

## **Landscapes of Sociality**

### **Paths, places and belonging on Wogeo Island, Papua New Guinea**

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“He follows his path” I often heard while doing fieldwork on Wogeo, a small island off the north-coast of Papua New Guinea.<sup>1</sup> That someone “followed a path” was frequently used by Wogeos to explain why he or she lived in a certain place or why food or other items were given to people from other places. Initially I interpreted this as a way of speaking about the course of life – as we in Norway would speak about destiny – but gradually I understood that for the Wogeos the concept of “following a path” was more significant than merely designating an arbitrary or predestined course of life. Paths (*jala*) spoken of in this manner are not only metaphors of people’s lives as movement in time. Paths are also concretisations of relations between people belonging to different places: relations that through time have been maintained by people who previously belonged to these places, or more recent relations that people have found it worth while or necessary to maintain. Such paths exist as much in the geographical landscape as in the social landscape, and it was in this manner people in Wogeo spoke to me about paths.

Bourdieu (1977) has pointed out that inhabited space – particularly the house – has the ability of transferring cultural knowledge independently of the verbalisation of this knowledge. Through their presence in the inhabited space, filled with people moving in relation to each other and to the landscape in which they live, people learn how to relate to one another and to their surroundings (ibid.: 89). Where people sit, how they move within the

space, the structure of the house, what is placed where – all these embody essential cultural knowledge. That people in various parts of the world structure their houses in correspondence with social relations and cultural norms and that they fill their houses accordingly has become a well-known perspective in anthropological analyses. In this paper I shall show how the inhabitants of Wogeo not only incorporate social relations in their houses, but also in the lived landscape: the houses, the villages, the paths between them, and the paths across the sea to other islands and to the mainland. This inhabited landscape can be seen as constituting a concretised image of Wogeo sociality, a landscape that is conceptualised as being contained and incorporated in all the houses on the island. The houses are owned by matrilineages and can be seen as female: “Mother carries the place” (*tina vanua ebaj*<sup>2</sup>), as an old Wogeo man said to me.

### **The Wogeo landscape**

Wogeo is a relatively small volcanic island of about thirty kilometres in circumference. It is situated approximately seventy kilometres off the coast of East Sepik Province, facing Wewak, the capital of the province. It is the second largest of the Schouten Islands, a group of seven islands at the mouth of Sepik River, from Manam in the east to Wogeo in the west.<sup>3</sup> The north-coast of Wogeo (referred to by Wogeos as *kalet*, “the back”) is rugged with volcanic rocks and the sea is rough, whereas along the south-coast (*varo*, “the front”) there are beaches covered with smooth stones and pebble and good anchoring places for the dinghies that bring people and goods to and from the mainland. Around twenty villages lie scattered along the coastline. They are situated at the outskirts of the dense rain forest that covers the interior of the island. Two high peaks mark the silhouette of the island, the highest rising 620 meters above the sea. A pathway (*jala*) leads through all the villages, kept clear and

tidy by the villagers living nearby, and from the main pathway, smaller paths lead into the forest to the gardens – some close to the main path, others further up in the hillside.

Following the main path, the villages meet the eye as sharp contrasts to the wall of trees surrounding the path in forest. The houses (*ruma*) in the villages (*malala*) are built around large open places, covered with pebbles and always swept clean from leaves and waste from people and animals. The houses in a village are usually built in the same direction, with verandas along the side of the house (*varo*) that is facing the village space, and with the “back side” (*kalet*) towards the beach or the forest. In past times the most impressive building in the villages was the men’s house – the *niaboa* – that was always placed in the middle of the village with the back towards the forest.

Ian Hogbin, who conducted anthropological fieldwork in Wogeo in 1934 and 1948, described the houses as grouped into two or three clusters with the *niaboa* in the middle (Hogbin 1970: 12, 1978: 21). Contrary to my findings, he regarded the village with three clusters as an anomaly (1970: 18). To me, people said that nearly all the villages had a middle part in which the *niaboa* had its place together with one or two other houses. “The *niaboa* divides the village into two sides (*valu*)” Tarega, a man from the district of Takur, said.<sup>4</sup> The houses belonging to the different sides used to be built in clusters around the house of the *koakoale* (the traditional headman) of that part of the village.

Hogbin lived in the village of Dab in the district of Onevaro during his fieldwork, and Dab was also the site for my research in the 1990s. When Hogbin revisited the island in 1974 on an invitation from Bernard Gagin Dalle – the grandson of Moarigum, Hogbin’s main informant – many people had left the island to do wage work on the mainland or on ships. The *niaboa* were gone and Hogbin maintained that the organisation of the houses into clusters had vanished. He meant that this had happened as a result of the weakened power of the

*koakoale*<sup>5</sup> of the different clusters (Hogbin 1978: 10-11). I believe that Hogbin failed to see how the place itself – not only the houses – is significant to the Wogeo people; the different parts of the villages were in the 1990s still highly meaningful to those who live in the places and for the people visiting them.

### **To find the right place**

One of the things I noticed during my first weeks in Wogeo was how people spoke about places. They spoke about named places connected to particular people, events and histories and they pointed to certain places in order to explain me the origin and belonging of people and customs. It was always important that I saw the places of which they spoke with my own eyes. Already the first day they told me about the three parts of Dab; the two sides and the middle, not primarily, as Hogbin wrote, as clusters of houses but as the physical places on which the houses have their place (*maleka*). The parts of the villages are named and are referred to by their names or as sides (*valu*)<sup>6</sup>.

Most of the houses are also named, and Wogeos make a distinction between named “big houses” and unnamed “small houses”. There are not necessarily differences in size between “big” and “small” houses and “small” houses can also be given names but will still labelled “unnamed”. To say that something or someone “has a name” marks the significance of the house, place or person; that it has a long history and renown. Named houses exist independently of the built structures, and people would often point to an empty spot in the village and tell me that a certain house was there as if the physical building was actually present. A named house can, for instance, be given as dowry to another village even though the house still remains in the original village: it is the abstract house with its name, design and magic that is given, and the two houses will be spoken of as “one house”.

Each house has its certain place within the different parts of the village, whether the houses are built or not, and they are spoken of as belonging to that place. Not only houses have their place in the villages; people also belong to certain places, and this is how Wogeos primarily speak about belonging: that he or she belongs to that particular place. That a person belonged to a place was the most frequently used explanation that I have heard concerning people's roles in different situations – mentioned far more often than the person's kinship relations.

I have found it useful to analyse the parts of the villages as parallels to Houses in so-called "House-based societies" (see Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995; Lévi-Strauss 1983). In Wogeo it is the place with its property, name and titles, not primarily a group of people, that is the focus for continuity; the place defines the people. I was given an identity as belonging to a place as soon as I arrived in Wogeo: since I was seen as following the path of Ian Hogbin, I was named after Hogbin's informant Moarigum's favourite wife and, hence, given an identity as belonging to the same place as Hogbin.

People's lives are frequently likened to the growth of trees in Wogeo. Different elements in the life-cycle rituals symbolise this metaphorical relation: from boys' umbilical cords which are hidden in newly planted banana plants, via the young trees a first time menstruating girls should step over, to the souls of dead people which are "sat down" on the bases of certain old trees. "Young people are like the stem of a tree; the old people are like the leaves – all as necessary for the well-being of the tree," a young man in Dab stated. The roots are deeply planted in the place and the branches reach out, intertwined with vines and lianas<sup>7</sup> holding them steady. This image is given of the ideal state of the village in a magical spell supposed to secure the wellbeing and security of the village after the major food festivals of the past (Hogbin 1970: 182, 1978: 168).

Trees are also crucial in giving people their affiliation to the particular places: not trees with roots physically planted in the place, but cut-off trees supporting the roofs in the houses of the villages. These rafters – sixteen or eighteen in each house – are named; they each have certain histories connected to them, and each rafter is connected to particular plots of garden land in the bush. Such a rafter is called a *ro* (figure 1). “The rafter is the root, and the land grows from it,” said one of Hogbin’s informants (Hogbin 1939: 163).

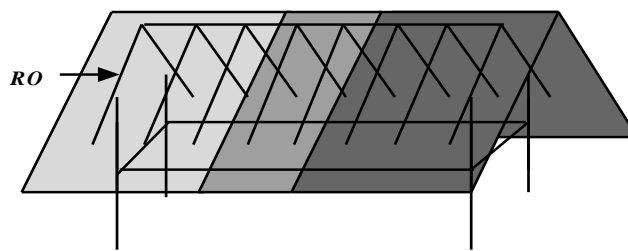


Figure 1: House in Dab with *ro*. The colours indicate the *ro* belonging to the different parts of the village.

All the houses in a village have the same set of *ro*, grouped according to which part of the village they belong to, in the same order in all the houses. The roof of each house can, thereby, be read as a map of the village and the land belonging to the different parts of the village. Each *ro* is spoken of as containing its own history – that is, the history of the people who, through time, have had rights in that particular *ro*. With these histories follow the male names and some of the female names of the villages; when a male child is born he is given a name from the *ro* to which it has been decided that he will inherit the rights. Some women are also given such rights, and the names of these women are also incorporated in the history of the *ro*. Otherwise, the female names belong to the different parts of the villages.

When people spoke of the inheritance of rights in *ro* in general, they would say that the *ro* were passed on from father to son, but, after closer elaboration, this always turned out to be only one among many paths the *ro* followed. “You have to follow the history of the *ro*,” people said. “You always have to show that you have a logical reason, a history to follow, in order to claim the right in a *ro*,” a *koakoale* of Dab told me. “The *ro* follow many paths, many stories.” People’s histories – and, thereby, the history of the various *ro* – are, among others, the movement of people along the paths in the landscape; from one place to another, or from one house to another within the same place. To illustrate this point I shall present a history, or a path, that a family in Dab is following (figure 2).

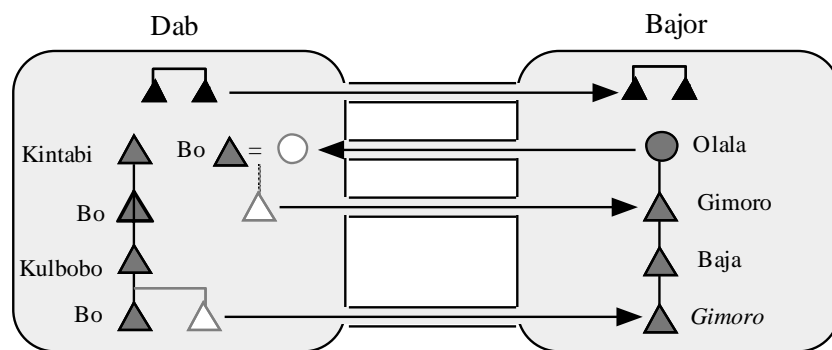


Figure 2: A path between the villages of Dab and Bajor.

A myth tells how a certain *ro* in Dab was made in order to be given to two men who came to Dab from Takur, a district east of Dab. Later the two men left Dab, following the path towards the west. They stayed for a while in all the villages along the coast until they finally ended up in Bajor on the “back side” of the island. For the last generations the history of this *ro* in Dab has been as follows:

A man in Dab (Bo) who had the rights in this *ro* married a woman (Olala) from Bajor. The man died while their son (Gimoro) was still a child, and the woman moved back to Bajor

with her son to live with her brother. Another man (Kintabi) followed a path in his history to the empty place in Dab (from the village of Badiata, east of Dab) and now he got the rights in the *ro*. He had a son and gave him the same name as the diseased man (Bo), and, thereby, the boy got a name and the rights in the *ro*. When his son again (Kulbobo) got his second son, he named him after the boy who had moved with his mother to Bajor (Gimoro), and adopted him to his son again (Baja). This boy will eventually inherit partial rights in the *ro* in Dab together with his biological brother (Bo) who lives in Dab and has been given a name from the *ro* and is going to inherit it from his father (Kulbobo).

This path between Dab and Bajor is not only kept open through adoptions and marriages; it is also maintained by people belonging to the two places who follow the path when in need of each other's help. Probably, since the path has grown strong, new marriages and adoptions will follow it in the future.

Adoptions and marriages often follow the same paths, and few marriages and no adoptions take place if people cannot show to a path to follow. Wogeos say about adoptions, "a white stone belongs to a white place, a black stone to a black place." Everything and everyone has its place, and nobody can be placed in a place to which they do not have a history and a path to follow.

Adoption (*oalati*) is very common in Wogeo, as it is other places in the Pacific (see e.g. Carroll 1970). According to my numbers from 1994, between 35-50% of the people from the villages from which I have reliable records were adopted. Of Dab's around 50 inhabitants at least 23 were adopted. Concerning places and inheritance of land rights, adoptions are definite and absolute, and the child is given all the rights that a biological child would have had. There are adoptions that are not followed by a transfer of care from the biological parents to the adoptive parents, and these adoptions are exclusively about inheritance and belonging



to places. Transfer of care that does not imply transfer in rights also takes place, but this is spoken of as “looking after” the child and is not regarded as an adoption. Even if the child is adopted, the biological relation between mother and child still determines belonging in certain respects, but this is a belonging relevant in other contexts than those in which belonging to places is the focus.

My contention is that, as far as belonging to places and inheritance of land rights are concerned, paths following histories that are not based on descent are just as important as those that are. But why the emphasis on paths? What is it that makes this particular metaphor so important to Wogeos?

### **“To follow a path”**

I have already described the inhabited landscape of Wogeo: the pathway leading through all the villages; the houses facing the path, and the side-paths leading to the gardens. Every day people move along these paths: between the villages and to the gardens. All the people of Wogeo carry with them a basket (*goate*) wherever they go. The basket contains betelnuts, betelpepper, lime and tobacco. When people meet, they offer each other a betelnut or some tobacco from their basket, and conversation does not begin until the betel-mixture is chewed red. “This *kastom* is one of the most important in Wogeo,” my adoptive mother often told me. I was given a basket the first day I arrived, and people always made sure that I had a sufficient supply of betelnuts so that I could offer *moin*, as this custom is called. “A man without a basket is like a sailing canoe without a rudder,” my oldest informant told me. The same man once tried to explain to me the Wogeo terms for *kastom* and *pasin*, the Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea Pidgin) words for tradition and custom.<sup>8</sup> “To follow *kastom* is to follow the stories from the past; our *pasin* (customary manners) is the rudder the stories give us<sup>9</sup>.” The old man

here referred to the stories of “the first people” of Wogeo. In both of the above statements it is movement in time and space – the rudder (*singara*) – that is used as the image of the best and proper way to live. According to themselves, the people of Wogeo have through history followed the stories and customs initiated by the first people, and the people from the particular places have followed the paths initiated by the people who previously have belonged to the places. In the daily maintenance of the paths, the people from the places carry with them baskets – their “rudder” – that contain products from their places and give them to the people they meet along the paths. My girlfriend in Wogeo often insisted that we should share a basket. To share a basket can be seen as a manifestation of sameness and belonging; to give from a basket can be seen as creating ties at the same time as it is a manifestation of difference (cf. Strathern 1988: 191).

Food is a key symbol in Wogeo (Anderson 1996; see also Paulsen, this volume). Exchange of food is an essential part of daily and ritual life in Wogeo. Every afternoon, close to sunset, children carry plates of cooked food with them between the houses in the village, plates that are sent back to the giver with an equal amount of food. Almost every day one can see women passing through the villages carrying larger plates of cooked food on their heads, or vegetables in large baskets (*kamina*) hanging on their backs from their foreheads, on the way to another village to give away or exchange. When people carry food with them – in baskets or in plates – a compensating gift of an equal amount of food should ideally be given immediately. On a later occasion a return gift will be given in order to “cut the rope” (*oaro faraik*), which again is compensated by the receiver. If one is invited to sit down and share a meal at someone’s house, the food does not require a return gift other than reciprocal hospitality.

Ritual food exchanges take place mainly on three levels: between individuals or households; between parts of the same or different villages, and between all the villages in a district. If individuals are exchanging, the cooked food is usually carried in plates to the place where the exchange is going to take place. If villages as a whole are exchanging, the food is normally cooked in *mumu* (stone oven) and carried in *kamina* baskets: one or two baskets from each village. The most important and extensive ritual exchanges that take place in Wogeo these days are exchanges between all the villages in a district, a type of exchange called *oalage*.<sup>10</sup> All the villages in the district (five in the district of Onevaro) are represented with one or two baskets that are carried by women to the house of the person honoured by the exchange. The baskets placed on plaited leaves or a canvas in front of the house and are then distributed to the villages so that no one carries away any of the food originating from their own village. Back in the villages, the food is shared between the households.

As Marilyn Strathern has pointed out, exchanges do not only create ties between people; they also “quite crucially sever and detach people from people” (1988: 191). Those who, during the exchange, share a basket or place their plates together have in the situation the same belonging, and most frequently it is the places that define who are exchanging together and with whom. Those on the other side of the exchange share, in that particular context, another belonging. The different belongings are visualised and manifested both by the organisation of the plates or baskets and by where and with who people sit during the exchange.

Each part of a village is related to a certain part of all the other villages in the district with ties of reciprocal obligations and belonging, and on some occasions these parts participate on the same side of an exchange. Whenever people from different villages are visiting each other, they will always go to the certain part of the village they are visiting that

is related in this manner to their own place to sit down, receive and give *moin*, rest and eat. They maintain the path in the social landscape, embedded in the geographical landscape, by walking along the path and acting out both the connectedness and the difference between the places. These relations between the different parts of the villages are paths that are often followed in the case of adoptions and marriages. When people spoke about the ideal form of adoption, they would tell how the newborn baby was also carried in a *kamina* basket along the path from its place of birth to the place of its new parents.

But the paths do not stop at the beaches of Wogeo, they also reach out across the sea to the neighbouring islands and to villages on the mainland.<sup>11</sup> A myth tells how two culture heroes (Mafofo and Onka) made a large sailing canoe and travelled to different places on the other islands and on the mainland (Hogbin 1935, 1970: 42-51<sup>12</sup>), and since then people from Wogeo have followed this path. Along this route, the Wogeos have trading partners (*lo*), in Tok Pisin spoken of as “friends” (*pren*), with whom they exchange certain goods and food. Among other things do the baskets the Wogeos always carry with them come to Wogeo along this path: from Murik Lakes at the mouth of Sepik River. The *lo* are inherited together with the *ro* and also belong to the places. When the partners visit Wogeo, they live with their *lo*. They are treated with extravagant hospitality and are served plate after plate with food (see Lipset 1985: 82). In Wogeo the custom is to give *lo* names from the places of their Wogeo partners, and in this manner these relations are also incorporated in the *ro* as paths to follow for those inheriting the rights in the *ro* (Anderson n.d.).<sup>13</sup>

Newer friendships can also be incorporated into the network of trade and friendship – friendships established while working outside of Wogeo, or with people for whom one has a feeling of gratitude. The criteria are that they live close enough to Wogeo to be visited by boat and that the relation is regarded as worth maintaining. As an example, a Dab family

established such relations with people from the island of Tarawai, which lies outside of the traditional network of trade, when the islanders helped the people of Dab when their boat shipwrecked and drifted ashore on the island (ibid.).

In this way, networks of pathways between places within and beyond Wogeo are created, pathways maintained by people and food moving along them in the social as well as the geographical landscape.

— **“the best way to go”**

Paths are commonly used metaphors for speaking of history and relations in Oceania.<sup>14</sup> A path can be, as Keesing (1993) has described it, the trajectory that is created through a person’s life, and also as the Wogeos conceptualise it, a path can be the trace a person leaves behind through her life. Paths can also seem to be founded on an idea of predestination – “he follows his path” (*ia jala*), people sometimes say – but there is always an underlying idea of repetition of actions by people who previously have belonged to the places. By sending people along the paths, from place to place, through marriage and adoptions, the paths are kept open. In the course of everyday life the paths are maintained by a continuous flow of food and people – in rituals or everyday visits. Some paths are strong and clear; others are left fallow but remain as possibilities for future flow, and the paths in the social landscape of Wogeo are always embedded in the geographical landscape. Tilley has stated:

A path brings forth possibilities for repeated actions within prescribed confines. [...] A journey along a path can be claimed to be a paradigmatic cultural act, since it is following in the steps inscribed by others whose steps have worn a conduit for movement which becomes the correct or “best way to go.” Spatiotemporal linkages thus established become obvious templates for future movement and maintenance of relationships (Tilley 1994: 30-31).

During the past years many anthropologists have written of the mnemonic function of places; the ability places have to remind people of certain episodes and histories.<sup>15</sup> People associate events with particular places, and by seeing the places the events are brought back. In Wogeo it was always essential that I should see with my own eyes the places in the stories I was told. Pathways can also be said to have such a mnemonic function: not for particular events, but for relations (cf. Roalkvam 1997, this volume). By following paths, the memories of relations through history are maintained and marked out “as the best way to go,” but the repeated acts of following pathways do more than maintain memories. To follow pathways are actions that create and maintain relationships – as ways of securing continuity in the history of the places as well as the wellbeing of the people in the places.

Following the above argument, the emphasis on “following pathways” could easily lead to the construction of a static model of Wogeo sociality. If people keep on following the same paths over and over again, it seems obvious that clearly definable local groups will be formed, and it is tempting to construct an ideal model based on principles of descent and alliance. But such clearly distinct groups do not exist on Wogeo. It is the places that define the people as much as the opposite and the places are filled with people who are following many different pathways into the places. This never results in a static system because new movements in time and space give the pathways new histories and directions, and each *ro* contains numerous potential paths. Depending on whom I spoke with, I was usually given many different versions as to which path a person had followed into a certain place. When land rights are transferred, at least three or more men, representing different villages in the district, must agree that the path chosen is the right one. The problem is never to find a path to follow but to find the right or the best path for that particular relation. It is possible to analyse

these relations in the light of conventional ideas of descent and alliance, but such an approach forces the Wogeo sociality into models that only elucidate parts of it – it does not contribute to an understanding of how the Wogeos themselves conceptualise and constitute their relations.

To summarise, the Wogeo landscape as composed of the villages, the parts of the villages and the paths between them can be seen as an embodiment of Wogeo social relations: of the various locales for belonging and of the existing and potential relations between them. The places and the pathways are more or less fixed in geographical space, and people flow in and out of the places in accordance with the history of the places. To the extent that we can define local groups in Wogeo, it will be the people who, at a given time, occupy a part of a village and those who live in other places but who maintain their ties to the place through visits and by harvesting from the place.<sup>16</sup> If the paths to the place are not maintained and followed, if one stops harvesting from the land belonging to the place, the affiliation to the place will end.

### **To be of “one blood”**

There are, however, clearly definable groups of people in the social landscape of Wogeo, but they are not localised in the geographical landscape. All Wogeos belong to one of two exogamous matrimoieties – the “Flying fox” (*Kilbong*) and the “Eagle” (*Tarega*). The moieties are said to be divided into an unknown number of matrilineages.<sup>17</sup> The matrilineages are called “mother” (*tina*), and the members of a matrilineage regard themselves as being of “one blood” (*dara ta*) or of “one skin” (*kus ta*).<sup>18</sup> Unlike the matrimoieties, the matrilineages are not topics for everyday conversation; they are “something to hide” (*kana mustaki*), Wogeos say.

Female fertility in Wogeo is regarded as spontaneous and immanent, contrary to male growth that has to be initiated and controlled.<sup>19</sup> The only way to become a member of a matrilineage is to be born by a woman of that lineage and nothing can change this identity. Contrary to the affiliation to a place, this identity is fixed and unchangeable – even in the case of adoption to women of other matrilineages. As an example, I was never reckoned as a member of my adoptive mother’s matrilineage, even though I had been given a name and a place of belonging. On the other hand I was often spoken of as belonging to the same moiety as my adoptive mother, and other newcomers to the island were also given such an identity – particularly women married to Wogeo men.<sup>20</sup> As a woman said to me: “How else would we know who her children should marry or not?” Obviously, then, there are no restrictions on talking about the moieties, and moiety-membership is often commented upon. People would often point to children’s behaviour and claim that they “walk like a flying fox” or “run like an eagle,” whereas membership in the matrilineages is only whispered about in private. Contrary to what is the case for the moieties, it is not difficult to keep the matrilineages outside of the public discourse, and, since the transfer of matrilineal identity is seen as an indisputable fact, it does not need to be manifested or confirmed.

It was explained to me that the matrilineages should be kept hidden because some of the matrilineages are regarded as “bad”. Through history, attempts have been made to destroy such matrilineages. The matrilineages own a particularly dangerous form of sorcery (*iaboua*, known in Tok Pisin as *sanguma*) and some of the matrilineages have a reputation for using this sorcery more often than others do. Nobody dies a “natural” death in Wogeo, and frequently deaths are explained by the use of sorcery. Since sorcery always is associated with the matrilineages, it seems obvious that people do not wish to draw attention to their matrilineal identity. There are also other reasons underlying the secrecy surrounding the



matrilineages, but there is no room for further elaboration on this here. The important aspect in this connection is the fact that the matrilineages seldom are spoken of or visualised as groups, and the situations in which matrilineal identity is made relevant are also qualitatively different from those in which the identity of the place is in focus. The domain of the matrilineages evolves around fertility, birth, death and magic, whereas affiliation to places is about creating continuity in history independent of the power the matrilineages represent as manifestations of female fertility.

The situations in which people's matrilineal identity was most apparent occurred after deaths. It is the nearest matrilineal kin who bear the main responsibility for the work of mourning when someone dies, but even on these occasions, people's matrilineal identity is not explicitly expressed or manifested. Usually the members of a matrilineage live spread around the island, and when someone dies the nearest kin come to the deceased's place of belonging and stay there until the work of mourning is completed (Wogeos speak of the mourning and the accompanying rituals as "work" – *manif*). When an old man in Dab died during my fieldwork, his only sister's son and his wife came to Dab and stayed there for two months. They lived with my Wogeo family, and during this period it was difficult to distinguish them from those belonging to the place. In spite of the fact that they lived only thirty minutes' walk away from Dab, in Badiata, they only went to their own house for a couple of short visits. They helped their host family in their daily work and they ate food from their gardens. The food they gave to the people who came to cry for the diseased, came from the gardens of Dab. The wife of the disease's sister's son and a woman in my household<sup>21</sup> spent all their time together and seemed like inseparable friends: they worked together, they cooked together, shared baskets, always chatting and laughing, and they often referred to themselves as "we from Dab" (*mitupela bilong Dab* in Tok Pisin). As the day of the couple's

return to Badiata came closer, the two friends complained that the time together in Dab was over; now all the fun was coming to an end. I argued that it could not be that bad – usually not more than a day or two passed between the times the two saw each other when passing through the other’s village or in church on Sundays. But when the couple moved back to Badiata, I never saw the two friends together again. When the woman from Badiata later came to Dab, she always went to sit down in a different place – in the place in Dab to which her part of Badiata belonged, and on Sundays, when everybody met outside the church, I did not see them sit down together. During the two months the couple was in Dab, we shared place; when they moved back to Badiata, this shared belonging ended. Even though it was matrilineal identity that defined the situation while the couple stayed in Dab, it was the place that sat the visible and discursive context for interaction – the matrilineal identity was toned down.

### **“Mother carries the place”**

The matrilineal families own the named houses. Such a house, with its design, magic and valuables, is spoken of as being contained in a plaited basket. Two such houses that have established certain ties between them are spoken of as being “one basket”, and they share the same magic. It can seem as though the only visible manifestations of the matrilineages are the named houses and, hence, it can be said that the only time the matrilineages are “spoken of” in public is at the construction of such a house.

Every time a named house is built, the social landscape of the village is visualised and embodied. When the landowners have fastened the *ro* in the roof of the new house, the thatch of sago-leaves, called *vato*, is laid on top – they “complete the *ro* with the *vato*,” as a *koakoale* of Dab said. Everybody who owns partial rights in a *ro* of the village – usually

children of people who have followed pathways out of the place – has to contribute one or two *vato*. These are placed in rows in front of the *ro* to which they belong, and in the end there are rows of *vato* in front of every *ro*. Then the *vato* that represent all the people having rights in the *ro* are fastened on top of the *ro* to which they belong. Although it was not the case when I witnessed this work, people told me that there often were a lot of arguments during this phase of the house building; arguments about who should give *vato* to whom, or who really does have the right to fasten that particular *ro*. If you do not give the *vato* you are obliged to contribute, the right in the *ro* is lost. In this way affiliation to the place is negotiated, confirmed, visualised and incorporated in the new house, and at the same time the children of the village learn the history and the paths of the different *ro*.

The roof of each house can, thereby, be seen as a microcosm of the village: the land belonging to it; the people affiliated to the place, and the pathways out of the place to other places within and beyond Wogeo. The house contains people belonging to the place but not necessarily people of the matrilineage that owns it. The matrilineages will, however, always try to send someone of their blood to their houses by marriage or adoption – these are paths that are often followed – and since daughters usually move out of the houses at marriage, these are paths that are followed over and over again. On the other hand, matrilineal identity is unchangeable and independent of locality, and, thereby, the houses can represent the matrilineages without containing its members – an analogy to the houses' existence independent of the concrete construction.

The matrilineage and the people belonging to the place where the house of the lineage is located often stand in a somewhat strained relationship to each other. The members of the matrilineage always try to increase their influence on the place, whereas the people of the place seek to prevent the matrilineage from getting too much power. Underlying are the ideas

of spontaneous, innate female fertility and instigated, controlled male growth – not as disparate properties of the two sexes but as gendered, complimentary values in both men and women and in the Wogeo sociality as a whole. It seems as though the work of creating and maintaining continuity in the history of the place is about maintaining a balance between the two opposing principles of belonging. Everybody belongs to both a place and a matrilineage, but in the course of everyday life it is the place of belonging that is salient while the matrilineage remains in the hidden domain. The work of creating continuity in history by following the paths of the different *ro* is about creating growth which is as independent of female fertility as possible – just as the *ro* once were trees rooted in the ground but now have become the “roots” the ground “grows” from, to use an image from one of Hogbin’s informants (Hogbin 1939: 163). The *ro* are cut off from their fertile source, but themselves become the source of the growth, or continuity, of the land.

Many rituals evolve around the theme of female fertility and male growth, and several myths tell how houses are created out of the body of a woman, or about houses that are carried in a woman’s womb (Anderson 1996: 108). “Mother carries the place,” the old man said – the place and the ground is contained and incorporated in the house. Just as growth cannot be without female fertility, people sharing a place cannot create continuity without being dependent on the matrilineages – manifested in the houses containing the people of the place. The lived space in Wogeo does not merely provide a model for thinking about society; the lived space does not only have the ability of transferring non-verbalised knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1977: 89): the lived space in Wogeo is the Wogeo sociality embodied (figure 4).

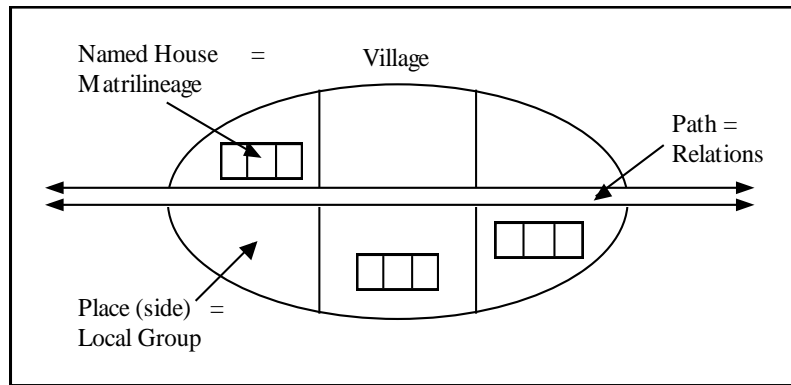


Figure 4: Wogeo sociality embodied

Based on Nancy Munn’s work on the Walbiri (Munn 1973 in Wagner 1986), Roy Wagner describes how the Walbiri infuse their lives and history into the landscape in which they move so that the landscape becomes their concretised history and worldview – the reverse process of abstraction<sup>22</sup> (Wagner 1986: 21; see also Roalkvam this volume and Sørnum this volume). Rather than abstracting models of and for how people relate to one another and to the world, it seems that Wogeos concretise these models into the lived landscape. Speaking of a “social landscape”, thus, becomes not only a metaphor that is “good to think”, but a concretising image – a macrocosm of analogies, “symbols that stand for themselves” (Wagner 1986: 26), to use the words of Wagner.

## Conclusion

There are two main loci for belonging in Wogeo – to a place and to a matrilineage – and, thereby, two main principles for the constitution of relations to other people – to share places and to share blood. The matrilineal identity is fixed and unchangeable, whereas the affiliation to a place continuously must be created and maintained. A person has to arrange a food exchange in his or her predecessor’s name in order to procure the land rights of his or her death. A girl has to be made into a woman of the place when menstruating for the first time

by climbing through the root of a tree rooted in the in the ground of the place she belongs to. Relations to people from other places are maintained by following the pathways between the places through adoptions and marriages and through exchanges, which both separate and create ties between people. Beyond Wogeo people sail along pathways across the ocean to maintain relationships that, through history, have manifested themselves as “the best way to go.” Affiliation to a place is given through naming, and in this manner Wogeos also incorporate strangers in their social landscape: strangers who have followed paths into Wogeo from other places – as I followed the path of Ian Hogbin, as the *lo* follow the paths of their ancestors, or as new friends are incorporated into the network of the paths of trade. The paths are inscribed in the landscape as potential relationships – some to be followed and actualised regularly, others as possibilities for future “journeys” – and, always, the name one is given tell will a story of the place to which one belongs and why that is one’s place in Wogeo.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork in Wogeo was carried out from July 1993 to June 1994 under the auspices of Institute of PNG Studies in Port Moresby, supported by funding from the Norwegian Research Council, Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, and Carl Lumholz Foundation while I was a graduate student at the Department and Museum of Anthropology, University of Oslo. In 1998-99, after this paper was presented, another fieldwork was conducted in Wogeo under the auspices of the National Research Institute in Port Moresby, founded by the Norwegian Research Council.

<sup>2</sup> The saying was explained to me as primarily referring to how the fertile soil gives life to everything “of the place” and houses were not in question. However, myths tell how a woman carried her house in a vulva, how a house was made from a woman’s body, or how an eagle – the totem of one of the matrimoieties – fetched a house from the mainland to his mother (Anderson 1996: 87-88, 138-41, 145-146). The parallel between the quote as referring to the fertile soil and to the symbolism of female houses will be made evident through this text.

<sup>3</sup> Manam, Boesa, Biem (Bam), Kadovar, Rubrub (Blupblup), Wei, Koil and Wogeo (Voceo). In some sources the islands of Kairiru, Muschu and Roboyn near Wewak are included as well, but these islands are by Wogeos spoken of as Wewak Islands.

<sup>4</sup> In past times, many of the villages (perhaps all) were situated on mountain ridges. The village of Gole was still located on a ridge when Hogbin conducted fieldwork in the 1930s and-40s, and at that time the *niaboa* of Gole (called Bagur) was built on the end of the ridge as the last house of the village with its back towards the sea. The village was divided in three parts: the side towards the bush (*uta*), the middle (*lukaluka*), and the side towards the sea (*ila*) where also the *niaboa* had its place.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the findings from the linguistic research conducted on Wogeo by Mats Exter in 1999, the spelling of the native Wogeo terms in this chapter in many cases differs from Hogbin's (e.g. *koakoale* instead of *kokwal*; *niaboa* instead of *niabwa*; *ruma* instead of *luma*).

<sup>6</sup> In Gole and Koblik the sides are spoken of as *uta* and *ila*, literally meaning “the side towards the bush” and “the side towards the beach”, complying with the direction of the villages while they located on the mountain ridges – even though the villages around the Second World War turned 90 degrees around and the sides now are facing both the sea and the bush.

<sup>7</sup> A metaphor for reciprocal exchange relations.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Keesing & Tonkinson 1982 and Keesing 1989 and 1993b for discussions about *kastom*.

<sup>9</sup> The man used the Wogeo terms *nanasa moa* (stories from before) and *singara* (rudder) (see Anderson 1996:17, 37).

<sup>10</sup> In past times large exchanges also took place between the districts on the island (by Hogbin called *warabwa* (*oaraboa*)). Such exchanges were described to me by the old men on the island as a “key scenario” of Wogeo *kastom* (Anderson 1996: 33; Hogbin 1969-70, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> See also Roalkvam's discussion of Onotoan pathways, this volume and Roalkvam 1997.

<sup>12</sup> As is the case for all the myths I have been told in Wogeo, there are several versions of this myth depending on in what situation they are told and by whom, and those I was told differs in some respects from the two versions accounted for by Hogbin.

<sup>13</sup> According to David Lipset (personal communication), the Wogeo names given to *lo* in Murik Lakes are not commonly known in Murik. The Muriks, on their side, speak of their partners in local kinship terms (Lipset 1985).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Keesing 1993a; Hoëm this volume; Hviding 1996; Roalkvam 1997, this volume; Tilley 1994.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Barth 1975; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Kahn 1990, 1996; Tilley 1994; Weiner 1991.

<sup>16</sup> All the people who belong to the same part of a village are referred to as a *dan* (lit. "water", see Anderson 1996: 52-62; Hogbin 1978).

<sup>17</sup> The old men of the district I lived in managed to count 12 named matrilineages when we were discussing the issue but meant there were more (Anderson 1996: 82).

<sup>18</sup> During the fieldwork in 1993-94, the people I spoke to maintained that matrilineal kin share blood, but some claimed that people share blood with their father as well. They did not, however, extend this further patrilineally. In 1999, some people said that *dara-ta* was not the proper designation for people belonging to the same matrilineage and said that *kus-ta* was the correct term. I shall not speculate on this change here, but suffice to note that the emphasis on blood as a substance shared with both parents most likely is related to the continuous negotiation between the side of father and the side of mother.

<sup>19</sup> Previously, young boys in their puberty had to go through extensive rituals in order to grow and become men (see Hogbin 1970). These rituals are not practised any longer, and people often told me how small the Wogeo men are these days (see also Anderson 1996).

<sup>20</sup> The moieties can, thus, not be defined as extended matrilineages.

<sup>21</sup> The woman was her husband's ZD and the deceased's ZDD and lived in our household because she was married to my adoptive MB who was away working on a ship while I lived in Dab.

<sup>22</sup> "And the life course of a people, the totality of their ways, conventions, and conventionally encountered situations, is the sum of its 'tracks', the trails over its country along which experience is measured on. [...] To 'follow' the track is to infuse a microcosm with the existence and motion of its maker, and, by certain analogy, any sensory enrichment of its iconography constitutes a similar reversal of the process of abstraction" (Wagner 1986:21).



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