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DANGEROUS WOODS AND PERILOUS PEARL SHELLS

The Fabricated Politics of a Longhouse in Pangia, Papua New
Guinea

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Abstract

This article approaches the analysis of ambivalence in exchange relations between groups in the Pangia area of the Southern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea from an unusual angle: the structure and materials of a ceremonial longhouse constructed to house participants in a gift-giving occasion. The sponsor of the feast declared that it was to mark peace and alliance with neighbors, but one of the recipients noted that the types of wood used in the building themselves carried threatening and competitive messages encoded non-verbally. Gifts of pearl shells and pork were similarly interpreted as double-sided: both to repair friendships and to declare enmities. The recipients themselves risked, from their point of view, death in accepting these perilous gifts from a longhouse consisting of 'dangerous woods'. The case study illustrates the possible disjuncture of interpretations of material acts and structures by differently positioned persons in the social arena.

Key Words ◆ gift ◆ longhouse ◆ modernity ◆ Pangia ◆ Papua New Guinea ◆ politics of tradition ◆ sorcery

CONTENTS AND INTENTS

Houses, like other artifacts, encode social messages, which may be complex and in part contradictory (Herzfeld, 1988). For example, spirit houses among the Abelam of Papua New Guinea may encapsulate both male and female elements, so that the interior of the house may be seen

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as a womb although the house's exterior is seen as male (Forge, 1966). The house is thus a condensed representation of a gendered world. In this article, we explore the complexities and contradictions of a particular house form in the Wiru-speaking area of the Southern Highlands Province in Papua New Guinea. The house-form we discuss was a special ceremonial and residential longhouse constructed both for a pig-killing festival and as a kind of 'cultural revival' in 1979–80. It can be seen both as a coded statement of political relations between groups and as a concomitant assertion of creativity on the part of its sponsor. The political message that was conveyed in it was a condensed expression of both alliance and hostility vis-a-vis surrounding groups. This expression, in turn, was framed historically and generationally, since the house was constructed notionally on the site of an earlier house and represented the regeneration of the male-centered political power of its builders. It therefore functioned in much the same way as elements of dance decorations do in many Highlands New Guinea societies, since these too convey messages that combine elements of hostility and alliance (Sillitoe, 1988). In Mount Hagen, for example, a combination of red and black elements in face painting can be seen as expressing both friendship and the ties of marriage that result in commonalities and flows of female blood, and hostility expressed in the charcoal faces of male warriors.

Such a combination of counterbalanced characteristics, reflecting a fundamental ambiguity of conjunction and disjunction in social relations, is a deeply characteristic mode of sociality in Highlands New Guinea, marked by political competition and fluctuations in power between groups and individuals. This ambiguity is a part of the oscillation of relations expressed in different modalities and temporal moments of exchange practices (Brown, 1980). As Marcel Mauss recognized, classic forms of the gift themselves partake of this duality of emphasis (Mauss, 1967 [1925]). The gift, in turn, may enter into sacrifices, since a sacrifice may be a 'total prestation' in the Maussian sense. Writing of sacrifice in the Sri Lankan context, Bruce Kapferer notes of the Suniyama rite that 'the sacrificial destruction of gifts and offerings in the rite is fundamental to the generative power of its ritual events' (Kapferer, 1997: 199). At the same time Kapferer speaks of the sacrificial 'gift as poisonous, as negating and separating, and as constitutive of relations and of life within the space of these relations' (1997: 199). This passage is highly pertinent to our overall argument here. The longhouse we describe entered into a nexus of relations expressed also in material gifts of pork and shells in decorations, and in flows of people and of lethal and creative forces between them. Kapferer's own general model of Sinhala sorcery, that it expresses, phenomenologically and existentially, the contradictory nexus of powers of creation and destruction between people, could equally function as our general model here. At stake, however, is also the question of whether

there is any wider sense of order created beyond the oscillating alternation, or even simultaneity, of alliance and hostility between persons. Kapferer refers to the 'hierarchical unity' of existence in this regard (1997: 199). And, writing in a similar vein on values expressed in houses among the Tanimbarese of Eastern Indonesia, Susan McKinnon declares that we need to move away from 'singular, substantive categorizations' and to grasp the fact that the values of different forms are 'derived from their explicit opposition to one another within a common system of relations' (McKinnon, 1995: 172). She refers at the end of her paper to 'the forces that anchor the source of life and those that foster its growth and expansion' (1995: 188), seeing these as adding up to 'hierarchical order' (1995: 188). It seems likely that this appeal to hierarchy by both Kapferer and McKinnon may reflect the actual salience of hierarchy in the societies they discuss. For Highlands New Guinea, hierarchy is much less in evidence, and instead the principle of 'alternating disequilibrium' (Strathern, 1971: 11) appears to hold sway.

The novelty of our argument here resides first in its application to an aspect of architectural construction. We have surveyed the readily available literature on the theme of 'longhouse construction' in a range of fringe Highlands, Papuan Plateau, and Strickland-Bosavi societies, and find that while all descriptions carefully delineate the internal partitions along lines of gender, age, and marital status in these houses, no discussion indicates anything about the types of *wood* used for the buildings nor says anything about the symbolization of external relations that may be expressed in house construction or form. Our account appears therefore to be a 'first' in this regard.

Second, a further novel part of our argument lies in the link between the house seen as a focus of *regeneration* and the house seen as a focus of *inter-group relations* (compare McKinnon, 1995 on sources of life versus sources of expansion). This link has not been explicitly foregrounded in the literature. J. Weiner, for example, has pointed out the regenerative imagery surrounding the men's longhouse among the Foi (Weiner, 1988a: 23), and he notes that pearl shells used in the brideprice for marriages by headmen and lined up at longhouse sites were described as 'male eggs'. The condensed male/female imagery here may in fact encapsulate the overall Foi theory of social reproduction, although this does not appear to have been Weiner's main focus. In our argument it is the tension between internal regeneration and external alliances that produces the field of ritual 'statements' made in and through the longhouse.

Finally, we stress historicity. The longhouse we describe was built as an 'innovation' as well as a 'revival'. Its sponsor attempted to cast it in both indigenous and Christian terms. So far as we know, his ritual experiment has not been exactly repeated. But, occurring as it did in 1979–80 shortly after Papua New Guinea's Independence in 1975 and at the time

of the creation of the Provincial Government, it represented the Wiru people's own 'experimental moment', when they first began the long process of cultural bricolage that has been their response, and that of many others, to the problems and opportunities of 'modernity'. Whether this particular experiment has been repeated or not, its enactment and motivation exactly capture, in 'dangerous woods and perilous pearl shells' the dilemmas and risks to be negotiated in the search for a future that can neither be cut off from nor entirely continuous with the past.

ENTRY: UP THE LADDER

'Longhouse cultures' are proverbially known to exist in the Strickland-Bosavi region of Papua New Guinea, including for example the Gebusi (Knauft, 1985), the Etoro or Etolo (Kelly, 1977, 1993; Dwyer, 1990), the Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1976), and the Samo (Shaw, 1990, 1996). They are also found among such neighboring peoples as the Foi (Weiner, 1988a) and the Daribi (Wagner, 1967). Two general features of these buildings are significant here: (1) they are architecturally more complex than other forms of dwelling-house that are built in these areas and are often two storeys high, constructed also for the purposes of collective defense and as a focus for ceremonial activities, while smaller buildings are used as individual garden-houses by particular families; and (2) in keeping with their ritual and political significance, their structure and internal subdivisions form a statement about social relations internal to the longhouse community itself, for example by a vertical or horizontal division between the genders, or by the way in which families or persons are allocated to sleeping places.

To take an example: J. Weiner reports that the Hegeso longhouse among the Foi people was bisected by a 'corridor of split black palm wood planks' called 'shield mother', indicating 'that the longhouse is a unit in warfare' (Weiner, 1988a: 83). Further, each fireplace was shared by two men who 'looked after each other', mostly close-lineage kin, such that if a father died a son took his place at the same hearth (1998a). Four fireplaces near the corners of the house were next to the main support posts of the house and these could be occupied only by headmen, seen thus as the supports for the community (1998a: 85). Men whose bridewealth had been sponsored by one of these headmen located their fireplaces near to their leader. Notionally there was a division between the factions of the two pairs of headmen expressed in these residential arrangements, and non-lethal fights could take place between these factions. Within the factions food and land were freely shared; between them, not. The men's longhouse was 'flanked by smaller individual women's houses on each side' (Weiner, 1988a: 23). About 50 per cent of marriages took place within segments of the longhouse community, and as these marriages were largely financed by the headmen through pearl

shell payments in bridewealth it is clear that the headmen and their shell wealth were seen as the male agents of the reproduction of the house itself, the larger pearl shells being referred to as 'male eggs'.

Longhouses were also rebuilt at generational intervals, 20 to 25 years, and the central support posts, made from hardwood trees, were transferred from the old houses to the new (Weiner, 1991: 185). Furthermore, the whole longhouse itself could be thought of as a reconstruction of the body of a mythical hero, the hunter Hanemene, and magical spells for putting in place its parts referred to each part as a part of his body (backbone, femur, toes, veins, rib cage, etc.); while each fireplace was ritually treated by burying in its sealing of clay bird feathers standing for another hero, Yibumena, said in spells to be 'sleeping with his arms and legs spread out' in the fireplace itself (Weiner, 1991: 188–90). We shall see some significant parallels to these details when we examine the data about the longhouse to be described here among the Wiru speakers of Pangia and its prototypes among the neighboring Kewa people.¹ In particular, the Wiru longhouse showed the same theme of 'regeneration' as the Hegeso house exhibited, but in addition it encapsulated external relations, as we have noted.

Houses of longhouse type were also built in Highlands cultural areas beyond the Strickland-Bosavi zone, for the explicit purpose of pig-killing festivities, as among the Kewa people, neighbors of the Wiru to their west (LeRoy, 1985a and b; MacDonald, 1991: 192). These Highlands peoples appear to have borrowed much of the symbolism of the 'Mountain Papuan' longhouses for their own political purposes, incorporating it into the structures of their own exchange and warfare-based polities and revealing the deeper connections of these practices with generationality, fertility, death, and warfare. The Wiru house to be described was of a type borrowed directly from the Kewa, who in turn had copied it from the 'Mountain Papuans', in Weiner's (1988b) term.

First, however, it is necessary to give a sketch of the context of social relations among the Wiru people into which the longhouse and the discourse surrounding it was set. The Wiru speakers of Pangia District, number some 15,000 people, living in grassland and forest areas mostly between 5500 and 3000 feet above sea level. They are horticulturalists and rearers of pigs like other New Guinea Highlanders, and their exchange system revolves around bridewealth, matrilateral, and death payments geared into the human life cycle, as well as compensation payments (called *kange*) derived from killings in warfare in the pre-colonial past (prior to 1960). Major settlements (*tumbea ta*) were in the past composed of collocations of smaller hamlets (*dendea ta*) whose members belonged to, or were attached to, segments of a dominant phratry defined by a narrative of common origins. In colonial times these large settlements were further nucleated by administrative command into census villages,



FIGURE 1 Placement of the rafters at early stage of construction



FIGURE 2 Internal view of main central corridor with residence places on either side. The builder is lashing cross-pieces together

which in the post-colonial period (since 1975) have tended to revert to their earlier, more dispersed form. The territories of these major settlements may be called parishes. They are political units with boundaries, either flexibly or rigidly fixed and marked by surveyors in colonial times. They form the basis of Local Government Council wards also.

Such parishes are divided by enmities and linked by alliances corresponding to old warfare patterns. Each parish had a number of allied parishes and another set of parishes with which there was enmity expressed in warfare. The two parishes primarily involved in our discussion here, Tunda and Mamuane, were enemies, each supported by sets of allies. Allies who helped in warfare and suffered losses had to be compensated with wealth, and in addition payments of wealth, in pigs and/or shell valuables, might be made directly by the killers to the kin of those whom they had killed, in order to reduce feelings of hostility and the likelihood of revenge being taken. Marriages take place between Tunda and Mamuane, but this does not abolish the historical traditions of enmity between these two contiguous parishes.

INSIDE THE BODY OF THE BUILDING

A longhouse was built in Mamuane parish during 1979–80 for a pig-killing festival (Figures 1–5). The structure was unusual and was made



FIGURE 3 External view of rafters and roof cross-pieces after trimming, and part-thatching of roof



FIGURE 4 Thatching in completion. A part remains to be trimmed at the edges

as an expression of complex social relations. Meanings attached to particular materials that were used to build the longhouse and the architectural forms themselves signaled particular social relations.

The builders were primarily older men who had last made a similar type of house when the Australian government station was opened in the Pangia area during early colonial times around 1960. These senior men took this opportunity in 1979 to teach the younger men the required methods needed to construct such a building and to help define for them some of the delineated relations with neighboring groups.

In April of 1980 two interviews were conducted with leading individuals who were involved with the



FIGURE 5 General view of the longhouse under completion, showing thatch, roof, and rafters at various stages

longhouse. The first informant was Kandi of Kaimari phratry, the dominant group in Mamuane parish, who was the primary person involved in the construction of the house. He was interviewed in Mamuane village in Pangia where the house was built and was a sponsor of the construction and associated exchanges. The second informant was Kapu from Peri phratry, the main group in Tunda parish, who was interviewed in Mandaiyawane hamlet within Tunda. Their stories reveal some of the contradictory meanings that the building held for the communities involved.

Kandi, the senior man who organized the house construction, said that his intention was to make friends of his enemies (*'tepe meadene tokou'*, 'I made to give them my stomach') and bring well-being to the area by stopping the use of sorcery² (*tomo, nakenea*, 'poison' and 'leavings' kinds of sorcery). He claimed to be doing this primarily for both the Peri and Kaimari people whom he wanted to honour, to bring them to make peace with each other, and to stop the practices of sorcery between these groups. He said, 'I thought that if I could build this house perhaps we would live together in peace and that is why I built it.'

The general name for this type of house is *pokou yapu*, because it is large, long, and has a verandah at both ends and is for the primary use of men. Its particular name is Dapanda, a term derived from the Kewa language in which it means 'men's house'. Kandi added that this house had been built in the customary way of his fathers and that there would be payments made to neighboring groups which would include shells and money, and that there would be a sacrificial killing of a small pig at the verandah of the house, made in connection with its erection. Kandi said: 'The knowledge of this came to me from my great-grandfather. Each father passed this knowledge down to his son. We took a tall *limbum* (black palm tree) and we cut it to make the walls on the inside (as in the Foi longhouse). *Api* wood was used for the *komo* (which marks the beginning of the verandah) and *komambi* (a kind of mountain moss) was used to line the top of the walls as a type of insulation'. Kandi said that he hoped the neighboring groups (e.g. Tunda and Kalue, see later) would follow his example and construct similar houses. (This, however, did not happen.)

Kandi described elaborately the materials used in the construction of the house, naming both the house-parts and the kinds of wood used for them. Most interestingly, the wood types and their provenances were socially significant, as Kapu explained after the visit to the longhouse itself (see later).

Kandi continued his narrative: 'Here is the point beyond which women may not go where an *api* wood log has been placed at either end of the house. The women can bring food to us only to this point but not beyond it. Men sleep in the house on occasion.' Inside of the house there

were small divisions or cells where pairs of men would sleep (Figure 6) – again the arrangement resembles that for the Foi. At this point the house was being used by some men on a sporadic basis but since the building had not been officially dedicated by the pig-kill it was not recognized fully as serving its community purpose. Kandi said that there would be a general pig-killing festival to celebrate the construction of the house and that the guests who gathered would be fed pork fat and liver and that there would also be a small sacrificial cooking inside the house itself of pork liver and stomach pieces, at which time the women and children would be invited to come inside the house for the first time and to sleep in this space along with the men of their families.

Kandi further explained that he had made some of the prestations associated with the building of the house earlier, detailing sets (*lu*)³ of pearl shells he had given to people of village groups to the south and west and others to more distant villages. He had not yet given to the people of three neighboring village areas, reserving these for a later time. All of these payments were compensations for killings that had happened in warfare before 1960, prior to colonial 'pacification'. Moreover, they were essentially payments to Kandi's allies who had helped the Mamuane people in warfare against the Peri of Tunda and their allies in pre-colonial times. The reason given for the payments was that when men of these places throughout the areas rebuilt their houses they would see the marks of charcoal where their fathers' houses had previously been burnt down in warfare. Then they would grieve, be angry again, and make sorcery against Kandi and his group. To make them desist from this course of action, wealth objects such as pearl shells had to be given to them.

The Peri informant, Kapu, discussed the Dapanda house further and the compensation payments, *kange*, associated with it, saying that



FIGURE 6 Lashing together the lianas (ropes) holding the firebox in a residential cell of the longhouse. Each man or pair of men, or men with families, would cook on a separate fire made in this way

Kandi saw his allies . . . had been killed during the time of warfare by Peri people [and so he decided to give shells to them]. When the Dapanda house was constructed people who came to see it saw the charcoal remains from the house that had been built previously. In the past, *kange* was given and now it is being repeated in a big *kange* of shells. These valuables were also given to Kandi's allies among the Kalue people. The Kapele were also allies to Kandi's group, therefore he gave them a *poya* (ally) payment because the Peri had killed some of their people. These gifts were not just for their mother's people or their cousins [i.e. matrilineal life-cycle payments] but for men who had been killed. As for us, the Peri, we also gave shells to these same people before because when they built new houses marks of the houses burnt down previously by us Peri would be seen and these marks would remind people of their fathers who had been killed in fighting and make them feel bad. Therefore, we gave them many shells so that they would not poison us or make leavings sorcery (*nakenea*) against us. Two of our Peri leaders individually gave money and shells for the same reason, a big payment was given. The recipients will not return *kai lunori* (pork rib cages)⁴ for these shells unless they too had killed some of our people. This is to make peace, to say *ame* (brother) to each other. These payments were not given for nothing but for *ali tono poiiko* [a warfare payment for the dead men's bones].

When these men give back pork to us later they will still be crying for the brothers and fathers that were killed and they will make *poi mokora* (hostile sorcery)⁵ to us with pork so that we too should die. Kandi also wanted to make *poi mokora* against us by constructing this house. He used *tomio*, *waluma*, *pangali*, and *pangio* wood for the posts (see later), he has thought these things in his mind (*wene*) and stomach (*tepe*) and is actually making *poi mokora* against us. We know these things because we have seen the wood that has been used although we did not go inside the house because of our shame [at knowing what Kandi was actually doing]. The house is named Dapanda which is a Kewa name, a Lapanda, it means something like '*kora-kenea*' (i.e. a cave).⁶ Kandi is saying, 'you burned my house and drove me out into caves, now I have returned to build this house, you try to build one so large! I fled and lived in open caves (Apenda) on the hills and now I have returned.⁷ I had to flee, and live in caves where bats and swiftlet birds defecate. Now I have returned after having thought about this for many years – now I am building my Kewa Lapanda.'⁸

Men like Kandi have 'power' in their stomachs and that is why he will not tell the true reasons for his actions – but we know. Just look, *tomio*, *pangali*, *wanio*, *pangio*, *wanu* posts. *Paru* and *tomio*, those are chosen against us 'to do us down' (*toro kaurakere*). *Paru* is forbidden to us.⁹ The other woods are chosen too because the same types grow in our various hamlets. Some were selected because they are names of our men. We name our children after these trees. *Tomio* is against us, we Peri are called *Tomio*. *Paru* is forbidden to us, we may not burn it for cooking. All these materials were chosen on purpose and we have noted their use in the building's construction.

Kapu further listed some of the other woods and materials used in the house and the significance of selecting them for use:

- *Api* as stated above was the wood used at the front entranceway. Another name for the wood is *Wanu* which is the name of a village with which Kandi's group was angry and they wanted to express their anger by using this wood.
- *T* was the wood used to strap the sides of the house together. The name of this wood was also the name of Kapu's father who was supposedly killed by a *poi mokora* pork 'gift' in previous years. Thus, its use signaled Kandi's continued hostility toward Kapu's family.
- *Komambi* is a moss. It was used as insulation/caulking between the walls and the roof. *Komambi* is also the name of a hamlet in a village of people who were enemies to Kandi's group and allied with Kapu's group, the Peri. Kapu said that the material had been used to make the men of *Komambi* hamlet and their allied partners angry, '*ali kiri tepe kamorokoa tiki*' (make their stomachs stand up).
- *Okoi rambe* is a tree bark that was flattened and used to cover the walls. It was obtained from two nearby parishes. The display of this material in the longhouse was said by Kapu to be a mark of hostility since pork had previously been given by these people to one of Kandi's allies who subsequently died from receiving this *poi mokora* 'gift'.

One month prior to the actual pig-kill event and pork distribution



a ceremonial distribution of lengths of sugar cane took place (Figure 7). This distribution indicated the amount of pork that was to be given to each recipient at the pig-kill that would follow several weeks later. This occurred after the distribution of pearl shells. Pearl shells represented a valuable wealth item at that time. Kapu's interpretation of the pearl shell distribution suggested that it too was aimed at making *poi mokora* against Kandi's enemies perhaps through the gestures of

FIGURE 7 Men accepting lengths of sugar cane presented prior to a prestation of pork



FIGURE 8 Tunda recipient at Mamuane pig-kill. His facial decoration represents the hornbill bird's beak (*kaila timini*). The 'nose' or beak is a mark of 'anger' in men



FIGURE 9 Tunda male recipients stand ready to enter the Mamuane longhouse area. They wear large baler shells on their chests and hold bows and arrows upright

handing them over or via hidden associations of the shells' individual names.

At the sugar-cane distribution occasion those who were going to receive larger distributions of pork or who wanted to express their allegiance to Kandi's group decorated themselves elaborately. Those who were more peripheral to the event or who were expressing bad feelings or disagreement with the organizers of the event did not decorate. Significantly, women did not decorate as they would on an occasion where alliance was being overtly expressed between the gathered groups. This occasion was rife with hostility and non-verbal threatening postures. The face decoration, *teke*, that was worn represented various birds and marsupials which were known to convey particular coded meanings about the level of hostility or fearlessness of the decorated individual. The spectators would comment on the overall decorations of the men (Figures 8 and 9). Those that were deemed to be well decorated were said to be going to live while those that were not were said to lack the support of their ancestors who provide a good appearance, and spectators suggested that this lack of ancestral support was a sign that the individual would die.

There was a procession of the participants to the ceremonial ground where the Dapanda longhouse stood (Figure 10). Six rows of men of different villages marched in. The man at the head of each row was one who had had a relative killed in warfare. Marching in this position expressed bravery and the desire to receive a large portion of pork. But there was an element of risk associated with this since receiving pork in this way could potentially kill the man just as if he had been hit by a weapon in warfare. Kapu said that his own father had been killed in this way when he received a large portion of pork by *poi mokora*. The pork had been too much for him to receive in his hands and it fell onto his body, knocking him back and frightening his soul. Three months later he was dead. Kapu said this was called '*kai-me oa tukanea*' (to kill speaking with a pig).¹⁰ The gift of pork is from one viewpoint a Maussian 'total prestation', marked by the giving of a 'whole pig'. But the pig is in fact cut in two and this severance of its unity makes it into a 'poisonous sacrifice' in Kapferer's terms, a combination of life-giving and life-destroying power.

EXIT

This narrative of the Dapanda longhouse reveals the contradictory meanings that were assigned to it in the accounts of its sponsor, Kandi, by comparison with those of an observer, Kapu. The contradiction derives unequivocally from the fact that Mamuane and Tunda villages (or parishes) had been bitter enemies in pre-colonial times, and the Peri men of Tunda had burnt down the houses of Mamuane in one particular

FIGURE 10 Men in procession, passing some of the food prepared for the occasion



phase of warfare. In an ostensibly pacified and Christian post-colonial Papua New Guinea Kandi wanted to stress that his aims were peaceful, and his verbal account accentuated this theme strongly. Kandi was also interested in responding to the suggestion that his building might receive assistance from the recently created National Cultural Council of Papua New Guinea as a cultural monument and thus bring money and prestige to himself and his group.¹¹ Certainly no building of this kind had been constructed in Pangia since at least 1967, and the design, as we have noted, was not that of the usual men's house among the Wiru, which is smaller and not raised so far from the ground, nor did it correspond to the kind of temporary longhouse shelters made for guests at pig-kills and called *ne-yapu*, 'food-houses', for storing vegetables and meat. Instead the design clearly relates to those of Strickland-Bosavi longhouses, or, more close to home for the Wiru, to the design of the *tapanda* men's houses also made for pig-kills among the neighboring Kewa. Kandi's house encoded both a pre-colonial borrowing between Strickland-Bosavi and Highlands cultures and a contemporary re-statement of hostile politics between the Peri and the Kaimari.

It was in this respect that the two narratives diverged sharply. Kandi verbally stressed peace. He was anxious to retrieve prestige he had partly lost by failing to be re-elected in a Local Government Council contest recently: he had always stood for 'modernity', including road-work and community projects; now he translated this back into 'culture', the appropriation of culture from the past for the future. To present his aims to the outside world he had to stress his peaceful intentions, indeed he suggested that he aimed to trigger a round of longhouse constructions celebrating peace and involving return prestations for himself and his group.

Kapu declared that the underlying intentions were quite different and coded in the woods used to construct the longhouse and in the prestations of shells and pork themselves: in dangerous woods and perilous pearl shells, which spelled continuing hostility to the Tunda men while ostensibly offering peace. Kandi also clearly recognized the reality of continuing hostility centered on old killings, house-burnings, and lethal pork prestations, and the effect on men's memories of seeing the charcoal left over from bouts of warfare in the past, reminding them of kinsmen lost in fighting. Kandi's declaration was that he aimed to counter the desires for revenge raised by the sight of charcoal from the past with gifts of pearl shells and pork in the present. Yet Kapu saw these very 'gifts' as conveying danger. This longhouse, therefore, can be seen either as a project of peace and 'modernity' or as yet another continuation of war by other means.

These contradictory images of peace and war can be traced also to a deeper level if we look at some reports on the *tapanda* among the Kewa

narratives. In one narrative a man gathers the hair and bones of his dead clansmen who have been killed and thrown into a gully. He packs the relics into a netbag and takes them home to the men's house (*tapanda*), now empty of men. There he places some bones and hair of the dead men into each of the spaces where men used to sit and sleep. Later he returns to the men's house and now sees a host of young men, finely adorned with shells and feathers, and he realizes that these have grown from the remains. The clan is renewed (LeRoy, 1985a: 161, cf. 1985b: 213) – later the man wrongly curses one of these 'new men' over the incursion by a pig into this garden, and the men all turn into pigeons, so the power of regeneration is lost.

We see from this story that the longhouse is not only the site of male solidarity and succession, it is credited originally with the power of generational reproduction itself. It is a site of male procreative power. If a sense of this kind is carried over into Kandi's construction of his longhouse, we can see that his aim of impressing his neighbors was underpinned by a cyclical theory of renewal. The previous *dapanda* had been built 20 years or more previously, about a generation before, and Kandi was attempting to initiate a regional cycle of renewal comparable to the performance of a series of Female Spirit cult occasions every 20 years or so in Hagen society (Strathern and Stewart, 1997, 1998; Stewart and Strathern, 1999). This renewal of Kaimari strength could obviously be interpreted as a threat to the Peri, yet Kandi was also inviting them to enter into his version of ritualized aggression by asking them to make their own longhouses and emulate his actions. While the woods of his longhouse and the gifts of his shells were seen by the Peri as dangerous, their group rose to the challenge in the face of potential violence by decorating themselves finely and presenting themselves as recipients in the enemy's territory. The logic here is that a challenge should be met, and a cycle of relations must be set in hand even if it carries danger with it. That is a condition of life in the politics of danger developed in the New Guinea Highlands. Kandi's longhouse testified to this point, for he too risked his prestige, his resources, and potentially his own life by building the Dapanda house. Identifying himself with his longhouse, he stood for both his proclamation of peace and for the suspicions of hostility that the Tunda men entertained in relation to him, lending a particular local force to remarks made in another context by Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones in their Introduction to the volume *About The House*:

The house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person. . . . House, body, and mind are in continuous interaction. . . . If people construct houses and make them in their own image, so also do they use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups. (1995: 2–3)

What was further remarkable about Kandi's longhouse project was that the house and the exchanges made in celebration of it represented not only Kandi and his group but also a whole regional network of social relations. The shell gifts were mobile constituents of these relations in space, movable substances of indemnification. The house, on the other hand, was a standing, immobile representation of these same ties, captured in the names of the various woods used in its construction. It was a form of epideictic display that was both self-sufficient and closely tied in with the gifts of wealth, a metonymic representation of what the shells (and pork) conveyed metaphorically. In another sense, the longhouse was also a dramatic 'ritual condensation' of these regional ties, encapsulating *both* alliance *and* hostility literally in a single framework.

CONCLUSIONS

We have taken the idea of ritual condensation here from the reanalysis of *naven* ritual among the Iatmul people by Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi (1994). These two authors argued that ritual practices condense and bring together relations which in other contexts are treated as incompatible. Hence the comparison with our data on how the Pangia longhouse was made. In its messages of both alliance and hostility were conveyed. The implication here is that ritual provides a privileged context in which loaded messages of this kind can be communicated. We can specify this context more closely. First, it is non-verbal. The house makes a 'statement' through the names of the kind of trees used in its construction. Second, it also makes a statement simply through the fact of its construction. The building of such a house signals a desire to make peace with surrounding groups by giving them reparation payments for killings in warfare. In its exterior form, then, the house corresponded to Kandi's claims, that it was designed for peace. In its interior substance, however, Kapu claimed that it in fact corresponded to hostile intentions, intentions linked to sorcery, and the 'taking of people's names in vain'. The ritual condensation involved is therefore one which emerges from two separate and contradictory narratives, and this is different from Houseman and Severi's usage. Nevertheless, the two contradictory accounts together constitute a field of interpretation in which alliance and hostility are uneasily counterposed.

Moreover, the deeper significance of the house is that it represents the regeneration of Kandi's group. Kapu saw this as the regeneration of 'war', while Kandi expressed it as a regeneration that was also a cultural innovation, a declaration of 'new time', transcending the old military and sorcery-based days of conflict. Kapu, however, dismissed this as the exterior and therefore superficial account, privileging the silent witness of the wooden materials inside the house as the real markers

of truth. The implicit debate between these views was never engaged, and in fact emerged only from separate discussions. The overall ambiguity of meanings was marked also in the *poi mokora* gifts and in the men's face paints rather than in their public speeches. Kandi, therefore privileged his own public, 'modern' verbal messages as the locus of truth, while Kapu stressed the unspoken, material testimony of the woods themselves. Placing the two contradictory interpretations together we can see that they encapsulate the wider truth that social life among the Wiru consists of the oscillation between hostility and alliance over time, but both moments are often simultaneously present in ritual actions.

Our interpretation itself in a sense collapses or condenses the two men's statements into a single conspectus or semiotic model. By this we are enabled to say in fact that the longhouse expressed both hostility and alliance and tension within them, and we can be confident that this basic element is constitutive in practice over time in the society. On the other hand we can also stress what we have called the historicity of the ritual act of house-building involved here. Kandi declared both that he was reviving custom and that in a sense he was doing something new, adjusting the ritual act to the times of Christianity and modernity. Kapu denied this and stressed the idea that Kandi's intent was really that of a dangerous traditional sorcerer with hostile power in his body; whereas Kandi said he wanted to 'give his stomach', i.e. his goodwill, to the Peri and to transcend old enmities. Even Kandi's embodied emotions were made the stuff of debate, showing how 'the body' in this sense entered the contested field of interpretation just as the longhouse did: and in both instances what was at stake was the meaning of the 'inner' parts. We can therefore see our accounts, in phenomenological rather than semiotic terms, as a negotiated field of conflict between two interpreters of an event (compare Csordas, 1994). In the broadest of terms the debate into which Kandi and Kapu creatively entered was one that exercises many people to a much greater extent in Papua New Guinea today: the meaning of 'modernity' and the viability of 'culture' in relation to it. Kandi said his house meant modern peace and Christianity, while also being a 'cultural revival'; Kapu said it meant traditional war and sorcery, and this was what was 'revived' in it. And as readers of the text of the house as they presented it, we too can read it both ways.

This brings us finally to the question of hierarchy and unity. We do not see these principles exemplified in our case. The elements we have identified coexist, and are not transcended. The historical moment of the house-building ushered in an era of urgent debate, confusion and improvisation which indexes an uncompleted search for a dominant model of society, one which continues today, in both local and national terms, to be characterized by experiential flux.

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Notes

1. For some other architectural and structural descriptions see also Kelly, 1993: 38–51, including diagrams on pp. 40–1 of longhouse design among the Kamula, Kasua, Kaluli, Onabasulu, Bedamini, Etoro, Gebusi, and Samo, with references. For the Daribi see Wagner, 1967: 18, who writes that women lived on the first floor while the second was men's quarters, the internal details not being elaborated.
2. From 1967 to the mid-1980s in Pangia, there was considerable concern about the prevalence of sorcery generally, a pattern commonly found in colonial post-pacification contexts in New Guinea when warfare is stopped but enmity continues. Kandi's project, then, was a classic one in post-colonial terms: to deal with the aftermath of colonial pacification by instituting indigenous arrangements for peace. Warfare being held in abeyance, the next problem was sorcery. *Tomo* sorcery involves the ingestion of substance held to be lethal. *Nakenea* involves taking stuff imbued with a person's life force and giving it to a sorcerer who manipulates it so as to cause its owner's death. See Stewart and Strathern, 1997.
3. These sets are described as *lu*, packages, from the practice of packing shells together in twos or fours for transportation in bark covers. A single set consisted of four shells and prestations were enumerated in terms of multiples of sets, such as 5×4 or 10×4.
4. *Lunori* are a special cut from the whole pig, comprising the rib cage and often the internal organs such as the heart and lungs, with attached meat, wrapped up in fern leaves and bound with banana-stalk strips. Placed separately in steam-cooking earth ovens, these rib cages are then given in a ceremonial and honorific manner to kinsfolk on the maternal side in recognition of their act of 'bearing' one; and, by extension, to political allies.
5. The primary meaning of this term is 'to make a hostile division', referring to the practice of cutting a whole pig's carcass into parts, the front and the back parts of the pig, and presenting either both parts or one of them to a recipient. This manner of butchering is seen as the opposite of splitting the carcass open and removing from it the rib cage (*lunori*), which is then given to mark alliance with maternal kin, the epitome of close alliance.
6. Kapu's etymology here does not correspond to standard Kewa usage in which *tapanda* means 'men's house'. In the Wiru language, also, *tapa* refers to a cult house in which the spirits of dead male kin were housed, in the shape of round black stones. However, Kapu plays with words and sounds here in a way that is common in the Highlands, linking together the phonemes /d/ and /l/ because of their similarity or interchangeability and even eliding them altogether in the case of 'Apenda' in order to fabricate a set of associations of a political kind.
7. It was a common practice in Pangia during warfare to burn down entire villages so as to displace enemy groups, thereby prolonging the time before a regrouping and counter attack could be successfully attempted.
8. This is reminiscent of secondary burial practices in some areas of Papua New

- Guinea where caves are used to place the bones of an individual after a primary burial. The imagery is as though Kandi is saying that he had returned from the dead in order to build this longhouse and regenerate his group.
9. These woods are associated with the origin stories of the Peri phratry. The main item that defines the Peri as such is the *Miscanthus* cane, called in Wiru *peri*, and in principle they are not supposed to harm this cane by burning it. *Paru* and *tomio* are secondary regrowth trees that co-occur with the cane in many locations, and perhaps for this reason are also not supposed to be cut down or used by Peri people. The rules are somewhat notional, since the cane at any rate has frequently to be cut down in clearing fallow land for cultivation.
 10. This detail is reminiscent of a divinatory practice recorded for the Wola of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, in which two contestants slap the earth with a packet containing a side of pork and each swears that he is telling the truth and curses the other who is declared to be lying (Sillitoe, 1981: 261–2). If one of the two later dies, he is declared to have sworn falsely. The context here more closely resembles the Melpa (Mount Hagen) practice of swearing on the *mi*, sacred object of the group (Stewart and Strathern, n.d.); but the action of slapping pork on the ground is like that carried out in Wiru *poi mokora* actions. For the Wiru, as for the Wola, gifts of pork affirm the flow of social relations, and therefore 'special' forms of the use of cuts of pork make 'special statements' about relationships. The Wiru case, however, has to do with the straightforward expression of hostility constrained within a framework of putative amity. It is therefore like a piece of 'concealed talk'.
 11. In fact, Kandi had asked about the possibility of monetary support for his project from the National Cultural Council and raised this question with Andrew Strathern, who at that time was employed by the National Cultural Council in Papua New Guinea as Director of the Institute of PNG Studies. The language of 'cultural revival' was partly imported into the context as a possible reason for giving support of this kind for a project to conserve the house after its immediate political purposes had been achieved. For this reason also Kandi especially stressed his peaceful and 'modern' intentions while also appealing to the idea of 'ancient' tradition. The NCC, however, did not in the end supply funding, largely because of the remote location of Mamuane and its distance from the usual venues of visitors as tourists interested in 'culture'.

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