Contesting Representations of Gender Stratification in Pohnpei, Micronesia

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ABSTRACT Both space and language are resources in the production of social hierarchies. In Pohnpei, Micronesia, the social categorization of space in the feasthouse creates a map of the social order that includes a subordinate identity for women, that of a wife whose status depends on her husband's. However, women orators at feast discursively subvert characterizations of women's status as contingent on men. The orators invoke a more complex range of gendered subject positions than are expressed spatially, including women's multiple identities as mother, sister, and wife. This article examines how gendered space in the Pohnpeian feasthouse relates to gendered discourse and discourse about gender. The tension between the spatial representation of women's status and the discursive one indicates that the production of social stratification is a dynamic and interactive process in Pohnpei, entailing contradiction as well as confirmation within and across semiotic modalities.

KEYWORDS Gender, Space, Micronesia, Pohnpei

Discussions of gender differences often cohere around idealized notions of men and women, not only in scholarly discourses about gender in anthropology, but also in discourses among the populations we study. Feminist theorists (and others) have critiqued such essentializing processes, and have called for a 'reconceptualization of the subject as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference' (de Laurieris 1990:116), even as they acknowledge the political advantages (in building power and solidarity) that can accrue through essentialization or a reduction of facets of difference, for example in constructing a singularly shaped identity to claim redress for inequalities based on categorical difference. The representation of gender (or other social category) as a unified domain both organizes power relations and frames opposition to power relations in particular contexts. However,

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A lack of attention to the multiple ways gender articulates with other social institutions can lead to conundrums in trying to understand relations between gender and social stratification; particularly the role that women play in the reproduction of structures of inequality. The question is how to investigate the multiplicity of relations of difference, and the contradictions inherent in them. This multiplicity includes compound modalities for the expression of gender, since social categories are produced not only in discourse, but also through spatial relations of proximity and distance, inclusion and exclusion. I will be especially concerned in this article with the role of space in privileging and essentializing certain gender relations out of possible connections.

Space is a powerful resource for discovering, organizing, and reproducing particular sets of relations. Spatial conception has been claimed to be central to human thinking (Levinson 1992) hence the proliferation of spatial metaphors in talking about temporal relations, music, mathematics, emotions, and social structure (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Levinson 1992). Space in Austronesian houses serves as a 'memory palace' or mnemonic cultural design for the remembrance of the past (Fox 1993:4); for example, in Maori culture, spatial coordinates of a house are associated with coordinates of time (Van Meijl 1993). Ideas interpreted through physical space are situated within a habitualized historical practice. In Pohnpei, Micronesia, the ceremonial feasthouse is a key site for the visual instantiation of ranked and gendered status relationships, and this article will discuss some particular instances of women's oratory about gender and status situated within these feasthouse relations.

Space and place are important resources in the construction of gender relations cross-culturally, as feminist geographers and anthropologists have noted (for example Massey 1994; Moore 1986; Women and Geography Study Group 1997; Spain 1992; Ardener 1981): space is instrumental in the exercise of power (Foucault 1980; Rose 1993). Limiting spatial mobility, an idea central to social disciplining (Foucault 1977), is common cross-culturally, and has implications for the acquisition of social roles (Laws 1997: 56; Toren 1999). In constructing social stratification through spatial symbolism, differences are made not only between men and women, but among women and among men.

The power of space to express relations of social difference is particularly striking in Pacific societies, and as Duranti has noted for Samoa, space is often considered a more salient guide to status relations than speech (1981, 1994). Toren similarly suggests for Fiji that even a weak chief whose directives are ignored is unlikely to completely lose influence, because his visible high status spatial position at public gatherings 'gives him an edge over any
opposition' (1990:142) (see also Hoem 1993 for a discussion of how relations between people are represented spatially in Tokelau). Toren (1990) has shown how Fijian children are socialized to interpret social asymmetries through physical relations of 'above' and 'below.' In Pohnpei, space and status are regularly constructed as analogous: the paramount chief is called Wasa Lapalap, which literally means 'place high-ranking,' and certain members of the paramount chief's clan are typically called the johpeidi, 'face downwards,' because they face down towards others who face up to them in the feasthouse. Pacific societies can provide a fruitful ground for looking at gender and status because of this kind of projection of social relations onto spatial relations, a practice which provides a visual map of the organization of principles of social difference.

Pacific societies are also particularly good contexts for exploring multiple axes of gender difference. In many Pacific societies the roles of mother, sister, and wife have quite different statuses (see Weiner 1982; Marshall 1981; Philips 1994a, 1994b; Tcherkezoff 1993; Moris 1998). Sisters have a high status, in some societies outranking brothers (e.g. Tonga), yet as wives they are subordinate to husbands. Thus a single individual can be dominant in one relation but subordinate in another. Mothers have a high social value in a society such as Pohnpeian because they determine social status and legitimacy to power. An individual's particular share of manaman, 'spiritual power or efficacy, is distributed through the matriline. The Pohnpeian feasthouse spatial organization, however, privileges wife (a lower status than sister or mother) as the representative status for women (cf. Toren 1990 for Fiji, but see Philips 1994 for Tonga), while status for men is founded on clan affiliation and seniority.

In this paper I am interested in how Pohnpeian women use opportunities available to them in oratory to raise the status of women by expanding the range of gendered identities beyond what is spatially represented in the feasthouse, and by linguistically inverting the status relations represented in space. Two women orators I will discuss argue for attention to the multiple and different ways gender articulates with status in Pohnpeian society; in short, they argue against an essentialist reading of Pohnpeian women. The oratorics show the local interplay between representations of essentialized gender categories and multiply-faceted gender identities and the roles of language and space in building and contesting the particularities of gender difference. Discursive arguments against the dependency of women on men for status are contradicted by the spatial privileging of the conjugal relation as the essential link to status for women in Pohnpei.
Before proceeding to look at how gender identities are spatially and discursively endowed with social value, I provide some ethnographic background, including a discussion of the feasthouse and its role in producing hierarchy.

**Ethnographic Background**

Pohnpei is an island nation in the western central Pacific Ocean. It is circular and roughly 16 kilometers wide; about 30,000 Pohnpeians live there. The island is divided into five chiefdoms. Although united under a form of democratic government today, and part of the Federated States of Micronesia, the traditional ranked chiefdom remains an important organizing principle in the practices of the island, and the five paramount chief and chiefesses still retain a good deal of influence. Each of the five chiefdoms is ranked hierarchically, and divided into sections and into neighborhood communities or kouaap. These sections and kouaap have leaders and subleaders. Women have important community roles throughout the complex hierarchy, roles dependent on their spouses' social position. The chiefdom in which I have done the majority of my fieldwork is Madolenihmw, located in the southeast portion of the island. My principal host during my field stays in periods from 1990 to 1995 has been the former secondary chiefess of Madolenihmw, now paramount chiefess.

Pohnpeian society is organized into matrilineal clans. Relationships among clan members are marked according to seniority of matrilineal descent (Garvin & Reisenberg 1952), and this provides the basic pattern for the acquisition of hierarchically ranked titles by male members (counterpart titles are given to women). Because chiefdoms, clans, and sub-clans are ranked, the same title held by members of different chiefdoms are not equivalent, and thus no two Pohnpeians have the same rank (for a more complete description of the Pohnpeian polity see Reisenberg 1968; Petersen 1982; Shimizu 1982; Keating 1996; Kihlgren 1996; Mauricio 1993).

Rank or status is an underlying principle in Pohnpeian society. Rank influences language use, the land or space one is 'entitled' to, responsibilities, food share, where one sits relative to others in the feasthouse, as well as many features of daily interaction. Titles are always used instead of personal names to address and refer to people. Both status and gender are indexed in these titles. Two separate but related hierarchies are created, one among men and one among women. The following list shows some of the highest ranked titles for men and women in the paramount chief's line in the Madolenihmw chiefdom:

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The title of paramount chief of each chieftain is ordinarily given to the senior male member of the ruling matrilineage (Mauricio 1993:60). The paramount chief’s title, Nannawarki, literally means ‘the one who controls titles.’ The secondary chief is from a different clan than the paramount chief and controls a different line of titles. Women are described by one ethnographer as having ‘complementary’ spheres of activity and domains of power (Kihleng 1996:41). However, a woman, including a paramount chiefess, cannot keep her title if her husband dies. When my host, the secondary chiefess of Madolenihmw, was widowed, her status immediately declined. Later, when she married the widowed paramount chief, she became the highest status woman in the chieftain. There are a few titles that are given to women in their own right (i.e., titles that are theirs for life, and not dependent on their husband’s rank).

Pohnpeians discursively mark status relationships not only through the title system but through certain grammatical choices. Thus Pohnpeians continually construct their own and others’ relative social status when they talk. Such a system of grammaticalized status relations is known as ‘honorifics’ among those who study language. Typically only certain aspects of the grammar of a language are selected as salient for status marking. For example, in languages such as French and German, this status marking centers on the second person pronoun, the well known tu/cous contrast (choice of pronoun constructs a status relation). One of the most important sites of status-marking in Pohnpeian is verbs of motion and stasis, i.e., a person’s position or path in space. For example, to say ‘that woman goes’ and indicate high status one says iho keatta (lit. woman that moves [high status] -there), whereas to say ‘that woman goes’ and indicate low status movement one says iho patohia (lit. woman that moves [low status] -there), and to say ‘that woman goes’ without status marking, one says iho kehia. Verbs of speaking, eating, mental state verbs, and the expression of possessive relations are also important sites of differentiation into high or low status.
Pohnpeians don’t raise their own status through language; they would not, for example, use a high status verb for their own actions. Modesty is valued and such self-raising is inappropriate. Instead, Pohnpeians regularly lower their own status through language. They also lower the status of others through language and this lowering of others is twice as frequent as lowering of the self in my corpus of videotaped interactions where status-marked language is used. In one of the following excerpts when the master of ceremonies at a feast exhorts the women present to come and listen to the chiefess, he uses a low status verb for the women’s action, saying *kumuaik līh ukān mena la patololu* (lit. ‘you-all women please move! low status’-here’). It is important to mention that status-marked language is not used in every context or interaction, and that it is possible to carry on an entire conversation without the use of status-marked terms, providing a chief or chiefess is not addressed or referred to. In the presence of chiefs and chiefesses, and other high ranking members of society, such as priests and ministers, it is appropriate to use status-marked language. Status-marked language is also used in all radio broadcasts, since it is assumed high status persons will be in the audience (see Keating 1997, 1998 for a more detailed discussion of status-marked speech).

Spatially, Pohnpei is not organized into villages. Instead of villages, Pohnpeians live on their separate farms on the flatter lands near the shoreline. However, the port town of Kolonia is organized according to Western colonizers’ ideas of space and townships. Among the widely scattered homesteads in the rest of the island, often obscured from sight by dense equatorial rain forest, the customary practice of neighbors joining together in the evening to share *sakau* (a ritual beverage called *kava* in many Pacific societies, made from the pounded roots of the pepper plant), helps create community ties, and reproduce hierarchy, including elements of both gender and rank. A ranked, gendered hierarchy is constructed through the order of the serving of cups of *sakau*; for example, the highest ranking woman present is served third after the paramount chief and secondary chief. Pohnpeians also join frequently together in *kamadipou*, or feasts, held in the ceremonial feast house or *nahi* (described below). The entire community participates in food consumption and exchange, as these events are organized around bringing tribute to the chiefs and chiefesses, which is redistributed according to rank. Those who bring large amounts of tribute in the form of agricultural produce, cash, and imported goods are praised and eventually rewarded with higher titles.
The Feast House

Gender differences are often spatially realized cross culturally in patterns within dwellings, in ceremonial houses, where often specialized knowledge is transferred to younger men, and in segregated workplaces (see Spain 1992; Moore 1986; Ardener 1981). Bourdieu describes the house as a ‘book’ into which children are socialized through their bodies, and where they learn a particular ‘vision of the world’ which is ‘read by the body’ (Bourdieu 1977:90). The Pohnpeian ceremonial house, the feasthouse or mahr, is a central focus of ranked and gendered spatial symbolism in Pohnpei. The customary spatial organization of the feasthouse is a key site for the production of status difference. The overall space in the mahr is ordered hierarchically, and this model is regularly imposed on other locales as well, such as Western-style buildings.

The feast house is rectangular in shape, with a floor plan that is U-shaped, and one side is completely open to the outside (see diagram, adapted from Mauricio 1993). The walls traditionally extend only half-way to the roof to permit maximum air flow in the humid, equatorial climate. The floor is raised on three sides above the middle, a bare earth floor (this space is marked Naukan- deni Limes Rat Ie and Pehson Pwel Pahpepo on the diagram). On this raised platform gender participates in the two important dimensions of status-marked space: vertical and horizontal planes. The rear of the platform, or the opposite of the opening to the outside, is the place of highest status (Woun Kerehtap in the diagram). This is divided into male and female sides and is where the paramount chief, the secondary chief, the paramount chiefness, and the secondary chiefness sit. The space behind (and superior to) them is the space occupied by the ancestor deities, whose presence is constructed through a prescription against walking in their space, as well as through the plural pronoun used to address the chief, who is the corporeal representative of the deities. Pohnpeian oral historians equate the feasthouse with a church because it embodies sacred symbolic elements (Mauricio 1993:124). The sides of the platform (Woulap and Wounken and the unmarked space beneath in the diagram) signify lower status than the rear. In an 1899 description, ‘the women and children and those of lower estate’ sat not on the high status rear platform, but on the sides (Christian 1899:141). A change can be seen in the relative status of women as expressed spatially in public events since the turn of the century, since now high ranking women sit in a particular section of the larger space formerly reserved for men. In terms of vertical hierarchy, the paramount chief and secondary chief often sit on imported chairs, in spaces that mark them as first and second in rank, while the paramount chiefness
and secondary chiefess sit on the floor, vertically below the chiefs and on the 'female side.' In both male and female sides of the feasthouse, persons are ordered according to rank, visually setting up two gendered ranks. Not only is status among men and status among women saliently represented, but the relations between men as a group and women as a group.

In the feasthouse roof support posts are named and reserved for certain high status men. A certain post is reserved for a man with the title Kereaun en Ledau, and only a man with the title Nahlaine can use the opposite post. These posts are important supports, not only for individuals’ backs, but to hold up the roof. The paramount chief sits against a central post known as Saladien Enihlap, literally 'the facing downward of the Great Spirit Nahusapai' (Mauricio 1993, see diagram, position 'A'). As Fox notes about Austronesian houses, 'from a physical structure – a particular arrangement of posts and beams – one can begin to trace the ideals and social values of a society' (Fox 1993:2). There are no designated women’s support posts in the nahe. Just as seating arrangements in the Samoan fono or political meeting can influence rights of participation in talk (Duranti 1994), the side platforms of the Pohnpeian feasthouse where low status persons (and traditionally women) sit are called maeangintik, literally 'whisper little,' indicating a relationship between status and appropriate amount and volume of speech.

There are six entry doors to the feasthouse platform which signify status and gender (see 'a' through 'g' on the diagram). One door is for the paramount chief, one for the second chief, one for high titled women, one for high titled men, and one for lower status women and one for lower status men. These entryways are ranked according to proximity to the rear of the platform. Thus gender and status are relevant from the moment of entry into symbolized space, and gender and access to space are mutually constitutive.

While for men seating position in the feasthouse is not dependent on their role as husband but rather is related to the role of son, i.e. their status through clan affiliation (which is matrilineal), for women’s seating position is determined by the husband’s title.11 The multiple statuses that women commonly have in Pacific societies, i.e., that of sister, mother, daughter, and wife, are essentialized and unified into one status for purposes of hierarchical seating in the feast-house. The salient status (and guide to seating position) is a dependent and provisional status (when her husband dies, the woman loses her title and position in the feasthouse).
Fig. 1. Drawing of Nata
A — Roof post called 'facing downward of the Great Spirit'; B — post called 'facing the heavens,' where the principal serves of 'sakau' to the paramount chief sits and works; C — post where the person in charge of the redistribution activities and the 'sakau' ceremony works; D — post where the person in charge of the hearth and the cooking works; E — post at the entrance of the 'nata'; Secondary roof posts are numbered 1–14. Entryways are labeled 'a' through 'h'. Entryway 'a' is used by the secondary chief and his children, 'b' is another 'sacred entryway,' this one used by the paramount chief and his children, 'c' is the entryway for the women who sit in the second floor panel (Pahn Eririso) on the upper platform; 'h' is the entryway for men who sit in the second floor panel. The general entryway for women is 'a', the general entryway for men is 'g'. The entryway for those who have high ranking titles in the paramount chief's line is 'e,' the entryway for those who have high ranking titles in the secondary chief's line is 'f.'
Oratory, Status, and Gender: Looking at Women’s Speeches

Feasts are, not surprisingly, the most important activity which takes place in the feast house. The entire community participates, and oratory is an important part of the event. The community sits in a pattern that replicates certain status relationships between women and men and among women and men. Usually the paramount chief and secondary chief give speeches, as do other high ranking men. High ranking women have also recently begun to give speeches. Orators typically stand and address the gathering from the same location in which they have been seated, i.e., the location which signifies their status relative to everyone else in attendance. At the beginning of each speech there is a formulaic introduction with a canonical ordering of paramount chief, secondary chief, paramount chiefess and secondary chiefess followed by other high status members of the audience. As with the order of serving sakau, this constructs the highest position of women as third. In the following excerpts I look at some ways that the status of women expressed in women’s oratory in some ways confirms but in essential ways contradicts the status represented spatially and in other cultural practices. The women utilize resources available to them in language to disrupt the visually conceived order and reposition women versus men.

At the many feasts I attended during a year of fieldwork (feasts are held at least weekly), sometimes one woman delivered a formal speech, and sometimes none did, while there were always three to four speeches by different high-ranking men and sometimes more. The speeches I discuss here are representative of the women’s oratory I recorded in Pohnpei during the period of my fieldwork, in that they valorize women’s work and build solidarity among women, praising their contributions to society, while still placing their oratory within traditional frameworks, both discursive (for example in using canonical oratorical features) and spatial. Nevertheless these are also performances particular to these two women’s leadership styles.

Women’s oratory often contains topics ‘for women’ and ‘about women’ while men’s oratory is for the whole community. At one particular feast, for example, while the master of ceremonies calls for everyone to come and listen to a high-titled man’s speech (Excerpt 1) he only calls for women to listen to the chiefess’ speech (Excerpt 2).

(1) MASTER OF CEREMONIES’ INTRODUCTION FOR A MAN
kumwai de pato, kumwai patelungado
you all don’t stay outside (you of low status), you all come inside (you of low status)

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In contrast to Excerpt 1, the master of ceremonies genders the audience for the paramount chiefess’ oratory.

MASTER OF CEREMONY’S INTRODUCTION FOR THE PARAMOUNT CHIEFESS
01 na kumzaid ilih akan kumzaid menlau potoko
    so all you women you all please come here (you of low status)
02 ansonei Likend pahn mahsen.
    now the paramount chiefess is going to speak (she of high status)
03 kumzaid menlau potoko, kumzaid
    you all please come here (you of low status). You all
04 tungelnuhi kawcid, pahn sang Likend.
    will receive (you of low status) advice from the paramount chiefess.

However, in this particular case, as soon as she begins to speak, the chiefess resists the framing of her remarks as gendered or limited to women. She characterizes her speech as in fact addressed to a man and in dialogue with him. As she speaks, she makes it clear that she has risen not to give advice to the women (line 05), but to challenge a characterization that a high status man has made that the women are worthless and not contributing to the feast that is underway.

(2) A REPLY TO A MAN: NOT ADVICE FOR WOMEN
05 sote kawcid, tial me pahn kawcid it (...)  
not advice. They are the ones who will advise me (...)
07 rahmoei t ilil pekida ri ansou forge i en iang
    today I also request some time to speak in order to join in
08 poteng kapinga ahfree mehtel N ((titl.))
    giving praise/thanks but the real reason is that N ((a high titled man))
09 me karengi ri ubda
    caused me to stand up

A high-titled man, in line to be chief, N, has publicly complained that the women are ‘just eating and not working’ to make the feast a success (the implication is that they are like children). The event is a kamadipoe en wathi or feast of honor. These feasts at the beginning of the yam harvest show honor and pay tribute to the chiefs and the chiefesses. The significance of the chiefess’ reply to the accusation can be understood as a contestation of the lowering of the status of women. Since promotions in status through the title system are dependent on clan affiliation as well as public performances of work in service of the chief, usually shown through prestations of agricultural produce from one’s lands to the chief during feasts, such a negative char-
characterization can have serious consequences for family status. If the women's service is publicly labeled as deficient (as is claimed by N), this is humiliating and dishonoring (and status-lowering) to them.

The feasthouse of the paramount chief of the chieftain of Mataiendane

When the chiefess begins her speech, she restates the complaint against women as a complaint not only against lower status women just eating and not providing anything, but high status women (see Excerpt 4). She indicates both statuses by using a low status verb and a high status verb in a serial construction, *tuntungoelehu de suk*, literally 'eating (low status) or eating (high status)'. During the course of her speech she utilizes the status marking features of the language to create both a community of women stratified according to status and a unified, purely high status community of all the women.

(4) STRATIFYING THE COMMUNITY OF WOMEN

(... because N has accused the women of)

14 *tung tuntungoelehu de suke *

just eating (those of low status) or eating (those of high status)

15 *ahpe sahe katepe, ih karepen ei patohda uhe.*

but not providing anything. This is the cause of my standing up (I of low status)

Note that she characterizes her own status as low in line 15 by using a low status verb, *patohda*, for her act of standing up (an act that, not insignificantly, puts her vertically higher than everyone else, even the chiefs). This is an ex-
ample of how status-marked language can recontextualize relations expressed spatially. Spatially, she is higher than the other women, and they are in a lower status relation to her. In his introduction (Excerpts 1 and 2), the master of ceremonies characterized the women in the audience as low status and the chieftess as high status. He used a low status verb to refer to the women's action of coming to hear the speech (patalho 'come' in Excerpt 2, lines 02 and 03), and a high status verb to refer to the chieftess' speaking, mahsen (in line 02). In his introduction the women are differentiated just as the spatial relation models. In her speech, however, the chieftess subverts the usual roles of chieftess and subordinate, lowering her own status through her choice of a low status verb of possession, and raising the status of all the other women through choosing a high status possessive classifier, spacheelimommawai (lit. your [high status]) for their show of honor (see Excerpt 5, lines 27 and 28).

(5) CHIEFTESS AS LOW STATUS, WOMEN IN THE AUDIENCE AS HIGH STATUS
27 rahswe i pil tungaalwika chu kaping kalangin
   today I also have (I of low status) praise and thanks
28 nin dwyen dukme sanuwalu spacheelimommawai wahu rahswe
   according to what has become clear by your (you of high status) honor today

The chieftess thus exactly inverts the status roles created by the master of ceremonies in his introduction (see Excerpt 2) where he uses low status for the women in the audience and high status for the chieftess. The chieftess' discursive representation is also the antitheses of the meanings expressed spatially, as she faces down to the others and they face up to her.

There are several other ways the chieftess contests the spatial relationships of the feasthouse. Her social worth, she asserts, is contingent on women, not men. This representation goes beyond what is instantiated by spatial positions in the feasthouse, which construct a woman's status as dependent on her husband's. Without the women's help elevating her or 'propping her up' she says she herself would be worthless ('only ... filling my stomach', line 46).

(6) WOMEN'S STATUS AS CONTINGENT ON OTHER WOMEN
42 i peki remzai phihrkei samwdaru kumwail
   I asked you all some years ago, you all
43 en sevucie oh utangie faze ma i phiw ale nitaht
   to help me and prop me up because if I have your propping up
44 ci kupwoorpori me i kak kuaikil pwekhi
   I hope that I can be capable because of
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45 kumwail ah ma soh ah ih pahn mauhmen
you all but if not (for your help) I will look as if
46 me ih pahn mauhmen tia audaude kapedele me soh katepe ieu.
I only sit filling my stomach. That is worthless.
47 eki ((laughed)) kalongan en komei, N
So ((laughs)) thank you, N ((man's title)) (you of high status)
48 komei me komekumekidier rahnoot.
you (of high status) are the one who caused me to take action today.

The chiefess goes on to refute N's criticism and praise the women for their contribution to her chiefly success and status. She includes all women.

(7) PRAISING THE WOMEN FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO HER STATUS
19 i drehisla waven ei kepin fawesi sung ni
I give fully my praise/thanks because since
20 eki kepevalieng Leheki sasinti alehdi
my rise in status to chiefess I have continued to get
21 saawen mauhmen saumawensahabu de mauhmen limpuk mohel.
good demonstrations of appearances of true love,
22 kodaen pif wahu to, wahu tangaki limpuk me i
not only honor honor joined with love that I
23 alehdi sung kumwail iken lepitwet
have gotten from all you women of this section
24 mauvin kaiden ohl akan, mauvin kumwail tih akan. ((laughed a little))
maybe not the men, maybe all you women.

The chiefess explicitly eliminates the men from her praise (though she laughs as she does so, modifying her insult, and also modifies the charge with 'maybe' lin 24). Thus she turns the criticism around, and calls the men's behavior into question. Speaker N has created a dichotomy and differentially valued men and women. The chiefess reverses his valuing.

Next she appropriates a male symbol of superior skill and procreative power (yams) to materialize her praise and status elevation of women. She announces her intention to plant a commemorative yam as a memorial to her approbation of women. The word she chooses for yam literally means 'egg.' Yams are important components of male prestige competitions and are symbols of gendered activities. The yam is a substantive symbol that will grow and increase with value over time. Yams used for prestige competitions are typically replanted after a competition to grow still larger (see Kihleng 1996 for a discussion of recent uses of yams in women's exchange practices).

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(8) APPROPRIATING A MALE SYMBOL OF STATUS

32 ma l pahn alesang wasaiki kutoh rian
I will get from someplace two small yams (literally 'eggs')

33 l pahn kappureding wasahu bhen wasahu
I will put back/leave one of them to the women of this place

34 chu pexe i umaiam duhme i kasalehda
one, because I will remember what I showed

The chieftess then employs another strategy which is constitutive of status in Pohnpei. She re-distributes to the other women some of the tribute that has been given to her in the form of cash. Throughout her speech she uses status-marked language and collaboratively worded utterances to construct a discourse which showcases and multiplies the contributions of the women, and joins them with her own high status as royalty. She links past, present, and future. All this is in contrast to N's attempt to differentiate women from men in terms of social worth. The chieftess not only constructs the category of femaleness as highly valued, but disrupts the dichotomy between male and female by using a male symbol of value, yams, to concretize women's high worth. An important part of her challenge to N is that women’s status (like her own as chieftess) is not dependent on men (as the title system and the assignation of space on the feast house platform suggests), but that status is dependent on women. It is the paramount chief’s sister's son who inherits the spiritual potency which legitimizes future ascendancy to power. Note, however, the orator is making this claim from a spatial position singularly dependent on the social status of her husband, the paramount chief. Because of the analogous relation between space and status in Pohnpei, this undermines her claim for women's autonomy in matters of status, although her speech serves to expand and complicate the picture.

A Second Orator and the Reproduction of Women’s Status

In another example of women’s oratory, also at a community feast, a series of gendered identities — mother, sister, and wife — are discussed. This woman is not a chieftess; her husband is high ranking, however, several levels below the chief, and she is thus one of the highest ranking women present on this occasion. The occasion is a feast in a series of feasts honoring the chief and celebrating the yam season. This orator also creates a tension between spatially instantiated gender roles and a larger set of relationships. She speaks from a space in the feasthouse subordinate to men, and determined by her husband’s position. Yet despite this, she characterizes women as pri-
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Mary; 'women are the ones who begin everything' (Excerpt 9, lines 02–03). She says Pohnpeian women have a worldwide influence; they have 'shown the world' (line 03) what a successful chieftain Madolenihmw is. Note how although mother and sister are statuses that are not recognized spatially in the feasthouse, they are constructed by this orator as important spheres of influence, power, and status for women.

(9) SECOND WOMAN ORATORE: MOTHERS AS FOUNDERS AND SPOKESPERSONS TO THE WORLD

01 maung kan, e sang retail kitail nohmo kan
honored people, it's from us we mothers
02 kitait lih akan, kitait lih akan kitail me
we women, we women are the ones who begin
03 tepih mech saong kiaro, oh kasilyengehr sampah yet oh
everything, and have already showed the world what kind
04 udara wehi soa Madolenihmew. (...) of chieftain Madolenihmw really is. (...) 05 epi karehaa inomen pohonpoahoe pawihet yet
and so cause very admirable success to be made here
06 e mite, paw e sang retail nohmo kan
it's true, because it's from us mothers

This orator says mothers are the generative force behind all success in the chieftain. In Excerpt 10, she generalizes her high status representation for all women, using inclusive high status constructions for all the women present (lines 07 and 08). She describes high status 'hearts' (intentions, thoughts) of women, yet she differentiates their spouses (men) into high and low status (lines 09 and 10). As mothers and sisters women have high status; as wives they are both empowered (in giving advice to husbands) and subordinate to (they must talk only 'a little' to, line 09) their husbands.

(10) HIGH STATUS WOMEN, LOW STATUS MALE SPOUSES

07 ma kitait white patn sapwelaimanik kapuar moahu, oh
if we don't have (we of high status) good (high status) hearts, and
08 kaukanweid sapwelaimalhik de pil, oh, putpato
counsel our (we of high status) own, or also, uh, speak (we of low status)
09 tikihieng ohng oh sapwelaimatai secir kan
small (i.e. nicely) to our high status spouses
10 de ataii tungoal pawihet kan ak ah kopoonpoorki
or our low status spouses but I trust that
This orator then assumes the identity of sister to ask her 'sibling women' (*ri'e iih ahan*), who she marks as high status, to continue their high status good deeds for the community.

(II) WOMEN AS SISTERS ARE HIGH STATUS AND DO GOOD DEEDS

11 me kaminimin me sang aiv lel rahe suet
our cooperation will continue from yesterday to today

This orator is concerned with the social reproduction of women's status. She portrays her representations of the high status of women as quintessential and authentic readings of legitimate Pohnpeian gender relations.

**Conclusion**

These two high ranking women organize gender relations in a way that valorizes and elevates women, contradicting their status as subordinate to and dependent on men. One claims that the high status of women is dependent on other women, the other catalogs women's multiple gendered roles and comments on the primary status of women as mothers and genitors as well as sisters. They do not argue against hierarchy itself, but their linguistic constructions of hierarchical gender relations present a much more complex and diverse picture. At times they stratify the community of women into high and low, at times they invert the composition of these high and low categories, and at times they join all women in a single high status. They organize social relations in multiple ways, emphasizing consanguine status relations, cooperation among women, as well as status relations through marriage as relevant to a woman's rank. One orator appropriates a key male status symbol, yams, as an emblem for women.

A tension exists between the articulation of women's status in these particular speeches and how status is constructed visually. Both orators considerably enlarge the influence and vested authority of women beyond the par-
ticular portentous public context of the feasthouse, utilizing the resources available to them in language to construct alternate realities and attempt to make these relevant within the particular stratified relations instantiated in the feast house. However, their arguments are situated within a meaning system where space and status are coreferential, and the discursive construction of gendered status in these Pohnpeian women’s oratory is at odds with a spatial construction of gendered status.

A hierarchical ordering among women based on clan affiliation (like the men’s), rather than on marriage would have quite different results in the spatial organization of the feasthouse than the one visible as these orators speak. In Pohnpei, the principles of the relation between location and status in the feasthouse obscure for women the causal link between a mother’s status and son’s status in favor of the causal link between a husband’s status and wife’s status. Whereas the spatial position of the man is a reflection of his title, which is dependent primarily on matrilineally determined clan affiliation (as well as partly on work in the service of the chief and chiefess), the same man’s mother’s and sister’s spatial location in the feasthouse is determined, not by their clan affiliation, but by the status of their husbands. Some of the implications of spatially privileging the conjugal tie over the consanguinal one (for women but not for men) have been discussed, i.e., defining women’s status in terms of men, as dependent on men. The matrilineally defined flow of status from women to men is reversed in spatial relations, making the maternal link to status something possessed by the man and not the woman. A particular type of relation between women, men, and status is constructed (see Kulick 1998: 226–227 for an interesting discussion of differences in situated binary constructions of gender).  

In negotiating which meanings will underwrite gender identities and legitimate or de-legitimate the social precedence of women, the modality of language is just one resource. Space is a complementary as well as contradictory tool for organizing hierarchies of meaning and creating categories. I have been particularly concerned in this article with the role of space in privileging and essentializing particular sets of gendered status relations out of possible gendered connections. As space is socially constructed and the nature of society constructed spatially, some scholars claim that the spatial and social aspects of a phenomenon are rendered indivisible (Massey 1984, 1994:255; Dear & Wolch 1989). Clearly, though, what is spatially represented can be challenged as partial, as these oratories show. Space is open to discursive contestation by those trying to question and redefine meanings and boundaries.
(Smith & Katz 1993; Graham 1998). My purpose here has been to show not only the importance of space in constructing particular gendered status relations in Pohnpei, and excluding others, but also to show some ways that the relationships instantiated spatially are contested as unrepresentative of the production of status in Pohnpei. It is not just a matter of describing dominant and subordinate locations, but dominant and subordinate ideas of how those locations mean. Both orators discussed here construct social identities and communities of women that contradict and expand the spatial model – women are superior and efficacious rather than subordinate and dependent. The orators use essentialized gender categories in strategies of resistance against the devaluing of women and they also argue against essentialism, utilizing a notion of the multiplicity of women’s subjectivities to build the authority of women. However, as their speeches are concluded, and feasting activities continue, the visual map of the organization of principles of social difference endures, recognizing only ‘wife’ as the relevant role for spatially constructing status, at least for the present.

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Notes
1. For example, projects to redress past injustices.
2. As Philips points out, it can also lead to problems with cross-cultural comparison. What is needed is a discussion of ideological diversity in the construction of gender (1994:594).
3. For discussions of relationships between language and spatial cognition see Brown and Levinson 1993; Haviland 1993; Wassman 1993; Stauf 1994; Pedersen 1993; Danziger 1999.
4. A process which can conceal influences on their development through time (Lefebvre 1991).
5. In Oceanic societies, however, lack of mobility is a way to signify elite status.
6. Hoem also discusses moral conceptions of space in Tokelau (500 km north of Samoa).
7. *Manaman* is a cognate of *mana*, usually translated as efficacy or power, a concept widespread through Oceanic societies.

8. In Fiji 'it is not "women" but "wives" who are most salient below in the space of the house' (Toren 1990:224, see also Toren 1988).

9. This reflects the fact that references to the position, movement, possessions, and mental states (all domains where status marking is appropriate) of others is more frequent than that of the speaker; however, it also shows that the Pohnpeian social hierarchy is principally built in interaction through the status lowering of same status peers.

10. According to Pohnpeians these changes are due in part to responses to influences from the early missionaries.

11. Promotions to higher titles can also be achieved through recognition by the paramount chief of exemplary work to provide tribute to the chief or chieftesses. According to Mauricio (1993:132): 'No one knows for sure how many titles there are on Pohnpei and when they emerged. However, the titles *Nahin-maawak* (paramount chief) and *Nanten* (secondary chief) were first bestowed after the overthrow of the *Saualeku* dynasty (est. date 1461). At this time the *nabs* was expanded in *sire* so that it could include all community members during feasts.

12. I am not sure, however, when exactly women began to give speeches at feasts. The expansion of high-ranking women's (and men's) influence through Western models is part of a Pohnpeian strategy of incorporating new structures of power and authority into traditional frameworks.

13. The master of ceremonies also uses low status verbs of spatial movement and location, *pato* and *patolongade* for the entire community he calls to the male orator's speech in Excerpt 1.

14. Hierarchy is valued in Pohnpei (Keating 1998, see also Abu-Lughod 1986 for a discussion of the morality of hierarchy among the Bedouins she studied).

15. In his discussion of travestis in Brazil, Kulick writes: 'Instead of talking about themselves as a third gender, travestis spend a lot of time situating themselves and others in relation to a very specific gendered binary. That binary, however, is a different binary, anchored in and arising from different principles than those that currently structure and give meaning to gender in places like northern Europe or North America (1998:226–227) (emphasis in original).


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