through ritual and cultural materials was

shared strictly in the men's house, nothing of *"importance or value was conducted or spoken outside its walls."*

Millar (1987,1998) has written extensively on the 'materiality' of objects, suggesting that the relationship between people and things has implications on their ability to comprehend but also accept incoming



Fig 27. Traditional tapa cloth - Goroka, EHP

forms of information. The physical nature of a 'thing', especially in non-literate society and its relationship to the culture in which it is manifest should not be taken for granted. Tuzin suggested that it was in fact these "artifactual" activities that were as much apart of social life and therefore deeply expressive of cultural comprehensions as anything else, and that they in fact offer more to theoretical possibilities of understanding and should not be ignored (1980:122). He goes onto say that in many cases it was the spirit house among the Iahita Arapesh which acted as the foundational index providing the space for cultural ideas and social activities to be created maintained and reinvented (1980:120). In other words as Moore has suggested among the

Marakwet, "bodily movement through, and action in ordered space, are simultaneously both action and interpretation" (1986:24). Another key aspect to the ongoing transmission of knowledge is summed up in



Fig 28. Men's house traditional dance (re-enactment) - Sendeni, Obura Wonenara

the term "tok het", which can mean either 'secret knowledge' or things which are talked about in private. In either case a large degree was kept secret from women and outsiders, and was only shared within the men's house. The Gavasuka commented that not only was this 'secret' knowledge shared only with in the walls of the men's house, there was a genuine fear that should this knowledge be heard by other clans, or tribes it could be detrimental to their survival. With the decline of the men's house and by association many methods of knowledge transmission, it can easily be assumed that aspects of local knowledge and associated meanings went with it.

The Gavasuka clan is located mid-slope on a steep mountain behind Goroka town - what is now called Mt.Gavasuka Park. It is home to a diverse and unique ecosystem with an abundant amount of flora and fauna. During my time at this particular site, much of our discussions

on the men's house focused on its importance and role in the process of passing on local ecological knowledge. They spoke of certain plants which were good for colds and flues, scabies, and other dysentery type illnesses. They mentioned that this type of knowledge would have traditionally been passed down with the structure of the men's house, but now no longer was. The elders are quick to point out that the youth - *"no got save long ol tambuna plat"*. Meaning, the youth now do not know of the traditional medicines and plants once used by our ancestors, they've never been taught, they don't know. Galtuno says:

"Nem bilong dewai, natapela-natapela I stap, na name bilong banana, natapela-natapela I stap; tasol now ol putim olsem, banana em banana. Na name bilong banana kin kin I stop, but ole I no save long dispela na mipela, mipela save. Na tanget to, name bilong en, natapela-natapela I stop, na dewai to, onekin. Ol save long dewai tasol."

Galtuno has articulated in the above statement that the younger generation know nothing specific about local ecology, that many of the ways in which the Gavasuka related to the environment around them is changing, there has been a fundamental loss in understanding and living in relationship with the local ecology. The youth have a hard time identifying specific plants and animals; they call everything by its generic term, banana, or tree, but do not know specific species or how they might be used in healing and in other traditional ways. He feels this knowledge is invaluable if you are planning on living well with the land and understanding the resources that are around you and how to use them in sustainable manner. This type of knowledge he said was traditionally passed down through the men's house, over the years of a boy's life through certain life cycle rituals and coming of age rites. The linkages between biodiversity conservation and local tradition were more recently made formal at the Biodiversity Convention in 1993. It recognized that local knowledge of more traditional societies cannot be understood in lineated or cognitive frameworks, but rather must be acknowledged as part of local systems - in the practices and customs of local people and "embedded in communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for ...conservation" (Law and Hassard 1999:161).

It seems clear from the examples given that the conceptions, transmission, and adaptation of secret rite, ritual, and the development of knowledge were systematically linked and an intricate interplay of collective social processes. It was not merely a 'reproduction' of tradition, a 'verbatim' account so to speak, 'individuals' (ritual experts) were clearly involved in the adaptation and ritual interpretation of certain myths and knowledge. Barth suggested that it was in fact the elders and ritual experts that were

the keystone to the transmission of myth and ritual, through both the ongoing ‘maintenance’ of tradition, but also to its creative adaptation, as he felt allowed them to engage the ritual practitioners at that moment in a relevant, meaningful act. In other words knowledge traditions are therefore created and maintained through the “particular history of an intermittent conversation between ritual experts and their audiences” (Barth 1987:30).

Community & Clan Solidarity

Strathern (1996) compares the Kabyle world to that of many of the Highlands groups in the importance it places on gender, “ the categories of right/left, man/women, male honor/female honor are all encoded in the spaces of the house (1996:26). Social primacy is in the forefront of everything which is conducted. Herdt comments that the relationship between the initiate and ritual practitioner and the bonding between the initiates – the formation of affinal relationships and establishment of age mates were a fundamental part of the men’s house experience (Herdt et al.,1998:66). Allan (1967) also comments that the formation of close bonds between initiates as a result of regular initiations involving different communities from surrounding area’s is an important aspect (1967:10).



Fig 29. Traditional men’s house food preparation (re-enactment, no longer practiced) - Kokinaga, Unggai Bena

The Kokinaga elders articulated a change over the years in the meaningful interactions between men and youth of the community. They said “*before we would be together for long periods in the men’s house, to be with each other and share information is fruitful, sharing food and fire is important.*” An important part of maintaining traditional practices and relationships within the Eastern Highlands has always revolved around ideas of food and the meanings which are evoked in its sharing. Food associated rituals and ceremonies; their ‘cosmic’ and ‘relational’ implications were intricately linked with the men’s house. The maturing and development of the person is nurtured through social and spiritual relationships (Knauft 1999:27). The body – relations with others – and belief systems built upon the transactions of food and the central hearth, which defines the central



gathering place of all houses in the Highlands. Not only is the act of sharing food a 'spiritual' process at the moment of its exchange, something of the giver is transferred to the receiver (Knauff 1999). In the Eastern Highlands central to the men's house is the "controlled discipline and authority" of men who manifest this connection of

food, body and relationships with the growing of sugar cane around the exterior of the men's house to be extended to those in greeting who come from outside the community. Along some of the coastal area's this 'controlled discipline' manifests itself in the form of long yams which are grown (Knauff 1999:49).

Carsten (2000) reminds us not to lose sight of the “small, seemingly trivial, or taken-for-granted acts” for example how Nuer idioms of food sharing are directly related to the ‘formation’ of ‘blood relatedness.’ Sharing food, fire, story, song, the chewing of sugar cane and betel nut, a hot drink and casual conversation, should “provoke a careful examination of the symbolic and social significance of the house”. The “permeability of boundaries” between objects, persons and types of relations becomes more obvious in these “taken-for-granted acts” (Carsten 2000:23).

It was in fact these ‘little acts’ within the walls of the Kwakiutl Longhouses which motivated Strauss to rethink how houses might relate more fully to the way in which people form relationships with each other. Strauss claimed that what the house ‘did’ was important, in many cases it was able to transcend these often contradictory social forms, such as filiation/residence, patri-/matri-lineal descent, close/distant marriage, which traditional kinship theory often treats as being mutually exclusive. Strauss saw the house as a fundamentally unifying entity, “replacing internal duality with external unity” (Strauss 1982:184-5). By extension he was calling into question the importance placed on the primacy of strict kinship and anthropological classifications at that time and suggesting that researchers look closer at particular spaces which bring people together in meaningful ways and the “intimate domestic arrangements and the behavior and emotions associated with them” (Carsten 2000:21). As a result we may find that “Boundaries between the biological and the social...so crucial in the study of kinship are in many cases distinctly blurred, if they are visible at all” (Carsten 2000:7).

In some cases it was observed that initiates from different clans would join together with the initiation ceremonies conducted at a specific men’s house. As men and initiates of different clans came together, “the structure of role allocations becomes not simply a function of kinship, residence, or any other single social relationship” (Herdt et al., 1998:210). Relationships are then extended beyond a single men’s house to those around it, traversing normal ‘relational’ boundaries through the agency of the men’s house and the network of relationships with which it was able to foster and maintain. Allan (1967) uses Eisenstadt’s (1954) theory to explain the unitive role initiation and age grade ceremonies can have on inter and extra-community affairs and posits the “degree to which they form corporate and solidary units, across local and kinship boundaries, regulate the behavior of their members and control the political, economic, and ritual life of the community (Eisenstadt 1954 as quoted in Allan 1967).

Among the Tairora, Watson says that people of “primary importance” by all accounts are divisible by into to categories which regularly cross-cut each other - ‘kinship’ and ‘friendship’. Both recognizable by “degrees”, hostile ‘kinsmen’ are as likely and as possible as other hostilities towards non-kin.

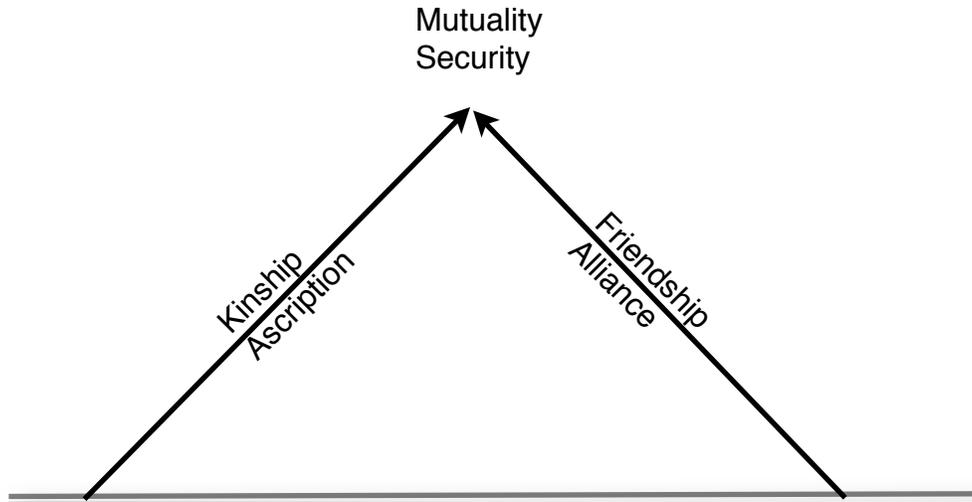


Fig 31. The Convergence of Friendship and Kinship. Source: Watson (1983)

The Hogave elders spoke frequently of the inter-clan relationships around the men’s house, especially in the construction of new ones. As I have mentioned, surrounding communities were expected to bring materials for the construction, and the gesture would be reciprocated at a point in time when that particular community needed to rebuild.



Fig 32. Kokinaga elders - Kokinaga, Unggai Bena

The Kokinaga articulated that their men’s house was an important space for hosting leaders from other clans and sub-clans. It was these interactions which helped them to develop a better understanding of their relationship to other groups, as well as receive valuable moral lessons in the form of ‘life story’, which they say held

'more value' than those told by local elders, based on the fact that they came from outside the community. As one of the elders put it; *"it was an occasion to learn new ideas."* In contrast to today, it was put this way; *"now there is no Yahusave, and no one [from other areas] can come and talk."* It's an interesting statement if we view it in the context of a 'network' of men's houses, relating to each other from across space and time. Ritual invite of other men's house groups through the agency of the men's house was seen as important, another example of how ritual can be directly related to the collective well being of a group – "through the common body of ritual knowledge" (Rappaport 1968).

Church House – Government House - Men's House

In all four sites, the role of the church and its introduction into the community played a large part in the discussions. Generally there was agreement in its value, in what it provided for the community and the way in which it brought healthy ways of living and positive teachings. In the case of the Hogave community, the transition from the men's house as a central pillar of the community to that of the church was sudden and profound. Elders remember the day that the men's house was burnt to the ground and a church erected in the same location. In the words of the eldest member – *"the church came and took the place of the men's house. It replaced the leadership inherent in the men's house, the church now took control in directing the youth and people of the community."*



Fig 33. Kamila, Okapa

Although they are quick to point out the benefits to the gospel message in terms of moral behavior, they are as equally apt to make light of the fact that most youth don't go, and even among adults they notice the attendance waning from previous years. Even though they say that the men's house teaching and the 'church teaching' are the same with respect to 'ethics' and 'morals', they articulate the difference as being one of choice. Church is optional where as the men's house was by all accounts, not and therefore more integrated into community life. At the end of the day most said the "the church is not working like the men's house did."

The Gireku elders listed ten different church denominations representing a population of about 300 people. This type of situation has put a lot of strain on community cohesion as the pastors vie for membership, and ultimately to be seen as the central authority figure. In some cases when the pastor is from the local area, decision-making, or at least

spokesperson responsibilities are shifted automatically to him. The agency of power becomes localized and created through the church building and its 'material constructions' indexically replaced than the local men's house.

Around the Asaro area, Gireku elders clearly remember the arrival of the Lutheran Mission. They were told to "cut ties with all of the ways of the past, your traditions, leave them behind." Many were baptized and told to go to church, the "men's house was to be destroyed and all of its associated traditions." Heider (1979) said of the Dani men's house that it was the "most complex and revealing cultural artifact of the Dani." Unfortunately both the missions and the government saw it both as a political and a religious issue and sought ways to dissolve it. These criticisms of the men's house by both the mission and the government failed to understand this house in its relational context, ignoring its many cultural "interrelationships" which were directly relevant and impacted by an imported "change in architecture" (Heider 1979:56) in the construction of both church's and government administration buildings and their associated power structures.

The men's house - retentional and protentional index

Through the case study data presented and other ethnographical examples from across the province we can see that "cultures of relatedness" to use Carsten's (2000) term in the Eastern Highlands, are not easily defined by strict kinship or descent relations. In fact many relations were developed and intricately linked to the index and agency of the local men's house. I intended to show among Highlanders, ideas of relatedness and how they inform the local social environment as it was lived out in the men's house space are deeply related to what Carsten terms 'indigenous statements and practices.' If nothing else it challenges us to look more 'loosely' at the way people with in the Eastern Highlands have established, maintained, and negotiated their connections over time, connections and networks of peoples, relations, and relationships that are part of larger community, clan, tribe and country and must be understood in their entirety.

Knowledge transfer, governance and leadership, social organization, and individual personal development were the key areas discussed in interviews and most widely articulated in the anthropological data on the Highlands region regarding interaction with the men's house. The men's house was imbued with and was the center of different rituals pertaining to life cycles, initiations and age grade ceremonies, all interconnected with these four components of social life within the community. Catherine Bell, in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, cautions about trying to boil down ritual into

any sort of general global theory. Shifting frameworks from the theoretical to social realm, she suggests a focus of ritual as a way of relating to those around you, as an individual, as community, rooted in local geographical and environment conditions. She challenges us to look at ritual as a form of 'social control,' where relationships, personal, communal and political are brought together, acknowledge, supported, tested and negotiated – “how ritualized way's of acting negotiate authority, self and society”(Bell1992:8). In western terms, ritual has a tendency to be categorized in opposition to 'thought or 'action,' and then analyzed on this basis. She proposes a different approach to 'thinking' about ritual, one much closer to relationship and interaction. Ritual has evolved to do what it does, “without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking” (1992:93).

“To sing or dance in concert or in unison with others, to move as they move and speak as they speak, is literally, to act as part of a larger entity, to participate in it; and as the radical separation of the everyday self dissolves in the *communitas* of participation – as it sometimes does – the larger entity becomes palpable” (Rappaport 1999). In Goffman's 1972 essay we see that a major force in the playing out of ritual processes is the impact that these rituals have on stabilizing social relationships within a group. He highlights the importance of acknowledging the multiplicity of networks and connections that are made when individuals and groups come together. To see “these events as subject matter in their own right” (Goffman 1972:2). Ritual acts of community can be seen as “both weapon and shield for handling the political and moral delicacy of social co-presence that characterizes human interaction” (Senft & Basso 2009:77). Many researchers have concluded that the initiations and other related ceremonies appeared not to only focused on young initiates, but rather about the meeting that occurs among people from surrounding villages clans, “thus a network of participation connects all centers and all major events throughout the area”(Barth 1987:8).

Strathern (1999) raised an interesting point when she proposed the question as to why Highlanders would expend so much time and resources on the exchange of like goods – 'shells for shells,' 'pork for pork.' In contrast to our own culture, Highlanders perception of 'value' of the material object is not necessarily the issue, what is implicit and significant in the exchange is the manner in which it is done, from where it came, and its inherent meaning in relation to the giver. These items have social meaning and are about connections between people, the items themselves have 'meaning' and therefore 'value' because they are seen 'in relation' to a broader social environment. To take a step from the 'local' to the broader social network, the men's house had a specific meaning in relationship to the

community is represented, only so far as it was in relationship to other men's houses. As Rappaport aptly put it, "The study of man the culture-bearer cannot be separated from the study of man as a species among species" (Rappaport 1967:242).

Further research in the meaning of 'exchange' led Marcel Mauss' around Melanesia, Polynesia, and N.America, in search of explanation, to compartmentalize the idea of 'gift', into economic, social, material, all with their different meanings and sub-meanings is not possible. Gift exchange is a way of being and interacting in the world and in society. He uses the word "whole", and suggests that it is only when we understand the system in its entirety, its completeness, its wholeness, can we really understand the meaning of what is taking place.

"More than institutional elements, more than institutions, more even than systems of institutions divisible into legal, economic, religious and other parts. We are concerned with 'wholes', with systems in their entirety. Such wholes cannot be broken down into smaller elements since "it is only by considering them as wholes that we have been able to see their essences, their operation and their living aspect"(Mauss:1967:78).

"The whole determines its parts, not only their relation but their very nature. The 'wholeness properties' and the 'wholeness tendencies' must be studied in addition to the simple association mechanisms" (Benedict 1959:57). Seeing the men's house in its 'wholeness,' in its entirety is what is fundamental. Its physical make up - posts, walls, rafter, and coverings - merge into one to provide an index for Highlanders to 'live' out the interaction of ritual, exchange, and meaning in a complete, simple, yet complex 'whole.' Ritual...plays a crucial role in the way in which the sociocultural holism of a living community works...ritual keeps a system of cultural categories responsive to human needs" (Steward & Strathern (eds) 2010:65-66,67).

As we have seen, the 'structure' of the men's house created the environment for leaders to be mentored and governance to be centered. Benedict (1959) comments that in his study of leaders, in our own society, they appeared to be no consistency of traits. She found that in fact it was the structure, constraints, or particular situation that produced good leaders. "It has become more and more evident that social conduct...is not simply the expression of a fixed mechanism that predetermines to a specific mode of conduct, but rather a set of tendencies aroused in variable ways by the specific problem that confronts us" (Benedict 1959:206). In a similar tone, Berndt proposes that in order to understand the

local social environment, we need to understand the broader environment in which the 'local' is placed. He terms the broader social environment in which a community may interact with as a "subsystem" (Berndt 1962:399). Social controls and rules of conduct are very much transferred through the structure of the men's house, mediated and negotiated on a face-to-face basis, in the wider tribal structure. It would appear (from available literature) the effects of the more 'impersonal' authority structure of the administration on 'interpersonal' relations and social life within and between groups has not been well studied at the local level.

Placing the research of interaction in this framework has implications on how agencies of power and leadership were acted out through the men's house across clan boundaries and how the colonial administration failed to understand this at the time when it placed ultimate control with the "individual and his psychology," placing power in the hands of one individual. Rather than acknowledging the "syntactical relations" (Goffman 1972:2) that were present in the traditional shared leadership structure and how those relations were constructed between individuals and other groups.

Impacts on the Agency of the Men's House

By the early 50's the colonial administration began to impact local systems of dispute resolution in complex ways leading to conflicting views regarding settlement decisions – local vs. state. With the decline of certain forms of highland 'interaction,' and their inherent links to organization around leadership and the men's house architecture has produced many difficulties in "mediating inter-group conflicts as well as denying an avenue of social expression" within the community (Robbins & Wardlow 2005:128). As a result, more and more, communities began to seek out state conflict resolution venues for matters of local disagreement, government stations were quickly overrun with mediation's and arbitration was conducted according to the Queensland Criminal Code, when local leaders were unable to cope with them or disputants wanted a 'different' opinion (Abraham 1947).

New power systems defined by the state and church altered the 'hierarchy' of power in many communities and created tensions between 'new' and 'old' systems. Ian Hogbin (1951) uses the story of Bambu, a government appointed leader to illustrate the absurdity of the imported Australian government system on a coastal community. Over time due to the power given to Bambu by the administration and its 'autonomous' nature (answerable only to the administration office) Bambu, a local village leader becomes almost uncontrollable and despotic in his governance. The *luluai* and *tultul* system established out of ignorance to traditional systems of governing and decision making – was at polar opposites to

what was in place at the time. The *luluai* and *tul-tul* system were a councilor and committee, meant to represent the community and their area. Today a glance at the local newspaper in the Highlands will show how at odds the current system put in place by the administration is with traditional structures of leadership and was doomed to failure before it was instigated. Ward Goodenough summarizes the situation in this way:

Melanesian social controls are not based on the development of a strong conscience within the individual and the vesting of authority in a single leader as embodiment of the collective conscience, but on a network of mutual obligations and duties in the family, clubhouse, and community. A man's power in the community increases with increasing indebtedness of others to him and a decreasing indebtedness on his part to others. As his power increases, therefore, he becomes freer to do as he wishes unencumbered by great pangs of conscience. The community is protected because the clan and club systems militate against everyone's becoming indebted to one man. The result is that community authority tends to rest with a group of important men, whose conflicting interests and loyalties provide the needed checks and balances. If the man appointed luluai is of no account in his village, his indebtedness to others makes him ineffective from the governments point of view. If he is already an important man, appointing him luluai gives him the extra power needed to make him answerable to no one but the District Officer. So long as he pleases the latter (to whom he is in debt for his office), he can get away with almost anything (Goodenough 1953).

Traditionally leaders and mediators were “constrained and influenced by traditional cultural principles; social structural relationships between kin and co-residents, the importance of transaction” (Levine & Ploeg 1996:235). Now those constraints are no longer present, and as Goodenough said above, so called ‘leaders’ are now able to get away with almost anything.

Langness concludes that in the mid sixties once warfare had been outlawed and men no longer feared raids from other tribes, men began sleeping in the same house as their wives, and the relationship between men and women as it related to the men's house, began to change. On one level the dwindling threat of war was a welcome change for many among the Bena-Bena as it had obvious benefits to society. What was little understood at the time however, was how so much of the religious and cultural systems had been built around the men's house. Sacred flutes were given public viewing and promptly burned, and the men's house and all their related activity within a matter of years was totally abandoned.

Many of the men later commented that they feared “their work will be unsatisfactory if they do not have the men’s house in which to discuss important matters” (Langness 1967:175).

The religious missions have been recorded by a number of researchers as having a particular impact on the Highland social life. Many groups made concerted efforts to rid the community of any cult practices, objects, beliefs or institutions, encouraging local evangelists to “burn sacred stones, profane sacred pools, and set up churches everywhere to replace local cult houses, emptying the landscape of its visible markers of indigenous religiosity” (Strathern & Stewart 2004:154). Most communities and individuals were forced to become dependent on new modes of thinking and the institutions and ideologies that came with that. In many communities it is common to hear that the men’s house was replaced directly with that of a church building.

Clark (2000) argues, among the Western Highlanders, the sudden and drastic changes which many underwent in their social, political, economic and religious structures and their discontinuous nature “together with the new dependencies, [government, religious, educational, economical] had particular effect upon historical praxis and the reproduction of culture” (2000:6). Pragmatic in nature (Read 1988) most Highlanders were eager to adopt western ‘practices’ in hopes of the acquisition of similar colonial ‘material goods’ – it was a means to an end approach by many. Early anthropological writing records numerous cases of the presence of cargo cult beliefs throughout Melanesia.⁵ Read (1958:273) calls them “extremely widespread in New Guinea society” cargo is apart of the “atmosphere of native New Guinea” (275). Cargo cult beliefs and their regional manifestations is a topic of study all its own, but what I want to emphasize is the relationship between these beliefs and how quickly communities were willing to abandon traditional ways and replace them imported ones in the hopes that the end result would be a similar acquisition of goods to that of the explorer, missionary, administrator or business person. But early on tension and frustration began to grow among many as they recognized the gap between the material and economic prosperity they long for and the means to acquire it was a gap that they could not bridge.

⁵ Cargo cults in Melanesia in many cases have slightly different regional manifestations. The overarching theme however is in the ‘divine’ nature of foreign material goods in the absence of the knowledge of manufacturing processes. Material goods and the means by which they are ‘produced’ are associated with their possessors, and therefore effort is made to alter ‘local’ tradition to mimic that of the explorer or missionary in hopes that like goods of equal value will be bestowed on ones self, family or community (see Wagner 1981 & Read 1958)

The colonial administration and all its associated ‘projects’, schools, roads, health services, local government systems, economic reform, came in strong but since independence in 1975 and the pullout of Australians from key roles in service delivery and government positions have left “the locals only partly in control of the new ‘knowledge’ and resources they need to achieve the kind of changed existence that outsiders had advocated” (Strathern & Stewart 2004:131). Roads have become impassable, schools are not staffed, maintained or supported, health posts are closed or don’t have medicines, generators that



Fig 35. Four-wheel drive on poorly maintained road - Kamila, Okapa

once ran remote administrative centers have long since stopped working and local staff have picked up and moved on, leaving buildings empty. “Pacification begins to appear as a historical mirage or interlude rather than a permanent institutional change” (2004:129). Early recording along the coastal area’s showed that much of the customs that were performed on a regular basis within the communities stopped as a

result of young men being pulled away to work on plantations and other government or mission projects,



Fig 34. Kokinaga elder - Kokinaga, Unggai Bena

this had its own effects and consequences on the local customs. Ceremonies could not proceed or were delayed, and as one local put it, the “absence of a majority of young men tends to make village life very dead” (Armstrong 1917-22:42). Clark and Hughes (1995) reported that, while many were sympathetic to the Missions arrival and influence, they were also “sympathetic to the past, when men had been educated to behave as ‘real’ men through the bachelor cult, believing that men treated women better than they do today” (1995:epi).

The Hogave elders spoke eloquently of the clash of knowledge systems occurring at the community level. They spoke of the local vs. colonial vs. media and that these three different types of influence were creating tensions and problems at the

community level. The link between power and knowledge, who has it and controls it, are being

manifested many different ways, causing friction at the local level. These material manifestations of power in the form of government and church buildings are convincing are powerful mediators among many communities, imbued with their own sense of authority and influence, meted out in diverse ways.

One example in looking at 'layers' of diversity's found within architectural indexes and their impacts on local systems can be found in Donald Tuzin's work (1976,1980,1997) among the Ilahita Arapesh in the Sepik region. Tuzin followed several similar lines of observation among the Arapesh to that of the men's house in the Eastern Highlands and through years of observation found that "male cults cultivated, organized and brought coherence to male organization – and violence – in ways that were both instrumentally productive and ultimately constitutive of its culture, including its beliefs, values and ethics"(Knauft 2011). He later drew some very strong links and conclusions between the decline of male cults and related alienation of masculinity being played out in a 'modern context' – increases in male violence, criminal activity, sexual violence, etc.

"With the demise of collective cult activities, central longhouses, or their equivalent, and the mythic and ritual moral authority of elders, younger men (as reported by Tuzin and many others) have been less restrained in individual aggressive or violent assertiveness towards women as well as with other men, including within the community, than they had often been before"
(Knauft 2011:104-5).

Once again in this example we are challenged to look more deeply into this 'house' and its complex layers of relatedness, its indexically communicable processes and their ever wider social influence on communities. Knauft has also recently conducted retrospective studies among the Gebusi where he spent from the mid eighties until present day conducting anthropological research documenting cultural change (Knauft 1985,1990,1997,2002,2010). His most recent work (2008 - published in 2010) showed some surprising results. When he traveled back in 2008 to his previous research site he discovered a very different situation to the one he had left in the mid 90's. A closed airstrip due to poor maintenance, government services either severely under supported or not functioning altogether, health centers and schools closed or with no supplies or staff, and local government, including police and related services – non functioning. (This is currently the case in many locations across the Eastern Highlands) As a result of the air strip closure, the once thriving market based on the importation of goods via air was all but defunct and the 'cash economy' was essentially non-existent. Knauft asks, "How did the Gebusi respond to these difficult circumstances?" The Gebusi

had developed a “striking resurgence of customs and practices”, which he had thought were long since gone. “ By 2007 a central longhouse had been built, male initiations were once gain held, and traditional dancing with costumes identical to those in the 1980 was highly in evidence” (2010:109).

The re-introduction of local tobacco, subsistence farming techniques and crops, along with the “Gebusi male ethos was more similar in 2008 to what it had been in 1980.” In short “Gebusi had resurrected infrastructural as well as cultural patterns that were reminiscent of their pre-colonial past. “A palpable male collective social life based on camaraderie and longstanding collective ritual expression has again become alive and well among the Gebusi” (Knauft 2010:109). In closing, Knauft asks; “How and why Gebusi developed and are maintaining their present pattern of rejuvenated male social life but without significant violence - and after a period of intense locally modern adoptions during the 1990’s are both important and challenging questions” (2010:109).

CHAPTER 5 ~ ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary & Questions

In the section below I will draw together the four main themes discussed in the previous section; knowledge transfer, governance and leadership, social organization, and individual personal development. I will show how these four processes were interrelated and fostered by the indexical characteristics of the men's house through ritual process and meaningful relationships. In this context, the men's house then becomes a 'whole' unit and takes on characteristics of agency that enable its extension across clan and tribal boundaries, bridging and maintaining complex social networks over time. In view of our original questions we will begin our analysis.

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What was the relationship between the individual person, the lineage, and the men's house?

What was the relationship between the men's house and other men's houses, within clans and between tribes?

What were the effects on the community and clan with its replacement by external agents?

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Theory of Agency and Index

Drawing on the work of Gell (1998), I will use his example of the Maori Meeting House, as an illustration, looking at the role it played in the Maori community as both agent and index. Gell places the Maori meeting house in the context of art theory or the anthropology of art, but takes a step from the view of art as merely a matter of meaning and communication and instead proposes that it is in fact more about 'doing', which is where he then brings in his theory of agency and index in relationship to the community and the meeting house. He begins by saying that it is the "subset of social relations" in the case of the Maori meeting house which grounds the social agent to the 'art-space' as he calls it, through the social interaction that takes place (Gell 1998:13). Again we see threads of what Bourdieu (1977) and Moore (1986) have eluded to in Gell's work – where meaning is given to the space by the activity that takes place within it not the other way around.

According to Gell 'doing' is theorized as agency, as a process involving indexes and their effects they have on people and between people; or in the case of the Maori meeting house, the mediation of agency by indexes (meeting house among meeting houses – a network of meeting houses), understood as material entities which bring about inferences, responses or interpretations within communities and between communities. Gell further establishes his theory in relation to the discourse of anthropology and states that if the relationship between the community and the meeting house has a "specific subject-matter at all, that subject – matter is 'social relationships' – relationships between participants in social systems of various kinds, culture has no existence independently of its manifestations in social interactions"(Gell 1998:4).

Gell categorizes the Maori men's house as 'collective indexes of agency' from a simplistic point of view, because people collected in them and were subsequently united together under their roofs. He goes on to say – that the house is "complex artefact" their "organic plan and capacity for disassembly and reassembly, remodeling and redecoration allows them to objectify the organic connectedness of historical processes" (Gell 1998:252). Maori meeting houses are not "symbols but indexes of agency. In this instance, the agency is collective, ancestral, and essentially political in tone"(1998:253). Political because the index itself, while inherently fundamental to relations within the community, acts also as a secondary agent in relations to other meeting houses around it - "collective index of communal power" (1998:252). It exists in a system of relations within relations, both macro and micro.

Finally he goes on to say that the "house is a body for a body, they are containers which, like the body, have entrances and exits. Houses are cavities filled with living contents"(Gell 1998:252). But their 'form' also had ancestral connections and implications and were built upon the collectivity of past generations, Gell says - "To enter a house is to enter the belly of the ancestor and to be overwhelmed by the encompassing ancestral presence...the ridge pole - the fountainhead of ancestral continuity" (1998:253).

Looking back to Watson at the beginning of the Case Study review, we can remember his comments about the Tairora - how the center pole of the men's house symbolized a connection to the ancestors - a 'lineage' expression, called by a term meaning 'our ancestor' it was seen to "support everything else" (Watson 1983). Here again we see the importance of continuity over time expressed through architectural and material detail, on which the foundation of 'community' can be seen to 'rest' and from which 'community' is able to exist in the present moment and yet also project itself into the

future. “The agency of the ancestor of which the house is an index is ...future-oriented” (1998:256). Gell goes on to say that these ‘containers’ or houses, had further architectural implications and were also an attempt to “bring about the crushing of the (architectural) self-esteem of members of rival communities” (1998:256).

Gell builds on the work of Roger Neich, who spent years documenting the artwork connected with Maori meetinghouses. In the graph below Neich charted Maori meetinghouses over a span of 60 years. The numbers within the circles on the graph denote particular meetinghouses, and the letters correspond to specific ‘traditions’ of Maori figurative painting. Nicholas Thomas further expanded on Neich’s work from an anthropological perspective and was one of the first anthropologists to write about paintings in relationship to the Maori meetinghouses and the community. He like Gell proposes we not look at the houses as symbols but rather “vehicles of a collectivity’s power”. These structures like the men’s houses were able to “index a group’s own vitality and ideally or effectively disempowered others.” He says this about the diverse layers of meaning propagated through the index of the Maori meetinghouses, “Distinctions between function and meaning, use and expression, instrumentality and symbolism obscure what was integrated and processual in these collective presentations of tribal efficacy“ (Thomas 1995:103).

Gell proposes the question - “To what extent can we study the whole gamut of Maori meeting houses, distributed in space and time, as a single, coherent, object, distributed in space and time, which, in a certain sense, recapitulates, on the historical and collective scale, the processes of cognition or consciousness?” Indeed it is not hard to make suggestions in that direction on the basis of Neich’s drawing below. (Fig 36.)

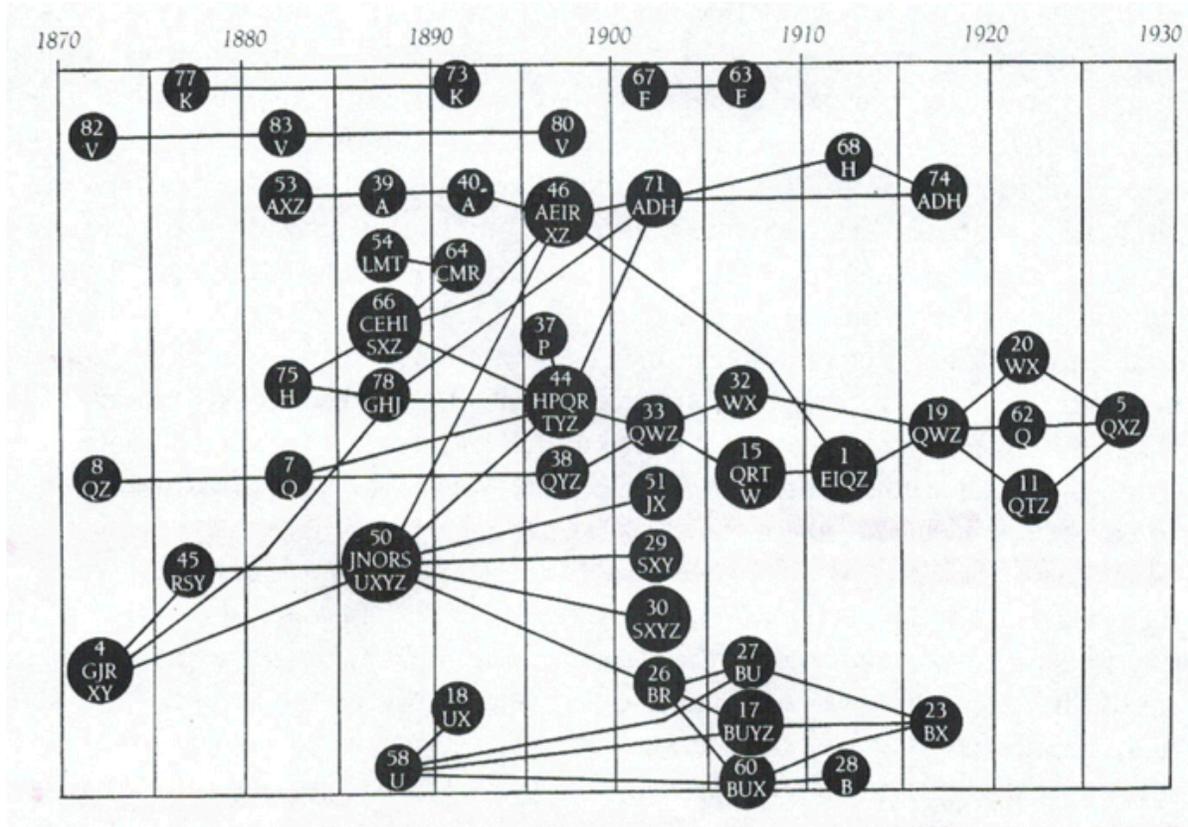


Fig 36. Maori The Maori meeting house as an object distributed in space and time. Source: Neich 1996: table titled 'The Transmission of Selected Figurative Painting Traditions'. Reproduced courtesy of Roger Neich and Auckland University Press (quoted in Gell 1998:255).



Fig 37. Painted shield - Sendini, Obura Wonenara

Thomas draws a further analogy about the intricate carvings and paintings on the Maori and Polynesian canoes and their relationship to power and use in warfare also as “vehicles of a collectivity’s power”. One aspect of the men’s house that I have not touched upon but that one might draw similar parallels with canoes and their association with warfare, were the intricate and often colorful carvings on both the shields and the arrows of warring men’s house group’s. This art-fact was common across the Eastern Highlands and may add further weight to this argument.



Fig 38. Man with quiver of arrows - Goroka, EHP

Through Gell's theory of index and agency, we can see more clearly how a defined space such as the men's house maintains continuity in community relationships and interactions, but how it is also constitutive of their mediated and adaptive change over time. The relationship between Maori meeting houses is an important point on which I will expand further as it relates to the relationship between men's houses in Eastern Highlands and how we can better understand their historical relationship to each other. Understanding their 'relatedness' in this context will help us, I believe to better understand them in their singularity. This brings us back to Levi'-Strauss' original comments on 'house societies' that to fully understand the 'house' - singular is to understand the relations between them,

the individual houses making up, a complete living organism. Gell's theory of Index (the physical 'space' in which an action takes place) and its relationship to the 'agents' who act within it, give a compelling story to the process that takes places, or the relationship between participants in a given space like the men's house. Again, he says if the house is about anything its about social interactions which can and are manifested within it and the power and ability it has in 'creating life' over time in a community of people.

Collective Agency – Local Index

Rather than asking what inferences can be made or conclusions drawn in analyzing the men's house space, and drawing fixed relationships between space use and social structure, Moore (1986) suggests another way of asking, rather "How does the organization of space come to have meaning and how are those meanings maintained through social interaction?" Looking at it from this perspective should avoid structuralist/semiotic approaches to the analysis and conclusions put forth, which she believes "takes no account of the activities of individual actors or the meanings they ascribe to those activities" (Moore 1986:7).

At the community level within these four Highland communities we have relationships being preformed and maintained through the spatial index of the men's house, ritual and ceremony play a key role in facilitating these interactions. In this way we can see the men's house was very much apart of the

“doing” (to use Gell’s term) of social interaction in Highland communities. These interactions had implications on certain aspects of community, leadership, knowledge transmission, ideas of relatedness, maintaining continuity over time through the agency of elders and older men. These patterns of life that were passed on and created through the men’s house, by ritual experts and elders should not be seen as fixed and rigid, but rather as fluid and adapting to local conditions as they change and are ‘acted’ upon. They are free to use their creativity as much as they are bound by tradition, to reinvent, re-contextualize knowledge systems, wisdom, and other local social and cultural details as the interaction with young men unfolds in the process. Kockelman (2007) suggests an understanding of agency could be better conceptualized as “ a relatively flexible wielding of means towards ends”, emphasizing “self-creation” & “self-invention” - “tradition” or “source”, rather than “structure” or “shackles”(2007:375)

Bourdieu (1977) highlights a similar point when he challenges us to think about how people categorize their world, how they interact simultaneously with both ‘things’ and ‘people.’ The positioning of the individual to things and people through material constructions, both interaction between individuals (body to body) and the men’s house itself become the index in an interplay of ritual action under the ‘cosmic’ agency of a house. Bourdieu’s emphasis is that space becomes meaningful through its use and engagement through ‘practice’. Agents, or actors as he terms them and their actions, cannot in fact be accounted for within a strict framework or schema. “It is agency that imbues personal being with significance and social being with virtue...locating the uniqueness of the human agentic condition in our capacity to give meaning to reality” (Kockelman 2007:393).

At the community level we can see the men’s house functioning at both at an indexical and agency level. Indexically it mediates, or provides space – the nexus for social interaction between individuals, ritual experts, elders, shared leadership and the young men as they initiate into the men’s house. In this way these local ritual acts of communication played out through the index of the men’s house reaffirm its “social relations and hierarchies, identities and collectivities, based on and producing notions of personhood, agency, and causality and society” (Senft & Basso 2009:198).

As agency the men’s house can be seen as a collective of relations among relations, ideas, meaning, power and knowledge of a particular group or community. Understood in this form and establishing ‘political’ autonomy, it becomes an entity in itself mediating the collective ‘indexes of agency’ with other men’s houses, within other clans and tribes.

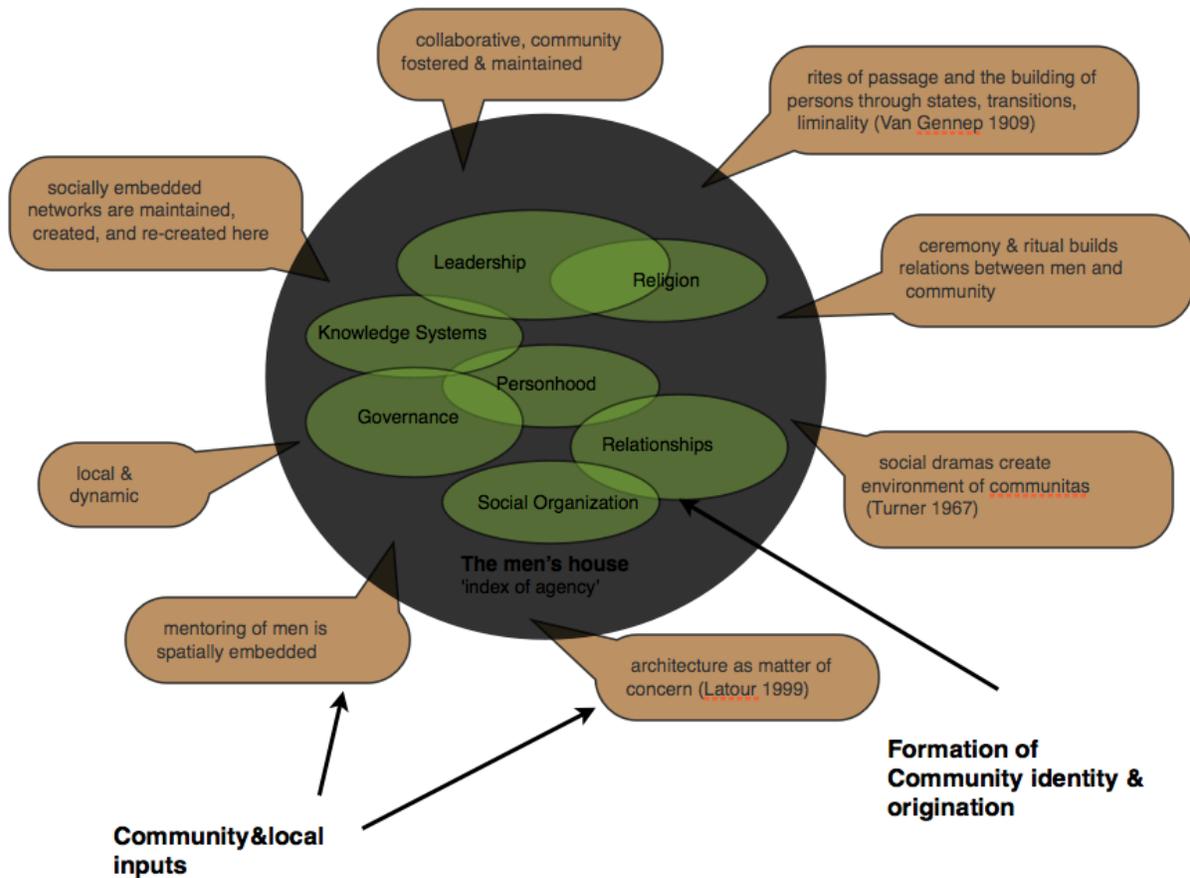


Fig 39. Index of Agency - The Men's house. Source: Authors own

We can see from the diagram above (figure 39.) how the men's house itself became both the embodied index and agent in the exchange of ideals, and knowledge through processes of power relations, ritual exchanges and ceremonies, where people come together in an exchange on multiple levels and in a multitude of ways. The men's house itself becoming not only a collective 'index of agency' (Gell 1998) for the lineage, but how it is able to maintain its secondary agent properties across space and time to interact with other men's houses in a similar way, creating, maintaining, and negotiating complex social networks. It is this space syntax that interacts across clan and in some case, tribal boundaries in a way that no individual could, or would normally be socially permitted to do. If we hope to understand this unique Highlands architecture and its "syntactical relationship" (Goffman 1972:2) to the community, we must situate it first and foremost in its social environment where we see

very quickly how instrumental it was in interactions between space and person, between persons, and between communities relating at different levels in unique ways.

The physical presence of the men's house was by all accounts a powerful feature – a fixed in space and time structure, fostering not only deeply relational aspects, but providing a very 'structural' even 'iconic' feature to its users. Its 'material' presence was a fundamental part of its syntactical abilities with respect to leadership, organization and politics. The drawing on the following page (Fig 40.) illustrates the men's house relationship across space to other men's houses.

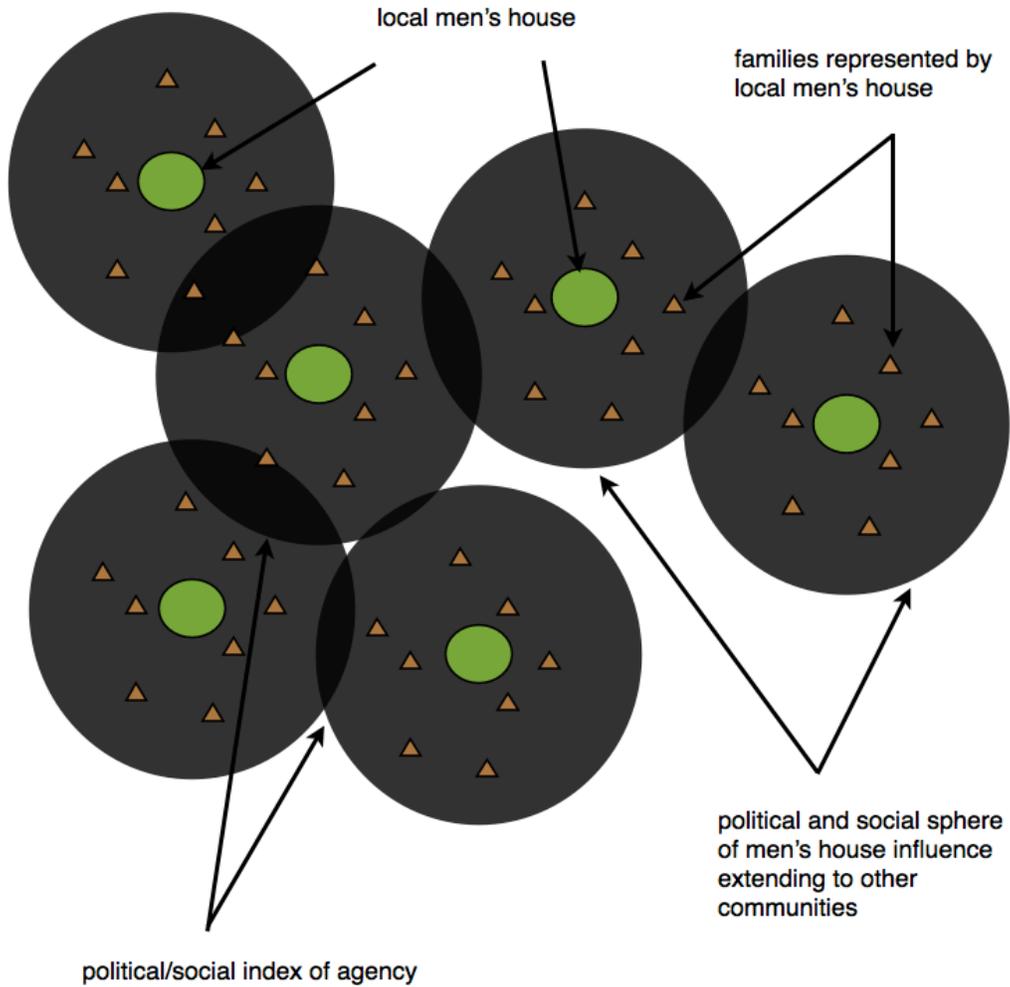
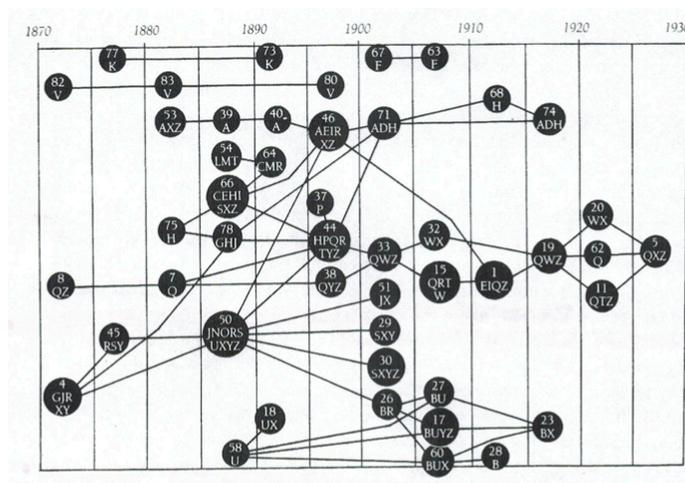


Fig 40. The Indexes of Agency of men's houses across space. Source: Authors own.

Contrast the sphere of influence and agency of men's house in the above drawing with Neich's drawing below of the Maori meeting houses distributed in space and time previously shown on page 73, Fig 39.



From the first diagram on page Seventy-three (Fig 39.) we can clearly see the men's house was not merely a 'space' but a process, a deeply relational process fundamental to everyday social relationships with layers and multiple 'inputs'. In the second diagram we can see that its agency, like the Maori meeting house was "undeniably retrospective," its relationship to other men's houses was political, as "agent gestures these houses are prospective and future oriented" (Gell 1998:256). This space then, this 'object of relationship' or 'index of agency' is able to take on a 'form' or 'power' of its own, becoming part of a larger network or sphere of influence with other men's houses. 'Meaning' was granted through its relationship with other men's houses, it retained its "spatial integrity by virtue of its position in a set of links or relations." The integrity of the men's house group can then be seen as maintaining and holding "patterns of stable links," its circulations, and not about attempting to maintain an arbitrary 'geometric space' within a larger "Euclidean volume." (1998:6). Ultimately it forces us to take seriously the 'essential' social units from which this space has evolved into being, its 'eidos' (to use Bateson's term again) and thus "offer an indigenous mode of communication through which people describe themselves" (1998:167).

Conceptualizing the men's house in this way I believe, more clearly underlines the domino type effect the introduction of alternative ways of governance and leadership and their architectural manifestations had on the men's house network across the Eastern Highlands. The replacement of men's houses by either a church, government office or school had a destabilizing effect on its power and 'relational' syntax, causing the 'network' of men's houses to be undermined - being relationally tied to one another, the network became disconnected. Referring back to Neich's diagram and my diagram of the 'network' of meeting houses, Gell challenges not to look at this network as 'temporal relations' or abstract 'volumes' - "synoptic mapping" but a series of unique 'whole' entities corresponding to different "temporal (and spatial) points of vantage; each one of which generates a distinctive distribution of retentional and potential relations between any given meetinghouse and its spatio-temporal neighbors" (Gell 1998:256).

Carsten (2000) touches briefly on this idea of networks in relationship to 'houses' in building on the work of Singleton and Michael 1993 and that of Law & Hassard (1999). More recent theories of networks are being 're-structured' and a serious inquiry between the "material and immaterial," the "human and the non-human" is being explored. We no longer should explore networks as strictly between individuals, but rather see them as "both the effect of vehicles mobilized to carry messages and

the resultant passages and translations which co-mobilize different orders of phenomena...passing from one domain of materiality to another” (2000:162). This is precisely why structuralist approaches to society, norms, values, culture, social context, in attempting to understand what gives shape to the larger macro environment, ultimately lead us back to the local “back to flesh-and-blood local situations from which they started, “the very local, very practical, very tiny locus” (2000:17).

In the case of the Eastern Highlands men’s house, back to the ‘little’ interactions of ritual, ceremony, the sharing of food, the singing, dancing, and laughing, the fire and the story – the “flesh-and-blood” of community life. Through the index and agency of the men’s house, “something finite allows for something infinite; something fixed allows for something emergent: something normative allows for something transformative of norms” (Kockelman 2005:300). It is clear that the “instruments by which people reckon connections with one another create mediators of diverse kinds (Carsten 2000:163).

Senft and Basso suggest that it is indeed the understanding of rituals as both ‘instruments and mediators’ that can “provide a particular intake to such process of conflict management” (Senft & Basso 2009:206). They see ritual interwoven into the very fabric of meaning that communities evoke in certain situations, and acknowledge certain components like local conflict management processes are not easily removed from the ‘whole.’ The completeness of these local knowledge systems are often intertwined and in “continuous interaction, with the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, molding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds” (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:2).

Conclusion

In my approach to place the men's house in a theory of index and agency as well as actor network their may be a risk of moving to far from 'praxis'. But as we have seen the men's house cannot be easily explained solely by brief descriptions, compartmentalized observations or theory alone. On the other hand I believe that Gell's theory has been helpful in order to conceptualize the overall 'position' of the men's house in Highlands society in so far as we are able to 'keep close' the micro interactions at the community level on which the foundation of the men's house rests; embedded in real interactions and real time and with real people.

In Bourdieu's study of the Berber house he suggests that it is "necessary to postulate that each of the phenomena observed derives its necessity and its meaning from its relationship with all the others. This alone enables one to carry out the sorts of observation and questioning that are capable of bringing out the facts which escape any unsystematic observation and which informants are unable to provide spontaneously because they take them for granted" (Bourdieu 1979:133). From the standpoint of relations within the community and outside, we can see how the men's house was intimately linked with the ongoing maintenance of those relationships, and as a result strict kinship boundaries were rarely followed, but rather a fluid and openness to others culminating and negotiated through the index and agency of the men's house.

Descola (1994) makes a similar observation with respect to the fluidity and 'openness' to kin boundaries in the Achuar society. The "social circumscription" created by the house, represents the only "effective principle of enclosure in the Achuar social system" (1994:108). This dynamic 'kin-like' classification becomes only fully realized through the agency of the house as it provides creative space for the "economic, ritual, and co-residential relations" (Joyce&Gillespie 2000:42) to be enacted and nurtured within the 'framework' of the house.

What has been central to this study, is the centrality of the men's 'house' and its ability to define and maintain personal, social, and political relations in complex and multi-dimensional ways. The emphasis being on its "heuristic utility" and its "dynamic and processual aspects, rather than its classificatory status" (Joyce&Gillespie 2000:13). It is this 'heuristic utility' which Vellinga touches on when he challenges us to take seriously the "dynamic and multifarious meanings" associated with a buildings "material form and spatial layout; the use of space and resources; and the ways in which all of these material, social and symbolic aspects interrelate to constitute social relationships and

identities” (Vellinga 2007:764). This approach should enable us to incorporate a more complete understanding of the men’s house, relationally, socially and politically.

The social and ritual focused prominence of the men’s house and its former use as a men’s communal dwelling, its “function as main venues for communal meetings or rituals, only adds to the important part they play[ed] in the accomplishment and maintenance of social relationships and groups” (Vellinga 2004:155). At a broader level we have seen how the men’s house was integrated into a wider network, and how certain ritual forms were communicative and essential to the maintenance and building of relationships, but we can also see how this space was influential in the leadership and conflict resolution and how leadership was maintained, and how ‘legitimacy’ was exercised and achieved over time.

It was through the above analysis that I sought to present a better understanding of the men’s house “in the round” (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:2) in whole relationship to the lineage it represented and to give a more complete picture of the architectural, social, symbolic and political importance it played in Highland social life. As Ruth Benedict so eloquently put it, “cultures, likewise, are more than the sum of their traits. We may know all about the distribution of a tribes form of marriage, ritual dances, and puberty initiations, and yet understand nothing of the culture as a whole which has used these elements to its own purpose” (Benedict 1959:53). I intended to present data that better called into focus the more complex purposes of the men’s house as an extension of both individuals and community as they interact with each other in complex webs of significance, effecting “cognitive models to structure, think and experience the world” (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:3).

Returning full circle to the beginning of this paper, quoting Merleau:

“Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:284)

I believe that we have sufficiently explored the difficulty in answering our original questions individually without discussing them in relationship to each other. There are no easy yes and no answers to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper. But rather analysis that builds and

compounds all three together in a 'whole' understanding, I believe is the furthest we can progress to a more complete conceptualization of the men's house and its interconnectedness to the people it served.

In the past few years, I have heard a renewed resurgence in the men's house has begun to take root amongst scattered communities across the Eastern Highlands. Some politicians have rebuilt men's houses as part of the modern day local level government system in an attempt to engage its 'democratic' population at the local level. Community centers in the 'form' of men's houses are not uncommon in some places, as it would appear, to establish some sort of connection between the past and the present ways of thinking about the world but also, in hopes of achieving a more integrated balanced approach to the governance, social, religious and architectural forces impacting the community in its present situation.

When we attempt to understand the changing forces of power and influence of outside systems and knowledge it is helpful to keep in mind that if indeed "older paths connect with newer roads, they should be seen in the continuing context of each other, even as they turn each other upside-

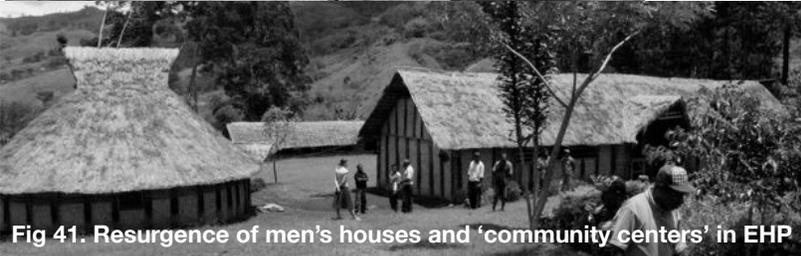


Fig 41. Resurgence of men's houses and 'community centers' in EHP

down" (Goldman (eds) 1998:159). How this 'new' road or new index will ultimately resurface over time at the community level as a 'replacement' to the men's house, is hard to say. "What gets built is whatever seems the best possible compromise in the light of all the practical difficulties and constraints entering into the situation" (Gell 1998:257). What is clear is that the men's house was never

given the chance to evolve into a new form or to be altered based on its agents new meaning of perceptions and interaction with outside forces. Rather it was abruptly replaced with foreign structures and foreign ideologies with

no continuity to its previous form or beliefs. In dialogue with those who are planning steps forward with new 'architectural forms' representative of current community ideals and beliefs

about their world, it appears to be this recognition which is driving the motivation for a 'new men's house' in different locations around the province. A recognition that although many communities express satisfaction with many of the recent changes over the last sixty years, they also fervently express a loss of culture and self-expression in what is now a rapidly changing modernizing community.

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2. <http://anthropology.ua.edu/Faculty/murphy/436/kinship.htm>

APPENDIX A

A number of men, mostly from the same clan, join together and build a men's house in some suitable place. They fence off a large area around this men's house for cultivation and planting...The men's house is inside the settlement area, often just one, but more often [where clans increase in population] more than one. They often plant sugar cane, bananas, and greens around the men's houses so that many of these buildings are hardly recognizable from any distance. The size of the open space in front of the men's house differs according to the likes of the inhabitants. The floor plan of the houses I am describing is rectangular...the entrance to the house is always by the front small side of it. Normally the person entering will step into an antechamber without any external door, and going further inside will have to pass through a permanent wall through a small door in it. The fireplace is in the antechamber. I has a small external door opening, draped over with banana leaves to prevent too much loss from warmth through it. The inner room is the real 'house'. Usually it also has a fireplace (from my research, often more than 2 and as many as 6 depending on the size of the clan). The long sidewalls of the men's houses are the place for the sleeping couches. The men's houses are not only the common sleeping place for all the men, but also the storehouse for weaponry (shields, spears, bows, and arrows, and other digging implements). Everyone will also have there personal magical materials, in a net bag, and especially everything that a man wants to hide from the eyes of a women, anything which belongs to the cult (such as the spirit flutes). Even in the men's house these items will be preserved in such a way that they will not be visible to each and every eye. Men's houses often display a decoration on top of the main, end posts. It is an inverted fern plant root, rising above the level of the roof. This is protective magic for the house and it will be placed on the post with special magical formula. Now we can briefly go through the process of building a new house.

One fine morning they tore down the old men's house. Already some days before this they will have gathered wood, lianas [natural rope or vines] and bundles of dried grass for the new construction. The ground where the old house once stood is dug up a little and carefully smoothed over. The earth dug up during this then piled up along the sides. Then the builder's lines will be drawn. The first ones are for the outer walls, and they lay down switches and lianas on the ground and peg these down securely with small pieces of wood. Now the posts for the wall are driven into the earth along the line marked out by the switches. In wall posts are placed about 40cm apart. Long poles are then laid into the upper forks of the wall posts and tied fast with lianas. Instead of these poles they use something different for the rounded rear wall of the house, flexible switches. The spaces between the many wall posts are filled up with fence palings driven into the ground, and these are again bound to the switches or the long poles. Then comes the second row of the wall, outside the first row and parallel to it. It is made entirely of fence palings driven into the ground, and forms the outer wall of the house. The narrow gap between the two rows of the lower wall is completely filled with compressed leaves and grass, and after this is completed the spiked tops of the outer wall stakes are tightly tied to those of the inner ones and to the long poles laid lengthways along the top of the inner wall. This finishes the house walls.

While all this is going on other men have been measuring out the place for the two main posts of the house. A “big man”, but one who does not belong to this men’s house, first drives the rear main post into the indicated place on the ground. While doing this he is supposed to murmur the blessing formula; “The sun hold fast by day, the fire by night”. The front house post is driven in by another man. The long ridge beam is laid in the forks formed by the tops of the two main posts. The upper ends of the rafters, somewhat curved, are laid onto, and tied to the long ridge beam. Their lower ends are lying over the house wall or on the long poles topping that wall, and their protruding section is bowed downwards and tied tightly to the outer side of the wall. The cross bars for the roof are laid athwart the rafters. This brings the workers to evening. The women bring the men an abundant meal, and everyone goes home.

The next day grass is gathered for the roof by the women and the men start the roof covering. The two house posts stick out above the roof by about 100cm, and it is on these posts that the house father places the inverted stump and roots of a fern plant, while pronouncing the following magical spell:

“O great father sunshine up there!

Fire stay on the earth so we don’t freeze!

You ancestors of mine, ones who have died, hold back the fire!

O great father sun, keep watch that no spirit or magic harm us!”

The house we have been describing is now ready; its total length about 9m wide by 3.45m wide. The inside height was 1.47m. When the house has reached this state of readiness the fireplaces are installed. The first fire on the hearth is lit with considerable ceremony. Particular grasses and plants are bout up with bones of a pig and placed near the new fireplace. The house father lights the fire by using the “rattan say” method [friction using a bamboo bow, dried grass and a piece of hardwood] which involved pulling a thin strip of bamboo to and fro around the split end of a stick which a standing man keeps down on the ground by standing on it. The ‘new’ fire is placed in the hearth and the bundle containing the magical material is burned in it.

APPENDIX B

Ethics Approval Form

Faculty Of Technology, Design & Environment, Oxford Brookes University
ARCHITECTURE / PLANNING / REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION

RESEARCH ETHICS FORM E1BE FOR STUDENTS ON TAUGHT COURSES

Please read the Guidance Notes at www.brookes.ac.uk/res/ethics/forms

Section A - You & your project

What is your name?

First name Zachary	Surname Jones
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What is your student number?

0	8	1	5	6	7	7	3
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What is your email address?

inbuilt.ca@gmail.com@brookes.ac.uk

What is your supervisor's name?

First name Marcel	Surname Vellinga
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What is your supervisor's email address?

mvellinga @brookes.ac.uk

In which Department are you studying?

Architecture
 Planning
 REC

What course are you taking?

IARD

What is the topic area of your research?

Men's house, EHP - PNG

On what kinds of topics will you be collecting data from the participants in the research?

Relationship between Men's house and community

Section B - Your participants

What kind of participants will be involved in your research? (Please tick one - if more than one, then complete a separate form)

Professional/management group
 Members of the general public
 Vulnerable individuals

Briefly describe these participants

Elders / Village / Community heads

How many participants will be involved?

20 Number of people

How will the participants be selected?

Age and Seniority

Section C - Your data collection

When is your data collection likely to start?

d	d	m	m	y	y	y	y
0	1	0	1	2	0	1	2

What will be your method of data collection?

In-depth interviews Telephone
 Face-to-face surveys Email
 Direct observation Post
 Other, please specify

What kind of data will you be collecting?

Quantitative/statistical/numerical
 Qualitative/written/text
 Images/drawings/maps

Will it be possible to avoid asking for personal data from the participants?

Yes No

Will it be possible to ensure the participants are not being deceived in any way?

Yes No

Will it be possible to ensure the participants remain completely anonymous?

Yes No

Will it be possible to ensure the participants do not suffer any negative consequences?

Yes No

Section D - Declaration

I declare that I will

- give all participants an information sheet conforming to university guidelines
- not contact any participant until my supervisor has approved my information sheet, research questions and methodology
- be sufficiently well-trained in necessary methods of data collection and analysis

Student signature	Date
	28.07.12

Supervisor signature	Date
	28.07.12

Module Leader signature	Date
	28.07.12

You may only start fieldwork when this form has been signed by your supervisor & your Module Leader

