

# EXCHANGE AND SACRIFICE

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Pamela J. Stewart  
and  
Andrew Strathern

*Series Editors*

# EXCHANGE AND SACRIFICE

*Edited by*

Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern

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Front cover photo: A newly constructed men's house (*manga rapa*) complex at the head of a major ceremonial ground (*moka pena*) laid out by the leader Ndamba of the Kawelka Kundmbo clan in the Mount Hagen area, Western Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Fronting the entrance of the house is a raised wooden tub in which the sacred cordyline plant is growing. Magical stones to increase fertility and success in *moka* exchanges are buried in the tub. Stakes to which pigs will later be fastened as gifts in *moka* are neatly lined up on either side of the tub. Sacrifices of pigs to ancestral spirits traditionally accompanied the building of such a complex, establishing the preconditions for the leader's success in his exchange activities. 1970s. (Photo: P.J. Stewart / A. Strathern Archive)

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For the Flow and Cycle of Life  
Its Exchanges and Its Sacrifices



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## Series Editors' Preface

The inclusion of this volume in the Ritual Studies Monograph Series is an appropriate addition to the set of works previously published in the Series.<sup>1</sup> As general Editors for the volume we wish to thank all of our contributors whom we invited to discuss the topic of *exchange* and *sacrifice*. We enjoyed reading, commenting on, and discussing the chapters in this volume and entering into scholarly exchanges of ideas with each of the authors in this collection. Over the time period in which this book developed into its final form we have both been fortunate to have had affiliations with a number of academic institutions, which we gratefully thank, where various aspects of our work on “Exchange and Sacrifice” have taken place: These include Visiting Scholar positions at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan; and Visiting Lectureship positions, at the College of Indigenous Studies, Dong-hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan.

This book is in general intended also to commemorate the work of Daniel de Coppet, especially his work amongst the people of the Solomon Islands in the South-West Pacific. Each of our contributors has engaged with de Coppet’s corpus of writings, not necessarily to agree with all of his perspectives but in every case to recognize the rich contributions which he made to anthropological theorizing on this part of the Pacific.

We would like especially to thank here all of the staff at Carolina Academic Press with whom we have worked over the years on this and other projects. These include Keith Sipe, Linda Lacy, Bob Conrow, Tim Colton, Reuben Ayres, and many others at the Press who have helped to bring our various works into being and have successfully promoted the books in this Series and the Medical Anthropology Series which we also Co-Edit.

Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern  
Cromie Burn Research Unit  
4 October 2007

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1. For a full listing of titles in the Series go to the Carolina Academic website (<http://www.cap-press.com/>) and examine the list under “Ritual Studies Monograph Series”.



## Introduction

# Aligning Words, Aligning Worlds

*Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart*

## Definitions

The essays in this edited collection were ones that we solicited from well known scholars who were requested to address in some way the work of Daniel de Coppet, a distinguished French anthropologist, the leader for many years of a distinctive research group of the CNRS/EHESS in Paris, and the ethnographer of the 'Are'Are people of Malaita, Solomon Islands. De Coppet's fundamental theories of relationships between death, exchange, sacrifice, the ancestors, and concepts of society and person influenced many anthropologists in his milieu. This set of papers honors his contributions with ethnographic studies from the Pacific, pursuing these from a variety of theoretical, critical, and appreciative viewpoints as well as those of de Coppet himself. De Coppet died suddenly on the day of his retirement, and on his birthday, at age 69 in 2002 (see Itéanu, 2003, Barraud, 2003, and Zemp 2003, with citations to de Coppet's work included there).

De Coppet's writings touched on a wide variety of enduring themes in anthropological analysis that go far beyond the immediate context of the Pacific region, broad, diverse and intrinsically significant as this region is. De Coppet's ideas were both ethnographically integrative and epistemologically challenging. Faithful to his mentor Louis Dumont's emphasis on hierarchy and encompassment, he constantly reminded readers of the problems of perspective that may derive from recent thinking by scholars trained in "Europe" by contrast with ethnographic materials derived from areas such as the Pacific. This basic issue emerges in his piece on "the body" which has been translated from the French by Hattie Hill and included in this collection at the beginning of the volume.

In applying the idea of encompassment to cases from the Solomon Islands in the South-West Pacific, de Coppet also implicitly engaged with theories that

foreground individuality, political competition, and agency without recognizing the wider place of these aspects in frameworks that he called hierarchical. Ethnographically, his demonstration of a cosmic cyclicality between violence and peaceful exchanges has carried the most immediate and powerful applicability to many cases in New Guinea, notably the Highlands areas in which a novel surge of research work was carried out from the 1960s through to the present. His insistence that death, exchange, and religious rituals are all intrinsically, not contingently, bound up with one another reveals that the true lineage of his work goes deeper than Dumont to the life-work of Marcel Mauss.

In accordance with the impetus that pervades all of Mauss's work, de Coppet's emphasis is on a holistic view, and this means one that is seriously grounded in an appreciation of the power of religious and ritual ideas. There is no attempt, in Mauss's or de Coppet's work, to subjugate the ideas behind exchanges in the Pacific region to a secular model of explanation. Here, then, de Coppet's fidelity to the 'Are'Are ethnography provides the most effective epistemological challenge to sociologically deterministic explanations. His insistence on the Malinowskian dictum of grasping, in so far as one is able, the "indigenous" world-view has also provided leverage for novel contemporary ways on the part of Solomon Islanders to assert their own contemporary identities, as the contributions to this volume by Pierre Maranda and Michael Scott show. It is also for this reason that we ourselves explore further here the relationship between exchange and sacrifice, since this relationship indicates the intimate connectedness of ideas in these two spheres of action. De Coppet's ideas have themselves also been repeatedly challenged, and several of our contributors elaborate on such challenges. The lasting merit of his work is shown in the fruitful ways in which these challenges contribute to social theory as a whole.

Sacrifice is one of the classic topics in social anthropology as well as religious and ritual studies and continues to be of vital importance in the world today as we read about it in the news on a daily basis, for example, the battles in Iraq, conflicts in the Middle-East, and contexts found through the world. The study of sacrifice within British social anthropology derived from the early work of theorists whose studies drew on materials from the ancient European world as well as on contemporary accounts of people in different parts of the world. Scholars such as Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, Sir James Frazer, Jane Ellen Harrison, Andrew Lang, Fustel de Coulanges, and many others compared ancient Greek and Roman practices with those of people in the colonial domains of Africa, South America, India, and the Pacific. These studies found many parallels and similarities of practice. The central theme in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* had to do with sacrifices in a sacred grove of trees at Nemi in ancient Italy, conducted by priests who considered that the mistle-

toe plant had particular powers; and beyond this with the practices surrounding the death and replacement of sacred rulers who embodied the health and prosperity of their domains. Sacrifice has often been regarded as one of the central acts in religious rituals. This is because it is seen as one of the prime means whereby humans communicate with spirits and deities whom they see as having power over their lives. Spoken invocations or prayers are another way of communicating, but often these go along with, and are not separate from, acts of sacrifice.

What do we mean by the term sacrifice here? First, in its more specific sense, sacrifice refers to a material offering of some kind presented to a spirit entity. The offering may in principle be of any kind. Typically, however, it is something of value, and frequently it is something edible, such as fruits or vegetables, meat or fish, or wine. In another classic sense, sacrifice may involve the ritual taking of the life of a living entity that will be dedicated to a deity or spirit. The killing of such a being represents a kind of destruction or expenditure of its capital value in the interest of presenting its body and life force to the world of spirit power. In practice, the bulk of the meat of a killed animal is consumed by the congregation of those who sacrifice it as well as by important ritual experts and leaders within the “religious” community.

The scholar W. Robertson Smith regarded the act of communal consumption as fundamental to sacrificial rites, further seeing it as a means whereby group bonds were intensified by eating together, by acts of commensality. Robertson Smith’s ideas were similar to those of the French sociological theorist Emile Durkheim, who saw religion and group bonding as closely intertwined phenomena. Other theorists have paid close attention to the killing of a living creature. For them, the act of violence in killing is important. Since life is considered to be a supreme value, the offering of life is a supreme form of gift to the deity/spirit world.

This point brings us to the next analytical theme, that sacrifice can be seen as a kind of gift, a gift to the gods/spirits/ancestors. Anthropologists have frequently debated the issues surrounding gift giving. Gifting itself is often seen in the concept of reciprocity, that is, for every gift a counter-gift is often expected. How does this apply to sacrifice? Early theorists, drawing on the traditions of Latin scholarship, established two functions here, called *do ut des*, ‘I give in order that you may give back to me’, and *do ut abeas*, ‘I give so that you will stay away / go away from me.’ These two functions may be merged together, or they may be separate. In either case there are significant connections between death, sacrifice and exchange. In our chapter in this volume we draw out these connections in more detail, combining the ideas of Mauss and de Coppet together.

Sacrifice may also be given a set of broader meanings that tie it in with ideas of exchange with the spirit world or the cosmos. We give here two diverse examples. First, a sacrifice may be of one's own life. This is a fundamental theme in the spiritual elaboration of nationalistic ideas, based on the symbolic logic of kinship solidarity. In the Judeo-Christian world, the sacrifice of his life at the violent hands of others by the figure of Jesus may be taken as a poignant illustration of the prevalence of this idea, projected onto the universal realm. In the context of the nation this idea is transformed into patriotism — "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his land": the individual subordinated to the collectivity of being, signaled by the land that sustains people. A further transform of this is found in the figure of the suicide bomber, who dies for a cause in directly killing those seen as enemies of his/her cosmological world-view. All these are varieties of sacrifice, in which the expected return is spiritual favor, advantage to oneself or one's group, or redemption.

In the second example the sacrifice may be that of someone else who is killed. Head-hunting falls into this category. Head-hunting in the world of the Austronesian populations who colonized large parts of the Pacific and South-East Asia within the last several thousand years, had a spiritual or cosmological significance, having to do with the regeneration of life (on which general topic see Bloch and Parry 1984). The life taken through the killing augmented the life of the killer and the killer's group.

In 2003 we came across a contemporary discourse on this theme among the Atayal people, one of the recognized Aboriginal groups in Taiwan. We had been taken on a post-conference visit from the Dong-Hwa University in Hualien to Taroko Gorge, a notable sight-seeing area within Taiwan. Our group of conference participants made a visit to a workshop of an Atayal artisan-activist, whose work area was lined with portraits of older people tattooed according to custom prior to the time when Japanese colonialists in Taiwan had forbidden this practice. The man explained that in the past Atayal men had earned the right to be tattooed by taking the heads of their enemies from other Aboriginal tribal groups. He went on to say that, in their attempts to control the Atayal, the Japanese had forbidden anyone who was tattooed to enter the new schooling system that they had introduced and that, for the Atayal, this was a considerable problem, because successful entry into the world of the dead, where their ancestors were, was thought by them to be predicated on being tattooed. Thus, the sacrifice of a victim's head was a prerequisite for these men to obtain initiation into life after death.

## Alignments

The essays in this edited collection fit into the following main divisions of the book:

- A. Fundamentals of Comparison  
Chapter 1
- B. Exchange and Identity  
Chapters 2 and 3
- C. Rethinking Issues: Rank and Performativity in Exchange Systems  
Chapters 4 and 5
- D. History and Creativity: Emergent Narratives  
Chapters 6, 7, and 8
- E. Exchange and Sacrifice  
Chapter 9

The topics of exchange and sacrifice have loomed large in anthropological theorizing from the beginnings of anthropology as a formal academic discipline in the nineteenth century. We have chosen to bring these topics into alignment with each other in this Introduction for two reasons. First, and foremost with regard to one of the purposes of the volume, which is to give recognition to the ideas of the late Daniel de Coppet, exchanges in a number of the societies of the South-West Pacific where de Coppet worked are often deeply bound up with moments of sacrifice centering on deaths. Second, at a broader comparative level, these two topics, exchange and sacrifice, can sometimes best be seen as belonging together in an interlinked network of practices constituting a local cosmos. Since de Coppet also promoted holistic analytical ideas of this kind, our suggestion fits in general with the orientations of his thought, even if we do not necessarily completely follow him in his allegiance to the work of his mentor Louis Dumont. “Exchange” and “Sacrifice” are two words that figure prominently in ethnographic and analytical texts, but have not always been systematically aligned with each other. Together, looking at the matter holistically, such an alignment of words points to the deeper process of alignment of worlds of experience and practice that goes to make up a cosmos in which beings of different orders (for example, the living and the dead, spirits and people, animals and humans, objects and persons) are socially engaged with one another.

One advantage of alignments such as we have just advocated is that they may enable us to break down certain dichotomies. For example, sacrifice is often seen as belonging to the sacred world of interaction with the spirits and thus not subject to human manipulations of the kind encountered in contexts of exchange. Yet if a sacrifice is an exchange, it may in fact be subject to vari-

ability, choice, and manipulation, although in such contexts manipulation may not be perceived as the best strategy. With regard to exchange, especially exchanges of wealth in South-West Pacific societies (and elsewhere), models of strategizing and manipulation have frequently been applied, sometimes thus obscuring the religious or ritual underpinnings of the practices of exchange themselves. (See, for an exposition of this point, A Strathern 1993, in a paper that deliberately cross-cuts the stereotypical distinction between “big-men” and “great men” in the “Melanesian” literature. In this distinction, “big-men” are often present in secularized mode, while “great men” are often linked with the worlds of ritual. See also Strathern and Stewart 2000a).

Much of the early anthropological interest in sacrifice as a theme centered on studies of ancient Greek and Roman religion, and also on early Semitic society. Since traditions stemming from these sources have also entered historically into the stream of European practices, a kind of continuous connection is made with these ancient cases as foundational to the topic. An early synthesizing work was produced by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, and a translation of this appeared in 1964 with a foreword by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who himself contributed notably to the analysis of sacrifice in his work on the Nuer people of the Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1956). Hubert and Mauss drew extensively on classical, Semitic, and also Hindu sources. Central to their approach is the Durkheimian notion of the distinction between the sacred and the profane realms. Thus they argued that “it is indeed certain that sacrifice always implies a consecration; in every sacrifice an object passes from the common [*scilicet* “profane”] into the religious [i.e. “sacred”] domain” (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 9). Equally central is their view of the functions of sacrifice expressed in their definitional statement that “sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned” (p. 15). Although animal sacrifice is their main focus, their argument is intended in principle to apply regardless of the medium employed to communicate with the spirit world. At the same time, animal, or “blood”, sacrifice is significant as a category here because of another classic characteristic or feature, the imputed “identification” of the victim with the sacrificer. Pigs in New Guinea fall into this category, because of the multiple ways in which they stand for, or substitute for, or can be exchanged for rights over, persons in social relationships.

Hubert and Mauss introduced a further term into their analysis: the sacrificer (p. 10). The sacrificer, in their usage, is “the subject to whom the benefits of sacrifice ... accrue, or who undergoes its effects”. Hence the reference in their theory to the transformations of the moral personhood of the agency that provides the sacrifice; or alternatively of a material entity to which the

sacrifier is connected, for example a house that is consecrated or blessed by means of an appropriate sacrifice. Hubert and Mauss further made a distinction between offerings of “oblations” (their term, pp. 11-12) which are brought and consecrated as votive offerings but are not further altered, and those cases in which an object or creature is destroyed/killed. They add (p. 12) that “it is clearly for oblations of this [i.e., the latter] kind that the name sacrifice must be reserved”. To some extent, any definition of this sort must be regarded as arbitrary, because oblations or offerings of many kinds are mixed up together and are not necessarily distinguished by the people who make them. But, for our purposes here, Hubert and Mauss’s emphasis on the destruction or killing of a victim as an essential part of sacrifice is important because it lays stress on the gravity of the act of sacrifice and also ties in with the question of the cosmological framework in which sacrifices, as types of exchange, take place; as well as raising the question of the extent to which exchanges can be regarded as sacrifices. Given de Coppet’s emphasis on the cyclicity of life and death and the importance of compensation in turning the circle of events between life and death, the killing of a victim as a pivotal act also gains further significance.

Finally here, in Hubert and Mauss’s scheme, there is the distinction between the *sacrifier* and the *sacrificer*. The latter may be a priest or ritually pure specialist who undertakes the actual act of killing the victim, acting on behalf of the beneficiary of the sacrifice or the sacrificer. In many of the cases they draw upon, such as those from Hindu practice, or Jewish rituals, or from ancient Greece and Rome, priestly specialists were typically involved in sacrifices. But the sacrificer and the sacrificer may also be one and the same person, as in many contexts of the sacrifice of pigs in New Guinea.

In terms of the theory of exchange as an element of sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss reached a striking conclusion. Sacrifice is a highly performative act according to them. It does not simply reflect relationships, we might say, glossing their argument: it changes them. And one of the primary changes involved they characterize as redemption: “There is no sacrifice into which some idea of redemption does not enter” (p. 99). They also argue that “fundamentally there is perhaps no sacrifice that has not some contractual element” (p. 100). Redemption, then, is the return from the sacrifice to the sacrificer. And the exchange entered into between humans and spirits is a kind of contract, in which each side has customary expectations. Although, then, much of Hubert and Mauss’s work is classificatory, concerned with the details of different types of sacrifice, their fundamental project fits well with a stress on exchange elements in sacrifice.

How does this theory fit with the well-known and influential theory of Robertson Smith, who argued that the essential aspect of sacrifice is the shar-

ing of a communal meal between humans and spirits/deities (Robertson Smith 1889)? This is a matter of emphasis in the analysis. Sacrificial occasions can exhibit elements of redemption, contractual exchange, and communion, equally co-present, or with one dominant over the others; or other permutations. Robertson Smith's ideas were incorporated into theories that emphasized the creation of solidarity, a notion that was important also for the Durkheimians, such as Hubert and Mauss themselves. And his stress on communion, or the communication and creation of solidarity through the sharing of consecrated food, fits well enough with Hubert and Mauss's concept of moral transformation, since communion with the gods strengthens humans and sanctifies their social relationships with one another. Nevertheless, there is a difference between these theories: in Robertson Smith's scheme, the stress is on the sharing of the food. If the victim is an animal, its killing is a necessary preliminary to its consumption. In Hubert and Mauss's scheme, the stress is on the killing itself, and on the necessary transformation of the victim into another form that makes it a sacrifice, by the gift of its life, in return for which benefits are sought from the spirits or deities. Robertson Smith's theory more closely resembles a theory of generalized exchange or sharing; Hubert and Mauss's theory resembles one of balanced exchange or reciprocity.

Commenting on these two paradigms and drawing on our knowledge of New Guinea sacrificial occasions, we may say that a processual theory can accommodate both viewpoints. The initial act of sacrifice corresponds to Hubert and Mauss's paradigm, while the subsequent events are in line with the paradigm of Robertson Smith. In other words, pigs are first consecrated, killed, and prayers made to spirit forces; then the consecrated animal is cooked and consumed notionally by both the spirits and the people, the people eating the roasted flesh, the spirits consuming its aroma or steam. And this mutual consumption seals the contract involved and also creates good feelings all round, what the Melpa speakers of Mount Hagen in Papua New Guinea refer to as *min*, a term that can be glossed as harmony, friendship, goodwill, (similar to, in some ways, the Christian phrase "goodwill on earth as in Heaven"). Interestingly enough, in today's syncretic contexts of blending between indigenous and Christian ideas and practices in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere, Christian prayers often either substitute for or are combined with invocations to the ancestors, the ancestors are seen as involved in a contractual way, and the Christian God is called on in a generalized way to bless the sharing of the meal. This kind of layering or multiple functioning of sacrifice appears to have been present also in ancient Roman funeral practices in which a sacrificed pig was "divided three ways: part went to its divine recipient [the Goddess] Ceres; part was placed on the pyre of the dead person [and then

burnt], part on a table where it was eaten by living mourners. That is to say, dead and living shared in a sacrifice to Ceres" (Parker 2005: 30, drawing on Scheid 2005). The layering is not the same in this case, of course, since it is all within a single complex of historical practices. Yet combinations of elements from different external and internal sources were a common feature of ancient Greek and Roman ritual, one which historians of religion have delighted in teasing out. In the examples from New Guinea, where Christian and indigenous elements are blended and make subtle alterations to overall meanings of the rituals involved, the significant feature may be that these elements are in practice placed on the same level, so that they can be combined together. This may go with a set of ideal statements privileging one or the other dimension, so that indigenous elements appear to be subordinate to the Christian ones; but such statements may be in response to power structures or particular local struggles for power, whereas at the level of practice what we, as observers, see is the commingling of elements themselves. In Mount Hagen, for example, the indigenous sacrifices were designed to create amity or *min*, between people and the spirits and between people themselves, and Christian prayers added to these occasions help further to create a sense of shared community and to give a blessing to the shared meal. Amity and blessing go harmoniously together. These two elements naturally fit with the Robertson Smith model of sacrifice as communion. The prayers, however, and the sacrifice itself, constitute a kind of contractual petition for the redemption (literally "buying back") of certain kinds of unfavorable circumstances.

If a sacrifice is intended as an exchange, what kind of exchange is envisaged or imagined through such an act? The sacrifice does not compel the spirit to do as the sacrificer wishes. Rather, we might say, by acting as a mediating substance between humans and spirits, it is intended both as a kind of offering or compensation and as a means of establishing a moral bond with the spirits, most obviously in cases where the spirits are the spirits of dead kinsfolk. This moral bond can be exerted at a number of different levels. While Robertson Smith stressed the collective context, the individual context may also be important. Careful ethnographic study is needed to elucidate how these contexts are played out in terms of the process of sacrificial acts themselves.

## Sacrifice and Exchange: Evans-Pritchard's Account of the Nuer

In *Nuer Religion* (1956) E.E. Evans-Pritchard gave a detailed account of how sacrifice operated among the Nuer people of the Southern Sudan. His

discussion is notable in two ways. First, as with many other writers, he restricts his descriptions to blood sacrifice. In this, he appears to have been following the work of Hubert and Mauss. He notes numbers of minor occasions when offerings of maize, millet, tobacco, beads, beer, or milk are made in order to avert sickness or give thanks for the harvest of a crop. In psychological terms, it seems that these offerings in fact form a continuum with those more important and serious occasions which Evans-Pritchard is content to label as sacrifice (1956:197). He restricts the term sacrifice to blood-sacrifice, because in this the life of an animal is taken and is offered to the world of Spirit or God (*Kwoth*) and because blood as a vehicle of life holds an important symbolic role in Nuer ideas of life and death, including issues of pollution and expiation.

Second, Evans-Pritchard is careful to present his readers with the vernacular terms that he relates to the concept of sacrifice among the Nuer. First there is *pwot*, the act of tethering the victim by a peg driven into the ground (p. 208). A libation may be poured at the foot of the peg (*ibid.*). Next, the men who will speak the invocations to Spirit at the killing of the animal each rub the beast with ashes of cattle-dung, an act which Evans-Pritchard argues marks the identification of the men with the animal they consecrate in this way (*ibid.*). The invocation (*lam*) comes next, conducted while the speaker, holding up a spear, speaks over the victim, addressing Spirit/God. Evans-Pritchard distinguishes *lam* from prayer (*pal*), in which a speaker makes a straightforward petition for a favor. *Lam* speeches roundly declare that the sickness or pollution or danger has been averted by the act of sacrifice. *Kam yang*, coming next, is the actual immolation, the killing, of the animal.

Spirit may be said to “eat” the “soul” of offerings (p. 212), or to “pull” the victim, but these are intended as metaphorical expressions, Evans-Pritchard says (p. 213). Spirit takes the life (*yiegh*) of the victim, while humans take and share out for consumption the *ring* (flesh) (p. 214).

What is achieved by sacrifice? Evans-Pritchard wrote that the term *kuk / kok* indicates a form of “redemption” (p. 221). That is, the act “appears to be regarded as a ransom which redeems the person who pays it from a misfortune that would, or might, otherwise fall on him. By accepting the gift, God enters into a covenant to protect the giver of it or help him in some other way. Through the sacrifice man makes a kind of bargain with his God” (p. 221). *Kok* may also be made to a female spirit (*buk*) of a river or lake, asking for her protection against dangers in the water (*ibid.*).

What kind of sacrifice is made here? Evans-Pritchard is at pains to argue that the ritual does not compel the deity. The deity gives back life or protection as a “free gift” (*muc*) (p. 222). But a costly sacrifice places right or jus-

tice (*cuong*) on the human side of the bargain. Spirit is seen as in debt (*col*) to the sacrificer. The term *kok* is also used of transactions of purchase and sale of items with Arab traders; but the Nuer see these transactions as ways of giving things to the trader so that he will feel obliged to help the Nuer in return (p. 223).

Evans-Pritchard agrees, then, that sacrifice is an exchange, but he adds that the concepts involved are complex: it is not a simple exchange. The term *lor* may be used to indicate an act of going out to “meet” a source of misfortune, such as a swarm of locusts, and persuade them with a sacrifice to depart (p. 226). The term *kir* may be used to indicate an expiation, and this term is used only in the context of sacrifice. Here the sense is that of “getting rid” of something, not that of a bargain-like exchange that is negotiated. On the other hand, the term *col* strongly brings to mind a sense of indemnification (p. 228). *Col* implies indemnification for a death, reparation for it, and any death seems to require this. Kin of the dead person have to atone for the death by a compensation payment; and in homicide, the killers must expiate the “sin” of killing by paying compensation for it through sacrifice. It is in this concept of *col* that the clearest connection with New Guinea Highlands concepts of exchange and sacrifice can be discerned.

Evans-Pritchard comments further on his own ethnography by assessing the communion and the gift theories of sacrifice. For the Nuer, he rejects any idea that the sacrificial meal establishes commensality between people and Spirit / God. He also argues that the gift aspect of sacrifice entails much more the idea that the Spirit / God stays away (*do ut abeas*) than the idea of a gift in return. These, however, are particularities of Nuer practice and Evans-Pritchard’s interpretation of it. More generally, communion and gift aspects of sacrifice may be intermingled. Some commentators have argued that Evans-Pritchard gave his Nuer materials a Christian inflection. This may be partly the case; but as a scrupulous ethnographer Evans-Pritchard takes his stand primarily on the ethnographic findings as he saw them (1956: 272-286).

## Sacrifice: Hermann Strauss on the Melpa

Hermann Strauss, in his monumental study of Hagen ritual practices, includes a lengthy account of sacrificial practices. Pigs are the prime vehicles of sacrifice, as cattle are or were among the Nuer. Andrew Strathern, in a paper on “Pigs and Politics in Papua New Guinea”, has noted that:

“The pig complex, wherever found in Melanesia, varies significantly with ecology, but in its cultural essentials it is linked to the same basic

notion of an equivalence between pigs and people which has its most striking expression in religious sacrifices; and every slaughter of a pig is a 'total' act linking material and symbolic actions together. Ghosts, for example, are asked to 'eat' a pig rather than 'eating' (i.e. making sick) a victim. The Maring kill pigs as offerings to the 'red spirits' who help them in war, as well as gifts to their human allies in the same activity. Pigs represent, therefore, a fund of religious strength essential for the maintenance of communication between people and spirits. All the more reason why they are kept hidden both from visiting exchange partners and from enquiring anthropologists who want to count them. It is this combination of material and symbolic significance, reflected in their importance in both production and exchange, that makes pigs so central. When Ongka [a prominent leader] says that without pigs a man is rubbish he does not only mean that a traditional form of wealth is still valued. He is also saying that a lack of pigs is a bad omen, for the man without them cannot expect the ghosts to support him in future." (A. Strathern 1983: 79. For further information on Ongka see Strathern and Stewart 2000b.)

Strauss's discussion runs in the same vein, with the added point that the dependency between living people/humans and the spirits is mutual:

"According to the beliefs of the Mbowamb [Hageners, Melpa-speakers], the dead, in their existence as spirits [*Geister* in German] are dependent on the sacrifices which their descendants bring for them. The spirits of the dead nourish themselves from the life-force of the sacrificial animals. This life-force is contained in the *tirndéglem* or aromatic smell that rises up from the sacrifice. The more the sacrifices are that are brought to a dead person, the higher that person's standing becomes among the spirits of the dead. The dead are also obliged to their descendants for their housing and for protection against the night and the cold, wind and rain. If their living kin do not build a spirit-house for them, they must feel the cold, as well as hunger if no-one brings sacrifices to them. As the dead are dependent on the living, so in turn are the living dependent on the dead for their health, well-being, luck, and healing from sickness. So the dependence is mutual. The means whereby mutual good understanding can be established and always further renewed is the sacrifice and the sacrificial meal. Good relations signify good fortune and a good life for the living, while distorted and bad relationships mean misfortune." (Strauss and Tischner 1962: 377, transl. by the authors).

The reciprocity involved is stated very succinctly here. Strauss proceeds to discuss all the different contexts in which sacrificial offerings are made. Like Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer (and also like Hubert and Mauss) he concentrates on sacrifice as the killing of an animal, the pig. Evans-Pritchard, following Hubert and Mauss, stressed the redemptive or indemnificatory character of the sacrifice. The Nuer relationship to Kwoth, or God/Spirit, as Evans-Pritchard portrayed it, is, however, not so intimate or reciprocal as the relationship that Strauss portrays as holding between the Melpa and the spirits of their dead. Indeed, in his model of reciprocal relations, Strauss is basing his account on this relationship, seen as an extension of or parallel to the relations among living kin. And Strauss writes of a social world among the dead that parallels and is bound up with that among the living. Just as, among the living, status was gained through prominence in *moka* exchanges (competitive exchanges of wealth in pigs and valuable shells), so among the dead status was seen as gained by the reception of sacrifices.

The relationship, Strauss goes on (p. 377), was particularistic. People would approach only their own fathers, mothers, brothers, or sisters, not other people's kin. Only one's own kin could either punish one or support one. Parents and close siblings were those most relied on for help when dead, just as they would be when alive (not spouses, note). For this reason people would build sacrificial huts near to the burial-sites of these kin. A man would bring a piece of sacrificial pork to such a hut and there would call out to the dead kin:

“Father and mother, both of you! If you are present, eat this sacrifice. After you have eaten it, I and my wife and children should always remain healthy, you two should not inflict sickness and headaches upon us, you should always go in front of us so that we do not suffer misfortune and we do not fall into an ambush set for us by our enemies ...” (p. 378, transl. by the authors).

Similar offerings were made before the cultivation of a new garden, to ensure its fertility, and before going out on an expedition to ask an exchange partner for a valuable shell desired for use in a *moka*. Why was a sacrificial request needed for such an occasion? Strauss explains:

“The owner of a valuable or a pig hangs on with all the fibers of his heart to this possession. According to the thinking of the Mbowamb this has to do with a magical holding on to the object. No-one can overcome this magical force simply by the powers of verbal persuasion so as to make the possessor of the object relinquish it. Also, the

object belongs also to the dead kin of the owner of it. Either he has inherited it from them or they in turn have helped him to get it” (p. 379, transl. by the authors).

Only the help of his own dead kin can enable a man to wrest a valuable out of such a tight nexus of desiring possession. In order to gain the support of his dead, he should offer a sacrifice to them before setting out on his quest. If he does not, he will not succeed. And from the point of view of the giver of an item such as a pig, if he has promised to sacrifice that pig to his dead kin but then promises it to an exchange partner instead, he will not succeed in his own next quest. Words and deeds all need to be aligned rightly; and, as per our title for this Introduction, aligning words entails also aligning worlds of practice.

These observations by Strauss are of particular relevance here because they indicate that sacrifices were a vital component of *moka* exchange activities. They are also significant because of how they reveal the individual dimensions of ritual action. People have individual concerns. But these concerns are far from being simply autonomous. Instead, they are relational. The relationality in focus is that between the living and the dead. But it is also about the kin of the living and impacts the exchange partners of the living, who may be unrelated or only more distantly related than one’s domestic kin. In all instances, it is what we have called “the relational-individual” that is portrayed here (Strathern and Stewart 1998; Stewart and Strathern 2000). At the same time there is an autonomous element of choice at work. The person comes to the spirit with an individual agenda; albeit for his family as well as himself. This mixture of relational and autonomous elements in action is one that persists in contemporary contexts of change.

## Christianity and “The Individual”

The earlier debates about personhood and individuality in the Highlands of New Guinea took place largely without particular reference to the impacts of Christianity. As we have pointed out elsewhere (Strathern and Stewart 2000a), a phase of writing in which the individuality of entrepreneurial big-men was highlighted (e.g. Finney 1973) was followed by a reversal of focus in which relationality was privileged as the “essence” of these Highlands cultures. Such emphases tend to be rhetorical tropes of interpretation and analysis, in which the earlier or preceding forms of analysis are presented as foils. The newer emphasis does not simply modify the earlier form: rather, it reverses

that form, in order more clearly to foreground its own stance. In our own work we have tended to stress a middle way of analysis which avoids such sharp swings and reversals of viewpoint. Thus, we introduced in our discussions of Melpa societal practices the concept of the relational-individual (Stewart and Strathern 2000), bridging over the gap between relationality and individuality and linking Highlands materials to those on other societies around the world. The relational-individual was not intended as a term primarily, or only, to be applied to the Melpa, for example. Human social processes everywhere are arguably grounded in a combination of relationality and individuality, but the balance between these elements may differ considerably, as may the contexts in which either appears or the ways in which they are combined. The balance may also shift historically.

Here is where another shift in patterns of analysis occurred. Having set up “relationism” as the putatively dominant principle in Highlands social processes, various authors began to argue that elements of individuality that were manifest over time in these processes were the result of new values introduced through capitalism and Christianity. Capitalism supposedly encouraged individual economic activity, while Christianity fostered the idea of the individual in relation to God.

Several critical caveats need to be introduced into this latest scheme of thought. First, if we see the basic ongoing substratum of activity over time as marked by *both* relationality *and* individuality, there is no need to suppose that changes that occur over time necessarily obliterate one value in favor of another. Instead, an ongoing coexistence, or struggle, between these values is likely to be observed. This would apply from the earliest times of observation through to the present and the future. Second, while capitalism certainly encouraged individual economic activity, this was not necessarily in conflict with pre-existing patterns. In the Hagen area, when the colonial Administration first introduced cash-cropping of coffee trees, the agricultural officers at first tried to set up collectively maintained plots of trees, on the supposition that this would fit with the “clan mentality”. They rapidly found that these plots were not maintained properly, and over time the people abandoned them. Instead, they set about planting trees on their own family land, naming rows after individuals who would pick the coffee cherry and market it, thus obtaining the money for the crop. The money itself was either used for individual or family consumption needs or sometimes it was contributed to larger-scale collective prestations of wealth organized by big-men. These prestations, in classic manner, reappropriated a new form of wealth and channelled it into pre-existing, but modified, modes of exchange. What was this, then? Collectivism? Individualism? Surely, it was a combination of both, governed by sequential processes of activity.

A third comment relates to Christianity. “Christianity” is not a simple, unitary category. Its form and impact vary. Distinctions between Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, Pentecostalism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism, for example, can be significant. Overall, Catholicism may emphasize hierarchy and collectivity, while Protestant churches may nurture more egalitarian and individualistic ideas of action. But in all cases, again, what we empirically find is that a mixture or alternation of values is found. Presbyterian traditions, for example, certainly stress the significance of education and literacy for the individual and the importance of personal achievement, values which may not be so much connected with the idea of individual salvation as with a social ideology tied to work and effort in life generally. But Presbyterians, like all Christians, also emphasize the collective domain. The Preface to the Hymnal published in 1948 by the authority of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA ends, for example, with this wish: “The Hymnal is offered to the Church in the hope and with the prayer that, in spite of its imperfections and limitations, it may bring worshiping congregations into closer communion with God as they “speak to him in song” and into their fellowship with one another as together they sing his praise” (Dickinson and Laufer eds. 1948: iv). The songs in the Hymnal thus provide a suite of resources for offerings to God of a collective kind. While offerings (Hubert and Mauss’s oblations) are not the same as blood sacrifices, it is clear that they are analogous in many ways to such sacrifices. The smell of sacrifices is thought to appeal to the gods or to the ancestral spirits, as among the Melpa. The sound of song is thought to appeal to the Christian deity in a similar way.

## Song, Cosmology, and Landscape

While, for definite reasons, we have in the main followed here the usages of Hubert and Mauss and of Evans-Pritchard and Hermann Strauss in restricting our discussion to blood-sacrifices, these last remarks bring out the point that the idea of sacrifice as a way of mediating between the living and the spirits can involve numbers of sensory dimensions. Smell is one of these dimensions. Sound can be another. In both cases communication is involved, and the aim is to please the spirits or deity. Or the aim may be to achieve a particular ritual aim, for example to create the pathway for the spirit of a recently deceased person to find its road to the land of the dead. Song can thus be a sacrificial offering. It can also be thought to have a ritual purpose or efficacy of its own.

In a complex treatment of Roman song from ancient times, Thomas Habinek has elaborated an argument of this sort (Habinek 2005). Habinek

deploys Catherine Bell's (1992) theory of ritualization to contexts of the development of Roman song, beginning with sodalities in which members ritually ate and drank together and also practiced convivial singing (Habinek p. 35). Chapter six of Habinek's book deals explicitly with "magic, song, and sacrifice" (pp. 220–256). Here he highlights the significance of materials on "female divinities, female singers, and female bodies" (p. 221). One such figure is Carmentis, a goddess figure associated with the founding of the Palatine settlement, a putative kind of *axis mundi* "around which circles the rest of the city" (p. 244) of Rome. Carmentis is also a female counterpart of the male god Janus, the "god of passage, of coming into being" (p. 225). Her festival is one of those "that commemorate deities associated with the creative power of the human voice and limitations thereon" (p. 225)—in this instance the power of song. Habinek believes that Carmentis, as a "foundation-singer", was also seen as "one knowledgeable in the art of sacrifice. Her sacrificial expertise both confirms her cosmological significance and points to yet another way in which song "founds" the Roman universe" (p. 226). Further on in his exposition, Habinek notes that Carmentis was by one ancient writer identified with the Greek goddess Themis, and he goes on to suggest that "in Greek texts, the representation of a song as a sacrificial victim is relatively common" (p. 230). This certainly reminds us of the role of hymns as offerings to God in the Christian traditions (see also Dumézil 1996: 392–4 on the connection between song and prophecy).

A second goddess figure that Habinek deals with here brings us close to a parallel from Papua New Guinea. This is the goddess Nenia, a term which can mean "end", "entrails" or "trivial, ending parts." Entrails were associated with sacrifices and with funeral songs (p. 235) and the *nenia* song led by a *praefica* (female leader) was the last piece of song engaged in by an inner circle of mourners for the dead (p. 235). *Nenia* songs were performed at the end of funeral rites and their purpose was not only to praise and honor the deceased, but also to send their spirits away to the place of the dead (p. 245), to reconstitute them in that place. The *nenia* songs were themselves a sacrifice, persuading the dead to leave the living.

This theme resonates strongly with materials on Duna lament songs sung by women at funerals (on the Duna people of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, see Stewart and Strathern 2002, 2005a). The aim of these songs was explicitly to hasten the spirit of the dead on its way to the rock-ledges in limestone mountains where it was to dwell with others of its kind. If it stayed, it would be unquiet and would seek to pull the living to go with it, people said. The songs expressed grief, but they also were injunctions to the spirit (*tini*) of the dead to move on. These Duna laments, sung exclusively by women (like

Carmentis or Nenia, figures in touch with the processes of birth and death), can thus also be seen as sacrifices with the meaning of *do ut abeas*, “I give (this song in grief for you) so that you will go away” —the gift of absence, of withdrawal into another part of the cosmological realm seen as a totality. For, in these kinds of contexts, cosmology completes the circle that is left open by the networks of social connections among the living.

Cosmology also relates society to the wider world of landscape in which humans live. One aspect of Carmentis referred to in Roman sources is the idea that she was not only a prophetess but a river goddess, rivers and water generally being seen as a source of prophetic knowledge. The same is true of the Duna female spirit figure, the Payame Ima (Stewart and Strathern 2002). The Payame Ima is one among a kind of pantheon of figures imaged in Duna thought about “the environment”. One of her domains is said to be the great Strickland River that divides the land of the Duna from that of the Oksapmin people to their west. In general, the Duna landscape was seen as alive with cosmological and spiritual significance. This landscape full of meanings was placed at risk with the incursion of new Christian religious practices and of companies looking for mining resources. Some elements of former ideas dropped into latency, notably those to do with sacred stones thought to be the embodiments of the spirits of ancestors and held to rise up from the ground after some generations. Other elements have proved tenacious and adaptable, notably those to do with the Payame Ima. Although the landscape is Christianized through the presence of churches and the destruction of former places where sacrifices were made to indigenous spirit forces, the basic attitude to the environment has not been obliterated, and new narratives have emerged linking old and new issues together. What the indigenous sense of the environment meant was that much ritual work had to be done to maintain it and recognize the spirits in it as a part of the cosmos. The sacrifices people undertook were a mark of their care for the environment and for one another within it.

Fieldwork which we ourselves undertook to elucidate this intimate and complex relationship with the world similarly took much effort and time, like a kind of sacrifice. What came to us in exchange was a heightened perception of the environment and our own experience of it: comparable, perhaps, to the sense the Duna have that their life is bound up with their environmental world. Our vivid memories of seeing the sunset beyond the mountain peaks of Oksapmin, watching from the small woven veranda of our field-house at the place Hagu high on the hillside overlooking the Aluni government station, are deepened by the knowledge that the Payame Ima had as one of her domains the Strickland River. They are deepened also by the knowledge of how

sunset or dawn is described in the Duna epic ballads known as *pikono* (see Stewart and Strathern 2005b), in which the Payame Ima often plays an important role; and finally by our own sense of our emplacement in the Duna world at Hagu itself, a small settlement centering in part on one leading family and the Baptist church nearby, but also backing into large tracts of high forest, an intersection between the world of gardens and houses and the world of trees, python snakes, forest resources, and the spirits. Emplacement, temporary or long-term, is what gives meaning to such experience, and it entails understanding that places are not just different places, they are also in an important sense different worlds, constituted by sacrifices and exchanges.

## Personhood

Debates about personhood are long-standing in anthropology, and are unlikely to be fully resolved, because they often stem as much from the inclinations of the anthropologist as from matters that can be empirically established or tested. Our own “relational-individual” concept represents, as we have noted above, a classic middle-way hypothesis, aimed at corresponding as closely as possible to the complexities of life (Stewart and Strathern 2000). The concept can be fitted on to different dimensions or domains of social life. In his appreciation for the work of de Coppet, André Itéanu sets up an opposition between the early works by Marshall Sahlins on the significance of big-men and power relations as the key to social order in the “loosely-structured” and acephalous societies of “Melanesia”, and the position of de Coppet, who stressed the importance of overarching cosmological principles above and beyond the individual activities of big-men. Itéanu argues (2003: 121ff.) that de Coppet’s position is based on an insistence on attending to cultural specificities, and the complex semiotic relationship between features of custom and practice. It is further based on the idea that the whole ensemble observed is coherent (p. 122), and has continuity through time in spite of changes that occur (*ibid.*)<sup>1</sup>

Itéanu goes on to argue that de Coppet’s approach “scandalisait l’anthropologie individualiste” which Itéanu says is “aujourd’hui dominante” (p. 122). De Coppet instead, he argues, analyzed the activities of leaders among the ‘Are’Are as contributing to a single social totality, of which they were the servants as well as in a sense the masters. The “peace-chief” and the “assassin” or “murderer” acted together ultimately in a symbiosis realized through acts of exchange (and, we might add here, sacrifice). The domain of the peace chief was marked by a sense of tranquillity and intensified production of items for

rituals of exchange; whereas in the realm of the assassin there reigned fear, egoism, and instability. The two realms came together when the assassin killed (sacrificed) a victim and delivered the body to the peace chief in return for a payment in shell valuables (“monnaie”, p. 122). The assassin then used these valuables to set himself up over time as a peace chief. The cyclicity and alternating symbiosis of exchanges of wealth and violent killings is certainly reminiscent of cycles of killing and compensation in the Papua New Guinea Highlands. And, aside from this significant ethnographic parallel, the more general point, according to Itéanu, is that “the living and the dead work together, through exchanges, to renew society and the cosmos in all its elements, plants, animals, humans, the land, the dead, and deities (p. 122, transl. from the French by the authors).

De Coppet’s basic position here was a powerful one, grounded in his own ethnographic work, but with implications for comparative studies. It is notable that he allowed for a pole of “egoism” (or autonomous individuality) in his analysis, but saw this as balanced by the pole of “peace”. Notable also is his recognition that these two poles were involved through a process of killing and compensation for killing in a regular ritualized cycle of exchanges. From our viewpoint here, the killings can be seen not just as murders but as sacrifices, because they were a part of an expected ritual sequence leading to the renewal of society as such. Sahlins, of course, moved on from his early position on the individualistic character of “big-men” to stress the importance of cosmological ideas and the cultural order. And, in our own writings, we have again taken the middle way. Big-men in Hagen, for example, are both individualistic at times and collectivist at other times (Strathern and Stewart 2000a).

At a deeper level again of making comparisons, it is not hard to see how de Coppet’s ‘Are’Are based model can be transformed into the Hagen context. In the ‘Are’Are case there is a polarity between two characters or personae, the peace chief and the assassin. In Hagen there is no such institutionalized polarity. A big-man might be both, or at least might be in pre-colonial times a strong fighter as well as prominent in exchanges. But the balance was tipped in favor of the peace chief modality, since big-men were largely prominent in financing compensation payments and the *moka* exchanges that arose out of them rather than through a role as killers. The cyclicity of violence and exchange in Hagen was directed externally, not internally within the group. In the Melpa system there was no emphasis on a big-man killing another in order to be paid. But a big-man might arrange for an enemy to be killed in revenge and then would pay the assassin. If there is a totality in the Hagen system, it resides most clearly at the more general level of the collaboration of the living and the dead in the renewal of society. This collaboration, and mutual de-

pendency, has been shown most clearly in the passages from Hermann Strauss's work that we have discussed earlier (see also A. Strathern 1993 on the importance of ritual aspects in the roles of big-men in Hagen and elsewhere).

## Sacrifice, Violence, and Exchange

Themes relating violent killings in warfare to notions of sacrifice are explored with great perceptiveness by Margo Kitts in her work on "sanctified violence" in Homeric society (Kitts 2005). Kitts points to a number of arresting features in the portrayals of violent deaths in Homer's *Iliad*. When animals are sacrificed for commensal occasions, she says, the act is portrayed without strong reference to the violence of killing the animals; instead the emphasis is on feasting and conviviality. Oath-sacrifices, however, held to solemnize a promise, and often connected to a desire for revenge, do highlight the dying of the victim. The victim's death perhaps prefigures the promised death of someone as a revenge act in the future. In accounts of the deaths of warriors, their last gasp may also be compared to the last gasps of a sacrificial animal. The dying warrior may thus be seen as like the dying animal in sacrifice, killed for a purpose to fulfill a ritual vow, an oath of revenge, or some other ritual pronouncement; or as a verdict on some untruth or perjury that has been perpetuated (Kitts 2005: 17).

Kitts goes on to buttress her discussion with a careful appraisal of theories of ritual performance in general (2005: 21-49). For our purposes here, it is sufficient to note that a parallel is made between animal sacrifice and the killing of warriors in pursuance of oaths, typically oaths of revenge. Such a theme of the necessity of revenge was deeply ingrained in the Papua New Guinea Highlands cultures also. But another element was added, that of exchange, just as among the 'Are'Are in de Coppet's account. A killing in warfare may be seen as a sacrifice, to satisfy an imperative of revenge demanded by the ghosts of dead relatives. But the pathway to overall appeasement and the creation of alliance out of hostility is seen in the possibility of paying for deaths with pigs and shell valuables.

In an extraordinary image of the abrogation of cannibalism, Hageners portrayed the sublimation of sacrificial killing into an ethic of exchange. "You killed our man, but you did not eat him. Now we give back the 'bone' of the man to you, so you can later pay us for his 'head'". Parsing this, we find that it refers to a sequence of initiatory gifts and main gifts in a sequence that could lead to a *moka* exchange. The "bone" is a gift of pigs made to the kin of the killer, asking them to repay it by a much larger gift for the victim's "head", em-

blematic of his whole body/person. The “bone” is like a small sacrifice made to elicit a greater return; like a piece of pork offered to a dead kinsman in order to solicit prosperity and health, a greater return. (This aspect of a greater return is also reflected in the remarks of Basir Muka, a Ngaju ritual expert, quoted in Schiller 1997: 150-1). The “head” payment will be larger, as befits a compensation. But it too could engender a sense of debt, which could lead to a return gift, and thus turn into a “road of pigs” between the groups involved (see our chapter in this volume for further discussion of themes of this kind). Violence is thus turned into exchange, and at each stage the agreement of dead kin has to be sought in sacrifices. Exchange replaces sacrificial killings; but exchange is also underpinned by such killings, and is generated out of them: as in de Coppet’s model.

The cyclicity of models of this kind reminds us of the difficulties of cutting into social realities to determine starting points. Michael Lambek (2007) has suggested that we see sacrifices as “exemplary beginnings” of action. By beginnings here he does not mean first origins, but recursive starting points or renewals in contexts of power. The sacrifice of her life by a Queen among the Sakalava people of Madagascar, carried out in order to ensure the succession to power of her son, is cited by Lambek as an illustration of this point. He writes: “My point is that sacrifice is one way to mark a gift as ‘first’” (p. 13). First, that is, in a particular sequence, generating or triggering the potentiality of what follows: not first in the sense of absolute historical origins. Lambek cites also Roy Rappaport’s well-known theory that ritual translates analogical signals into a digital form (Rappaport 1968: 239; 1999). This “switching” aspect of ritual may be seen as an example of a “first” movement. Obviously, the switching is a part of much larger sequences that must be seen as recurrent. So the “first” characteristic really has to do with “renewal”. Lambek is also concerned with the definite character of ritual acts of beginning: the killing of a sacrificial victim, for example, since once killed an animal cannot be brought back to life. Here we might comment that a concentration on “beginnings” can usefully be complemented by a recognition of cyclicities. The killing of an animal releases its “spirit” or “life-force”, which then enters another realm, or pays for some other life-force, enabling social relations to be renewed. What is involved may be definitive from one viewpoint; from another it itself is a part of a recursive and transformative cycle at the cosmological level, in the manner stressed by de Coppet.<sup>2</sup>

De Coppet’s model was also based on the idea of the inextricable connection between life and death, they are each produced out of the other or exchanged for the other. His mode of analysis could certainly be productively exemplified by studies on the South-East Asian practices of head-hunting and funerary sacrifices (see, e.g., Schiller 1997; George 1996); and further to the cyclicities im-

plied in former practices of this kind among the indigenous Austronesian speakers in Taiwan (for numerous comparisons made in such a “border-crossing” mode between Indonesia and Melanesia, see Strathern and Stewart 2000c). The further exploration of such comparisons lies beyond our present treatment; but it is surely appropriate to gesture toward such an exploration at the end of our Introduction here, in order to recognize the fact that in creative activity beginnings and ends belong together and nurture each other.

## Endnotes

1. Serge Tcherkézoff provides an insightful and innovative reanalysis of Nyamwezi bridewealth practices in Tanzania, essentially using theoretical building blocks characteristic of de Coppet’s approach to ethnographic interpretation. Stressing the importance of the relationship with ancestors and seeking to establish a hierarchy of values expressed through the circulation of valuables, Tcherkézoff sees this circulation as a form of sacrifice, as well as an exchange between the families of the groom and the bride. His account is thus also a valuable illustration of the relationship between exchange and sacrifice and of the cosmological relationship between living people and their ancestors (Tcherkézoff 2000, see also Tcherkézoff 1983).

2. Hints of such a transformative cycle are found in the Chinese film “Blind Shaft”, directed by Li Yang, and made in 2003, which is a morality play that contains within it a theme of sacrifice and exchange. Two peasants, who have taken up work in coal-mines, make money out of luring workers into the mines, killing them and then claiming to be their relatives in order to get compensation. In the film they lure an innocent and eager boy of sixteen to go with them to be ‘sacrificed’ in this way. The boy, whose surname is Yuan (“money”), (Fing Teng Yuan), is told to call one of them, Song, his uncle, as a part of their scheme. The boy is quite unaware of their intentions, and expresses gratitude for their help, in spite of their rough ways with him. He buys a chicken in the market for Song, shares his food with him, and insists on paying back some debts with his first pay. Song procrastinates and is unwilling to carry out the murder. He feels guilt because he too has a son who, like Yuan, is good at school. Yuan wants to get money and wire it back to his family to help his sister pay for school. Song says that Yuan must be made ‘a man’ before he is killed, and must also have some wine to drink when the chicken he has bought for his ‘uncle’ is killed. Eventually, in the mine shaft, Tang fells a workman who stops him from setting up a dangerous blast to kill Yuan, then turns on Song and strikes him down too, saying he will kill anyone who stands

in the way of his fortune. But Song gets up from behind as Tang menaces Yuan, and hits him in return. The two men fall down together, while the boy escapes into the light. When the supervisors think the mine is cleared they detonate an area of the mine and the two men Song and Tang die. The boy reluctantly receives compensation of 30,000 Yuan as their ‘relative’ and is escorted out of the mine, recovering their ashes after their cremation.

Sacrifice and exchange are here intertwined: the intended victim escapes, the conspirators kill each other. There is a peripeteia (reversal of role): Song strikes back at Tang to save the boy, who has become like his relative in fact. There is also an anagnorisis (a recognition): the boy sees the two in their true light. In exchange for their death he gets the compensation — and their ashes.

Song begins to doubt the plan to kill Yuan when he thinks the boy is the son of the man they had killed before and if so their ‘family line would die out’ — a form of religious and social disaster in the terms of “traditional” Chinese practices.

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