Paideuma 56:41–62 (2010)

THE CATEGORY 'VILLAGE' IN MELANESIAN SOCIAL WORLDS
Some theoretical and methodological possibilities*

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During doctoral fieldwork with Korowai of West Papua in the mid-1990s, I encountered a kind of unfolding historical process that many other anthropologists have also previously seen and documented: a process of village formation, in which a population of people previously living dispersed thinly across their land begins shifting to part-time residence in permanent centralised settlements, concomitant with deepening involvement with states, world religions, and markets.[1] Yet while transitions of this kind have been momentous events of cultural change across large areas of the globe at one time or another in recent centuries, village formation (or the combining of centralised and dispersed residential styles) has little visibility in scholarship and in collective anthropological imagination of ways humans typically organise their spatial lives. At least, during my fieldwork with Korowai, I came to think that novel anthropological lessons were present in the way that 'village' was for them a highly unnatural, foreign type of space on the land, though a space they were experimentally involved with in deep ways. Prior to village formation, Korowai already took an exquisitely space-focused and space-sensitive approach to social relations. Geography is a main medium through which they signify and grasp their kinship processes, the moral state of different social bonds, the memory of past events, the exchange politics of collective feasting, and the traumas of death and bereavement. Because of this existing sensitivity, Korowai in their encounters with village living have been richly outspoken about social principles and cultural associations they see as embodied in the new spatial form.

In a recent book on Korowai social relations, I gave a brief initial account of the theoretical interest of how Korowai are currently integrating village space into their

* The immediate impetus for this article has been my involvement in co-organising (with Courtney Handman) a session on "Villages and their alters in Melanesian social worlds" at the 2009 and planned 2011 meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO), and my conversations with Holger Jebens about the session on "Village and town in Oceania" he is co-convening with Alexis von Poser at the 2010 meeting of the European Society for Oceanists. That the paper exists is owed in many ways to Courtney and Holger's encouragement, and direct contributions to the writing. My ideas are indebted also to ethnographic papers circulated in 2009 among the ASAO session participants, and to our initial discussions of these themes in person in February 2009. Three Paideuma reviewers offered very charitable and helpful comments on what might be done to improve this text, for which I am also very grateful. While the statements presented in this article are mostly derived from published work of other scholars, from conversations with academic and Korowai friends, and from anthropological 'common sense', the article's shortcomings are my responsibility.

1 Published discussions of village formation include Descola (1981), Århem (2000), Knauft (2002), and Oakdale (2005:34–53).

overall lives (Stasch 2009:63–72), and I hope soon to finish a longer essay on Korowai village formation. A main goal I pursue in that work is to denaturalise the category 'village' itself, by giving an ethnographic account of life without villages, and of a contingent and ambivalent transition to life with them. But in the course of working on this topic, when I have sought comparative insights from colleagues and published literature (including work from Melanesia, India, and Amazonia), I have often learned that other scholars have also been thoughtfully analysing villages as relational entities, including 'even' in settings where villages are a longstanding cultural presence rather than a new and foreign one. It may be that Melanesia is a region that particularly challenges anthropologists to think subtly about the village form as such, because villages are such prominent parts of many people's lives across the region, but in highly varied ways in different places, and in highly volatile or unsettled ways within single locations. What I offer in this article is a review and prospectus of selected broad themes that I take to have emerged from anthropological work on the question 'What's in a village?', and that might usefully orient renewed further inquiry on this topic.

For purposes of exposition, I organise my discussion around a series of orienting propositions that open up specific lines of research about what a village is relational to. Many of these propositions are quite general. My hope, though, is that together they trace an overall direction that scholarship has gone, and should continue to go. And while some of the propositions might seem so broad as to be uncontroversial, it should be emphasised also that much of what I advocate here flies in the face of two dominant developments in the overall discipline of anthropology today. The first is what Diane Mines and Nicolas Yazgi refer to as 'the delegitimization of villages as objects of anthropological concern' (2010:26), such that studying villages across recent decades became first 'untrendy' and then even 'taboo'.[2] The second is anthropology's recent tendency, when granting villages significant attention, to conceive them predominantly as being sites of state or market power-effects. Both of these trends of anthropological imagination are an impoverishment of thought that is out of touch with the empirical complexities of major portions of global human experience today. This essay's propositions are a small effort to keep anthropology in touch with that empirical field, while nonetheless maintaining a temporalised, anti-naturalising approach to face-to-face levels of human spatial life.

2 Mines and Yazgi (2010:24). Mines and Yazgi's essay gives a reading of the village category in scholarship on India similar in orientations to what I attempt here.

1.

A village is a historically and culturally specific spatial form.

A basic premise of ethnographic work on Melanesian villages should be that the idea and fact of a village in any given setting has to be understood in its emic character. Rather than take 'village' for granted as a pre-existing category, we need to work out inductively the particular shape and life of this category in given locations.

The renewed current interest in the subject of villages is partly motivated by a double-conviction about the 'village' concept itself. On the one hand, the category is extremely important in Melanesia and worldwide, such that it is worth making it a focus of anthropological analysis and comparison. On the other hand, the ubiquity, importance, and apparent concreteness of villages in different locations makes them susceptible to naturalisation, or to being assumed to be the same thing everywhere. One purpose of further attention to villages in Melanesia is to use the juxtaposition of contrasting cases to further denaturalise 'village' as a category. New work on villages, and careful study of past work, is likely to both affirm the importance of the village category in and across specific locations, and to decompose villages into the particular cultural and historical relationalities making them up in given cases.

Ulf Hannerz (1980), calling for the emergence of urban anthropology as a subdiscipline, distinguishes between anthropology in the city and anthropology of the city: between ethnographies only incidentally about urban locations, and ethnographies that centrally concern themselves with the nature and character of urban social life. This article's concern is to advocate further development of an anthropology of Melanesian villages.[3]

2.

A village form, as a concrete spatial phenomenon, is not self-evident or natural but is an incarnation of specific values, ideas, narratives, feelings, political and moral projects, and visions of what social life should be.

This proposition is entailed in the idea of historical and cultural specificity. Like any other material practice of space and categorisation of spatial life, a village is not only a concrete space, but a realisation of cultural and political principles. A major goal of work on Melanesian villages should be to describe some of the most relevant values, ideas, or projects that are at stake in villages. Anthropologists should read spatial cat-

[3] See also Mines and Yazgi (2010:8, 10).

egories, evaluations of space, and spatial practices for the qualities of social relations embodied in them.

This orientation aligns with a vast body of scholarship on the historical and cultural constitution of spatial forms, ranging from work on emotionally and sensorily thick local engagement with landscape (Feld and Basso 1996), to work on imaginative or cosmological aspects of people's relations to village spaces (e.g. Pandolfo 1989, Aggarwal 2001), and work emphasising the 'production of locality' amidst the pressures of macro-scale political, economic, and cultural forces (Appadurai 1996:178–199). For example, it can often be seen that villages incarnate narratives of modernity and development, political principles of state rule, and the like, possibilities I discuss further below.

3.

One aspect of the historical and cultural specificity of villages is the linguistic categories by which they are talked about.

In a renewed anthropology of villages as emic categories, one imperative is for scholars to document the terms by which villages are spoken of in vernaculars, linguae francae, and languages of colonial and post-colonial rule mediating the creation and ongoing life of villages as concrete spatial forms. Of particular importance is how terms are borrowed or calqued across boundaries between different types of languages, or how the categories remain contrastive or incommensurate. In many regions of Melanesia besides the Korowai area, 'village' was not a salient category of spatial life prior to colonisation. Even in areas where villages of some kind are a deeper historical presence, they exist in the midst of a heterogeneity of linguistic frameworks and in the midst of a heterogeneity of kinds of social spaces. Linguistic patterns of translation, borrowing, and lexicographic contrast are a good starting place for getting purchase on the different systems of spatial organisation that are historically interacting in a given place. Additionally, it is important to examine narrower taxonomic distinctions that local or extralocal actors draw between different types of villages or village conditions. Below, I advocate a general methodological and theoretical strategy of interpreting villages through their relations of close contrast with other forms of space. In this respect, it is also important for researchers to document the linguistic categories with which villages contrast, locating relevant terms for 'village' in a wider semantic field of categorisations of space. The linguistics of specific villages' names or other designations can sometimes also be an important focus of elucidating the character of what a village is.

Building on the foundation of this kind of language-attentive work, if we then juxtapose village forms in different parts of Melanesia, the disparities between cases

again help us to relativise and historicise the village category in each location. Certain linguistic terms intensely important within geopolitical subdivisions of the wider Melanesian region have little or no resonance across those subdivisions, such as English 'village' and Tok Pisin 'ples' (Papua New Guinea), Malay/Indonesian 'desa' or 'kampung' (West Papua), and French 'tribu', 'commune', and 'aires coûtumières' (New Caledonia). Within geopolitical subdivisions, the same terms can have quite variable meanings or relevancies in different localities. These variations again can aid us in denaturalising the village category, and making explicit the multiple cultural and historical relationalities that constitute it. Strikingly, in the New Caledonian context 'village' designates residential districts of settler colonist-descended populations, not Kanak populations. Patterns of using the word 'village' in Anglophone ethnography of Papua New Guinea are thus discordant in relation to scholarship on New Caledonia. Similarly, in some contexts of Indonesian government representation, 'villages' (*desa*) are territorial units as well as population units and residential centres, and the entire national territory is conceived as an exhaustive jigsaw of abutting village territories. In many parts of West Papua, an on-paper 'village' can thus comprise tens of square miles of primary forest or other sparsely-occupied land. This territorial sense contrasts with what a 'village' is in more densely populated settings (such as on Java or around Papua's largest towns), and contrasts also with what a 'village' is in the speech of people who live in them. So too, in the Korowai lands and similar areas where residential aggregation in villages is a recent event, *desa* as a status of bureaucratic recognition of a population centre with locally-appointed civil bureaucratic officeholders is quite different from *desa* (or *kampung*) as an actual clearing with a large collection of houses in it: there are many more residential villages than administrative ones. This use of the 'village' category is internally contradictory, and very different from the category's use in other Indonesian locations.

Ideally, too, ethnographic work on the village category needs to present not only taxonomic lexical information, but also information about patterns of category use in talk, patterns of discursive commentary about villages and other spaces, and patterns of spatial taxonomy as these emerge and shift historically. Typically, ethnographic engagement with the lexicography and discourse of villages in linguae francae and administrative languages will be inseparable from issues of institutions of colonial and post-colonial rule, as well as from issues of the mutual entanglement of governmental village policies with professional anthropology's visions of the village category. But another significant focus of research and analysis needs to be regional linguistic categories' complex (bidirectional, and perhaps convergent as well as oppositional) relations to local vernacular terms.

4.

While villages are categories or ideas, they are also concrete forms of physical and spatial activity.

At the same time as we study how villages embody projects and values – which are necessarily abstract, conceptual, moral, ideational, and ideological – it is equally important to make the spatial concreteness of villages a main subject of analysis. Describing the actual spatial practicalities of the village form is a crucial part of spelling out the projects, ideas, and principles that are lived through and around a village *qua* concrete space. Work on the village category needs to address what people concretely do in villages that makes them villages in the first place, and how people evaluate these village-constituting activities. In different sites, the physical, practical definition of a village is different, and different kinds of spatial practices stand out to people as the right ways to live in a village, or as the facts that make a village a village. A village category is not only defined by a certain density of dwellings standing in one place for an extended time, but also by specific housing forms, specific ways of using houses, specific consumable objects, specific economic practices, specific forms of exchange, specific practices of language, specific institutions of schooling, governance, or worship, specific practices of kinship, specific organisations of gender and sexuality, and so forth.

At a certain broad level, though, concrete spatiality may be one area where a case can be made for treating 'village' partly as an etic category as well as an emic one. Even as ethnographers should work to denaturalise and historicise the village form in any given setting (refusing the notion that there is an absolute definition of what constitutes a village), one reason for coordinating with other scholars in the study of villages is that there are recurrent tendencies that come up cross-regionally and cross-historically in practices of people building and occupying dwellings in a centralised vicinity. To give an account of the 'village' as a category is necessarily to engage with questions of what it is to reside somewhere; of what it is for people to live together; of what kinds of physical, practical, institutional, and political patterns set a village apart from the wider range of kinds of localities in people's lives; and of why it is analytically useful to speak cross-culturally of 'villages' in the first place, rather than only using a vaguer, more neutral term like 'locality'.

5.

Villages are produced.

This point overlaps with other ideas presented above and below, but the language of spatial forms being 'made' or 'produced' is sometimes very helpful ethnographically and theoretically. The tradition of Marxist cultural geography associated with Henri Lefebvre (1991) is one locus classicus of this orientation, offering forceful ideas about the way forms of social space are the precipitate of political processes and cultural commitments. In recent decades, scholarly literature on colonialism has been a particularly lively site of analyses along these lines. Within Melanesian studies, Nancy Munn (1986) presents an innovative account of forms of spatial consciousness and spatial relatedness being directly 'produced' in practical actions. Francesca Merlan (2006) gives an exemplary analysis of the processual making and 'unmaking' of concepts and emotions of relatedness to settlement space across generational time (albeit focused on a town rather than a village).

One of many examples of a case in which village forms can be approached from this perspective is Joel Robbins' (2004) account of Urapmin people's association of villages with the agency of Big Men. Urapmin think of their population's organisation into villages as reflecting the willful persuasiveness of Big Men, and they think of the Big Man role as centred on making villages. The Urapmin village form, and the figure of the Big Man, are elements in a broader pattern of moral experience that Urapmin wrestle with across all areas of their lives, consisting of a dialectic of lawful adherence to established structure and willful structure-conferring transgression of established arrangements. In other Melanesian locations, villages are produced quite differently from this, involving a confluence of a larger variety of factors. Ethnographic work on villages needs to spell out the culturally and politically relevant ways settlement spaces are made, in each case.

6.

Villages, qua concrete spatial forms, are precipitated
at the intersection of multiple values, ideas, and projects.

To hold that the village category is culturally and historically particular, and incarnates ideas, values, and principles, does not presume that this category is unitary or self-same. Rather, a basic point of ongoing ethnographic work on villages is to chart the pluralities of projects and forces that go into the production of a given village form. Villages can lie at the intersection of diverse interacting or conflicting social positions, institutional

forces, or felt imperatives. Anthropologists can take up the village form as an object through and around which to trace an overall field of disparate political and cultural values in play in a given location.

Concerning just relatively 'local' social positions and levels of agency, one thing this means is that current work on Melanesian villages generally rejects the stereotypy of villages as scenes of primordial *Gemeinschaft*-style social experience (after Tönnies 1957), a stereotype that is part of the culture of global metropolitan modernity but that has little first-order relevance to Melanesian village lives.[4] Another concern should be careful charting of the interactions between concrete ways of inhabiting village spaces, on the one hand, and the existence and production of other kinds of human categorisations central to village life, on the other hand. These other categorisations can include, for example, gender, kin group, denomination, ethnicity, or age. Here ethnographers need to address such questions as: are these other identity categorisations a product of the conflicting pressures and projects of village life? Are they independent? If independent, do they get amplified in villages?

In this broad vein, for example, a recent South Asianist work by Diane Mines (2005) takes as its central object the lines of fracture, controversy, and revaluation that are at play in the very existence and definition of a village as a lived reality. Similarly, in a study of the plurality of projects and extralocal relationalities incarnated in a single Kabyle village, Judith Scheele writes that 'although there was obviously a physical village in the form of several hundred houses perched on top of a hill, a number of imaginary villages existed within this small space' (2009:7–8).

7.

Villages are often important sites of the intersection, clash, or interface between cultural projects of extralocal and local actors.

This is a continuation of the theme of 'multiplicity'. As I noted at this paper's outset, the specific issue of colonial and post-colonial state actors' concerns with the production and administration of villages is probably the single most prominent issue in contemporary anthropological work on villages generally.

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4 In U.S. anthropology, one well-known early case of the development of conflicting stereotypes of the village as autonomous *Gemeinschaft*-style community versus the village as a scene of stratification and conflict was the disparity between Robert Redfield's and Oscar Lewis's respective studies of the Mexican peasant village of Tepoztlán (Redfield 1930, Lewis 1951). Similar differences are apparent in a review of Marriott (1955) authored by Dumont (1957). See also the reconsideration of Dumont and Marriott's positions in Mines and Yazgi (2010:2–3, 7–8).

One way the village category exists is as an imagined, normatively-modeled element in narratives of social evolution or modernisation that are cosmological orientations of nation-state institutions and their metropolitan subjects. A core assumption of the folk anthropology of Westerners and urbanites at large is that villages are the naturally occurring residential forms in which Melanesians and other non-urban people generally live, that villages are the main unit of these people's political and geographic lives, and that village living is basically the same thing in different places. This folk stereotypy flourishes even though the assumptions are not consistent with actual conditions in past and contemporary Melanesian societies. Tourists and travel writers visiting the Korowai area, for example, routinely apply the English term 'village' to temporary forest clearings containing two or three Korowai houses, even as Korowai perceive forest living to be radically contrastive with the new residential form of the 'village' proper. Raymond Williams' "The country and the city" (1973) is one well-known study of the character of village imagery as a relational projection of historical conditions of urban modernity. This work's lessons apply importantly to Western imagining of Melanesian social life.

The discipline of anthropology has complex relations to this broad narrative of modernisation, particularly the narrative's stereotypy of the village as a culturally, economically, and politically autarkic, internally solidary corporate body. The British colonial administrative model of villages worked out in India and transposed to Papua New Guinea has a scholarly correlative in Henry Sumner Maine's formulations on the 'village community' (1871), and in the long afterlife of some aspects of Maine's formulation in *Gemeinschaft-* or integration-assuming tendencies within the 'village study' ethnographic tradition. One long-running anthropological idea here has been that villagers have a common consciousness and common will as a natural effect of living together intimately and familiarly in small numbers in the same space, in marked contrast to the heterogeneity of experience and consciousness characteristic of collective life in modern urban locations. For example, the *Gemeinschaft*-stereotype (particularly its portrayal of villages as face-to-face communities of mutual acquaintanceship) is strongly evident in Priscilla Reining's (1980) state-of-the-art synthesis from several decades ago, as well as in Margaret Mead's (1980) contribution to the same volume. The journalistic work of Richard Critchfield (1981) similarly concurs with and promotes the popular understanding that 'the village' is the natural residential form and social world of all of non-urban humanity. A main goal of current ethnographic work on the village category is to explore villages in their empirical complexity and specificity, without this theoretical prejudice.

Among fieldworkers studying village settings today, though, there is a general eschewal of Romantic images and assumptions in the heritage of Western and social scientific thought about villages. Mines' statement is characteristic:

> It is important here to work our way out of the worn and idealised image, found both in prior academic and current popular imaginings, of villages as wondrously harmonious communities, as places that take one back to a retrojected sense of wholeness now perceived as lost in the contemporary world. These idealisations are based in a hopeful nostalgia more than any real understanding of the village as (what I argue to be) a heterogeneous and even heterologic place, a shifting part of world events, power differentials, history, and both the joys and sufferings of human relations (Mines 2005:24).

But contemporary work is also often concerned to consider carefully the ways this Romantic imagery of villages, and policy structures linked to it, have shaped conditions of life in actual villages. Stacey Leigh Pigg (1992) offers an exemplary study of the political and ideological importance of Nepalese villages as a negatively evaluated figure of backwardness, in national and international elites' narratives of development. She also documents villagers' counter-discourses to this elite view, and affirms the general pattern of multiplicity in forces constituting villages and in actors' evaluations of them: 'There is no single meaning attached to villages: villages can evoke familiarity, ambivalence, disdain, or nostalgia'.[5] In a New Guinea context, Roy Wagner (1974) provides a classic account of villages as visible concretisations of the 'groups' that are the only way Western colonial administrators could conceive human sociality, in contrast to the process- and event-founded sociality characteristic of indigenous Melanesia. John Barker, after documenting the internally fractured complexity of a Maisin village prior to engagement with Europeans, notes that 'Nevertheless, administrators and missionaries assumed that Papuan society was village-based. The projects of pacification and "civilisation" depended on the existence of cohesive villages, and, just as importantly, went some way towards creating them' (1996:214).

The most important issue here is the status of 'village' as an official structural unit in a state's formal institutional apparatus, alongside the surrounding range of ways that villages become sites of 'governmentality' in Foucault's sense: the exercise of power through diverse technical operations of administering populations. In analysing villages as sites of state formation, one counter-reaction against the *Gemeinschaft*-stereotype has been to describe villages as entirely the creations of states. With reference to literature on South and Southeast Asia, for example, Jan Breman asserts that

> We now know that the image of the peasant settlement in Asia as [a closed, stationary, and strongly collectivist social formation] is not only a cliché which lacks any real empirical base, but is also a construction which, for the most part, originated during colonial rule.[6]

Indonesia's proximity to the Melanesian region can offer a useful comparative reminder of the intense links between village structures and states, given that in the Suharto years

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5 Pigg (1992:493). See also Thompson (2007).

6 Breman (1988:10). See also Kemp (1988).

(1965–1998) so much kleptocratic governmental control in the name of development was exercised through attention to 'village' structures as a site of national conformity. More recently, in West Papua and other peripheral Indonesian provinces in the post-dictatorship 'reform' period, the politics of creating new territorial administrative subdivisions (down to and including the 'village' level) has been the major arena for elite struggles over rearranged access to power and wealth (e.g. International Crisis Group 2007). Yet even in the Indonesian context, close attention to any one village quickly leads to findings that state and local actors are at times inter-implicated and overlapping, that each of these sides is itself heterogeneous, and that the state's ideas of what a village is are no less real or imaginary than local people's. 'Village' is a cultural or emic category for all actors involved, including state ones. Concerning the Balinese town of Ubud (famous historically as an artistic centre and expatriate anthropologists' and artists' colony, and known today as a tourism destination), Graeme MacRae offers this balanced summary of these same issues:

> What the various parties concerned refer to as 'Ubud' is an entity perceived in various forms according to their point of view. A holistic understanding recognises not only all of these viewpoints but their constitution through processes of local, colonial, national and global scope, as well as ritual, economic and political mode. Ubud is thus a series of dissonant unitary conceptions but also a polyphony of pattern and process that deconstructs these unitary conceptions while simultaneously linking them. [...] [T]his notion implies that the polarised terms of the 'village studies debate' (Breman 1988, Kemp 1988) may be overconceived. While Ubud is an exceptionally complex and globalised village – this point is inescapable – all villages are, to a degree, artifacts constituted at the intersection of similarly multiplex processes. They are also however, not merely the machinations of colonial, academic, and touristic imaginations, however, but empirical realities, physical, social, economic, ritual and administrative, for the people involved in them.[7]

Emphasis on local complexity and partial local determination of outcomes is the consensus path even in empirical work focused on top-down government programs of settlement-focused reshaping of populations.[8]

Current work on the village category in Melanesia can aptly position itself in relation to the just-outlined scholarly trends in the following four ways. First, we should eschew the stereotype of the solidary, homogeneous, autarkic village as a space of intimate sharing, stasis, or naturally-occurring political and cultural unity. In keeping with existing traditions of research in the region, we should chart ways in which villages

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7 MacRae (1999:148). Compare also Henk Schulte Nordholt (1991:2), as well as Nicholas Herriman (2007) on local residents' influence on state officials in a Javanese setting.

8 See for example James C. Scott (1998:223–261), D.S. Moore (1999), Jessica Cattelino (2006). Pierre-Yves Le Meur (2006), and Tania Li (2007). See also Alan Rumsey (2006) on dialogic intertwining of endogenous and exogenous prompts of cultural change generally, with reference to a PNG location. Michael D. Woost (1994) falls on the side of state-as-juggernaut.

exist systematically as products and composites of disparate cultural forces, even on the most local of levels. This remains worth demonstrating in empirical depth despite its obviousness to Melanesianist fieldworkers, because of the ongoing popularity and political consequentiality of metropolitan evolutionary and nostalgic stereotypes about village life.

But second and at the same time, students of Melanesian social life need to deal directly with stereotypes, normative projects, nostalgic desires, and so on toward villages advanced by extra-local actors, such as state agencies, mission or church organisations, NGOs and international social or environmental movements (West 2006), social scientists, literary or visual artists, Melanesian towndwellers, and so forth. Besides being places people live, villages are figures in a global cultural narrative of world-historical social evolution, development, and governance. This provides another rationale for retaining the category 'village' itself as a common object across different cases. There are differences in how extralocal actors have imagined and shaped the village form across Melanesia and across time, but the partial continuities in extralocal actors' own emic understandings of what a 'village' is also generate continuities across different ethnographers' sites of study.

Third, the best overall approach to the village category in Melanesian locations is thus probably one of methodological and ethnographic symmetry, concerning the respective contributions of extralocal and local agents to the making of villages. Such an approach provides a cultural account of what the village category is for state actors, in the same way it gives such an account for local actors. We should not assume that local or extralocal models are ultimately more determinative of what a village actually is, or that these different actors' contributions to the making of a given village category's definition can even be separated. These are empirical questions, which need to be addressed ethnographically with respect to specific cases.

Fourth, in holding to this methodological symmetry, it may be heuristically useful to understand villages as in some cases precipitates of the interaction of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' forces. For example, it may be helpful to narrate specific cases in terms of contrast and interaction between village residents and state agencies. But here too the point is to chart the overall plural system of interacting projects that go into the shape of a given village form, not to assume pre-ethnographically a single Manichaean structure that sits behind all Melanesian village situations. Even to the extent a heuristic distinction between top-down and bottom-up social scales makes some sense, we expect that top-down processes themselves can be internally plural, contradictory, or heterogeneous, just like bottom-up ones.

8.

'Top-down' or state-emanating forces are not the only political ones.
The village form is pervasively political on local scales.

This is only to expand a point implied in the previous section. The local or bottom-up is not necessarily all that 'local' or 'bottom'. Close empirical investigations of the village form today are likely to entail engaging with well-known Melanesian patterns of mobility and extralocal geographic involvement as local cultural business-as-usual. State, church, or NGO actors do not have a monopoly on long-distance social reach, social coordination, or imagination of collectivity.

A main issue here is the ways that spatial practices of dwelling together in one place – and all the specific patterns of doing so, talking about the virtues of doing so, having trouble doing so, or giving up on doing so – are concrete enactments of core political values. In some Melanesian locations, ethnographers have found people's lives to be centrally and recurrently structured around a value polarity of egalitarianism, self-determination, and autonomy versus relatedness, coordination, and amicable unity.[9] In most analyses, there is thought to be a productive tension between these values: the values are deeply held priorities of people's lives, but stand in complex relations of both mutual implication and mutual contradiction. Ethnographic work has been most thorough in pursuing questions of how these values are realised and reconciled through exchange institutions. But questions of where and how to live spatially are also a major site where these value commitments are concretely realised and at stake. It may be useful for ethnographers to analyse village-making processes in terms of locally relevant variations on these themes.[10]

9.

Villages are relational to other kinds of spaces and spatial practices.

This idea is implied or spelled out in many assertions already presented.[11] A very effective way to make visible the multiple values, principles, and visions of sociality embod-

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9 E.g. McDowell (1990), Munn (1986), Schieffelin (1990), Stasch (2009). See also Myers (1986) for a non-Melanesianist ethnography also organised around such a polarity.

10 Donald Tuzin's (1988, 2001) work on the village of Ilahita (which is unusually large by New Guinea standards) is organised around the question of village size, and seeks to identify the institutional and cultural structures that enable or constrain a large population's capacity to live together densely in one place.

11 It is also emphasised in the titles and intellectual programs of both meeting sessions mentioned in my acknowledgments.

ied in villages is to examine the ways villages are relational to other major categories of spatial and social organisation in people's lives. Rather than emphasising the autonomy of villages as a kind of space, this perspective is open to the vast available evidence that in Melanesian settings, people experience the desires, goals, and projects embodied in village spaces in major part through relations of alignment and contrast between villages and other levels of social geography.

The idea that villages are 'relational' to other kinds of spaces is meant to encompass a notion of both logical and practical linkage. For example, physical movement between villages and other kinds of spaces, or physical transformation and reshaping of villages, are not only physical in nature but are also practices of transforming sociability, or of sewing together different modes of sociability in single lives. 'Relational' here means not only contrastive but also mutually implicated. Different spaces can be inside each other, so to speak. A useful touchstone here is Lefebvre's understanding that, whatever people's experience of the perceptual separateness of different social spaces, these spaces are not necessarily separate or distinguishable:

> Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia [...] Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise [...] to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity.[12]

The specific inter-spatial relationalities that are most important in defining the village category in different cases vary widely. Some ethnographers of Melanesian settings today are dealing with a primary contrast between villages and less centralised residential forms, such as dispersed forest living, oscillation between villages and gardens, or a pattern of living in small hamlets. Others are examining closely contrasts between villages and themselves: between coexisting models of what a village is or should be (as in Lévi-Strauss 1963), or between different kinds of actual villages on a single landscape. Other ethnographers are looking at relations between villages and towns or cities,[13] between villages and centres of administrative rule or trade, between villages and nation-states, or between villages and the world system of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption. Barker (1990) presents a case study of the salience in one PNG location of the relational contrast between village and mission station, as kinds of spaces. Additionally, there are cases involving intimate alters to villages that are not spatial in the same way villages are, such as clanship (Handman n.d.), congregational or denominational affiliation, type of economic activity, or program of governmental rule.

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12 Lefebvre (1991:86–87; italics removed). See also Doreen Massey (1994:7).

13 Levine and Wolfzahn Levine (1979) is one of many existing studies detailing close village link-ups from the urban side.

One point of building ethnographic accounts of the village category around its relations to intimate alters is that doing so can help us hold to the goal of simultaneously making villages a central object of study and understanding them to be culturally and historically constituted. Focusing on villages in relation to their alters precludes privileging the village category in its own right, but locates a village as standing in an equipollent relation of interlinkage to other kinds of spatial arrangements, and as being part of a larger system of multiple spatial and moral possibilities and principles.

10.

While villages are prominently spatial,
often the village category is intensely time-saturated and time-based.
Melanesian villages often seem to be strongly 'events' as well as places.

Issues of the village in time, or the diachrony of villages, figure centrally in work on Melanesian villages today in multiple ways. Some scholars are studying historical processes in the creation and dissolution of villages.[14] Other ethnographers are dealing with processual transformation from one village pattern or idea to another, or with ways that village residents talk about villages through narratives of ancestral migration, events of founding, or other mythological or historical episodes. On smaller temporal scales such as personal biography or even a daily or weekly round, villages are often defined centrally around events of coming or going, disaggregation or reaggregation, or more complicated processes of alternation. In many cases in Melanesia and beyond, the village category has to be understood relationally to people's overall practices of mobility.[15] Korowai village formation, for example, has paradoxically involved an increase in residential mobility as villages have now been added as further destinations in people's already elaborate itineraries of routine mobility. Concrete acts of travel to and from villages is a main practical way in which Korowai live out relations of both contrast and interpenetration (per Lefebvre) between village aggregations and forest spaces of dispersed residence. One dimension of cultural variability in the definition of the village category could be a question of what kinds of movement (of villages and people) through space a local ideology of villages produces. Different cases also might group around different temporal frameworks in which village spaces are inhabited.

There are many ways in which ethnographers could conceptualise links between the temporal dimension of villages and the other main principles outlined earlier in this article. Some researchers might deal with a theme of villages as the precipitate of

14 E.g. Knauft (2002). For parallels in Amazonian contexts, see Århem (2000), Descola (1981), and Oakdale (2005:34–53).

15 Schoorl (1988), Lowe (2003), Halvaksz (2006), Le Meur (2006)

multiple intersecting projects, but specifically across time: when actors, projects, and values change or shift, this is registered as changes in villages. Historical and mythological stories of village-making told by villagers themselves can also be venues in which multiple values and projects realised in the village form are represented and brought into mutual confrontation. Other ethnographers might deal with patterns of oscillation toward and away from villages, or between different village forms, as the concrete shape taken by central value tensions of people's lives,[16] including tensions between local and state projects. A notable issue that arises in some Melanesian cases is the partial elective affinity between villages and feasts. There is a rich anthropological tradition of work on feasting as a temporal process in which societies alternate or mediate between different visions of social life, thereby living their most basic value commitments in a more intensified form, or confronting more directly the contradictions and synthetic possibilities of competing values.[17] In Melanesia, where ceremonial feasting has in many locations been a preeminent and highly valued social institution, comparing village processes with feasting ones may in some cases offer particularly rich interpretive possibilities.

A last possible focus within the broad issue of the temporality of the village category worth underlining is the intersection of the question of 'What's in a village?' with temporal orientations to the past and future. For many town dwellers in some Melanesian countries, villages are geographic figures of nostalgia for a past that is felt to have been lost in the biographical and historical present of urban life, even as urbanites' actual ties with village settings are morally ambivalent and socially fraught. But as Mines again aptly introduces as a principle of her South Asianist monograph, concrete villages are also lived as sites of orientation to the future:

> The process of village-making is also a process of self-making, and I work to show that localising wider agendas and concepts is part of a more general human process whereby local actors ground and localise the wider world – using whatever forms it might offer – and at the same time create themselves as regional and historical actors, in this instance as villagers [...] who extend, act, and change their own lives and the lives of others and who create the locality (the village) in which they live as they do so. In the ethnography that follows, it will become clear that a critical part of village-making processes are personal hopes for different futures, for bringing into reality something new that is 'imagined to lie ahead'. As disenfranchised village communities strive for a different future, they are in fact remaking their present as they are also making new conditions for continuing to constitute new futures (Mines 2005:24).

In the current era of rapid change in Melanesia (characterised in part by the ever-increasing importance of village-centric institutions such as churches, stores, and often poorly resourced health centres and schools), a basic goal of ongoing work on the vil-

16 Compare Mauss (1979), and Valeri (1990).

17 E.g. LeRoy (1979), Stasch (2003), among many others.

lage category in diverse locations should be to trace how alterations in the character of Melanesian social relations are being registered or grounded in changes in villages, as categories of space. But in living in and thinking about villages as spaces, Melanesians are also intently conceptualising where they are in time and trying to act on that temporal position. They are hearing and telling narratives of where they are headed next, or where they wish they could go.

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