GENDER AND COSMOS EMPLACED: WOMEN'S HOUSES AND MEN'S HOUSES IN BARIAI, WEST NEW BRITAIN, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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In Papua New Guinea, the men's cult houses are dramatic examples of vernacular architecture that have overshadowed the importance and symbolic meanings of the domestic dwelling, or women's houses. This essay is an ethnography of house forms, specifically women's houses and men's cult houses in Bariai, West New Britain. The focus is on relationships of articulation between the built environment and gender concepts within the framework of Bariai cosmology, which show how gender concepts and relations are emplaced and the built environment is gendered.

ALTHOUGH PART of the larger regional, national, and world system that encompasses it, the Bariai District of the northwest coast of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, continues to be isolated, rural, and underdeveloped.[1] The Bariai are swidden horticulturalists whose daily fare depends primarily on taro, yams, sweet potatoes, and coconuts. The starch processed from the sago palm, seasonal tree fruits and nuts, and wild bush foods are important as ceremonial and famine foods. As coastal dwellers, the Bariai are also fisherfolk and use a wide variety of seafood to augment their diet. Pigs figure prominently in the socioeconomic prestige system as an important source of meat and wealth. By 2003, the population in the Bariai District had increased by approximately 50 percent in slightly less than two decades. The village of Kokopo, where I lived during fieldwork, is the most central and largest of the ten coastal villages; it has grown from a population

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of 180 in 1985 to 300 in 2003. The built environment has expanded into the spaces between houses, which are now much closer together, and the open spaces that marked hamlet boundaries no longer exist. House construction is constant and ongoing. This essay is an ethnography of Bariai house forms, specifically the gendered structures of women's and men's houses, and the ceremonial houses for firstborn children, as these structures have evolved through time and changing circumstances to their present configurations.

Bariai villages retain a pattern (if not the practice) of residential sexual segregation characteristic of so many Papua New Guinea societies, represented by two primary types of construction: the domestic dwelling or "women's house" (*luma*) and the "men's house" (*lum*). The women's house is associated with the female focal domestic group and household activities, including production and reproduction. The *palata*, a temporary open-sided shelter, is an extension of the domestic dwelling outside the village into another domesticated space, the household's gardens. The men's house is associated with agnatic-descent group membership and male secret-sacred activities. This building is an exclusively male space, off-limits to all females as well as boys or youths whose fathers have not yet earned them the right to enter.[2] Important temporary ceremonial structures are built for firstborn girls (*kailanga*) and for firstborn boys (*popou*). There are no menstrual huts or permanent birth huts; however, during the birth process, whether in a cook house, a defunct copra dryer, a lean-to on the beach, or in the bush, the birthing place and environs are defined as female secret-sacred and off-limits to all males as well as to all girls and young women who have not yet experienced giving birth themselves.

In his classic cross-cultural study of built form, Rapoport emphasizes that men's ceremonial houses in Papua New Guinea, such as the Bariai *lum* mentioned above, have more religious and social significance and "possess greater symbolic value and content than the ordinary [domestic] dwelling" and thus "stand for more than the house" (1969:10). Similarly, Oliver notes that there are "sharp distinctions . . . between *household* and *public* buildings" in Oceanic cultures (1989:330, Oliver's italics). Household buildings are those "where all females regularly and all males sometimes, slept and ate," whereas public buildings are sexually exclusive places "where males spent some of their time, sleeping, eating and doing other things" (p. 330). Oliver further notes that sexually segregated public buildings/men's houses in Papua New Guinea societies are the site of culturally central religious activities, whereas "the only religious practices widely associated with household buildings [are those] having to do with birth and death" (p. 332). Duncan comments that the "ordinary" domestic dwelling or women's house in Ulithi and Malaita is overwhelmingly viewed "as simply a container of women and goods"

(1981:2). Here both the domestic dwelling and the menstrual hut associated with the female domain represent "the spatial manifestation of [female] subordination" (p. 45). If, as these examples suggest, built form expresses and represents aspects of culture and society (cf. Lawrence and Low 1990), the implication seems to be that persons and practices that come within the purview of the domestic (private) dwelling are, by definition, less culturally and socially valued than persons and practices that come within the purview of the (public) men's houses. There is definitely a tendency to "denigrate domesticity" (Strathern 1984).

There is also a rather skewed notion of "private" and "public" here. Bariai men would not agree that their men's house is a "public" domain; a sexually exclusive building is not a "public" building. The men's house is always off-limits to all women or girls (including female anthropologists) and to boys or youths not properly presented there by their parents. The dance plaza in front of the men's house is where spirit beings are presented to the "public" and where people of all ages and sexes dance, exchange pigs, and have meetings. The area around the men's house that is hidden by three-meter-high walls of greenery is very private, reserved for adult men and spirit beings only. While the inside of Bariai women's houses is "private" to all but those who live there, the house verandah is a public meeting and greeting space, as is the open area underneath and around the house. A cook house is a public area until it (or some other structure) becomes a birth house, and then it becomes very private until birthing is accomplished. The public/male and private/female dichotomy is too simplistic in terms of Bariai vernacular architecture, and the only truly "public" buildings—in the sense that they are non-exclusionary according to sex and age—are the relatively new introduced structures that are local churches and schools.

Houses, especially women's houses, are obviously much more than "mere item[s] of material culture" (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:31; Rensel and Rodman 1997) and very much more than a material representation of gendered inequalities, as the works previously cited would suggest. In many cultures, houses are "imaged in terms of the human body" (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:37), and since human bodies are always gendered, I argue that the spaces inhabited by those gendered bodies are conceptually gendered as well. Wherever residential sexual segregation and sexually exclusive places and spaces such as men's houses and women's houses occur, that is, where "whole areas of social life ('domains') become the apparent concern of one or the other sex," as M. Strathern suggests, "their relationship of articulation must be investigated" (1988:69).

My goal here is to investigate relationships of articulation among spatial constructs, building types that define areas of social life, and gender concepts

within the framework of Bariai cosmology. For the Bariai, sexual differentiation is the fundamental source of cosmic action and human agency; engendered spaces describe an articulated system of difference. The demarcation of places as female and male is an emplacement of Bariai cosmology and gender. Thus I begin with a brief discussion of Bariai cosmology as it pertains to the creation of engendered places. This provides a basis for a discussion of house forms both pre- and postcontact not as rigidly defined spaces but as shifting and malleable constructions that accommodate prevailing sociopolitical conditions. In the following sections I describe the various types of Bariai built form, and since there is a tendency to neglect such structural descriptions generally and domestic dwellings specifically in the ethnographic literature of Papua New Guinea, I pay some attention to the details of construction and materials. Throughout, the main point I wish to make is that Bariai gender relations are emplaced relations grounded in homology and analogy rather than structures of hierarchy and dominance (cf. Strathern 1988:13) as a simplistic public/male and private/female dichotomy would suggest.

Cosmology and Concepts of Gender

Bariai cosmology is predicated on a preexisting but undifferentiated universe. The only reference to "origins" in their oral literature is a brief mythic statement about the creation of place—of the land and the sea and the creatures that inhabit those domains, of the creation of the sexes, and of the first men's houses. Paraphrased, the origin myth goes like this:

> A solitary being, Upuda,[3] sits upon a huge rock in the dark, misty void and, for reasons unknown, begins to create boundaries within a cosmic continuum.[4] Upuda constructs place through movement: by kicking up sand and soil and sea, thus differentiating land and sea, the island of New Britain is created. Upuda then populates the land with all the flora that are now "naturally" part of that domain. Upuda's final act is to create human beings and all the fauna that inhabit the land, the sea, and the sky. Upuda divides a branch of the *asi* tree in half and carves two figures, one male and one female.[5] The wood shavings created become all the animals and birds that inhabit the forest and all the fish and other creatures inhabiting the rivers, lakes, and sea. Initially, the stick figures were inanimate, deaf, and mute, so Upuda carves their ears, eyes, and mouth and breathes life into them. The primal couple prosper and produce fifty sons, each of whom is head of a men's ceremonial house.[6]

Upuda is an otiose gender-neutral creator being who, after these initial acts of creative differentiation, has no further role in the fate or affairs of that which has been created. Metaphorically, the uncut *asi* branch is a cosmos in stasis: undifferentiated and unrealized, sterile and non(re)productive. If action is predicated on "dyadically conceived relationships" (Strathern 1988:14), then an undifferentiated humanity, like the uncut *asi* branch, is inert, inactive, unable to (re)produce. Cutting the branch creates a gendered boundary in a human continuum, separating an essential, inactive unity into a sexual dyad that becomes the basis of all action. The divided branch represents discontinuity and difference, which simultaneously engenders a dynamic and sexual, hence generative, universe. In Bariai cosmogenesis, as in some Polynesian cosmologies, there is "a strong relationship between cosmogony and birth, where cosmogony is specifically not conceptualized as creation *ex nihilo*" (Gell 2003:296), but as differentiation. As humans appropriate the power for (re-)creation through their sexuality, they risk destroying the universe since sexual intercourse represents the reunification of the cosmos into its undifferentiated state, which is, by definition, inert. Thus, "where boundaries are transgressed, annihilation follows" (p. 297).

In keeping with the spirit of the myth, female and male are two halves of a single totality (the *asi* wood); they are, elders explained to me, essentially the same "stuff." Differences between female and male are a consequence of a primal differentiation: a unity becomes a dyad. Concepts of gender express values and meanings attributed to human bodies, particularly embodied substances such as blood and semen, and it is in terms of these vital essences that Bariai elders explain residential segregation of the sexes. Contact with female essences can make men ill, nullify their magical efficacy, and render them ritually impotent. Women exposed to male essences can also become ill or sterile, or experience prolonged labor during childbirth, which could result in the death of both woman and child. The "heat" and embodied essences that cling to sexually active individuals are also dangerous to children and persons who are weakened by sickness or injury. Girls and boys who have open wounds received during ear-piercing or superincision bloodletting rites are particularly vulnerable. Exposure to the "heat" generated during sexual intercourse can retard their healing and cause fever, festering, and perhaps death. The reservoir of essential substances contained in human bodies is finite, and the loss of these vital essences during sexual intercourse as well as during processes of production (creation) and reproduction (re-creation) are major contributing factors to the processes of aging and dying (see Scaletta 1985). Through differentiation of the sexes, Upuda created a dynamic and interactive universe; however, the essential dyadic interaction thus created is sexual, and it is sexual intercourse that

dangerously reunites the primal dyad that results ultimately, indeed, necessarily, in death/inertia.[7]

The separation of the sexes and the regulation of human sexuality and gender relations are necessary in order to maintain a dynamic universe and a framework for meaningful social intercourse. The mythic origins of the sexes and human sexuality and residential segregation describe an emplaced cosmic imperative expressed pragmatically in built form. These structures create boundaries that define as masculine or feminine various spaces and places and the activities that occur within them. Such structures are not static edifices; rather, they coincide "in various ways with important events and processes in the lives of their occupants" (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:39). Colonialism was one such important event in the shaping of place for the Bariai. Following Gell, it is clear that only "separation preserves essences, and essence precedes existence" (2002:297).

Bariai Settlement Patterns and Colonialism

The occupants of the fifty men's houses mentioned in the origin myth were dispersed throughout New Britain as a consequence of a conflict arising out of a sexual relationship between a woman and a spirit being (B: *aulu*).[8] This mythic diaspora gives credence to the multiplicity of small settlements that Bariai elders described as their remembered precolonial residential patterns of kindred groups living on named tracts of land in the forest. These settlements were circular or semicircular in shape, embracing a cleared common area. Each settlement was a hub for a radiating network of footpaths through the bush that connected to related groups living nearby, to trade friends on the route over the mountains to the south coast, to garden plots, and to the beach.[9] These small settlements were composed of related men, who resided in the men's house, and their spouses and children, who lived in the domestic dwellings built on either side of the men's house. Those few men who were able to afford more than one wife built separate but adjacent dwellings for each wife and her children.

Both men's and women's houses were windowless, roughly constructed shelters of bush materials built on the ground, with the front entrance facing into the central clearing and a rear door permitting egress directly into the forest. Besides offering a convenient repository for refuse, the proximity of the bush provided a ready sanctuary if the hamlet was attacked: front entrances could be barricaded, and residents could make their escape through the rear of the building, where they melted into the forest, as one elderly man put it, "like wild pigs" (compare Samo longhouses discussed in Shaw 1997). From about ten years of age, all males slept, ate, stored their personal

belongings, and spent their leisure in and around the men's house. Although not strictly prohibited, men rarely entered the female domain of the domestic dwelling and never trespassed into the women's latrine area or walked the path leading to it.[10] A man received cooked food from his wife (or his sister or mother if he was unmarried), usually delivered by a child to the door of the men's house. Deceased members of the kin group were buried in shallow graves in the earthen floor of the men's or women's houses, and hearth fires for light, warmth, and cooking were built on top of the graves. Over time corpses were reduced to ashes and bits of bone, which became ingredients in magical spells and sorcery; some of these relics and power bundles are still extant. Buildings of bush materials precluded any kind of structural permanence, and people moved regularly between settlements and gardens, often spending more time in family groups in temporary garden shelters (*palata*) than in their houses. This impermanence of structures and people's residential transience sorely tried the colonial government's sense that a population is affiliated with a specific "place" and concepts of home and community.

Patrol Officer Ian M. Mack exemplifies the Euro-Australian association of "house" with "home" and with permanence in the sense of material solidity, generational continuity, inheritance, and heritage. In his 1931 patrol report, Mack provides the earliest written description of Bariai housing.[11] He writes that

> no villages have been other than of a temporary nature until the last few years. . . . Beach villages, such as Kokopo in [B]ariai, have had a "House Boy" [men's house] and several houses on their sites for some time, but most of the inhabitants actually lived in little houses in their taro gardens. I believe this to be the reason for the natives in the districts . . . building such flimsy houses. A house to them has not got the significance of "Home" in the sense that it has to us—a house for untold generations—merely [being] a shelter to protect them from rain and somewhere to sleep at night, but they have never lived in a house in the way that we do. Every year their taro gardens were moved to a new site, for several months each year the family would be camping out and hunting or gathering wild nuts and fruits—all that was required of a house was for it to be a nightly shelter for a few months

With the advent of the Australian colonial administration, Bariai settlement structure was forced to change in order to facilitate government census taking, labor recruitment, and tax collecting (see McPherson 2001). The patrol officers, or *kiap* as they were called in Tok Pisin (hereafter TP), searched

out and relocated people to settle on the beachfront, where they were more accessible to colonial administering. Preferred temporary shelters in the gardens were prohibited in favor of permanent villages constructed in a lineal plan of contiguous agnatically related hamlets. Villagers now had to commute to their gardens rather than live near their source of livelihood. From the administrative perspective, such relocations harmonized nicely with colonialist ideas of geographic space (land use) and place (village), households (as homes) with heads of households (agnatic descent, patriarchy), and the necessity for creating a population (census taking). For hygienic reasons, the administration further decreed that all houses should be built on stilts to permit circulation of fresh air and that the surrounding bush should be cleared back thirty feet (10 m) on all sides of dwellings. Latrines were ordered built and used for collecting human waste; refuse was to be buried in specially made pits or thrown in the sea. Burying the dead in the dirt floor of men's or women's houses was strictly forbidden; each village or settlement was required to provide a plot of land some distance from the residential area in which to bury (place) their dead. The dead are now buried in cemeteries—a space that separates the dead from the living in a manner that burying the dead in house floors never did—yet villagers continue to construct small houses on top of the graves to "shelter" the dead. Sometimes people so miss their deceased loved ones that they build a fire on top of the grave to warm the deceased and themselves while they spend the night beside the grave. Similar to contemporary men's houses, which used to house the dead, the little grave houses are never repaired or maintained but are allowed to decay and fall apart (discussed below). A mortuary ceremony with food distributions and payments of shell money is required to deconstruct the deceased's house (actually or symbolically by removing a wall but leaving the rest of the structure intact), remove and burn the construction materials on top of the grave, and beautify the site with fresh beach sand.

Interestingly, Patrol Officer Mack is unconcerned with men's houses in his patrol report and focuses on women's houses or "House Married" (TP: *haus marit*).

> Every "House Married" is raised on piles about four feet high, the houses do not differ much in size usually being a rectangle of 12 feet by eight, or approximately so. The walls are under four feet in height and the roof is nine or ten feet high at the ridge pole, which is usually about eight feet long, the roof sloping down to each end wall as well as the sides. The door is under four feet in height cut in the center of the longer side, in front of it is an unroofed verandah or platform, built of saplings laid horizontally on piles, with two of

> three poles forming a ramp to the ground taking the place of steps. Floors are made of limbom [palm sp.], the walls of peeled sticks or saplings, laid horizontally and fastened close together to the uprights, some few houses have walls of sewn sheets of *sacsac* [TP: sago-palm frond]. (Mack 1931)

Indigenous housing was a constant annoyance to colonial officers, whose appraisals and comments on housing standards (or their lack) are common entries in every patrol report. Mack often laments "slipshod workmanship" and gives a vivid description of the results of the new order of Bariai housing:

> Occasionally quela [TP: *kwila*, "ironwood"] posts had been used as blocks under a building, but they would all be of different lengths, with a stone or chock of wood placed on top to bring them to an approximate level; often the main bearers would be of soft pulpy wood that crumbled to the touch, uprights supporting the roof and forming the walls would be set in the ground at all angles, the floor joists consist of unbarked saplings laid carelessly on the bearers some thick and some thin, with the result that the limbom [split-palm trunk] floor would only touch one every now and then—no attempt made to fasten the limbom to the floor joists, the limbom itself would have gaps of two or three inches every foot or so, and flap about in a most disconcerting manner when one walked on it. Rafters in the roof would be of the poorest quality bush vine which dries quickly and can be snapped with one finger in a house a year old. The thatch would be sufficient to keep out the rain when the house was new, but when it had been on for a few months and dried and shrunk there would be many leaks. . . . In many cases the old style of building a roof was still adhered to, that is to say that the roof would be built on the ground then lifted bodily onto the house; this would account for the numbers of roofs which were such bad "fits." (Mack 1931)

Although Mack believed it would take "years of patient work to instill in the natives as a whole the desire for improved housing," the houses he refers to above were a "marked improvement" over those he had inspected on a patrol through the area five years earlier. Despite such improvements, however, Mack delayed his patrol for five days because he had "decided to build a new rest house . . . using only local material and no European tools except axes and bush knives in an attempt to show the natives that it was possible to build a neat, comfortable, durable and suitable type house without radically altering the type of dwelling to which they are accustomed" (Mack 1931).

After a century of influence from missionaries and colonial officers such as Mack who stressed European-style housing as the criterion of a "proper" house and a modern lifestyle, a permanent construction house of dressed timbers and plank walls and floors, with glass and fly screens in the windows and corrugated iron roofing, is a desirable but still unaffordable status symbol in Bariai villages. Chowning notes that among the Lakali, "the emotional importance of being properly housed, and of providing houses for one's dependents, has actually increased. . . . The family house is becoming a semi-permanent home and at least a few men have a vision of constructing one that can actually be inherited by their children" (1997:101). In 2003, when I asked a Bariai father of seven how he would spend potential resource-extraction royalties, his immediate response was "a permanent construction house." Still, only some villagers are able to procure odd pieces of corrugated iron for a section of roofing or to salvage glass for a window; for the most part, all Bariai houses are still made from bush materials much the same as they were in 1931. Tools used for cutting, dressing, and erecting the structure are minimal, primarily axes, machetes, and hammers. Structures are tied together with vines or secured with nails purchased from trade stores in town or salvaged from decrepit buildings and recycled into the new construction. Bush construction houses usually last, on average, from five to seven years. With the exception of periodic replacement of thatch, repairs are not made to buildings, and when the structure becomes too decrepit to be safely or comfortably inhabited, a new house is built, usually next door, and the old one used for firewood.

Women's Houses: The Domestic Dwelling

In 1985, in Kokopo where my "woman's house" was located, there were three hamlets, three men's houses and forty-five women's houses (*luma*).[12] In 2003, there were four hamlets, seventy-nine women's houses, and no standing men's houses. In 1985, it was possible to discern hamlet boundaries by the small "green spaces" left between them. In 2003, houses were so close together that a fire the previous year had destroyed three adjacent houses. Usually, the men's house (*lum*) is the most visible indicator of individual hamlets, if any are standing; now, without men's houses, hamlets are not physically identifiable and are in the process of becoming invisible altogether. The church has numbered each clan and renamed them as "LKK" one through four, where "LKK" means in Tok Pisin Liklik Kristian Komuniti (Little Christian Community). Elementary and high school children could not tell me the name of their clan affiliation, but they knew their hamlet LKK number.

Contemporary domestic dwellings are built on posts three to four feet off the ground, rarely have windows, and since the threat of enemy attack is a thing of the past, are no longer built with a rear door. The domestic dwelling is very much associated with the conjugal pair and is the symbolic and actual center of their joint enterprise and life together. Gathering and preparing the materials and construction of houses is men's work; indeed, one of the criteria indicating that a youth is mature, responsible, and ready to marry is his demonstrated ability to accomplish these house construction tasks. Postmarital residence is ideally (but not always) virilocal, and when a woman marries, she expects to take up residence in her husband's hamlet in a new house built for her by her husband with the assistance of his kin and age-mates. A newly married woman wants to avoid living in her mother-in-law's house and can even refuse to take up residence with her husband until and unless he constructs her a house of her own.

Rather than several domestic dwellings clustered around a men's house, contemporary Bariai villages have a main road (B: *edap maknga*) that runs parallel to the beach and bisects the village into houses constructed on the beach versus those on the bush side of the road. The main road and beachfront, which are spatial extensions of the domestic dwellings, are public thoroughfares. People traveling from village to village walk along the beach or main road, which announces their destination and reason for going there. Paths through the forest at the back of the village are "paths of stealth" (B: *edap salnga*). Any person who travels these bush paths is assumed to be up to no good or, worse, to be a sorcerer about his nefarious business.

Although the dimensions of domestic houses vary according to personal preference, women's houses have changed little from Mack's 1931 description.[13] Houses are still rectangular, approximately fourteen feet long including a covered verandah, and about twelve feet wide. Construction begins after all the materials have been prepared and gathered at the site. Footing posts (B: *kadanga taine*, "female posts") six to nine feet in length are cut from ironwood trees, which are impervious to rot and termite invasion. When the rest of the house has succumbed to the tropical environment and become uninhabitable, the ironwood "female" footing posts remain upright and strong. These posts are embedded in holes about three feet deep at each of the four corners and at three-foot intervals to create the perimeter of the house. When securely anchored in the holes, the exposed ends of the "female" posts are the stilts on which the rest of the house is built. Beams of a uniform diameter are laid on top of the "female" posts, and the floor joists (B: *kalunglung*) are attached to them at right angles. Next, split-palm flooring (B: *nares*) is laid, and king posts or "male posts" (B: *kadanga aranga*) are put in place at appropriate intervals around the perimeter of the structure,

and the top plate (B: *para*) is lashed in place. The gabled roof is achieved by centering one post on each front and back section of the top plate to support the ridgepole (B: *udud*). The rafters (B: *aulanga*) are attached to the ridgepole and the top plate. The roof is thatched with sago-palm leaf stitched onto four-foot-long narrow strips of bamboo; inverted sago-palm ribs serve as ridge tiles to prevent leaks. Walls are made with vertically positioned lengths of sago-palm ribs lashed together or three-foot square woven bamboo-strip decorative blinds (B: *didnga*). If a window is installed, these blinds also serve as window coverings that can be propped open or tied shut. Finally, a door (B: *atama*) is hung from vine hinges in the entranceway. The exterior of the domestic dwelling is not decorated except in the various designs woven into the bamboo walls or window covers.

Besides the building and its interior, the personal space of the people who live in the house extends to include the space that surrounds the house: that area of the beach, bush, or main road to the back, front, and sides of the dwelling (see also Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:3). Within this exterior domestic space are small ground-level structures that serve as cook houses, fenced pig pens, pig troughs, and occasionally a chicken coop. Cordylines or small decorative trees planted between houses demarcate individual households. With recent population pressures, houses are built in close proximity to one another, and many are surrounded by fences constructed of bamboo lengths, logs stacked horizontally, or chicken wire or corrugated metal; each fence has a stile for climbing over. Another new addition to domestic houses is a beautification project where the household "property" is planted with flowering trees, planters with flowers or cacti, banana plants, betel-nut palms, papaya, even dwarf coconut palms. On their verandahs, many houses display potted plants of aloe, pothos vine, dracena, and a variety of flowers. While the stated objective of the fences is to keep the pigs out (they don't), the effect is a physical and mental barrier that privatizes the household environs.

The dwelling house is the personal sanctum of all who reside there. Nonresidents are rarely invited inside the house, and the sanctity of house and householders is protected by magical spells. All visitors are expected to approach the house from the front and should not climb the fence or the ladder onto the verandah unless invited to do so. Every woman has her own personal trove of specially selected stones for her stone oven that she has magically bespelled to ensure succulent and well-cooked food and to ward off attempts by others to use magic to spoil her efforts. These stones are stored underneath her house, usually under a protective cover of sand; firewood is stacked beside the house or in the cook house if she has one. House stilts are usually built high enough for women to use the shady area underneath

their houses for socializing while they sew thatch and mats; weave baskets; make shell armlets, shell money, and colorful dance skirts; prepare meals; and do the multitude of tasks that fill their "leisure" hours and contribute to the wealth and well-being of their household. Most household activity and general socializing is highly visible and audible and takes place outside the dwelling proper in these external domestic spaces.

The interior of the house is usually not partitioned into rooms but is allocated according to functions such as sleeping, cooking, and storing personal belongings and day-to-day tools and equipment. Broad shelves constructed high on the walls hold wealth items intended for exchange (shell money, clay pots, pandanus mats, wooden bowls). With more exposure to European-style housing, some villagers have built an interior wall to divide the house into two rooms of unequal size. The smaller room, slightly left of the entrance, is used for storing personal belongings such as cooking utensils, clothing, and ceremonial regalia as well as money and other items of material wealth. Since men no longer sleep in the men's house on a regular basis, the second, larger room usually serves as a sleeping room for the family. Husband and wife, however, sleep apart. A woman sleeps with her nursing infant or youngest child, and her husband sleeps with their older children. Couples rarely, if ever, engage in sexual relations in the house since this is an activity that properly takes place in the liminal privacy of the bush. In many houses, the larger room has been portioned again to create a small private "prayer room" (TP: *groto*), where there is an altar with fresh flowers (replaced daily), small statues of Catholic saints or the Virgin Mary, and poster-sized religious pictures of Jesus and Mary on the walls. Larger temporary altars are built under the house to accommodate the numbers of people who attend the Charismatic Catholic group's healing and prayer sessions.

The symbolic heart of the domestic dwelling remains the hearth, which, paradoxically, is not always located in a dwelling. In the house, the hearth is built on a bed of sand to the right of the entrance. A hearth may also be situated on the verandah, and when traveling, women install their hearth on the platform of their outrigger canoe. The hearth may also be located in a cook house that is either attached or separate from the house itself. In essence, the hearth exists wherever a woman is, and no matter where it is located, the hearth is the center of domestic life from which comes comfort, companionship, warmth, and cooked food (see also Mascio 1995:146–148). Only women and girls cut and carry firewood—an ongoing chore to keep up with fuel needs—which is stored outside and underneath the house. Inside the house, built over the hearth, is a platform called a *golou* used for storing mangrove wood, which over time becomes tinder dry and blackened by heat and smoke from the hearth. *Golou* wood is used only to benefit others—as a

gift to warm the dying, cure the sick, or speed the recovery of a woman who has given birth. A gift of *golou* wood must be reciprocated publicly by the recipient with a gift of wealth, usually during firstborn or mortuary ceremonies. A woman with a supply of *golou* wood earns renown as a "true woman": one who works hard, plans beyond her immediate needs, and is considerate of others.

As a wife, a woman is both the primary source and the guardian of a man's wealth; a man without a wife is deemed truly disadvantaged, his social status reduced to that of an unmarried youth. One widower told me that without a wife he was truly impoverished; he had no one to look after his shell money, pigs, and other wealth and no one to generate more wealth. Pigs are the most visible sign of a family's wealth. Without a wife to feed, tend, and domesticate them, pigs become feral at best, or at worst they die. Unmarried males are described as analogous to feral pigs. Like wild pigs that forage in other people's gardens, single males do not eat food produced in their own gardens but depend on their mothers and sisters to feed them. Like wild boars that impregnate domesticated female pigs in the bush, unmarried males are depicted as wholly concerned with trying to seduce village women into the bush for sexual liaisons. Pigs are destructive and aggressively dangerous; they are of value to humans only when domesticated by women for exchange purposes or transformed on the hearth fire into cooked pork. Similarly, unmarried males with "wild eyes" are of little value to themselves or to society until they are transformed into socially productive men and husbands by their wives. Just as women feed and tame pigs in order to domesticate them, thus transforming them into objects of value, women as wives domesticate males by feeding them and providing them with a home and children, thus transforming them into men and persons with social value (see also Goodale 1985). Contrary to the notion stated earlier that houses are "containers of women and wealth," the importance of the domestic dwelling is not the house or structure, it is the woman.

The dwelling house encompasses the domestic unit or household, the locus of production and consumption. Household composition, which varies according to people's circumstances and predilections, usually consists of a woman, her dependent children and elders, and her husband. The household is headed by the wife, who centralizes household resources and oversees their production, allocation, and disbursement. The wealth—mats, pots, wooden bowls, shell money, ceremonial regalia—that she and her husband have jointly produced is stored within the house, and although he has access to it, a husband should not remove any item for gift giving or exchange purposes without first consulting with his wife and obtaining her consent to the transaction. Women generate wealth through their kin, their trade friends,

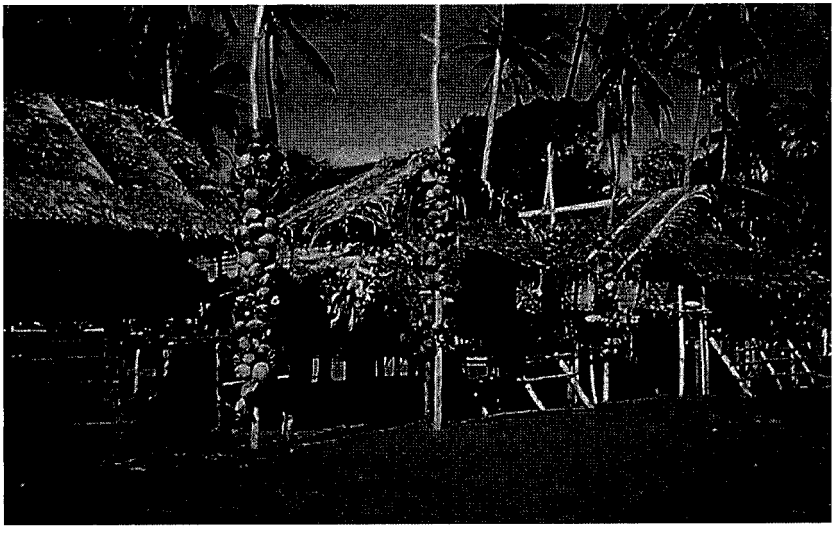

FIGURE 1. **Domestic dwelling with coconut poles.** (© 1982 N. M. McPherson)

and most especially through their own bodies in productive and reproductive labor. Bariai women are recipients of wealth and of real property in their own right, and they have a crucial role in the socioeconomic prestige system. Although it is a male role to transact publicly the distribution of ceremonial wealth, Mr. Ngauma Geti, a village elder, frequently observed to me that "without women, men's work [ceremonial exchange and performance] would be impossible." While the men's house is the focus and venue of public ceremonials, the long-term planning, preparation, and production of the wealth ceremonially transacted by males is accomplished within the domestic domain. In the privacy of the woman's house, the wife-husband team plans the size and number of gardens needed for daily subsistence and for ceremonial occasions. They also assess their resources in pigs and material wealth, how to increase their wealth, and among whom it should be disbursed during firstborn and mortuary ceremonies and exchanges.

The role of women as producers and the importance of the domestic domain is highlighted during these ceremonies with the ostentatious display of accumulated household wealth. Fifteen-foot (5 m) poles are erected next to the domestic dwelling to hold the hundreds of coconuts needed for food preparations (see Figure 1). The huge, specially built display platforms are heaped with taro, yams, and other garden produce destined to be either distributed raw as gifts or cooked as feast food. Pigs to be consumed or exchanged during the ceremony are trussed under the house for everyone to

count and admire. A wife is entirely responsible for organizing and overseeing the work units, consisting of her daughters, sisters, and female cognates and affines, who prepare and cook the food and pork she has amassed for consumption during the ceremonies. The public display of wealth outside a woman's dwelling attests to her personal and productive strength and prestige. A "good" husband acknowledges the crucial role of his wife in ceremonial work by publicly presenting her with a pig that she may dispose of at her own discretion, usually as gifts of cooked pork that she gives to her female kin as compensation for their labor on her behalf.

Womanhood is a complex status achieved through productivity and reproductivity, and a "true" woman is one who excels at productive activities such as gardening and generously laboring for and on behalf of others. Besides these productive activities, women (and women's houses) are associated with the generative processes of reproduction. Females, as an ideal category, are described as being "like spirit beings" in the sense that female genitals are the dark and mysterious hidden source of creation: the embodiment of an autochthonous power to create new life. The birth process is grounded in a corpus of exclusively female knowledge and expertise and, regardless of actual location, takes place in an exclusively female space. This birth process is homologous to the male process of (re)producing and bringing forth spirit beings from within the exclusively male space of the men's house. Men forbid women to be involved when they "deliver" the power of spirit beings into the men's houses; for similar reasons, women forbid men to be present during childbirth, when female generative powers are at their most potent and dangerous (see McPherson 1994b). There is no question here of males appropriating female generative processes or of one being derivative or symbolic of the other. Both women and men are involved in generative processes, each within their own secret-sacred place and each exclusive of the other, yet neither existing without the other.

In precontact times, when houses were built on the ground, women gave birth in their domestic dwelling, and this building was even more closely homologous to the men's house where spirit beings are brought forth into the public domain. With the colonial stipulation that houses must be built on stilts, persons and things under the house are now at risk from the symbolically "hot" fluids of parturition falling through the floorboards. Actual or proximate contact with these vital essences can nullify the efficacy of things such as nets or traps, and cause men, women, children, and domestic animals to sicken or die. In order to protect others from such powerful contamination, a woman will give birth in a ground-level outbuilding such as her cook house, in a small temporary lean-to hastily constructed by her husband for the purpose, or even, as one experienced woman did, in the bush behind her

house. Once the child is born, mother and infant bathed, and the afterbirth buried or disposed of in the sea, anyone can enter the now-desacralized birth place. After three or four days, when the blood of parturition has ceased to flow, mother and child return to her house.[14]

Although not practiced for at least fifty years, a mother and her firstborn child were once secluded for some weeks inside the domestic dwelling in a temporarily partitioned area called *ele vovo*, "her butterfly." Constructed of split-bamboo woven screens with butterfly-wing-shaped doors, the room was a symbolic cocoon. Neither mother nor infant was seen by anyone except the woman's own mother, who entered the room to deliver the food, firewood, and water provided by her enatic kin. The Bariai describe the neonate as helpless, infirm, and incontinent, analogous to the very old when they become decrepit and near death. Indeed, a neonate's pale skin is likened to that of a ghost, denoting its closer relationship with spirit beings and the dead than with living human beings. Mother and firstborn were kept secluded in the butterfly room for several weeks to protect the child from malevolent influences and to keep its tenuous soul substance (B: *tautau*) from slipping away. No one saw mother or child; the new mother left the room secretly at night to bathe and relieve herself. During seclusion the infant lost its newborn appearance as it became more and more a part of the human domain and further removed from the realm of spirits.[15] Senior Bariai women and men refer to the secrecy and seclusion of the birth hut and the now-defunct butterfly room as homologous to the secrecy and seclusion of the men's house when spirit beings are in residence there.

The custom of seclusion in the butterfly room is now defunct. However, the importance of the firstborn child (regardless of its sex) as a symbol of cosmological continuity and parental renown continues to be celebrated in seventeen ceremonies performed in honor of the firstborn child. The locus of fifteen of these ceremonies is the domestic dwelling, and their focus is the firstborn child and its mother. Interrelated concepts of generation and regeneration are deeply embedded in the symbolism of the men's house, which is central to mortuary ceremonies in which firstborn children, spirit beings, and competitive pig exchanges feature prominently.

Men's Ceremonial Houses

Traditionally, the men's house was a meeting and sleeping place for men, youths, and boys above the age of ten years and the place of exclusively male secret-sacred activities and publicly performed ceremonies. Although the men's house continues to be an exclusively male domain, nowadays men sleep, eat, and spend most of their leisure time in the company of their wives

and children in the domestic dwelling. Boys too old to sleep in their mother's house now construct a youth clubhouse, separate from the men's house, in which to sleep and socialize in a masculine environment.[16] While exclusively masculine, the youth clubhouses have no ritual or sacred associations; they are built like the domestic dwelling and are located in the midst of the women's houses rather than near the men's house. Senior men decry and lament the shift in custom, blaming much that is wrong in their world today, such as more friable spousal relations and incidents of illness and sorcery, on the fact that men sleep in women's houses. However, they are grateful that the boisterous, loud, and at times disrespectful behavior of the youths occurs outside the men's house.

Although the men no longer reside there, the men's house continues to be the locus of autochthonous powers that are contained in such things as the carvings of mythical beings on the main support structures, in special stones brought from origin places high in the mountains, in the spirit beings manifested during ceremonials, or simply in the fearful potency of the magical bundles and relics stored there by the membership. Though not enforced in living memory, tradition retains the threat of death to a woman who transgresses the boundaries of the men's house. Custom prescribes that such a woman would be killed and "eaten" by resident spirit beings, her jawbone flung into the central plaza as a lesson to others. Women discreetly look away when passing the men's house, and children learn at a young age not to play near the building. In 2003, there were no standing men's houses in Kokopo village; all had been demolished since the last round of mortuary ceremony. Despite this, men continued to have important community meetings on the ground where the men's house will be rebuilt.

Contemporary men's houses continue to be built directly on the ground with traditional tools and techniques. They are always located on the bush side (never on the ocean side) of the road that runs parallel to the beachfront bisecting the village in order for the front entrance to face the main road cum dance plaza and the rear doorway to exit directly into the bush. During ceremonies, the sides and rear of the men's house are hidden by a high palm-leaf palisade so that autochthonous beings and paraphernalia associated with their manifestation can be moved secretly in and out of the building via the rear door. Cordyline plants, symbols of the dead and of autochthonous spirit beings, are planted to create a spatial boundary around the men's house.

The interior of each men's house is spatially divided into a number of named sections, representing clan affiliations, marked by a hearth and sleeping platforms. Each section is the private domain of a particular set of kin. Men claim association with a particular lineage by tracing their cognatic relations to the lineage with which they wish to align themselves. Each member

of a men's house unit claims all other members as kin and actively resides on land belonging to the clan group. The men's house group communally exerts rights in and control over group resources including garden and bush land (including timber rights), sea and reef resources, sago-palm swamps, and inherited ceremonial artifacts and designs that decorate the men's house as well as particular spirit beings and the paraphernalia used during their manifestation. The men's house is often used as a dormitory for visiting men, but the primary function of the contemporary men's house, as a social institution, is to ensure the proper and timely performance of ceremonials in honor of deceased kin and firstborn children. The success of these undertakings reflects on the overall renown and prestige of the related lineages represented by the men's house.

Although the dead are no longer buried in its floor, the men's house continues to be the ideological and focal point of mortuary ceremonies that take place at intervals of five or more years. The beginning of a new mortuary cycle is marked by the final demise of the old men's house. Buildings, like human beings, have life cycles. An old men's house is an expression of the degeneration and decay of the aging and dying processes that the living experience and the deceased have fully accomplished. From the closure of the previous mortuary cycle, the men's house is left to decay. No repairs are made to the building. The thatch dries and bleaches gray, painted external decorations fade, and the framework, or "bones," sags and falls apart. The structure becomes more fragile and decrepit over time, like human beings. Indeed, for humans, a "good death" is one where an individual lives a long life, becomes bent over with extreme old age, and finally dies when one's "bones break," thus permitting one's soul substance to escape. The men's house too degenerates, and when a new cycle commences, it is finally broken up and dismantled, then cremated like the corpses it once housed. Clearly, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones suggest, when "body and house . . . serve as metaphors for each other, it may sometimes seem unclear which is serving as metaphor for which—house for body or body for house" (1995:43).

The reconstruction of a men's house is accomplished by men from other hamlets and villages who are cognatically related to the deceased or the firstborn children to be honored. Building a new men's house is a very expensive undertaking since the various components of the building must be erected by work groups and specialists (in carving, for example), who must be compensated for their labor with cooked food, shell money, and/or live pigs. Individual members of the men's house are responsible for accumulating this wealth. Since a firstborn's bloodletting rite (ear piercing or superincision) must take place "on top of the dead," that is, during mortuary ceremonies, the economic and ritual burden falls largely on the parents of a firstborn. Par-

ents sponsoring their firstborn's bloodletting ceremony cannot do so without the requisite mortuary ceremonies, which, in turn, necessitate financing and organizing the construction of the men's house, the regalia and personnel to support the spirit beings who reside in the men's house for the duration of the ceremonies, the massive pig exchanges and the weeks of feasting and dancing with spirit beings, and, if the firstborn is a girl, the construction of her ceremonial seclusion house (B: *kailanga*). All of this financing and organizing is done by the wife and husband team within the domain of the domestic dwelling. The erection of a new men's house is an occasion when virtually the total population of the Bariai District gathers in one location. Those not actively involved in the construction come simply to be part of the drama and excitement, to partake of the feast prepared and distributed by the wives and daughters of the men's house, and to pass judgment on every detail of custom and tradition.

Construction can only begin when sufficient wealth has been accrued and the appropriate building materials have been prepared. The trees and vines used in construction are cut, dressed, and stockpiled in the bush until the day specifically allocated for construction to begin. With the exception of pulleys and some heavy-gauge fiber rope, the men's house is constructed without benefit of imported tools and equipment. For weeks expert carvers live apart in the bush, carving and painting images of powerful spirit beings in the shape of mythic beings such as Moro, the half-man, half-snake culture hero, on the two "male" support posts.[17] These new carvings are extremely potent and are kept covered with pandanus mats so women and children will not see and be affected by them. The old support posts, similarly carved with images of Moro or other mythic figures, are fully exposed but empty of power; thus desacralized, they pose no danger to women and children who see them. (Indeed, they are even used for firewood.) Other mythic beings intended for viewing are carved in the shape of clan emblems such as fish or birds on the end of poles that lie on the top plate and the ridgepole and extend beyond the wall to overlook the plaza.

The workers dig two 6-foot-deep foundation holes, lined up about 10 feet apart, one for each 25 to 30 foot tall "male" support post. The parents of a firstborn are responsible for commissioning the posts, each of which costs them two pigs: one to a work group to dig the hole, the second to a different work group to stand up the post. Once erected, the center posts support the ridgepole, which gives the building its characteristic high-vaulted roof. The ridgepole is about three feet in diameter with holes drilled at either end to fit over the pegs carved at the top of the "male" posts. Winching the ridgepole into place is the most delicate and dangerous aspect of construction. Until the very recent past, male lore maintained that powerful spirit beings built

the men's house, and all women and children were sent away from the village on the day the men "pulled" the spirits from the bush into the village to erect the building. If there was a fatal accident during construction, the dead man was buried immediately, unmourned, at the base of the "male" posts and his kin were advised he had been "eaten" by the spirit beings. Since the likelihood of accident was high, men who are firstborns were (and still are) prohibited from participating in the more-dangerous jobs of standing up the "male" support posts and raising the ridgepole. The men's house construction I witnessed in 1983 was the first such occasion on which women and children were not sent from the village and could witness the construction process. Unlike me, village women stayed away from the construction site, and if they had to pass the site for any reason, they walked by with their eyes averted. Women were as discomfited about being in the vicinity while the men's house was going up as the men (especially elders) were discomfited by their presence. Although there were no injuries, there were construction problems that senior men vociferously blamed on the presence of women.

Once the ridgepole is in place, three decorated poles called "child of the ridgepole" (B: *udud inat*) are lashed in place, one on top of and one on either side of the ridgepole. These poles run the length of the building and are arranged so that the carved and painted figures on one end of the poles extend beyond the ridgepole to oversee the plaza in front of the men's house. With the two "male" support posts, the ridgepole, and the three decorated poles in place, the framework for the walls and ceiling is quickly completed. As in the domestic dwelling, the several evenly spaced posts that make up the perimeter of the building and provide structural integrity are called *kadanga taine*,"female posts." Over the next few weeks, the men's house members work to complete their new building. They construct the walls and floors, and they sew the sections of thatch for the roof and tie them in place. When the building is complete, they meet to decide what type of decorations should adorn the exterior. These decorations might be either designs painted on the exterior walls or carved posts that stand on either side of the front entranceway. Both types represent spirits or mythic figures that are the owned designs of the paternal kin of firstborn children whose blood will be spilled "on top of the dead" at the upcoming mortuary ceremonies (B: *ololo kapei*).

Before its reconstruction, the Bariai liken the previous men's house to an old man. Human potential is only realized by expenditures of vital essences in procreation and production, processes that deplete the life force and contribute to the aging and dying process. Thus, the old men's house framework (bones) becomes fragile and weak, its exterior (skin) faded and dry, and its power (membership) diminished through decay and loss (old age and death). The new building, when it is completed and decorated, is referred to as a

youth, an *iriau*.[18] Like a young man in his prime, the new men's house is strong and straight, its exterior fresh and beautifully decorated, its power regenerated: it is at the peak of its potential. This phase of the human life cycle, from the beauty of youth to adult domestic maturity, is mirrored by the new men's house, and the next phase of mortuary work does not begin for several months or years after the men's house is completed. In the interim, the building itself matures—the brilliant green of thatch ripens to a mellow brown color, the bright paint on external decorations and mythic figures fade, the exposed white wood of the framework weathers and grays with age.

While the men's house ripens, the men concern themselves with the secret-sacred work of (re-)creating and (re)presenting the spirit beings that preside over mortuary and firstborn ceremonial. Spirit beings are autochthonous, primal powers. In order for human beings to appropriate that power to their own ends, it must be called forth and made manifest in material objects. Within the surrounding forest, men spend weeks creating the masks that will materially "house" the spirit beings who are "pulled" into the men's house and then presented in a public forum. This is in many respects analogous to the procreative process. The spirit beings are given form/incubated in the "womb" of the men's house, after which they are "delivered" by men and presented to society from within the men's house.

It is an awesome and solemn occasion when the *aulu* spirit beings first exit the men's house. These beings are exemplars of powerful nonhuman forces brought into the realm of human existence and enterprise. As personifications of an undifferentiated chthonian force, spirit beings simultaneously represent creation and destruction, the life-death continuum. The *aulu* only make their appearance at the point in the ceremonial cycle when firstborn and mortuary ceremonials conjoin. The *aulu* spirit beings are considered to be youths, at the peak of their productive and reproductive capacities; their very presence holds the promise of continuity in the face of the finality of death. They are also memento mori whose presence reminds people of their deceased kin and of death itself; indeed, the *aulu* are accompanied by another spirit figure, *aulu asape*, the "widow" spirit being. The *aulu* always dance in pairs, except the *aulu asape*, who dances on her own, and there can be any number of pairs presented by the men's house. These spirit beings preside over the bloodletting rites of firstborn children, who directly link the past and deceased ancestors with the present generation and are the promise of future generations.

Firstborn Ceremonial Houses

While the men's house matures, the men work in secret areas in the bush to create *aulu* masks and regalia, and practice the music and dances to be per-

formed with the *aulu*. Parents of a firstborn to be honored must construct a special house for their child's bloodletting rite. For a girl, this rite once entailed having her earlobes cut and then elongated by the insertion into the incision of gradually larger and larger tubes of rolled ginger leaves or rounds of bamboo so that, over time, the lobe stretched to touch her shoulder. Boys underwent superincision. If the firstborn is female, she is secluded in a ceremonial house called a *kailanga*. In the past, firstborn girls were secluded for weeks in their *kailanga*, where a combination of overfeeding, inactivity, and lack of exposure to the sun made them plump and pale-skinned, both characteristics aesthetically valued as beautiful.[19] Nowadays, a firstborn girl stays in seclusion for the ten or fifteen days immediately after having her ears pierced.[20]

Referred to as a "female men's house," the firstborn girl's *kailanga* combines the features of a woman's house in its shape and lack of vaulted roof and the features of a men's house with its decorations, carvings, and ceremonial function. Built in front of or beside the girl's mother's house rather than her father's men's house, the *kailanga* is a smaller replica (about six feet square) of a domestic dwelling. It is raised about ten feet or higher off the ground, perched atop a single male support post (the *kadanga aranga* of the men's house). The post usually bears a carving of an animal spirit being or of Moro, the snake-man culture hero and mythic creator of firstborn and mortuary ceremonies who often adorns the "male" posts inside the men's house. Also, as for the men's house, parents of the firstborn must compensate others (usually the child's male maternal kin) who collect the building materials and erect the building, decorate the exterior with descent-group designs, and carve the mythic figures on the support post. This is a costly undertaking in food, wealth, and pigs. As with the men's house, *kailanga* are left standing for months after the firstborn/mortuary ceremonies have been completed, gradually falling apart, until eventually the child's parents have sufficient pigs to compensate a kinsman who will desacralize, remove, and burn the decrepit structure.

The firstborn bloodletting rites occur near the end of the mortuary ceremonies, which then culminate in massive pig exchanges. Two or three days before their ear-piercing rite, firstborn girls enter the seclusion house, where they are protected from negative influences by the power inherent in the carvings and painted motifs that decorate the house and represent their clan's totemic powers (B: *mirmir*). Each firstborn girl and boy is accompanied throughout the rite by a named pair of *aulu* spirit beings. The *aulu* take the children to the area where they will be cut, and after the ear piercing or superincision, the spirit beings return the firstborn girls to their ceremonial houses and the firstborn boys to the men's house, where they are secluded for several days while their wounds heal. Sexually active women and men must

avoid the firstborn houses, and each girl is attended by virginal or celibate "guardians" who are unmarried girls and thus (ideally) not sexually active or by pregnant women whose pregnancy has advanced to the stage where they must abstain from sexual intercourse. In either case, the attendants are uncontaminated by the aura of sexual intercourse, and thus they cannot pollute the vulnerable firstborn. While secluded in the *kailanga*, the girls are given food and drink only once each twenty-four hours to keep the need for elimination to a minimum. Girls enter and leave the house via a ladder under cover of darkness to attend to their bodily functions. Their heads are covered with a pandanus mat to protect their cut ears should they inadvertently meet with a contaminated person or the malevolent glance of a sorcerer.

The treatment of firstborn girls is more elaborate and expensive than that for firstborn boys. The girl child is symbolic of the female generative principle; she is the exemplar of ancestral and parental essence in the present, and as a wife-to-be, she is the "mother" of future generations and the nexus through whom numerous social relations are made possible. Even though a child herself, the firstborn girl is an exemplar of "true womanhood," and her special treatment is essentially a celebration of femaleness and womanhood. When the cycle of firstborn and mortuary ceremonies is completed, the spirit beings are sent back into their spirit domain, and all the regalia is burned. Both the men's house and the firstborn girls' *kailanga* are left to deteriorate and are eventually removed.

Conclusion

The fact that places and spaces are gendered and that gender itself is embodied suggests that structures labeled "men's" or "women's" represent emplaced gender concepts and relations. The Bariai speak of houses as bodies, attribute to houses a life cycle analogous to the human life cycle, and discuss how men labor to birth spirit beings in the men's house and women (classified as spirit beings) labor to birth human beings in women's houses. Bariai conceive of men's houses and women's houses, these gendered places and emplaced genders, as homologous. In Bariai villages, the men's ceremonial house dominates the scene by its sheer size, its high vaulted roof, elaborate decorations, and by virtue of the ceremonial objects stored there, its aura of mystery and power. During periodic ceremonial performances, the men's house does take on spectacular symbolic value and content, especially while spirit beings are resident there. But during the months and years between ceremonial cycles, the men's house sits moribund, unattended and untenanted, no more than a dormitory for visiting males or a sanctuary for husbands during marital strife. The houses of women, by contrast, are the locus of

gender relations, the constant center of daily life, both socially and personally, and the center of production of the wealth that supports the extravagant ceremonies for firstborn children and the dead. Only when firstborn and mortuary ceremonies converge does the men's house again come into its own as a place where human beings and spirit beings cohabit. Even then, however, the continuity of cosmic forces, separated and differentiated with the creation of human beings from an *asi* stick, are not symbolized by either the men's house or the women's house since both are mirrored in the firstborn girl's *kailanga* and enacted when the first child born of the domestic dwelling dances with a spirit being born of the men's house.

NOTES

1. This essay is based on twenty-eight months of field research in the Bariai District of West New Britain Province during 1981, 1982–1983, 1985, and 2003, financially supported by research grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Okanagan University College Grants-in-Aid of Research. My thanks also to David Counts, Dorothy Counts, Bil Thurston, Rik Goulden, Leslie Butt, Wende Marshall, and anonymous reviewers for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay. I am especially grateful to Anne E. Allen for convening the symposium out of which this essay developed and for her comments on previous drafts. Thanks to Judith Ingerman for her companionship and assistance during the 2003 fieldwork. I extend my deepest gratitude to the Bariai, who shared their space and their place with me.

2. There has been the rare occasion (recorded in genealogies but only once in living memory) when a firstborn woman would "become like a man" and take on the rights and privileges of a man, including entry into the men's house. Compare a similar situation among the neighboring Kove in Chowning 1978.

3. The name Upuda is from the Bariai word *pu*, "origin, base, fundament," and the possessive pronoun *da*, "our."

4. In some versions of this myth, Upuda's rock is identified as Mount Sakaili (shown on maps of New Britain as Mount Schrader), a volcanic mountain that hovers majestically behind the Bariai coast.

5. The *asi* is a species of tree favored for use as friction sticks for producing fire. Rubbing sticks together to create sparks or fire is a metaphor for sexual intercourse.

6. Although interspersed with elements adapted from the Christian creation myth of Adam and Eve, the myth goes on to explain how a major conflict among the fifty men's houses (caused by a spirit being seducing a woman/wife) results in the dispersal of peoples and languages that currently exist throughout New Britain. In the myth, there is no mention of "women's houses," and the story seems to imply that everyone lived communally in the men's ceremonial houses. Perhaps the seduction of a woman by a spirit being in the communal house also resulted in residential sexual segregation and the banishment of women from men's houses, though this is speculation on my part.

7. This end-of-the-world concept or "cosmological unraveling" is also discussed by E. Scheiffelin, who notes that the first white men in the Papuan Plateau were associated with the mythic figure Guni's "light-skinned children from the east." He continues: "If Guni returned . . . all the peoples and species that had gone their separate ways after her departure would also flow back to the origin point. That which was accomplished in the Origin time would then be undone and the world would come to an end" (1991:67).

8. At this mythic time, senior men told me, the subsequent battle between human beings and spirit beings also resulted in the latter removing themselves to the periphery of the human domain. Occasionally, during the brief moments of a sunset, humans can catch a glimpse of spirit beings. However, knowledgeable men can access the powers of the spirit-beings by drawing these beings into the men's house, where their powers, made manifest through sound, song, and dance, are manipulated to serve human ends.

9. I have discussed the importance of the domestic dwelling in long-distance trade relations elsewhere (McPherson, 2003).

10. In the past, any man who went into the women's latrine area would be apprehended and speared to death in the men's house; today he risks ridicule, gossip, and speculation about his masculinity.

11. Early patrol reports for northwest New Britain, especially those written by Ian Mack, are a wealth of ethnographic information that permits us to view change over time. Mack's 1931 report was written fifty years before I began fieldwork in the Bariai District and is an invaluable historical record. Mack gives a complete breakdown of the villages: their locations, population, birth/death ratios, age and marital status, rates of polygyny, and ratio of males to females (what he called the "Masculinity of Population"). Table 1 is adapted from

TABLE 1. **Populations, Village Size, and Housing**

Village	Total Population	Women's Houses	Men's Houses	Polygynists
Akonga	67	12 (no data)	2	1
Alaido	81	16 (15)	1	2
Autie[a]	26	4	1	0
Gurissi	58	8 (10)	1	0
Bambak	75	13 (12)	1	1
Kakassi[a]	24	3	1	0
Kairi[a]	42	7	1	0
Kokopo	59	10 (17)	2	2
Malasonga	38	7	1	0
Marika	63	12 (7)	1	2
Namaramanga	54	8	1	0
Natamo[a]	38	6	1	2
Nourapua[a]	55	10	1	0
Tavelliai	47	10	1	0
Togolakrum[a]	58	8	1	1

Sources: Mack 1931; Leabeater 1950.

[a] Village did not exist or had amalgamated with other villages when I visited in 1981.

his 1931 patrol report. Figures in parentheses are supplied from a 1950 patrol report by T. J. Leabeater, cadet patrol officer.

12. There should have been four men's houses for four hamlets, but the fourth descent group was reduced to two brothers and their spouses and children. Too small a group to have a men's house of their own, the descent group had a space allocated to them within another men's house.

13. In 1982, one member of my adoptive family, who lived next door to me, built a "modern" two-story house for his wife; unfortunately, the upper floor was blown away in the monsoon season.

14. Since the advent of the Maternal and Child Health Clinic at Cape Gloucester in 1982, some fifty kilometers by sea from the central villages in the Bariai area, traditional reproductive strategies have been under pressure to change. Village women are encouraged to adopt a Western medical model of childbirth and to deliver their babies in a clinical environment. For a more detailed discussion of this issue and concepts of womanhood, see McPherson 1994b.

15. The child's debut into society takes place on the occasion of its naming ceremony, the first of the series of seventeen firstborn ceremonies. It can take twenty years for parents to perform all firstborn ceremonies. Some parents never do accomplish them all, which affects their relative socioeconomic status. No ceremonies comparable to firstborn ceremonies are performed for secondborn and subsequent children.

16. I know of only one "girls' clubhouse," which had been constructed on the periphery of the village. The young women who slept in the clubhouse were harassed by boys and young men, and after one teenaged girl was allegedly raped and attempted suicide because she felt shamed, the girls' clubhouse was dismantled, and the girls returned to their mothers' houses to sleep.

17. On the legend of Moro, see McPherson 1994a.

18. *Iriau* is also a general term for "spirit, spirit being."

19. Among the Kove, this seclusion house is called *luma-galiki,* and "Galiki is the nickname for all girls in seclusion" (Chowning 1978:213 n8). "Galiki" is the name the Bariai give only to all firstborn girls and to females, such as myself, who are formally given the status (and the rights and obligations) of a firstborn female child.

20. Pressure from Catholic missionaries has resulted in a rejection of the traditional beautification process as barbaric; modern young people favor simple ear piercing, and nowadays girls (and boys) have their ears pierced in the Western manner.

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