

Divine powers and exchange with ‘others’ in Melanesia

ERIC HIRSCH *Brunel University London*

In memory of Marshall Sahlins.

Marshall Sahlins described divine king forms for a wide range of societies from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, among others. In this article, I document a divine king form among the Fuyuge people of the Papuan highlands, revising my previous understanding of this powerful figure. At the same time, I argue there is an inextricable connection between Sahlins’s theory of divine power and Marilyn Strathern’s model of Melanesian gift exchange: both operate according to distinct ideas of otherness. The capacity to engage in transaction derives from cosmological sources while evidence of cosmological power is provided by the ability to engage in transactions with others in effective and powerful ways. More generally, I argue that conventional Melanesian figures of big-men, great men, and chiefs are all versions of the alterity of power in related political forms; each instantiates the mutual relations between cosmological and transactional otherness.

Introduction: What kind of king?

When I first conducted fieldwork in the Papuan highlands, I was told one of the men in the area I lived was like a king. This was in the mid-1980s. The man I am referring to is named Kol. Some of the younger men said this to me in Tok Pisin (the pidgin language of Papua New Guinea [PNG]): *Em olsem king*,¹ he is like a king. They said Kol was a like a king, I surmised at the time, because he conducted himself with authority, spoke knowledgeably about many matters, and acted as if he looked after everything within his area. I assumed the people who said this to me had some image of British kingship that derived from their contact with colonial officials and missionaries. PNG is a member of the Commonwealth, and since 1975, when it was granted national independence from Australia, has had a unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The Queen is head of state. Throughout PNG’s colonial history, images of British monarchs were displayed and circulated so that many native peoples knew of their existence. More concretely, the Queen’s most extensive visit to PNG occurred during her Silver Jubilee tour in 1977

Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 0, 1-18

© 2021 The Authors. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Royal Anthropological Institute

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

when she visited the capital, Port Moresby, and provincial towns of Popondetta and Alotau. Prince Charles has visited the country several times; his first visit was in 1966 while he was at school in Australia.

I never, however, took seriously the comparison with a king. When I first heard the comparison made, I thought it was an interesting analogy but nothing more. I did not examine it more closely and it remained an early entry in my fieldwork notebooks. My view has now shifted. I have come to understand in a different way the power possessed by Kol and others like him, and more specifically both the origins of this power and the persons possessing it. In brief, both the power and associated persons derive from elsewhere, their origins are not of the place or land, but are 'other'.

I have now come to view a person like Kol as a king, but not in the sense I had previously thought, as somehow comparable to a British monarch. Rather, Kol and others like him are analogous to 'divine kings' or 'stranger-kings', to adopt the names Marshall Sahlins gave to a wide range of kingly figures. One of the key characteristics of such figures is that their authority and power are founded on alterity: the state of being other or different. Related to this, then, is that 'the internal aspect of leadership is subordinated to those aspects pointing toward the extrasocial' (Sahlins 2014: 137, quoting Viveiros de Castro 1992: 118).

Sahlins first described divine kings and stranger-kings in chapters of his *Islands of history* (1985). More recently, with David Graeber, he described 'stranger-king formations' as a particular form of divine kingship (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 5-7). Although both forms of kingship derive from cosmic powers, stranger-kings, according to Graeber and Sahlins's model, have distinct characteristics. As Sahlins noted earlier: '[T]he stranger-kings trump the native peoples' original rights by aggressive and transgressive demonstrations of superior might and thus claim the sovereignty' (2010: 110). There is also a founding drama involving the antisocial character of the king and 'a marriage between the stranger-prince and a marked woman of the indigenous people – most often, a daughter of the native leader. Sovereignty is embodied and transmitted in the native woman, who constitutes the bond between the foreign intruders and the local people' (Graeber & Sahlins 2017: 6). This model of the stranger-king *does not* apply to a figure like Kol or other powerful Melanesian figures I will turn to later. A figure like Kol corresponds to a divine king.

Sahlins documented the existence of these divine figures in various forms among a wide range of peoples from Africa to Southeast Asia and Melanesia. Rodney Needham also examined this phenomenon comparatively, in what he referred to as "the collective localization of the mystical" in unseen forces and beings, to the powers of which societies are inevitably subject' (Sahlins 2014: 137, quoting Needham 1980: 65-6).

My intention in this article is to describe a form of divine kingship in the Papua highlands, thus extending the range of cases documented by Sahlins as well as Graeber (see Graeber & Sahlins 2017: chap. 7). As Sahlins emphasizes, the powers possessed by divine kings derives from their alterity, their otherness, analogous to what he refers to as metapersons: spirits, ancestors, species-masters, and so on (Sahlins 2017). It is such divine figures and associated metapersons that provide the prosperity (but also potentially its opposite: see Jorgensen 1980) essential to the conduct of social life.²

There is, though, another kind of otherness enacted in social life which is only possible because of the alterity of divine figures and metapersons. Sahlins speaks of this when he follows Hocart (1970), noting that the value of difference (alterity) is connected to the idea that 'life-comes-from-the-other' (Sahlins 2013: 282). This can be understood

in relation to cosmology, as already mentioned (e.g. divine kings and metapersons). It can simultaneously be understood in relation to transactions between people. This later form of otherness is one theorized by Marilyn Strathern (1988: 191). She argues that exchange – 'gift exchange' in particular – is not about creating relationships as such but about severing and detaching people from people – creating them as other. People are differentiated by their relations: each person 'is defined with respect to the other and thus has his or her separate interest in the relationship' (M. Strathern 1988: 192).

If anything, coercion is vital to how the 'gift' is formed. People oblige others to go into debt. An object considered in a specific way by one person needs to become an object considered in a specific way by another person (M. Strathern 1992: 177). Individuals or collectives engaged in transactions are able to gauge their power by how successfully or not their gift exchange produces a matching counterpart – an analogous substitution (M. Strathern 1992: 185). But in all this, the capacity to exchange, to become an 'other' who enters into debt, is dependent on extrasocial sources of metapersons and divine figures. Sahlin (2017: 117) cites the example of a New Guinea highlands big-man who requests his clan ancestors (i.e. metapersons) sit on his eyelids when he goes to solicit valuables from a trading partner in order to persuade the trading partner to release his valuables (see A. Strathern & Strathern 1968: 192).

Each form of alterity references the other. On the one hand, there are the 'cosmic polities' of divine kings and metapersons: power and prosperity deriving from cosmological origins. On the other hand, life comes from other people, mediated through myriad forms of transactions. In a kind of continuous loop, then, the capacity to engage in transaction derives from cosmological sources. And evidence of cosmological power is provided by the capacity to engage in transactions with others in effective and powerful ways.

In this article, I first provide some background information about the Fuyuge, and in particular the way in which the Fuyuge people categorize and conceptualize a figure such as Kol. I next discuss my previous understanding of a figure like Kol and how I came to revise my thinking. I go on to describe the divine origins of a figure like Kol, his powers, and how this is related to another category of Fuyuge person: that is, the original inhabitants of the land. This relationship is what Needham (1980) calls diarchy: a structure of divine and earthly rulers, a form of dual sovereignty.

I highlight a parallel between the relation of divine and earthly powers and what is enacted in Fuyuge collective ritual. A figure like Kol – whose origins are other – is understood to be vital to sustaining and reproducing Fuyuge social life. In an analogous fashion, in Fuyuge collective ritual known as *gab*, which includes competitive ceremonial transactions and intermarriage, people divide themselves into groups – creating themselves as other – so that they 'may impart life to one another' (Sahlins 2013: 282, quoting Hocart 1970: 290).

Finally, I consider a more general issue. Divine king figures have only been documented in a limited number of Papua New Guinea societies (see Mosko 1992). On the whole, the understanding of powerful figures in the region has been dominated by the typology of big-men, great men, and chiefs. The distinction between these ideal typical figures is based on differences in forms of exchange and the extent to which hierarchy is present (see Liep 1991). However, virtually all the contributors to the Godelier and Strathern (1991) volume where the distinctions between these political forms were examined struggled with this classificatory scheme: in some ethnographic instances, pointing to 'chiefly' features existing in supposed big-man and great man

societies. In addition, what is common across all these ‘types’ is that power in one form or another derives from others of various kinds: divine figures, metapersons, and other people.

Sahlins (1963) originally suggested an evolutionary sequence from Melanesian big-man to Polynesian chief. As time passed, though, the sequence was found to have many problems: hereditary leaders were located in Melanesia and there were tendencies towards hereditary succession in the supposedly achieved status of big-men (see Liep 1991).

By contrast, Marilyn Strathern (1988: 340; 1991a: 93), through her comparative analysis of Melanesian societies, argued these societies were versions or transformations of one another. Although they may appear quite different – where big-men are prominent in one social context compared to chiefs in another – they are societies that ultimately ‘hold their conventions in common’ (M. Strathern 1988: 341). What this means is that even with differences between societies, these are differences, in a manner of speaking, that are all the same. They are each part of a general pattern. Strathern argues this sharing of conventions is the outcome of long-standing historical processes. Although the actual history (from a Western point of view) cannot be recovered, she suggests that ‘we surely know enough about historical process to recognize a series of connected events’ (M. Strathern 1988: 341).

This emphasis on the commonality of difference is apparent in Strathern’s comparison of big-men and great men and how each manages the way persons are implicated in the lives of other persons: ‘One is a figure who holds within his own will a precariously demonstrated capacity for unification in the face of external relations [big-men], while the other [great men] is one conduit among many who hold between them the powers necessary to accomplish equally hazardous internal divisions’ (1991b: 214). Her comparison of these two seemingly different political figures – big-men and great men – demonstrates how each is a transformation of the other in terms of connections between one person and many persons and concerning external and internal relations. The power of each also derives in distinct ways from a realm of metapersons (see below).

Following this logic, then, these powerful figures, including that of the chief, are versions of one another where the mutual relations between cosmological otherness and transactions with others assume different local forms, as in the case of the Fuyuge *amede* – the name for a figure like Kol. Analytically, concepts such as big-man, chief, and great man cannot be replaced by indigenous ones: ‘The task is not to imagine one can replace exogenous concepts by indigenous counterparts; rather the task is to convey the complexity of the indigenous concepts in reference to the particular context in which they are produced’ (M. Strathern 1988: 8). The Fuyuge concept of *amede* exists and is produced in the context of a cosmic polity and in relation to a transactional universe where *gab* ritual is central. It is to this context that I now turn.

The Fuyuge context: *amede*, fathers of the land, and people of the land

Before the advent of Europeans the Fuyuge did not conceptualize themselves as an encompassing linguistic and cultural entity.³ The origin of the name ‘Fuyuge’ is not clear, but most likely derives from reference to the area by neighbouring peoples to the south or east who were first contacted (cf. Hallpike 1977: 47). Already by 1910, C.G. Seligmann refers to Fuyuge as an established designation for this language in his book *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (1910: 39 n. 1). Today the people themselves rarely use the name Fuyuge in spoken



Figure 1. The Fuyuge-speaking area and neighbouring language groups (by the author).

discourse, but it is used on social media, for example, as a name for this language group.⁴

Fuyuge lands are situated in five river valleys of the Wharton Ranges on the Papuan side of the country (see Fig. 1). The total population of Fuyuge-speakers is c. 14,000. The Udabe Valley, where I have conducted research, has the largest population of roughly 4,900. Fuyuge valleys are rugged with steep gradients. People live between c. 3,200 and 7,200 feet above sea level.

Within each river valley, the people divide themselves into a number of named units based on shared notions of territory and dialect. I refer to these as ‘homes’ (*em*), a translation of the Fuyuge word for these spatial divisions. My research was conducted in Visi, which is a home of roughly 450 people, and it is in this place that Kol resided.

Within each home, there is a further distinction made between the warm area or lowlands close to the main river, on the one hand, and the forest, on the other. The forest is associated with immense and wild things. The lowland areas are where large yam and taro gardens are planted as well as plots with sweet potato, and where many settlements are located. The lowlands are associated with tame things such as domesticated pigs. The warm area is where the collective ritual known as *gab* is performed. The ritual consists of life-cycle rites, adorned dances, pig sacrifices, and ceremonial exchanges. The ritual is the means by which the Fuyuge sustain their social lives and social reproduction. The Fuyuge assert that the organization and performance of the ritual is only made possible by the *amede*.

Kol is an *amede*. He was born in the late 1920s or early 1930s and when I last spent time with him in 1999 he was around 70 years old. Kol cannot read or write but he is very articulate and has an exceptional knowledge of Fuyuge myths (known as *tidibe*, see below), events from the past, and current local conventions. Although he was baptized by the mission as a child, Kol had little or no involvement with mission affairs. He grew up during the colonial period, and as an adult had direct engagement with many of the patrol officers who came to the Fuyuge area. Already by the 1960s he was an *amede*, and by the time I first met him in the mid-1980s he was well known in all the Fuyuge valleys. This was readily apparent when I visited the five Fuyuge valleys at the end of my initial fieldwork and the names of Kol and his village were familiar to many.

The early missionaries translated *amede* as chief, but, as I will show below, the conventional notion of chief only partially captures what an *amede* is, which is why I retain the local term. In my early writings (e.g. Hirsch 1990). I also used the word 'chief' when referring to a figure like Kol because the status displayed by a man of his type seemed to fit the chief category then current in anthropological usage. In addition, Hallpike (1977: 138-61) used this term to refer to analogous figures among the neighbouring Tauade. At the time, I uncritically accepted the use of the notion. I also did not fully appreciate the cosmological origins of the *amede* figure.

In one sense, the *amede* can be understood as a version of the powerful figure that Kenelm Burridge dubs the 'Melanesian manager'. It is of note that Burridge (1975: 86) draws a comparison between such figures and persons from classic anthropological accounts, such as the leopard-skin chief of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940) and the divine king of the Shilluk (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 66-86). It is these individuals who 'make the social process possible' (Burridge 1975: 86).

This is certainly how the Fuyuge perceive *amede*. It is the *amede*, the Fuyuge say, as noted above, who enable people to unify and perform their collective ritual of *gab*; to achieve 'one mind' (*har fida*) and 'one skin' (*hode fida*). The *amede* also corresponds to another characteristic of the Melanesian manager as one who 'does the tasks that other men do' (Burridge 1975: 86): gardening, pig rearing, housebuilding, and so on. In other words, the *amede* is both different from – having divine qualities – but also the same as other men through the tasks he undertakes in everyday social life. While being individual and singular, the manager is also a 'symbol' capable of revealing to others the 'kinds of moral conflicts in which they are involved' (Burridge 1975: 86, 87; cf. Robbins 2007: 27).

Both Kol and his elder brother Yavu Inoge (great Yavu) were *amede* in the area of Visi in which I lived. Kol was very gregarious and publicly present while his brother was largely the opposite. The two brothers, each in their own way, disclosed what Burridge (1975: 87) refers to as a 'religious value'. However, in Burridge's model, the paired aspects of diarchic leadership are contained in one person: immersed in ordinary social relations while periodically becoming separate and empowered by metaperson-derived powers. The Fuyuge *amede* is different in this regard.

In contrast to the *amede*, whose origin is divine and who enables the reproduction of Fuyuge social life through collective ritual, is the *bul bab* or father(s) of the land. The fathers of the land are the original inhabitants of the land. It is they, for example, who established the boundaries of Visi land in the ancestral past and it is they who are its original cultivators. The *bul bab* ensure the continuing fertility and productivity of the land. They make sure that food grows, vital to the life of humans and pigs.

The *amede* and fathers of the land are differentiated from the *bu ul an*: men or people of the land. In contrast to the *amede* and fathers of the land, who were perceived as fair and good (*ife*), the people of the land were categorized as bad (*ko*). The people of the land are the supports of the powerful. However, the notion of *bu ul an* is not used much anymore as it has negative connotations, especially since the arrival of white people – missionaries, government agents, among others – and the social transformations effected by their presence.

All men regardless of status are categorized as *aked*, a word that can be translated as 'the plurality of men'. It is the plurality of men that decide when events and actions occur.⁵ The *amede* may facilitate the unity of purpose but any collective undertaking must be based on consensus (cf. Lederman 1986: 27-30). For instance, I often asked people when an event was to occur or when we would travel to a place. Inevitably, I would be told that the person speaking did not know but the plurality of men knew. In other words, when an agreement is established among the plurality of men, then a collective course of action can be undertaken.

Amede are meant to display 'good ways' (*mad ife*). They should not fight, steal, or generally cause conflict. In principle, they should be moral exemplars and 'look after' (*afomeme*) other men and women, including their gardens and pigs. These qualities are made explicit when it comes to deciding which man or men become *amede* from one generation to the next. For example, when I first lived in Visi in the mid-1980s, there was discussion about which man or men would replace Kol and his elder brother Yavu Inoge as the *amede*. The sons of Yavu and Kol were both viewed as unacceptable as they did not exhibit good ways. A consensus was emerging that a suitable successor would be Kol's sister's son – Kol's sister had married a father of the land – but several years later he died before the transition could be made.

Amede are selected on the basis of their character, their good ways and whether they are descendants of *amede* through their father's or their mother's relations. They must also be capable of standing among the plurality of men in the ritual village plaza centre at specific moments of the ritual events and speak in public. Not all men feel capable of talking on behalf of the plurality of men in this way. Several generations ago, a Visi *amede* lost his eldest son to sorcery. His younger son refused to take the place of his father as *amede* as he was fearful of speaking in public. As a result, Kol's father became *amede* and he was later replaced by his two sons.

The 'hereditary' character of *amede* is one of the reasons I originally translated it as chief. Hallpike (1977: 138-62), as noted above, opts for this term when translating the related Tauade term of *ami*. He does this after considering the 'big-man' model (e.g. A. Strathern 1971) in contrast to the 'chief model' (e.g. Hau'ofa 1981; Mosko 1985; Scaglione 1996), the two models of political types then current in Melanesian anthropology (cf. Sahlins 1963). According to the big-man model, 'status is not inherited, but achieved by each man according to his display of various talents and characteristics' (Hallpike 1977: 140) – such as competitive ceremonial exchanges and where women are transferred against bridewealth. The chief model sees status as 'well defined and strictly hereditary ... and considerable power may be vested in the office's holder' (Hallpike 1977: 139) – where often there is a centralization of wealth and forms of generalized exchange. Hallpike (1977: 142) acknowledges that neither the big-man nor chief model can be applied without qualification to the Tauade *ami* but nonetheless refers to these figures as chief, largely because of the element of inheritance in status and power.

More recent scholarship complicated this picture by adding the figure of the ‘great man’ (Godelier 1986). One of the differences between big-men and great men is the manner in which men transact through ceremonial exchanges or through ritual and initiations.⁶ The upshot of this difference is that in big-man societies social reproduction depends on the accumulation of material wealth, whereas in great man societies social reproduction rests not on the circulation of wealth but on ritual, initiations, and powers that great men use to dominate other men and women.

None of these models can be readily applied to the Fuyuge *amede*, and that is why I have chosen to use the indigenous term for this figure. The collective ritual of *gab* includes competitive ceremonial exchanges – comparable to those found in ‘big-man societies’; life-cycle rites – comparable to those documented by Maurice Godelier (1986) for ‘great man societies’; men who achieve ‘greatness’ by virtue of their skills as gardeners or, in the past, warriors; and hereditary power that is similar to that found in societies with chiefs. With regard to the contrast between big-man and great man societies, it has been observed that ‘[e]ach ethnographic instance of a type contains allusions to the others within its own “typical” practice’ (Lederman 1991: 217). In other words, elements of a type often turn out to coexist in whole or part in this or that society.

What I have come to understand instead is that the *amede* is a divine figure, a ‘divine king’, and all the other figures classified as big-man, great man, or chief are all figures, like the *amede*, deriving their powers and capacities from an array of metaperson sources.

In order to understand the origins and power possessed by *amede*, it is necessary to consider the metaperson who created the Fuyuge landscape as it is presently formed and gave to the Fuyuge the conventions that organize their social life, including the performance of *gab* ritual.

Tidibe

The Fuyuge world as it is presently known originates from *tidibe*, which is a creator force, a mythical being, and the source of all Fuyuge myths, also known as *tidibe*. I have discussed the Fuyuge concept of *tidibe* in a number of previous publications (e.g. Hirsch 2008), and the discussion here revisits some of that previous material (but see Hirsch 2021). *Tidibe* journeyed from east to west, across and beyond the Fuyuge world in the past, and in the process formed their landscape by establishing all the powers upon which Fuyuge social conventions, such as *gab* ritual, are based. When *tidibe* journeyed across the land, people were already present: the fathers of the land and the people of the land. These people did not possess their current conventions and the landscape lacked its current form and powers.⁷

What *tidibe* established in particular were the *amede* (see below) and the prototypes (*vasa*) of all things central to Fuyuge social life. These include prototypes of pigs, garden foods, pandanus trees, certain birds, betelnut, pythons, marsupials, headdresses, and dancing adornments. Some prototypes are visible (for certain types of trees) while others are invisible (such as the prototype for pigs). All prototypes are named and each home has its own array of named prototypes established throughout the landscape.

Some prototypes exist on their own without any human involvement; they just are, such as the prototypes for certain kinds of birds. Those things that require human involvement for their reproduction or creation, such as garden foods, pandanus, pigs, or even headdresses are different. *Amede* and fathers of the land look after the prototypes

and release their powers through long stones known as *valaga*. Each *valaga* is used in different ways.⁸

It is prototypes that ensure Fuyuge social life is sustained and successfully reproduced. Actual yams that grow in the ground or pigs that grow fat off the land are only possible because of the prototypes established by *tidibe*. Social and material life in the here and now depends on these forms of otherness – prototypes – that are at once inextricably connected to the Fuyuge but exist independently of them.

Tidibe journeyed beyond the Fuyuge world, where it is also understood to have originated the white people and their practices and wealth. The Fuyuge do not know what became of *tidibe*; *tidibe* at once disappeared but is ever-present in the powers and conventions that were established. *Tidibe* is not history, but a way of talking about the past in terms of pervasive, enduring forces. *Tidibe* is both a force and narratives of this power: narratives associated with the actions of *tidibe* are also referred to as *tidibe*. Figures in the narrative are human-like incarnations of *tidibe*. In this way, *tidibe* is both one form and many forms. The teachings and doctrines of mission Christianity potentially challenged the power of *tidibe* but many Fuyuge understand biblical narratives as originating from Fuyuge lands and being versions of *tidibe*.

Appropriate moral conduct derives from *tidibe*, as does the divine power that is channelled into the performance of *gab* ritual. *Tidibe* also established powers that can be used for immoral, nefarious purposes – such as sorcery. The powers established by *tidibe* are intrinsically connected to the relations of exchange performed in *gab* and more generally. There is an expectation that transactions will be conducted according to the ways of *tidibe*, but this can never be known for certain until they are actually experienced.

Robert Williamson was a solicitor and an associate of the early twentieth-century anthropologist Alfred Haddon. Williamson had an interest in anthropology and journeyed to Papua in 1909, following the earlier research conducted there by Seligmann. Williamson spent three months in a Fuyuge-speaking area. This was four years after the French Catholic missionary Father Paul Fastré established a base there. Williamson was hosted by Fastré and in particular Fastré's curate Clauser. It would be another thirty years before Fastré wrote about the Fuyuge based on his several decades' stay among them. I draw on his writings below. By contrast, Williamson published his material on the Fuyuge in 1912. He wrote the following about *tidibe*:

[T]here is a general belief among them in a mysterious individual named [*t*]sidibe [*tidibe* in the Visi dialect], who may be a man, or may be a spirit (they appear to be vague as to this), who has immense power, and who once passed through their country in a direction from east to west ... They believe that it was [*t*]sidibe who taught them all their customs, including dancing and manufacture, and that he ultimately reached and remained in the land of the white man, where he is now living; and that the superior knowledge of the white man in manufacture, and especially in the making of clothes, has been acquired from him. The idea of his ultimate association with the white man can hardly, however, be very ancient tradition. One of the Fathers was seriously asked by a native whether he had ever seen [*t*]sidibe ... As traces of his passage through their country they will show you extraordinarily shaped rocks and stones, such as fragments which have fallen from above into the valley, and rocks and stones which have lodged in strange positions (Williamson 1912: 264-5).

Each Fuyuge valley and each home has its own *tidibe* narratives. At the same time, many *tidibe* narratives are common between valleys and homes but with local variations. For example, three Fuyuge valleys share a major *tidibe* narrative that involves the movements and actions of human-like characters of a husband and wife. In the

myth, the two journey from a Fuyuge valley in the east and move westwards through the Udabe Valley, where I was based, and then again west through a third valley, before disappearing as they moved towards the coast. Through their movements and actions, the two human-like figures created the basis of conventional Fuyuge social life. One was creating the conditions for human reproduction: in the myth, the female figure has no vagina and she is tricked into cutting herself and creating one by her husband, who had tried to have intercourse with her. Another was creating the correct arrangement of animals eaten by humans: in the myth, people tie up worms and insects as if they were pigs and the correct order is then instituted. Similar order- and convention-creating acts are brought about in the myth.

When the missionaries arrived and began to teach the Fuyuge biblical stories, the Fuyuge told the priests that Adam and Eve, for example, were the missionary's names for the same characters in the *tidibe* narrative involving the human-like figures of husband and wife known by the names of Hufife and Aling, respectively. What the missionaries had brought in terms of biblical stories of origins, the Fuyuge already knew. When I was told the narrative of Hufife and Aling, my Fuyuge hosts also told me that Adam and Eve were the biblical names for these same characters.

From the Fuyuge perspective, *tidibe* and *tidibe* narratives derive from the past and endure in the present; they do not change. However, from an outsider's perspective (such as mine), *tidibe* narratives emerge when the horizons and circumstances of the Fuyuge transform. For instance, the first *tidibe* narrative or myth I was told was a story of how the missionaries (and later government) came into Fuyuge lands. From the Fuyuge perspective, this was not a contingent historical event. Rather, it was through Fuyuge action in the past that the missionaries came into Fuyuge lands and brought Christianity and law (see Hirsch 1994). By contrast, I was told a *tidibe* that accounted for how the Fuyuge had lost a type of betelnut to coastal peoples in the ancestral past that is today widely marketed in the national capital, Port Moresby, and a source of monetary wealth. The Fuyuge are now attempting to 'recover' this type of betelnut and bring it back home (see Hirsch 1990).

What these examples suggest is that the Fuyuge see themselves as the origin of powers and of things that all derive from *tidibe* (cf. Schieffelin 1976: 94-5). *Tidibe* is the basis of all in the Fuyuge world – including those things that have come to the Fuyuge (such as the missionaries) or have been lost or stolen from them (such as the valuable type of betelnut). At the same time, though, the origin of *tidibe* is other and unknown. *Tidibe* arrived from the east, moved to the west, and disappeared, but what *tidibe* created remained. In certain respects, *tidibe* bears similarities to the Judaeo-Christian idea of God, and this is perhaps why the early missionaries translated *tidibe* as God.

The Fuyuge, as I have noted, say they follow in the ways of *tidibe*. They speak of themselves generally as 'true men' or 'true people' (*an ataeg*). A true person is one who lives in a distinctive way, eats particular kinds of foods, speaks the Fuyuge language, and knows the narratives associated with *tidibe* as well as other stories associated with the ancestors. Most specially, true people perform *gab*. The idea of true people is found across Melanesia. Maurice Leenhardt entitled his best-known work *Do kamo* (1979 [1947]). This is the New Caledonian term for true or authentic person or personage. It can also be translated as 'true life'. 'An animal or plant is said to be *kamo* if circumstances suggest that it shares something in common with humans' (Descola 2013: 25).

By referring to themselves as 'true people', the Fuyuge differentiate who they are from others. This was made evident to the early missionaries, for example, who lived

very differently from the Fuyuge. In mission publications, some missionaries discuss the notion of 'true people' and consider its implications for their efforts of Catholic conversion. When the missionaries were able to speak Fuyuge and to engage in some Fuyuge conventions, the missionaries were told that they were now similar to true people. However, it is not necessarily the case that all Fuyuge understand themselves as true people.

Father Paul Fastré (n.d.: 339) observed that *amede* do not consider themselves to be 'true men' or 'true people'. His argument, which I follow here, is that while true people 'grew wild', *amede* were 'planted' like the prototypes established by *tidibe*. When *tidibe* passed through the Fuyuge world, people were already present, as noted above: fathers of the land and people of the land – the true people. *Tidibe* provided the true people with social conventions and formed their landscape and its powers. By contrast, *amede* are contemporaries of *tidibe* and were established by *tidibe* when journeying from east to west. *Amede* are contemporary with the prototypes set down by *tidibe* that are the basis of Fuyuge fecundity and reproduction. In this way, *amede* are at once of the place but foreign.

Sahlins (2008) argued there is an analogy between divine figures like *amede* and autochthonous people such as the fathers and people of the land, and that of external affines and internal consanguines. They are comparable because the latter is dependent on the former for the reproduction of social life. As I observed at the start of this article, following Sahlins (2013: 282): 'life-comes-from-the-other'. There is an assimilation of the foreign to the local as in the case of *amede* or in-marrying women.

It is in the Fuyuge collective ritual known as *gab* that these two connected forms of assimilation are visibly actualized: most marriages occur as a result of the ritual, when invited dancers and guests come from numerous homes and *amede* align all the people – including fathers of the land – in one place so that life-cycle rites can be performed. The ritual is staged in a specially built village (also known as *gab*) with a central plaza and houses all around the sides.⁹

The life-cycle transitions need to be made so that people can live effective lives without shame and the dead spirits can be removed from the living. But for the transitions to occur they need to be witnessed by others who publicly confirm they were enacted correctly – in the way of *tidibe*. Guests of various kinds are invited for this purpose, as are dancers, whose performances are meant to clear the ritual village of spirits of the dead. All of these invited relations are reciprocal and coercive. The relations between the hosts of the ritual and the invited dancers are especially competitive: for the hosts in the amounts of food assembled and pigs gathered and sacrificed that are all distributed in exchange; for the dancers in their daytime and night-time performances, where through their displayed power they attract women in marriage.

Each side seeks to achieve an impressive assembly of people and things: the food and pigs on the side of the hosts, made possible by the powers possessed by the fathers of the land; and the large numbers of adorned men and women on the side of the dancers. Each side seeks to appear as commensurate in relation to the other. But the ability to assemble people and things in this manner is dependent on the prototypes as well as on *amede*, both of which were established by *tidibe*, each of which are of the place and foreign at the same time. People see their own capacities and power as facilitated by *amede*, as the personification of *tidibe*.

Having said all this, *amede* are human and there is at times doubt about their capacities. Do they exhibit good ways and look after others, or are their ways bad and do

they lie instead of speaking the truth? I never heard Fuyuge people express their doubts in such an explicit manner, but the uncertainty about the capacities of *amede* emerged periodically in discussions. At the same time, the uncertainty expressed about *amede* is an instance of a more general uncertainty about any undertaking until it is disclosed, such as a pig killing, dancing performance, or ceremonial exchange event (cf. Fastré n.d.: 371; M. Strathern 1988: 273-4, 301).

I mention this not to undermine my analysis but to highlight the uncertainty that generally pervades Fuyuge social life and especially the transactions they conduct with others, particularly in *gab* ritual. A focus on transactions is well documented in the anthropology of Melanesia, especially those transactions referred to as gift exchange. Among the Fuyuge, the ability to conduct transaction with others is made possible by the divine powers established by *tidibe*, personified by the *amede* and the visible and invisible prototypes. At the same time, the successful conduct of exchange relations reveals, among other matters, the direct or indirect access to divine powers.

What I have described above for the Fuyuge and their divine king figure of *amede* can be seen in a related manner among Melanesian societies that organize their social lives, ritual practices, and exchange relations differently.

Alterities of power in analogous forms

Consider the following from the classic account of New Guinea big-men penned by Andrew Strathern in his book *The rope of moka*, based on his research among Melpa-speaking people: '[T]he big-man is regarded as both a planner of group policy and a source of strength for the group *through his contact with ancestor spirits*. When a big-man dies, his kinsmen claim they feel physically weak and at a loss for direction' (A. Strathern 1971: 75, emphasis added; cf. Sahlins 2017: 117). There are two aspects that can be noted here. The first is the big-man as the source of group strength and planning that is required for the competitive ceremonial exchanges between groups. The second is the source of this strength for planning and uniting the group, which is contact with ancestor spirits. It is the big-man's relation with these metapersons (ancestor spirits) that enables him to have strength and capacities needed to plan and unite his group vis-à-vis other groups, and the competitive transactions thereby conducted.

However, as Sahlins indicates:

Whereas the Sky People [*kewa wamb*] originally 'sent down' humans and their means of existence, it is the recent dead and clan ancestors who are most intimately and continuously responsible for the health and wealth of their descendants ... As recipients of frequent sacrifices, the recent dead protect their kin from accidents, illness, and ill fortune (2017: 116, quoting Strauss 1990 [1962]: 272; cf. A. Strathern 1971: 235).

The Sky People appear to be analogous to the Fuyuge idea of *tidibe* in terms of making possible conventional human existence. While the Sky People are 'other', the recent dead and ancestors are all understood as part of the clan.

The intergroup, competitive exchanges take place on specially created ceremonial grounds. Andrew Strathern notes that:

In the Northern Melpa area a [line of trees and shrubs planted by the ceremonial ground] is established only when a new ceremonial ground is made or when a new *moka* [a form of ceremonial exchange where one must give more – an increment – than one receives] is planned. Beside it are buried magical stones (often prehistoric mortars of the kind which also appear as ritual objects in Hagen spirit cults), to attract wealth, and in its trees clan ancestors are supposed to come and lodge themselves (A. Strathern 1971: 38).

Again, the conduct of ceremonial exchanges occurs in a space that is created in such a way that spiritual others are present, ensuring the transactions performed on the grounds are done successfully. The sprits and ancestors are not incidental but central to the strength and power big-men and their groups seek to achieve. The capacity to exchange with others is conditional upon the powers possessed by metapersons (i.e. recent dead and clan ancestors). However, these capacities and powers ultimately derive from the divine source of the Sky People.

Among the neighbouring Maring people, studied by Roy Rappaport, one finds a similar pattern, although here one does not find big-men as among the Melpa but what Godelier refers to as great men.

[In] Maring society the big men are first of all great warriors and great men endowed with supernatural powers that enable them to communicate with the ancestors. A clan usually has only one of these ancestor-spirit-men. It is he who organizes the sacrifices to the ancestors and thus partly controls the social use of pigs. Because he is the only person capable of communicating with the ancestors, he represents the interests of all the members of his clan (Godelier 1986: 186, drawing on Lowman-Vayda 1968).

According to Rappaport, the Maring 'see the purposes of the rituals as having to do ... with the relations of people to various spirits – for the most part, those of deceased ancestors' (1984 [1968]: 6-7). Relations with spirits and ancestors dominate the narrative of his book *Pigs for the ancestors* (1984 [1968]). One spirit in particular is *koipa-manggiang*, said to have nonhuman origins and to guarantee the health and fecundity of people, crops, and pigs (see Healey 1990: 45-6). This metaperson is not of the class of Sky People as in the neighbouring Melpa-speaking area, but its origins are understood as other – nonhuman: as a source of fertility but also of death (Rappaport 1984 [1968]: 39). The success of the *kaiko* ritual exchanges, described by Rappaport, with adversaries in warfare (human others) is contingent on the existence of a diverse range of metapersons, some with human origins as well as the *koipa-manggiang* (cosmological others).

In contrast to the Melpa and Maring peoples residing in the New Guinea highlands, the Mekeo people live near the coast on the Papuan side of the country and are lower-elevation neighbours of the Fuyuge. The Mekeo speak an Austronesian language and have chiefs (Hau'ofa 1981; Mosko 1985; 1992; Stephen 1995): a form of hereditary leadership comparable to chiefs in Polynesian societies.

Mark Mosko (1992: 709-10) cites a Mekeo myth that tells the origins of Mekeo chiefs. The mythical figure at the centre of this narrative is known as Akaisa. Like the Fuyuge *tidibe*, Akaisa is a kind of god or culture creator and is the divine source of Mekeo chiefs. The Akaisa myth details how this divine figure in his mortuary feast detaches and gives away flesh and blood to his living chiefly successors. In an analogous way, living chiefs, Mosko (1992: 710) argues, 'detach' parts of themselves at mortuary rituals and feasts and 'implant' these parts in the form of special prepared meats of pig and dog into their subjects. The chiefs are empowered over their Mekeo subjects with Akaisa's extraordinary capacities. Here is an example similar to the Fuyuge *amede* where in this case chiefs, as personifications of power, are simultaneously a display of divine otherness: or as Sahlins characterizes it, 'the [divine] king as human manifestation of the god, as an avatar of the god' (2017: 122).

Mekeo exchange practices centred on mortuary feasts and what Mosko (1985: 137-42) refers to as 'marriage compensation' each involve various categories of others. In

the case of marriage compensation, it is members of different clans, and in particular two sets of elder brothers on the side of the groom and spouse. For mortuary feasts, a differentiation is made between blood relatives (agnatic and cognatic) and non-blood relatives. The former are categorized as 'owners' in relation to the deceased, while the latter are categorized as 'labourers'. Divine power is what enables these exchanges, and the transactions with others are evidence of the constituting power of Akaisa.

God as alterity

The power deriving from forms of otherness – spirits, ancestors, and forces like *tidibe* – is not restricted to these entities but also now includes God. For example, at the time Andrew Strathern was conducting his original research on ceremonial exchange and big-men among the Melpa people discussed above, there was a substantial Christian mission presence that was affecting all areas of social life, including that of the *moka* ceremonial exchange system. As he notes early in his book: 'Mission preaching has ... driven out many of the overt signs of magic and ritual associated with *moka*' (A. Strathern 1971: 40). Lutheran mission policy in the area was that 'Christians should not make *moka*' (A. Strathern 1971: 165). In a related manner, when a big-man died in the past his skull was placed at the top of a specially built 'head house' (A. Strathern 1971: 192). However, already in the 1960s, mission policy prevented the construction of such structures. But as Andrew Strathern added at the time, '[T]he ghosts of big-men are still thought to be active as guardian of clan morality' (1971: 193). He summarized as follows the local situation as regards mission influence at this time before national independence (1975):

Mission influence on the *moka* has been negative. Baptized Christians are not supposed to make *moka*, but to devote themselves to religion and business. Many cultural practices associated with the *moka* seem to have been banned either directly or indirectly by decision of the Missions, because of the association of the practices with beliefs in magic and in ancestral ghosts (A. Strathern 1971: 228).

Strathern described a situation where *moka* relations were expanding, connecting more groups together, but the exchanges were compressed into briefer periods of planning due to the demands of cash-cropping, and mission- and government-associated work.¹⁰ As he observed: 'Whether the system can survive such pressures remains to be seen. Much will depend on whether younger big-men decide to combine prestige-seeking through ceremonial exchange with application to cash-cropping activities' (A. Strathern 1971: 229).

As it transpired, the power of mission Christianity proved most influential. By 2001, Stewart and Strathern report that Melpa people said '*moka* is dead' (Stewart & Strathern 2001: 101). However, this was not entirely true and a new form of *moka* had emerged where power derived from the otherness of God in contrast to that of spirits, ancestors, and Sky People. Stewart and Strathern refer to this as '*moka* with God'. Power had shifted from figures organizing wide-ranging ceremonial exchanges to that of church leaders organizing ritual cycles associated with various forms of mission Christianity. In both cases, the sources of power were extrasocial, previously from metapersons of ancestors and spirits and now from God.

Stewart and Strathern (2001: 101) argue that associations of powerful men among the Melpa introduced elements of 'big-manship' into Charismatic Christian church rituals that recall past forms. For example, baptisms of men are organized as public

events, thereby increasing their own status and the prestige of their church. In fact, events were marked by the building of a new church (analogous to the previous construction of cult houses), the sacrifice of pigs, the performance of powerful speeches, and the purchase of vehicles to transport supporters. As Stewart and Strathern (2001: 102) note, all of these features are comparable to the previous practices of big-men in their pursuit of status and prestige. In the past, the sources of these capacities were Sky People, spirits, and ancestors, whereas now it is God – in the past as in the present – facilitating transactions with distinct categories of others.

Conclusion

This account of different Melanesian political forms suggests a spectrum of the way divine figures and metapersons are incarnated: from the mediated form among what have been analysed as big-men and great men to the direct form of embodiment in the case of Mekeo chiefs and Fuyuge *amede*. To date, considerable attention in Melanesian anthropology has been devoted to a focus on exchange relations and how different modes of transaction are connected to distinct personal and social arrangements. A different form of 'otherness' to that associated with divine figures and metapersons is at work in this focus on transactions. In Marilyn Strathern's (1988) model of Melanesian gift exchange, it is 'others' – kin, affines, exchange partners, and so on – who are the cause of personal and collective action. As she argues, exchange severs people from people (as well as differentiating people from things and practices) and creates them as other: '[E]ach is defined with respect to the other and thus has his or her separate interests in the relationship' (M. Strathern 1988: 191-2).

However, the capacity to transact with others – for others to be the cause of action – is connected to extrasocial sources. As documented above in the case of the Fuyuge, it is *amede* and especially prototypes established by *tidibe* that make possible all forms of transactions by providing the resources (garden foods, pigs, etc.) that are intrinsic to them. In a manner allied to the theoretical concerns of Marilyn Strathern, Sahlins (2013) argues the reason people divide themselves from one another is so they can impart life to one another, as is exemplified in intermarriage or intergroup rituals such as *gab*. Sahlins's more general point, though, is that the real-life politics of exchange relations involve a cosmological *a priori* as in the Fuyuge concept of *tidibe* (see Sahlins 2014: 159).

I have argued that the Fuyuge have a form of divine king comparable to others documented in the comparative studies of Graeber and Sahlins (2017). I have suggested not only that the Fuyuge *amede* are such an instance but also that other political types previously documented in PNG – big-men, great men, and chiefs – can be analysed as comparable in distinct ways to divine kings. In other words, these versions of the 'Melanesian manager' (Burrige 1975) – who make the social process possible – are all variations in their own ways on divine kings, whereby their authority and power are founded on alterity: on metaperson others.

In contrast to the present argument, Mosko (1992: 711-12) has contended that the three political figures of big-man, chief, and great man can be analysed as part of a single set of 'partible persons' (M. Strathern 1988: 178-9), so that 'the full range of Melanesian leadership types might at last be accommodated within a single, homogeneous analytical scheme' (Mosko 1992: 711). However, Alan Rumsey suggests that the otherness intrinsic to transactions argued by Marilyn Strathern and the cosmological otherness delineated by Sahlins should not be treated 'as global features

of societies or cultures, but as mutually presupposing dimensions of social interaction' (Rumsey 2000: 113). It is this latter approach that I have followed here.

Acknowledgements

An early draft of this article was presented to the Anthropology Research Seminar, Brunel University London, where I received very helpful comments. Nicolas Argenti also provided valuable feedback on a subsequent draft of the article. I thank the journal's four reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive criticisms on a later draft, and Justin Dyer for his meticulous copy-editing on the final draft. For any errors in style or fact that remain, I only have myself to thank.

NOTES

¹ All Tok Pisin words are underlined while words from the indigenous language of Fuyuge are in italics.

² As Graeber and Sahlins observe: 'The precise historical trajectory by which divine powers – sovereignty properly speaking – devolved from metahuman beings to actual human beings, if it can ever be reconstructed, will be likely to take many unexpected turns' (2017: 4).

³ The following four paragraphs draw on material published previously in Hirsch (1990; 1994).

⁴ For example, by the Goilala's District Development Forum Blog (<https://goilala.wordpress.com/>).

⁵ Women influence the decisions about events and actions but their voices are not heard in public, unlike those of men.

⁶ '[T]he relevant question is whether exchanges between groups and individuals depend on a quest for non-equivalence, and thus incorporate principles of calculated disequilibrium or unequal exchange (as in the substitution of human lives for wealth [in the case of big-man societies]); or whether they rest on principles of equivalence and on mechanisms designed to restore equilibrium (wealth for wealth, life for life [as in great man societies])' (see M. Strathern 1991a: 1; cf. Foster 1995: 239-40).

⁷ Comparison here can be made with the Min people and the constituting travels of Afek and her relations to the indigenous figure of Magalim (see Brumbaugh 1987; Jorgensen 1980).

⁸ For example, the *valaga* for pandanus at a specific time of the year is placed together with a ripe cucumber. Cucumbers are one of the first foods to ripen in newly planted gardens and are one of the foods brought to men when cutting and smoking ripened pandanus. The firm covering and moist interior of the cucumber is a quality men want in the pandanus nuts. The relation between the *valaga* and cucumber is created to achieve an analogous outcome in the pandanus. When the cucumber rots, the *valaga* is turned over, and this transformation signals the pandanus fruits are growing and soon ripening. When the Fuyuge observe the ripening pandanus, they know that the *valaga* has been properly manipulated and the power of the *tidibe*-derived prototype accessed via the quasi-eternal stone.

⁹ The ritual is enacted to effect life-cycle transitions of the young, old, and dead. For the young: first wearing clothes; first entering the men's house; first holding the drum and dancing with headdress; a woman's first pregnancy; and name changes of the first born. For the old it is concerned with removing the shame of white hairs and for the dead it is to chase their spirits to the tops of surrounding mountains. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the dead were the major focus of the ritual and invited dancers danced with the bones of the dead.

¹⁰ At this same time, big-men were also seeking election in the newly introduced Local Government Councils. This often placed constraints on their *moka*-making abilities as they needed to organize work on roads or to promote cash-cropping. Some big-men who became councillors gave up *moka* and followed an entirely 'modern' role (A. Strathern 1971: 228).

REFERENCES

- BRUMBAUGH, R. 1987. The Rainbow Serpent on the Upper Sepik. *Anthropos* 82, 25-33.
- BURRIDGE, K. 1975. The Melanesian manager. In *Studies in social anthropology: essays in memory of E.E. Evans-Pritchard* (eds) J. Beattie & R. Lienhardt, 86-104. Oxford: University Press.
- DESCOLA, P. 2013. *Beyond nature and culture* (trans. J. Lloyd). Chicago: University Press.
- EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. 1940. *The Nuer: a description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1962. *Essays in social anthropology*. London: Faber & Faber.

- FASTRÉ, P. n.d. Manners and customs of the Fuyuges. Unpublished manuscript (trans. M. Flower, O.C.D. & E. Chariot, O.C.D.).
- FOSTER, R. 1995. *Social reproduction and history in Melanesia*. Cambridge: University Press.
- GODELIER, M. 1986. *The making of great men: male domination and power among the New Guinea Baruya* (trans. R. Swyer). Cambridge: University Press.
- & M. STRATHERN (eds) 1991. *Big men and great men: personifications of power in Melanesia*. Cambridge: University Press.
- GRAEBER, D. & M. SAHLINS 2017. *On kings*. Chicago: HAU Books.
- HALLPIKE, C. 1977. *Bloodshed and vengeance in the Papuan mountains: the generation of conflict in Tauade society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HAU'OFA, E. 1981. *Mekeo: inequality and ambivalence in a village society*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- HEALEY, C. 1990. *Maring hunters and traders: production and exchange in the Papua New Guinea highlands*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HIRSCH, E. 1990. From bones to betelnuts: processes of ritual transformation and the development of 'national culture' in Papua New Guinea. *Man (N.S.)* 25, 18-34.
- 1994. Between mission and market: events and images in a Melanesian society. *Man (N.S.)* 29, 689-711.
- 2008. God or *tidibe*? Melanesian Christianity and the problem of wholes. *Ethnos* 73, 141-62.
- 2021. *Ancestral presence: cosmology and historical experience in the Papuan highlands*. London: Routledge.
- HOCART, A. 1970. *Kings and councillors: an essay in the comparative anatomy of human society*. Chicago: University Press.
- JORGENSEN, D. 1980. What's in a name: the meaning of meaningless in Telefolmin. *Ethnos* 8, 349-66.
- LEDERMAN, R. 1986. *What gifts engender: social relations and politics in Mendi, Highland Papua New Guinea*. Cambridge: University Press.
- 1991. 'Interests' in exchange: increment, equivalence and the limits of big-manship. In *Big men and great men: personifications of power in Melanesia* (eds) M. Godelier & M. Strathern, 215-33. Cambridge: University Press.
- LEENHARDT, M. 1979 [1947]. *Do kamo: person and myth in the Melanesian world* (trans. B. Culati). Chicago: University Press.
- LIEP, J. 1991. Great man, big man, chief: a triangulation of the Massim. In *Big men and great men: personifications of power in Melanesia* (eds) M. Godelier & M. Strathern, 28-47. Cambridge: University Press.
- LOWMAN-VAYDA, C. 1968. Making big men. *Anthropological Forum* 2, 199-243.
- MOSKO, M. 1985. *Quadripartite structures: categories, relations and homologies in Bush Mekeo culture*. Cambridge: University Press.
- 1992. Motherless sons: 'divine kings' and 'partible persons' in Melanesia and Polynesia. *Man (N.S.)* 27, 697-717.
- NEEDHAM, R. 1980. *Reconnaissances*. Toronto: University Press.
- RAPPAPORT, R. 1984 [1968]. *Pigs for the ancestors: ritual in the ecology of a New Guinea people*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- ROBBINS, J. 2007. Morality, politics and the Melanesian big man: on 'The Melanesian manager' and the transformation of political anthropology. In *The anthropology of morality in Melanesia and beyond* (ed.) J. Barker, 25-37. Farnham: Ashgate.
- RUMSEY, A. 2000. Agency, personhood and the 'I' of discourse in the Pacific and beyond. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 6, 101-15.
- SAHLINS, M. 1963. Poor man, rich man, big-man, chief: political types in Melanesia and Polynesia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, 285-303.
- 1985. *Islands of history*. Chicago: University Press.
- 2008. The stranger-king or, elementary forms of the politics of life. *Indonesia and the Malay World* 36, 177-99.
- 2010. The whole is a part: intercultural politics of order and change. In *Experiments in holism: theory and practice in contemporary anthropology* (eds) T. Otto & N. Bubandt, 102-26. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- 2013. Difference. *Oceania* 83, 281-94.
- 2014. Stranger kings in general: the cosmo-logics of power. In *Framing cosmologies: the anthropology of worlds* (eds) A. Abramson & M. Holbraad, 137-63. Manchester: University Press.

- . 2017. The original political society. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, 91-128.
- SCAGLION, R. 1996. Chiefly models in Papua New Guinea. *The Contemporary Pacific* 8, 1-31.
- SCHIEFFELIN, E. 1976. *The sorrow of the lonely and the burning of the dancers*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- SELIGMANN, C. 1910. *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*. Cambridge: University Press.
- STEPHEN, M. 1995. *Aïsa's gifts: a study of magic and the self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- STEWART, P. & A. STRATHERN 2001. The great exchange: *moka* with God. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 15, 91-104.
- STRATHERN, A. 1971. *The rope of moka: big-men and ceremonial exchange in Mount Hagen, New Guinea*. Cambridge: University Press.
- & M. STRATHERN 1968. Marsupials and magic: a study of spell symbolism among the Mbowamb. In *Dialectic in practical religion* (ed.) E. Leach, 179-202. Cambridge: University Press.
- STRATHERN, M. 1988. *The gender of the gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1991a. *Partial connections*. Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- . 1991b. One man and many men. In *Big men and great men: personifications of power in Melanesia* (eds) M. Godelier & M. Strathern, 197-214. Cambridge: University Press.
- . 1992. Qualified value: the perspective of gift exchange. In *Barter, exchange and value: an anthropological approach* (eds) C. Humphrey & S. Hugh-Jones, 169-91. Cambridge: University Press.
- STRAUSS, H. (1990 [1962]). *The Mi-culture of the Mount Hagen people, Papua New Guinea* (eds G. Stürzenhofecker & A. Strathern; trans. B. Shields). Pittsburgh Ethnology Monographs No. 13. Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh.
- VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, E. 1992. *From the enemy's point of view: humanity and divinity in an Amazonian society* (trans. C. Howard). Chicago: University Press.
- WILLIAMSON, R. 1912. *The Mafulu mountain people of British New Guinea*. London: Macmillan.

Pouvoirs divins et échanges avec « les autres » en Mélanésie

Résumé

Marshall Sahlins a décrit des formes de rois divins dans des sociétés très diverses d'Asie du Sud-Est, d'Afrique et du Pacifique, entre autres. Dans le présent article, l'auteur m'intéresse à une forme de roi divin chez les Fuyuge des hautes-terres de Papouasie et reviens sur ma perception antérieure de cette figure de pouvoir. Dans le même temps, il avance qu'il existe un lien inextricable entre la théorie du pouvoir divin de Sahlins et le modèle d'échange de dons mélanésien de Marilyn Strathern : tous deux fonctionnent selon des idées distinctes de l'altérité. La capacité d'entrer dans la transaction est conférée par des sources cosmologiques, tandis que la preuve du pouvoir cosmologique est fournie par la capacité d'entrer en transaction avec les autres de manière efficace et puissante. Plus généralement, il soutient que les figures mélanésiennes conventionnelles des *big-men*, des grands hommes et des chefs sont toutes des versions de l'altérité du pouvoir sous des formes politiques apparentées : chacune est une instanciation des relations mutuelles entre altérité cosmologique et altérité transactionnelle.

Eric Hirsch is Professor of Anthropology at Brunel University London. He has a long-standing interest in the anthropology and history of Melanesia. His most recent publications are *The Melanesian world* (co-edited with Will Rollason; Routledge, 2019) and *Ancestral presence: cosmology and historical experience in the Papuan highlands* (Routledge, 2021).

Division of Anthropology, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, UK.
eric.hirsch@brunel.ac.uk