markers of rank. The paramount chief lives in a house of the same general size and type as those of other men. He dresses like them, eats the same kinds of food, and like other men works in his own garden. Even the linguistic markers of rank – special forms of address or special terminology – that exist elsewhere in Polynesia – are minimal. But in any gathering, familial or public, in which persons of different rank, age, or gender come together, the seating arrangement will reflect notions of hierarchy.

In order to explain the hierarchic implications of placement, it is first necessary to say something about the interior of a Fijian house. A traditional Fijian house is a single large room without any permanent partitions. There was variation in terms of floor plan and construction methods throughout the group (Williams 1858: 79–80), but in the Matailobau area houses were traditionally rectangular in floor plan and constructed of hardwood posts, tree fern poles, bamboo, vines, reeds, leaves, and thatch on an earthen platform (*yavu*) sometimes faced with stone. Today a variety of non-traditional materials are used; roofing iron or sawn timber may replace the traditional siding, and without exception roofing iron has replaced thatch as a roof covering on all houses and most outbuildings. But the traditional rectangular floor plan has been retained, and with just two exceptions among the 50 houses in the village in which I resided, the interior space is composed of a single individual room. Fifteen by twenty-five feet would be an average size.

Despite the fact that there is no dividing wall, this interior space is conceptually divided into two areas with a gradation between them. In many homes this division is marked by a long strip of decorated barkcloth hung from a roof beam across the width of the house. Photos of family members are often hung along this decorative strip, sometimes festooned with cowry shell necklaces or strings of plastic flowers.

Another feature that demarcates the two zones within the house is the placement of the doors. All houses have more than one door; most in the village where I resided have three and a few have four. The doors of a house are functionally specialized. The one at what is termed the lower end of the house (see below) is used by most people most of the time. Cooked food is always brought through this door, and women who are not members of the household should always use it. Unless beckoned by someone within, most men who are not household members also use this "lower" door. Two additional doors are usually placed at about the midpoint of the longer sides of the house, and their placement marks the transition point between the two polar zones within the interior. These "upper" doors tend to be freely used by household members, but on formal occasions when guests are present, these doors are for the use of the household head and elders, especially those of chiefly rank. If there is a fourth door it will be in the "upper" wall directly opposite the main door. I have never seen anyone other than the most senior men of chiefly rank use such doors.

Fijian households have separate cookhouses where most food is cooked and the pots and pans and so forth are stored, but household members eat their meals inside the main house. And so at one end of the room near the principal door there is often a food cabinet and some equipment for the preparation and serving of food (see Fig. 1). This area near the main door is conceived of as the lower, profane end of the house. At the opposite end of the house is the sleeping area of the household head and his wife. If the family has a chest of drawers it will probably be at this end of

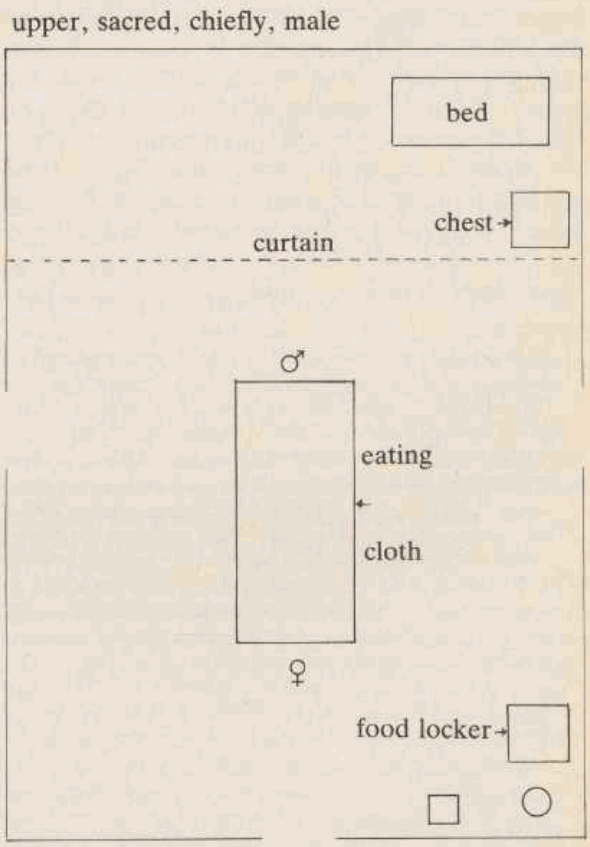

Fig. 1: The interior of a Fijian house