HOUSES AS CONSUMER GOODS: SOCIAL PROCESSES AND ALLOCATION DECISIONS

Richard R. Wilk

> . . . relatively large and well appointed house room is, even in the lowest social ranks, at once a "necessary for efficiency," and the most convenient and obvious way of advancing a material claim to social distinction. And even in those grades in which everyone has house room sufficient for the higher activities of himself and his family, a yet further and almost unlimited increase is desired as a requisite for the exercise of many of the higher social activities.
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> Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 1891:144-145

Introduction

Marshall's view of housing still goes right to the heart of what makes housing and the built environment an important anthropological topic. No artifact is so clearly multifunctional, simultaneously a utilitarian object of absolute necessity, and an item of symbolic material culture, a text of almost unending complexity. In every house the economic, social, and symbolic dimensions of behavior come together. This may be why the analysis of housing has had such a wide appeal in disciplines as diverse as social psychology, folklore, economics and engineering. Anthropologists themselves have shown a new willingness to consider the house as a key artifact in understanding the articulation of economic and social change during economic development.

From the perspective of our own society, surrounded by houses of all shapes and sizes, where wealth and luxury are synonymous with housing, this seems obvious and commonplace. The television show "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and journals like "Architectural Review" are odes to the home as a shrine and symbol of wealth. But just as clearly, there are societies where all the houses look alike, even though all people are not alike. Perhaps then, the assumption that there is something natural and obvious about spending on the house and home as a marker of prestige is ethnocentric. Why the house instead of something else?

A number of anthropological approaches attempt to place the house in a theoretical context which answer this question by relating housing to social, economic, and psychological variation and change. For example, a utilitarian approach that views the house partially as a workspace links changes in the elaboration of houses to changes in the kinds of work done in the household (Braudel 1973:201). Or if the house is seen as a reflection of how all household

activities are organized and divided, then the shape of the house will change as activities are modified, differentiated, or recombined (Kent 1983, 1984). An even more utilitarian perspective relates the form of the house to climate, technology and the kinds of building materials that are available (Duly 1979).

For others, the house is a reflection of the psychological and ideological processes of builders and inhabitants. Following a common sociological view that the consumption of goods functions to create and articulate personal and social identities, Cooper (1974) sees the house as an elaborate personal facade. Glassie stresses the generational design grammar of designers (1975), while Errington sees the house as a cosmological text, reflecting world view and religion (1979, see also Rapoport 1977, Cunningham 1973, Fernandez 1977). A more semiotic view relates house form to culturally-specific definitions of privacy, territory, and personal space (Altman and Chemers 1984). Rapoport views the home as codified culture, a patterned set of cues to proper behavior that he calls a "system of settings" that channel action and meaning (1982). Following these models, changes in value systems, cultural codes, and cosmologies will cause changes in house form.

Other authors argue persuasively that the house is a reflection of social relationships, symbolizing or passively reflecting social status and differentiation (e.g., Chapman 1955, Lawrence 1982, Donley 1982), or the kin relations between members of different households, or between households and the community (Rodman 1985a, 1985b). The house may have great significance in defining or stating ethnic or political affiliations, and it can also be an indicator of social differences within the household itself (Wolf 1968).

In the empirical analysis of why housing styles change or remain the same, these multiple interpretations (and I have by no means covered the full range) face us with a dilemma of priority. How can we judge the relative importance of psychological, cultural, social, and utilitarian factors in determining the shape of the built environment? The theories I have cited each make analytical and interpretive arguments about causality that cannot be judged against each other, or tested with a particular data set. I suggest that the best escape from this analytical problem lies in a refocussing of research orientations and methods. First we should focus research on actual human decision-making about housing in greater ethnographic detail, and secondly we should explode the analytical category of housing as some kind of unique artifact category.

Because the construction and use of a house requires much time, labor, and resources, it always entails choices, negotiations, disagreements and compromises about the allocation of resources to accommodate different household members' needs through design, or selection from a range of options. These choices about the use, reuse, modification and disposal of material goods conventionally fall in the economic category of consumption. Viewing houses as a consumer good, the product of patterned and constrained choices and decisions, provides a workable starting point for unravelling the multi-faceted nature of the

built environment. This focus on individual choices falls within the category of "actor-based models" advocated by Orlove (1980).

A complete theory of housing must link housing closely to other important realms of human action, because decisions about housing are intertwined with so many other kinds of decisions. The house is a part of a larger social field, and the decision to buy or build or modify a house is made as part of other social and personal decisions. In Anglo-American culture, decisions about the house are related to those about cars, clothing, furniture, career changes, social mobility, income prospects, the stability of marriage, the age of children.[1] In other cultures relationships with kin, local political conditions, the fertility of the soil, ethnic boundaries or stereotypes, may all be considered in the same context, at the same time, as a part of the decision about the house. Such a complete ethnographic description is beyond the scope of the present paper. Here I will select several connections between housing and other economic and social realms of society in order to demonstrate the utility of a consumption-decision-making approach.

The house as a consumer good

Treating the built environment as a product of consumption decisions means that the focus of research must be the human actors themselves and the processes by which people balance various options. The assertion made is that culture does not shape houses in some abstract or even direct fashion; people shape houses. In doing so they are informed by cultural knowledge and they act within cultural constraints, but always in the context of a dialectic between cultural rules and actual behavior that allows both to change. As Rutz (1988: 4) says,

> The causal arrow between culture and choice goes in both directions. An important part of consumption activities, therefore, concerns the introduction of new goods and the disappearance of existing goods as old meanings are attached to the former and new meanings define the existing groupings.

Therefore, to understand the process of decision-making, we do not have to build a grand overarching theory of the complex balance of function and aesthetics, meaning and social role. Instead we must study the factors that affect human decisions involved in buying, designing, building, altering, demanding, selling, and destroying houses, to see how people themselves achieve a balance through an interaction of cultural knowledge and pragmatic action. From this perspective, changes in housing come about through changes in that balance.

Housing decisions are only intelligible in the context of other kinds of decisions. While housing is a special cultural realm and a highly important category in many societies, decisions about houses are linked to many other kinds of choices, pragmatic and otherwise. Labor that is spent building or modifying a house is labor that cannot be spent in other ways. That labor represents an allocation decision, a choice to devote labor to the house instead of making

pottery, relaxing in the shade or attending a ritual dance. Similarly, goods traded for housing materials or money spent on the house or furnishings, represent another allocation decision, a choice among the many different things that could have been obtained. Housing is therefore conceptually the product of allocation decisions that conventionally fall in the analytical category of consumer behavior. The fields of sociology, marketing, and economics have recently been developing a set of concepts for understanding household decision making that can be useful in understanding variability in the built environment.

The economist Gary Becker has proposed an econometric model of how households allocate resources (1981, also Becker and Lewis 1974, Barnum and Squire 1979). This model has been criticized for its overt formalism, and for its assumptions that households have a "joint utility function" (meaning the household can be treated as a single entity with interests in common) rather than individual utility functions for each member (Folbre 1984). This debate has focussed attention on the economic interactions within the household, complementing sociological debates on the power relations between household members in relation to their participation in the labor market or in household labor (Safilios-Rothchild 1972, Hartmann 1981, Rodman 1972, Friedman 1984, Hareven 1982, Curtis 1986). The household itself is depicted as a unit in which each member has different interests, power bases, and goals, which are reconciled through complex processes including negotiation and coercion.

The study of decision processes within the household have been almost exclusively the province of consumer research. While much of this work has been preoccupied with the issue of husbands' and wives' relative power and influence in decision-making (see Ferber and Lee 1974, Davis 1976), a recent anthology includes broader and more sophisticated approaches (Roberts and Wortzel 1984). Recent anthropological discussions of decision-making tend to treat decisions as individual events where a choice is made between discrete and definable options (see critique in Orlove 1980 and Nardi 1983). Otherwise they tend to treat decisions through input-output analysis, defining the environmental conditions and cognitive classifications that make particular decisions rational and understandable. Consumer researchers, in contrast, have begun to treat decision-making as an ongoing process in which the outcome of one decision affects the inputs to the next (Bonfield et al.1984). Credibility in future decisions, for example, can be affected if a husband or wife makes a serious mistake. Consumer researchers are also are willing to consider cases in which the goals of the household are ill-defined, and the range of choices is imperfectly known (Park 1982). Some interesting work has also been done on the strategies used by household members to influence decisions, including bargaining, threatening, offering rewards, and monopolizing information (Spiro 1983).

Park (1982) brings many of these elements together in an analysis of how husbands and wives in American middle-class households interact in the process of deciding on a house to purchase. He maps out both spouses' decision-criteria as a formal "decision plan net" with different kinds of criteria ordered in a

sequence.[2] He then compares the decision plans of husbands and wives at different points during the decision-process, observing the ways that agreements are reached. He concludes that the main heuristic in the decision process is one of conflict-avoidance, or what he calls "muddling through." In the end, the goal of purchasing an acceptable house is subordinated to the need to maintain an acceptable marital relationship.

Anthropologists have been curiously silent on the general topic of how households make economic decisions. They have considered fertility decision-making within the household (Nag *et al.* 1978, Nardi 1984), the patterns of conflict and cooperation between and among members of households and kin groups (eg. Lamphere 1974, Wolf 1968), decisions to divide or dissolve households (eg. Carter 1984), and the ways that households balance resources, production and consumption during the developmental cycle (in a literature considering the work of Chayanov 1966). A general problem is the difficulty of gathering detailed data on the intimate details of household relationships and decisions. Too often, normative descriptions and post hoc generalizations are substituted for the messy descriptive details. A serious problem has been a lack of conceptual tools, like those used by consumer researchers, for describing and discussing what actually goes on within households. A promising approach is discourse analysis, used by Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1983) to draw out details of household and family decisions from taped discussions between household members. However, only a very small number of discussions can be analyzed by such intensive interpretive techniques.

I suggest, however, that anthropological analysis of household decision-making is essential for understanding variability in the domestic built environment. We need to look both at the relationships within the household that affect decisions, and at the relationship between the household and larger social entities like lineages or communities. By looking to the general processes of allocation and distribution within the household, it will be possible to understand housing as it is socially and culturally enacted.

Case study: Kekchi Maya economy and housing

The Kekchi Maya of southern Belize have a population of about 5,100 people scattered among 24 villages that range in size from 5 to 110 households, with a mean population of about 210 persons. They are relatively recent immigrants from the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala, where a much larger Kekchi population remains.[3] Culturally the Kekchi are like most other highland Maya in having cognatic kinship, compadrazgo, and rotating civil-religious cargos.

While the Kekchi have been involved peripherally in a market economy for 350 years, today many Kekchi in the more isolated southern Belize villages pursue a subsistence economy, with a small cash income from selling pigs and crops. In these southern areas the average household income is less than US

$150 per household per year. This small income is spent almost entirely on household goods like kerosene, candles, and soap, on foods like flour, sardines, and lard, on luxuries like liquor, coffee, cigarettes, and soft drinks, on basic agricultural tools, and on clothing for the family. Many purchases are made from travelling Kekchi peddlers who carry goods from the Guatemalan highlands on their backs.

In the Kekchi communities in the northern part of the Toledo District, on the expanding network of primary and secondary roads, cash incomes and economic inequalities are greater. Non-Indian farmers hire some Kekchi as seasonal laborers, but the major sources of income are the production of rice, beans, and to a lesser extent corn and pigs, for sale to the government and in the small local market. Starting about 1980 marijuana cultivation has become a major source of income for farmers in several villages; in such a small and cash-poor economy this influx of money has had a tremendous impact.[4] Some Kekchi entrepreneurs have also built small retail shops, and have engaged in trucking and wholesaling enterprises. It is this emerging elite group that has dominated the marijuana trade as well. A slowly improving educational system has opened up some avenues for Kekchi to join government service, to become salaried schoolteachers, church workers, or clerks in the villages or in the nearby district center of Punta Gorda. Lastly, a few Kekchi have begun seasonal wage-labor migration to other parts of the country, and a very few (especially young men and women) have moved to Belize City and joined the ranks of the urban poor.

I selected three Kekchi villages for fieldwork between 1978 and 1980. Santa Teresa, with 21 households, is located in the southern zone away from any road, and has the lowest average cash income of about $140 in 1979. Aguacate, on the boundary between southern and northern zones, is on the terminus of a dry-season road, and has been involved in cash-crop production on a moderate scale beginning in 1970. For the purpose of this paper we can consider Aguacate to be a transitional community, moving over the last 20 years from a southern subsistence economy towards a northern cash-based economy. In 1979 the 31 Aguacate households had cash incomes ranging from $28 to $357 with an average of $220. Indian Creek was founded in the early 1970s alongside the major highway north, and had 59 households in 1979. For a sample of ten households, 1979 income ranged between $103 and $967 with a mean of $485. Short return visits were made to the three communities, and others in the area, during 1984 and 1985, and changes in housing styles were noted.

Houses and consumption

For the Kekchi, like other Maya groups, the construction of a house is a socially and spiritually important event marked by ritual (Vogt 1969:71-91). The Kekchi house in southern villages like Santa Teresa is built entirely of natural materials gathered in the forest around the village. The household members cut and erect the upright posts, beams, and wall materials, while a village communal work group gathers vines for tying, and palm leaf for thatching, and then meets to

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erect the roof in two working days (cf. Farriss 1984:135). Houses vary in size, depending on the amount of labor the household can devote to building the framework and walls; this amount in turn depends on seniority in the kinship system and on the number of close relatives living in the community (see Wilk 1984). An average of 28 person-days of construction labor are provided by the community, and another 25 to 30 person-days (and a large pig to feed the groups) are spent by the household itself. Depending on the size of the community, a Kekchi man will donate between four and 12 days a year to others to help them build. In the more remote villages, there is no cash expense required in building a house or furnishing it.

Houses in transitional Aguacate are like those of southern villages. They range from 25 to 112 square meters (sides are about three times as long as the ends) in area, with a mean of 54.5. An interior partition often marks a rough functional division of the house into a kitchen at one end and a public area with benches and the household altar at the other, with a storage area in between. Household members sleep throughout the house in hammocks that are stored overhead during the day, and other specialized activity areas are lacking. In Santa Teresa and other southern zone villages some households use an old house next door as a kitchen and storage area, doubling their domestic space for a couple of years until the roof is beyond repair.

Southern village houses must be re-thatched about every five years, and rebuilt completely every ten. People move housesites frequently, as relationships with kin and other villagers change (house locations are used an average of 6.1 years before abandonment though they may later be reused by the original household or by new residents). Household location and orientation is a sensitive indicator of the state of relations between households. People on good terms with each other tend to live close by, and sometimes groups of kin form informal neighborhoods.

While households may vary greatly in their relative wealth and status within the community, the uniformity of housing expresses the prevalent ideology of equality, enacted also in the ideology of communal land tenure.[5] With increases in cash income in northern villages, changing consumption patterns have emerged. While foods and other consumables are increasingly in demand, much of the new cash income is channeled into the purchase of vehicles, consumer durables (e.g. radios, televisions), housing, and furnishings. While in the southern villages all houses are virtually identical in materials and style, in the north there is a diversity of housing.

Aguacate, in transition between the two zones, still practices subsistence farming. While cash incomes are much higher than in Santa Teresa, housing patterns are identical. Wage labor within the community is absent, and communal work groups still build houses that are essentially identical. Money that is not spent on basic foodstuffs, clothing, and tools (both agricultural and kitchen), is spent mostly on personal consumer goods, items that they consider individual

rather than household property. About the only common consumer good that is considered household property rather than that of individual household members is a radio or tape player.

In a sample of expenditures for 10 Aguacate households in 1979, of a mean $242 spent, an average of $130 was spent on taxes, tools, lime, basic foods, kitchen equipment, and clothing, about $14 went for expenses related to children's schooling, and the remainder went for a wide variety of consumer goods including a lot of cosmetics, luxury foods, toys, alcohol, cigarettes, items of personal adornment (mostly clothing not worn on a daily basis, like running shoes and decorative hats), and a few major items like musical instruments, bicycles, shotguns, and radios. No expenditures related to housing were recorded except for $7 spent on a small kitchen table used for making tortillas, and a few dollars spent by two households on nails for the construction of household altars.

Indian Creek is among the poorest communities in the northern zone, but even there, average cash incomes are more than double those of Aguacate. Larger communities like San Pedro Colombia have incomes at least double that of Indian Creek. In all northern zone villages a significant number of villagers receive cash income from shopkeeping, and from relatives who are working in jobs outside the community. A disproportionate amount of the cash income goes to men rather than women (as has been observed often in developing countries, Nash 1983). While in the more remote communities men and women share income from sale of pigs, and women have their own sources of cash, women are increasingly relegated to the domestic, subsistence sphere in the northern villages.

While some of the increase in cash income is spent on personal consumer goods and on consumables, most of it is invested in the house and furnishings. For most, this investment takes the form of substituting purchased construction materials for gathered ones,[6] within the context of the traditional Kekchi house. House plan remains the same, but cut boards are used for walls, corrugated metal replaces thatch in patches or on part of the house, concrete covers the dirt floor, and bedding, kitchen utensils, and other furnishings are upgraded or added. The use of space within the house does not change very much. There seems to be a trend towards less flexibility in the use of interior space that results from substituting furniture like chairs, beds, and tables for hammocks hung from the rafters, since the furniture cannot be put away during the day.

Of 25 houses in Indian Creek that were mapped in 1980, 9 were built entirely from gathered materials in the same shape and style as those in Aguacate and Santa Teresa. I noted a few subtle changes, as in the substitution of wire for split vines and bark strips in some fastenings in the frame and thatch. The average size of these 9 houses was close to that observed in Aguacate. Of the remaining 16 houses, 6 had whole or partial replacement of thatch with corrugated iron sheeting, 12 had cut lumber instead of split boards for part or all of their walls, four had raised hearths on tables rather than the traditional floor-hearth,

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three had windows with shutters, and three had whole or partial cement sealing of the floor. Those houses with some "improvement" averaged about 15 square meters smaller than those that were built from gathered materials; the occupants were sacrificing space because of the cost of materials. In the two households for which I have expenditure data during the time of house construction (both had board walls and partial tin roofing), 48% and 65% of household cash income over a two year period was spent on the house, as well as some savings from previous years.

For those with larger or more reliable income the major step is to a non-Kekchi style of house. This is a simple two or three room wooden house raised off the ground on pilings, with an iron roof, often with an exterior kitchen in a thatch hut. This style of house is common among all of the ethnic groups of rural Belize, and can be built with a cash outlay of about US $900. In 1979 in Indian Creek there were two of these "creole" style houses in the community, one occupied by a Mopan Maya schoolteacher and the other by a Kekchi Protestant preacher from another village. In 1985 the number had risen to 5, and several more were under construction.

The very wealthiest Kekchi in the most prosperous northern villages, people with salaried jobs or income from marijuana, have begun to hire masons and build concrete block houses in a style common in the well-to-do northern parts of Belize.[7] Striking contrasts can now be found in the richest villages, where large cash incomes have allowed a few Kekchi to build three-story concrete block houses with two-car garages, balconies and electricity, while their old thatch house still stands in the back or front yard, used as a pig pen or occupied by poorer relatives.

The increase in cash income above the level of about US $300 per year, then, has led to a change in the kinds of goods purchased. This change cannot be accurately described as a shift from necessities to luxuries (as is often presumed). Rather, a large percentage of cash income has always been expended on luxuries and consumer products regardless of income level or community type, but they have been personal luxuries--clothes, jewelry and the like. When incomes rise above a certain threshold, cash is reallocated to household luxuries and consumer goods; items like the house and furnishings that belong to the household as a corporate entity rather than to its individual members. The increased cash income could be allocated directly to individual luxuries and consumables like motorcycles, extravagant clothing, jewelry, cosmetics and foods, but for most people this is not done, with few exceptions.[8]

Instead, the main household expenditures besides those on the house itself, are on the provision of medical care and educational opportunities for children. Sending a child to high school in Belize is a costly enterprise, and in several Indian Creek households it required over 45% of annual cash income. I argue that this investment in the children is functionally equivalent to expenditure on the house and furnishings, in that it is shared consumption rather than personal

consumption. Children, like the house itself, are the joint product and property of all household members (this is obviously not true in most unilineal societies, where children are considered to belong principally to the kin group of the mother or father).

Seen in this way, the shift in housing patterns and allocation that accompanies greater participation in the cash economy is not a shift from spending on necessities to spending on consumer goods. Rather, there is a drastic change in the kinds of consumer goods that money is spent on. Housing and education replace personal adornment and personal consumption; investment in household property replaces investment in individual property. The cultural context of choice remains the same, but the outcomes of decision-making are quite different given a change in the economic environment and the social relations of production. I will next detail some of the links between specific outcomes (houses) and specific social and economic changes.

Household decisions and the community

Kekchi housing has undergone drastic changes, and these changes are closely related to the degree to which different Kekchi communities are participating in the cash economy of Belize. The question of how and why participating in a cash economy should lead to drastic changes in housing has been left open. I believe that this shift can be explained best at two levels: 1) the relationship between the household and the community, and 2) the relationships within households between its members. At both levels the general processes of economic change in Kekchi communities affect the decisions made by households, and it is patterning in these decisions that will now be outlined.

Kekchi community structures in more remote areas are similar to the type defined by Wolf (1957) as "closed corporate", while those in more accessible locations are much closer to the "open" type. The southern villages, however small, have miniature cargo systems of rotating, ranked political/religious offices. Village fiestas, featuring ritual dances, periodically drain a good deal of money out of the community. Presented as politically egalitarian to the outside world, the village is in fact dominated by several related core families, often descended from the original founders of the community, though they may be divided into rival factions (Howard 1977).

These communities have a strong corporate identity which is partially based on the kinship relations that link almost every household. Kinship being at best a weak "glue", cohesion of the villages is also a product of the practice of communal land tenure,[9] and the use of communal work groups in agricultural production. All adult males belong to labor groups of 12 to 25 men who clear, plant, and harvest each farmer's field in rotation. With the existing technology and crop mix, and with the very short dry season (the only time when fields can be cleared and burned), membership in the village labor group is a matter of economic survival as well as a symbol of community identity (cf. Farriss

1984:256-285). Dependence on the community allows households to be quite independent of their close kin, and neolocal nuclear family households are the norm. Ties between kin tend to be fragile, and neolocal residence is quite common, as is mobility between villages.

In this subsistence-farming system, competition between households within the village can be extremely disruptive. It is partially ameliorated by the formal system of rotating leadership in the cargo system, and is blunted by the inability of any household to accumulate or own land or other productive resources. The major ideological element of village morality is a fierce ethic of egalitarianism, and obligatory generosity. Fairly common for this kind of community in Latin America is a complex of envy, fear of envy, and witchcraft accusations, which serve as a means of social and economic control (cf. Gregory 1975). Obligatory aid and unbalanced reciprocity (codified in normative statements like "we are all a family" and "we must help each other like brothers") are reinforced by fear of envy and witchcraft, with the result that little accumulation of property takes place. The sum is a system of strong social constraints on consumption.

Housing standards fall under the community ethos of equality. Deviations from standard practice are not accepted, and I was told repeatedly that anyone who bui't a house with a tin roof or other foreign material would have their house burnt down (and several examples were cited). The house, in other words, is a supreme symbol of community membership (and by extension of ethnicity), and uniformity of housing is enforced (Wilk 1983). What happens within the household is not ordinarily a matter of community concern. This attitude towards the house has been observed in a number of societies that constrain individual competition and stress collective institutions.[10]

In communities where cash-cropping and wage labor play a larger role, the ethic of community equality and the cohesion of the village is much weaker. Households with a source of income outside the village no longer depend so heavily on the approval or cooperation of their neighbors, and are able to defy community consumption standards. It is usually petty shopkeepers and partially waged workers who find it easier to break with the standards of the community, because they are able to buy the food they need. Often they seek membership in a Protestant sect at the same time that they refuse to participate in fiesta expenditures, village offices, and the communal work groups. No longer able to draw on the village for help in building houses, they use less labor-intensive materials purchased in town. The building of a new house with board walls or a metal roof is therefore both a symbol of rejection on the part of the village, and a symbol of independence on the part of the owner.

The first person in a village to build a house of imported materials is the subject of intense hostility. Unless household members have very close kin ties with other village members they will be forced to leave. As time goes on, however, others may follow the original example, and more houses will be built

with purchased materials. This is not to say that the rest of the community disintegrates. Rather, those who continue to depend on subsistence farming maintain a community within a community, maintaining the ethic of equality in housing, in labor exchange, and in leadership. In the meantime, unbridled competition for economic and social position takes place among those households that have "left the fold", and houses become important symbols of success in that competition.

To summarize, there seems to be a close relationship between community uniformity in domestic architecture, and the economic/ecological unity and corporateness of the community (see also Rodman 1985a, Kowaleski *et al.* 1984). When the village economy is penetrated by the cash economy, and some households can survive without the cooperation of the community, they are also freed from the close constraints that the community places on consumption. Houses are both positive and negative symbols of the relationships among households, and between households and the community.

The household and its members

As mentioned above, in subsistence-farming villages, independent nuclear family households predominate. Upon marriage there is a short period of obligatory uxorilocal residence, and after this most couples set up their own separate neolocal household. With little property to inherit, and the community labor group to provide labor when needed during the agricultural cycle, there are few abiding or lasting links between parents and their married children.

The household economy is characterized by generalized reciprocity. All members of the household are involved in productive labor, and the male and female sectors of the domestic economy are poorly differentiated. All household members tend the household's pigs and chickens; all household members work in the fields (though only the adult males work in the communal work groups); all household members fish and gather wild foods. Husbands and wives have small sources of income that are traditionally considered theirs alone (chicken eggs, pottery, and weaving for women, copal incense for men), but the bulk of the cash income is divided up among household members for their own use after essential tools and supplies have been purchased.

The major issues within the household revolve around how to allocate productive labor, an issue which involves many other members of the community, for households cooperate closely with each other in the fields, in child care, and in house maintenance and construction. Negotiations between household members mostly concern work; will the husband work with the wife's father today, or will he go off with his brother hunting? Will a grown up son go to help his grandfather plant corn, or will he stay home and help fix the chicken coop? Conflicts are generally over the quantity and quality of work, not the distribution of the products that result. The constant exchange of labor, food, and household items between households obscures the balance within them.

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With the introduction of cash crops and a general increase in cash income, the organization of agricultural labor and production changes drastically. To handle more crops, growing in spatially separated locations at different times of the year, the community work group is ineffective. More labor is motivated through small exchange-labor groups of close kin. Increased competition for choice parcels of land means that family ties and inheritance become important means of gaining access to agricultural land. Groups of close kin also find it possible to pool cash for investment in productive enterprises like shops or trucks. The social result is the formation of extended family households, as sons or daughters stay in their natal household after marriage.

Physically, the settlement pattern of a community engaged in cash crop production reflects the presence of extended family households. Rather than building larger houses, the Kekchi house an extended family by grouping several small houses around a patio (this is an ancient pattern among all Maya peoples). The proximity of the houses to each other reflects the degree of cohesion of the family fairly directly (as observed elsewhere by Yellen 1977:89 and Kramer 1982:139). The individual houses each contain a nuclear family, and are counted by census takers as individual households, though an economic definition of the household would recognize the clusters as the salient economic unit. Unlike subsistence farming communities where houses are dispersed, mobile, and fairly evenly spaced, cash crop farming villages tend to be composed of discrete nucleated patio clusters that are themselves dispersed. The clusters tend to establish a firm sense of place, an association between the extended family and a particular housing site or area that has some continuity over time.

The extended family household is better able to pool labor and resources to cope with the demands of a more diverse economy (Wilk 1984), but the allocation of new kinds of income becomes problematic and complex. When exchanges between household members consist mainly of intangibles, they are complex and multi-stranded (including promises for the future), and it is hard for individuals to draw short-term balances. The goods that are produced and consumed within the household subsistence economy are joint products of everyone's labor, and that labor has no cash value as a commodity. But when labor can be valued on a labor market, when commodity flows can be converted into cash values, relationships can be more accurately judged in economic terms, and cohesive productive units with several adults face difficult allocation problems. A new imbalance enters the domestic economy. Who has the right to decide how to spend money from selling rice? The husband who took it to market? The sons who helped grow it? The wife whose labor fed them while they worked in the fields?

A major problem is presented to the household when younger people, who often have greater opportunities for wage labor because of their education (or because they will accept lower wages), no longer want to contribute their entire income to the common household fund. Households are deeply concerned with

keeping their children in the natal household as long as possible, and must strike a balance that allows the younger worker to retain a portion of cash as disposable income.[11] Thus, many young Kekchi men have a great deal (comparatively) of disposable income and they spend most of it on personal consumer goods. But the discussions and arguments that take place within the household reveal the volatility of the collision between household labor values and those of the wage labor market. Most common are violent arguments between brothers; elder brothers are often called upon to stay home and help their father farm, allowing a younger brother to go and seek wage work. The elder brother feels that it is his farm labor that enables the younger brother to eat and go away to work, but the younger brother has cash of his own to spend, while the older brother has none. And the older brother is doing hard, culturally valued work, while the younger one has an "easy" job. Meanwhile the younger brother finds himself marginal to the household economy, but can do no more than toy with the idea of leaving, given the poor long-term employment prospects outside the village. The authority relationships between siblings of different ages are firmly entrenched in the traditional kinship system (cf. Vogt 1969:230, 243), but the norms come under great stress when cash incomes enter the picture.

As mentioned previously, the gender-based division of labor tends to become much more sharply defined in cash-crop producing areas. Women's sources of independent cash income decline in relative importance, while most cash income is brought in by males. Agricultural production of all kinds falls almost exclusively within the male sphere, while domestic maintenance becomes the province of female work groups and individual female labor. The allocation of cash income between the sexes becomes a major problem, as men's labor can be assigned a cash value, and women's labor cannot (cf. Friedman 1984, Evers et al. 1984). When a man earns US $6 for nine hours of work on a farm, how does he value his wife's food preparation, child care and household maintenance? How does she place a value on her services? This kind of thinking and valuation is alien to the Kekchi and is resisted in many ways, yet the problem of what to do with the $6 a day remains: to whom does it belong?

Kekchi tradition places great value on the conjugal family as a joint decision-making unit, in which husband and wife share and cooperate within the bounds of a relatively flexible division of labor. But in villages with higher cash incomes, these ideals come under increasing strain. Family quarrels are very private, but sometimes they spill over into public when violence or drinking is involved. I witnessed a number of violent arguments between husbands and wives immediately after sales of swine, and the topic was always the allocation of the proceeds. How much could the husband keep? How much was she really going to spend on the childrens' books, and how much was she going to give to her mother or spend on jewelry? Several women complained to me that their husbands did not reveal how much cash they had received from the sale of rice.[12] Women often have to draw on their relatives to apply pressure on husbands when they feel that husbands are misallocating cash. But these are extreme cases. On a daily basis the negotiations between husbands and wives about allocation of

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This crisis of allocation is not an unusual situation in developing countries. It is clear that in some ecological circumstances, the household disintegrates as a corporate entity, and single stranded exchange relationships between individual men, women, and children take its place (see Palacio [1985] for a Belizean example). Wage labor may require temporary or seasonal migration by males, with females left behind to run a truncated subsistence economy and raise the children (Gonzalez 1969). The availability of full-time secure wage labor for males or females in the local area also has distinct, and complex, effects on household organization and the division of labor within the household (Laslett 1981).

But in the Kekchi cash economy, the corporate extended family household is vitally important unit in cash crop production, and the pooling of diverse resources in a large household unit is an important source of security in an uncertain and changing economy (cf. Sahlins 1957). Just as the cash income and subsistence goods from men's work are considered essential, so too women's domestic work and children's farm and household labor cannot be replaced by cash. No man can purchase child labor to help on the farm, prepared food, and lodgings in the local community. To keep the household unit together, however, the crisis of allocation must be solved.

The solution adopted by the Kekchi--to put surplus cash into the house and furnishings--is both traditional and pragmatic. Traditional in the sense that the bulk of all production in Kekchi farming, hunting, and gathering has always been allocated to the family as a group rather than to individuals. Pragmatic in a number of ways. First, because allocating cash income to the household as a unit settles the issue of who is to benefit in an equitable and equal way. Everyone gets to listen to the radio, everyone walks on the concrete floor, everyone shares the bittersweet envy of neighbors. Everyone, that is, who remains in the household. And this sharing is a potent device, on the part of the parents, in the struggle to keep children attached to the household after they marry. It is a demonstration that the income they donate to the household is not going to be wasted on rum for father or clothes for mother, but instead it will be spent on permanent improvements that the whole family can use for many years to come, and which add materially to the the family's assets. They will eventually come back to the child through inheritance, if the child remains in the household to assert a claim.

The issue of who makes these allocation decisions and how they are made remains an open one in the Kekchi case. The analysis above was not foreseen during fieldwork, so my data on how expenditures are negotiated are fragmentary. I was privy to a number of volatile discussions between fathers and sons, regarding the disposition of the son's earned income. Using idioms of "respect" (on the father's side) and "fairness" (on the son's), and "helping each other" (on both parts), some fathers negotiated successfully and kept their sons

attached to the household. Others demanded too much or spent the son's donated cash in unacceptable ways, and the son left (sometimes to return later). In the latter case, both father and son became, by their own definitions, poorer, for a large household with more than one adult male is almost a requirement for long-term economic success in the economy of southern Belize.[13]

In the process of allocating the bulk of the household's cash income to the built environment, the scene is set for intensification of the ideology of the household and house (cf. Lofgren 1984, Wong 1984). Many of the emotional and cultural loadings which we are used to placing on terms like "home" and "family" can be seen in nascent forms among the northern Kekchi today. The Kekchi are seeing a transformation of their social field from one with the community and kindred as primary units, to one in which the household is the primary unit. The house itself becomes an important tool for identifying, defining, and manipulating these social concepts and maps, and there is clearly feedback between economic, cultural, and social levels during the process of change.

Conclusions

Based on my analysis of the Kekchi case, I predict that investment in communal property, including the home, is a common solution to allocation problems within the household economy in many other cultural settings. Many other aspects of housing, besides the simple amount of household resources invested in it, should be amenable to similar analysis. One implication of the Kekchi example is that housing patterns are causally related to a number of variables in the wider social and economic sphere that are not usually considered terribly important. My explanation for Kekchi spending on housing suggests that key variable for further investigation include 1) the relative value of men's and women's wages, and the state of the labor market, 2) the monetary and cultural value placed on housework, 3) the value of child labor in the home and the marketplace, 4) the degree to which women own and manage property and their own cash, 5) the importance of inherited property for younger generations, 6) the existing system of marriage and residence, and the domestic cycle, 7) the kind of migratory wage labor opportunities that are available.

It is worth noting, in closing, that much of the recent literature on modernization and culture change is concerned with the issues I have listed above (e.g. Beneria and Sen 1982). Adopting a decision-making approach therefore has the potential of bringing discussion of the built environment back to center stage in the study of culture change, innovation, and economic adaptation. By focussing on how household members themselves make decisions about their domestic architecture we can build up a body of empirical data on the cultural, economic, environmental and psychological factors that affect that decision making in different contexts.

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Notes

1. *Kidder's House* (1985), a recent best seller, examines the way that the political, cultural, economic, psychological and aesthetic are all involved in the design and construction of a single American house. Would that we had a single ethnographic account of comparable detail from another culture!

2. Park (1982) makes a distinction between three kinds of decision criteria or dimensions. Rejection Inducing Dimensions establish minimum acceptable levels. Relative Preference Dimensions are attributes that are considered desirable but not essential; they increase the weight of an acceptable option. Trade-Off Dimensions can be compensated for if they prove unacceptable in value; for example if a house does not have a large back yard, this can be compensated for if it does have a swimming pool.

3. See Wilk 1981, Howard 1977, and Schackt 1986 for ethnography of the Belizean Kekchi, and Bolland 1986 for a general discussion of Belize.

4. It is very difficult to estimate the amount of money that has flowed in to the Kekchi area from sales of marijuana. The marketing of the product is handled by Creoles, Caribs and East Indians, so the bulk of the money does not go to Kekchi far ners (US $10/lb was the maximum price paid to farmers in 1984). Based on the number of new vehicles and other consumer goods to be seen in the last few years, some farmers are making several thousand dollars a year. See Birdwell-Pheasant (1984) for a discussion of the impact of marijuana income in Yucatec Maya villages in northern Belize. The influx of marijuana money in southern Belize took place after the main period of fieldwork on which this paper is based, so I have few details on how the Kekchi are spending it.

5. While the villages have systems of communal and usufruct land tenure based on custom (and not recognized by Belizean law), in practice the system is manipulated so that particular households and families have choice of the best parcels and locations. In these and other ways the egalitarian ethic is subverted or bent.

6. This is partially a utilitarian response to the increasing cost of gathered materials, for as the forest is cleared and converted to short-fallow agriculture, wood for construction becomes harder to find and has to be carried long distances. It is still cheaper, however, to rent a truck and drive off into the forest and cut wood, than to buy cut lumber.

7. The concrete block house on a concrete slab floor with a corrugated iron roof could be called the new "international" style dwelling, for it is a common aspiration in rural areas throughout the developing world. Rutz (1984) suggests that these building materials are chosen because they

substitute purchased inputs for labor time in construction and maintenance, and time is an increasingly valuable item in cash economies.

8. One exception to this rule is among young unmarried men; they have to give a portion of their income to their parents, but whatever is left over is spent entirely on personal consumption. They most often will spend on goods like motorcycles, musical instruments, clothes, wristwatches, and guns.

9. Kekchi land tenure and agriculture are described in Wilk 1981 and 1984. More remote villages are located in Indian Reserves, where individuals are prohibited from owning land, and the village alcalde ("mayor") is responsible for allocating plots each year and collecting a nominal use-fee. Depending on local population pressure and the quality of land available, informal and formal systems of tenure which sometimes approximate ownership are administered at the village level.

10. Summarizing and reaffirming the insights of Duncan (1981:47), Rodman (1985b:271) says

> . . . where a collective orientation prevails . . . The home is an enclosure with no public face, a private place for keeping women and valued goods. In other words, the house is a container of wealth . . .

The similarities with the Kekchi case are clear, though the definition of "collective orientation" remains problematic in practice.

11. The whole issue of parents and children negotiating over income is part of a larger topic of research. Caldwell's (1981) discussion of how inter-generation flows of wealth change during development is an excellent place to begin.

12. For an excellent comparable case where women are increasingly shunted into an enclosed domestic economy, while men function in a cash economy, with drastic consequences for the household unit, see Weismantel (1986).

13. See Hunt (1965) and Hughes (1975) for comparable cases where a large household is a prerequisite for economic mobility during rapid modernization. Netting (1982) makes the more general point that large households tend to be wealthier than small on a cross-cultural basis, an observation made also by Hackenburg et al.(1984) in a modern urban setting.

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