

Sago Versus Rice and the Reorganisation of Ritual Spacetime: Competing Modes of Dependency in an Age of Decentralisation in Asmat, Indonesian Papua

Tom Powell Davies
University of Cambridge

ABSTRACT

Asmat social worlds are permeated with multiple forms of dependency. In this paper, I ask how different modalities of dependency inter-relate within the space and time of Asmat life, and how this is being reshaped by Asmat's increasing incorporation within broader structural orders during a period of national decentralisation. First, I describe how relations of dependency shape everyday life, through a discussion of the time and space of quotidian food distribution and concomitant claim-making. Then, I outline how forms of inter-clan interdependency innovate on the above pattern during ritual feasting, which generates remarkable social co-presence through ritualised interdependent work. Finally, I explore how feasting interdependence, and its organisation in space and time, is being warped by 'The Allocation of Village Funds' ('Alokasi Dana Desa'), a decentralised government grant. I do so via a case study of a ritual feast house construction project, in which Asmat villagers attempted to reckon with new forms of dependency typified, in indigenous discourse, by the distinction between 'sago' and 'rice' as local versus introduced staple foods associated with contrasting regimes of action. At stake here, in the collision between indigenous and newly emergent modes of dependency, is the viability of socially valuable modes of ritual life, which, in an age of decentralisation, are becoming shaped by and reliant on new types of forces outside of the community's own labour and control.

Keywords: dependency, time, space, ritual, decentralisation, Melanesia, Indonesia.

Asmat social worlds are permeated with multiple forms of dependency. In this paper, I ask how different modalities of dependency inter-relate within Asmat life, and how this is being reshaped by Asmat's increasing incorporation within broader structural orders. This involves delineating different forms of dependency across three levels of analysis. In the first section of the paper, I describe how the spatial horizon of everyday life is framed around a tension between the ideals of autonomy and social coordination. I then outline how this polarity is founded in relations of dependency as they are expressed in everyday food distribution, and how people experience autonomy in their capacities to make claims on others. In the second section, I outline how forms of ritualised labour within cycles of feasting create a model of social *interdependency* premised not on claim-making, but rather on coordinated parallel work, highlighting how modes of social co-presence generated in ritual innovate meaningfully on the everyday autonomy/social coordination pattern. In the final section, I explore how feasting interdependence is being challenged by 'The Allocation of

© 2021 The Authors. Oceania published by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd on behalf of Oceania Publications (OP).

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

Village Funds' ('*Alokasi Dana Desa*'), a decentralised national government grant.¹ I do so by explicating a critique developed by an Asmat interlocutor, who contrasts the ritual mode of social organisation – which he metonymically terms 'sago', after the foodstuff with which it is associated – with a new form of dependency-focused social action that has developed in response to government grants, termed 'rice'. Finally, I examine how 'rice'-focused dependency is warping the spatio-temporal order of feasting. I trace this via a case study of a ritual feast house construction project, analysing how Asmat people are attempting to reckon with 'rice' Asmat's perturbation by encompassing it within the time structure of ancestral ritual. At stake here, in the collision between indigenous and newly emergent modes of dependency, is the viability of socially valuable modes of ritual life, which are becoming shaped by and reliant on new types of forces outside of the community's own labour and control.

Much of the recent anthropological interest in the concept of dependency has been prompted by the seminal work of James Ferguson (2013, 2015), which has offered perhaps the latest point of reference in the ongoing dialogue between Africanist and Melanesianist models of the social (e.g. Myhre 2016; Wagner 1974).² As with much of the best popular social theory, Ferguson recognised a hitherto unremarked upon aspect of many social worlds which, once identified, appeared obvious. Namely, he intuited that in many settings, relations of dependency are not inimical to freedom but rather the grounds of it, and that people exercise autonomy not by throwing off its bonds, but rather, 'from a plurality of opportunities for dependence', and the possibility of moving between different forms of it (Ferguson 2013:226). As Keir Martin (2021) observed, much of the ethnographic record can be re-read in these terms. This is especially true of settings where bonds of kinship are foundational to peoples' life projects and understandings of personhood. Furthermore, our own analytical customs as anthropologists are in many respects premised on a broader underlying quality of interdependency internal to social life worlds, however defined. How else have anthropologists, following Malinowski (2002 [1922]:14–5, original emphasis), been able to attend to '*the imponderabilia of actual life*', and to the way in which 'the real substance of the social fabric' is spun of 'innumerable threads', were it not the case that each aspect of a social world is dependent on others for its existence. In a broader sense, then, it is the interdependency in social relationships, and between various aspects of a social setting, that facilitates the classic anthropological strategy of unpacking one feature of social life by contextualising it with reference to its interconnection with others. In the face of the potential analytical fuzziness that may arise from addressing 'dependence' within such a broader frame – in which all social relationships suddenly appear to be ubiquitously ones of dependence – Martin (2021) urges us to shift our focus away from the question of whether or not certain sectors of the world's population are 'dependant' on others and to instead examine the performative effects of such descriptions. Here, however, I take a different track, analysing relations of dependence from the point of view of the categories of time and space, with an eye towards how dependency-focused relational strategies and practices shape the horizon of everyday life, and dynamics of social co-presence.

As such, this paper interrogates one particular corollary of Ferguson's argument. Namely, I examine people's movement between different modalities of dependency, asking how the interaction between them reshapes the broader spatio-temporal organisation of social life. Such an investigation, in settings experiencing an era of state expansion – be it the 19th Century Ngoni 'snowball' state, discussed by Ferguson (2013), or the recent push towards decentralised community driven development in contemporary Indonesia, discussed here – in turn necessitates an additional line of inquiry. We must also ask: what happens to the time and space of indigenous sociality when it is incorporated within larger social forms?

This question is particularly pressing in settings such as that of the Asmat people of Indonesian Papua, who find themselves being rapidly incorporated within the broader

structural orders of the state and market capitalism. The Asmat are a group of approximately 70,000 (generally) egalitarian hunter gatherers living across more than 220 village settlements in the lowland river and coastal swamp of Southwest Papua, Indonesia, where a sustained colonial presence, the suppression of warfare, and conversion to Catholicism began in the 1950s (Stanley 2012:43–54). Within anthropological and museum worlds, Asmat people are famous for their pre-contact practices of headhunting and cannibalism (Zegwaard 1959; Zubrinich 1999), woodcarving (e.g. Smidt 1993), and flamboyant ritual life. The two years of fieldwork that inform this paper were undertaken in the area of Sawa Erma amongst Keenok speaking Asmat, particularly the twin villages of Sa and Er, home to approximately 1300 and 700 people respectively.³

‘Small scale’ Pacific societies offer a particularly compelling vantage point for interrogating relations of dependency. Societies like that of the Asmat – where material inequality is problematic and there is intense social elaboration around the basic value of having the same (Sowada 1990) – offers a different vista onto the question of dependency from that of, say, the Ngoni state as studied by Ferguson (2013:226), where relations of dependency are oriented towards the establishment of hierarchy. Dependency, in the Pacific, is located less in strict relations of hierarchy than in a tension between something resembling ‘autonomy’ and ‘social coordination’. This has been framed variously in terms of ‘differentiation’ versus ‘relatedness’ (Myers 1991:160–79), ‘wilfulness’ versus ‘lawfulness’ (Robbins 2004:182–214), ‘separation’ or ‘otherness’ versus ‘relatedness’ (Stasch 2009:73–104) and the ‘autonomy’ of individual will versus incorporation within more encompassing relations (Munn 1986:67–73), to cite but a few anthropological formulations.⁴ While each of these categorisations cast this underlying value tension in slightly different ways, there are commonalities to the authors’ use of the terms which are helpful for understanding dependency. In each case, the two values are inter-related in complex, often mutually-implicated ways; the interplay between them is central to the ongoing construction of social space and time; that ongoing spatio-temporal ordering is itself central to the experience of ‘communal viability’ (Munn 1986:11); and, at the level of the person, the tension between these two values is experienced as an existential quandary. While each of the aforementioned conceptual frameworks are useful, I employ the terms ‘autonomy’ and ‘social coordination’, here, because of the way they foreground the problem of coordinating social action, and with it, others’ minds (Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Stasch 2008), both of which are central to interdependency, and, in Melanesian settings, not to be taken for granted. While in social worlds like that of the Asmat, people are not, by and large, given to producing abstract, decontextualised verbal formulations to describe the organisation of the world in which they live (Myers 1991:15–7), I use ‘autonomy’ and ‘social coordination’ as glosses to point towards recurring patterns of Asmat concern as they are experienced in lived, practical contexts. Likewise, whether or not Asmat people intuitively view the kinds of relations discussed below as forms of dependency is a matter of perspective. Villagers are often intensely aware of being relied upon, but are loathe to concede their own reliance. Despite this perspectival nuance, the concept of ‘dependency’ is nonetheless useful for interrogating how relations of reliance interact at different scales, shaping the spatio-temporal organisation of lived worlds in ways that determine whether or not particular types of social formation are realisable.

AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL COORDINATION IN ASMAT LIFEWORLDS

In the case of Asmat, the implications of kin inter-dependency significantly shape the ongoing spatio-temporal organisation of social life. While all Asmat spaces of interaction are

likely saturated with coexisting contradictory values and desires (Stasch 2009:256), to a significant degree village and forest space embody the extreme realisation of these two different social ideas. This dynamic was described to me, early in fieldwork, by a high school student who had asked me for English lessons. Eager to gather data, I asked him to write a description of village life in Bahasa Indonesia, which we would then translate. A few days later, he returned with the following:

Now they [villagers] are quiet. Everyone has gone to the forest, but then they hear news of money, the community then hears news of money. The community all return from their forest camps to the village. After receiving money they all go back to the forest camps again.

I usually analyse that the community all go to the forest camps, then there isn't anyone who wants to work on the development of the village. [They] come to be recipients of money, that's too good [dismissive; i.e. more than they deserve]. Leaders in the village are also bored with the community's way. So this is the situation now. Different from before. Before, the village was clean. Now the village is dirty, there isn't anyone who wants to clean it, because there aren't any people in the village now. All the people are in the forest, then they'll hear news of money then return from the forest camps to the village.

The student had given me an astute model of contemporary Asmat patterns of gathering and dispersal, in which a polarity between autonomy and social coordination is materially lived out in the spatial and transactional spectrum of forest camp versus village and feast house, and refracted and intensified by the temporal rhythms of state development funding disbursements.

Space, here, is permeated with contradictory values. Forest camps evoke feelings of self-sufficiency and autonomy, while village space is associated with inter-clan gathering and idealised social coordination.⁵ Forest camps (*isi cém*, meaning 'sleep house', or 'bivak', a borrowing from the Dutch for 'bivouac') are semi-permanent dwellings in areas of owned forest, usually within a four-hour paddle from the village (see Fig. 1). People feel uninhibited there. Together with kin (potentially including the owner, his younger siblings, their children, and respective affines) and away from more distantly related others, people head out to the forest to gather sago, catch fish, and hunt game, before returning to camp to eat together. For one interlocutor, the potentially joyous and unrestricted feeling of being in the forest camp was epitomised by a memory from when he was a young, unmarried man. On a fishing expedition, he caught a fish and ate it immediately on the spot, raw, so that it entered his digestion before others could claim a piece of it. This is a transgressive but typical strategy for obviating the demands of relatives in sharing-focused social worlds (Peterson 1993:860), where it is difficult to bound oneself from the claims of kin. For my interlocutor, this was a libidinal image of his own autonomy, and of the rare indulgence of satisfying his desires completely and without compromise around the wills of others. It was, to him, an alluring memory, distant from his current responsibilities as a husband, father, and ritual leader, at a time when the requirements of the latter role led him to reside primarily in the village, in order to coordinate inter-clan activities.

The village ('*kampung*'), on the other hand, is a permanent settlement where people live cheek by jowl across a series of contiguous, densely settled parcels of clan-owned land (see Fig. 2). The village was forcibly established as part of pacification by Dutch colonists in the 1960s on a fishing site where the grandparents and parents of today's senior leaders had gathered to claim territory from coastal *Joerat* Asmat groups. The village is a site of social coordination around ritual, the Catholic church, and government, which Asmat people



Figure 1: A forest camp, from which people look for food on the river and in the forest. Image courtesy of the author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Figure 2: Densely settled village space in Er village. Image courtesy of the author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

refer to as ‘the three hearths’, or foci, around which social life is constellated. Inter-clan collaboration in these areas is normatively charged. From an external observer’s perspective, village space may appear to be primarily an artefact of colonial governance. However, Asmat people feel that, because the village was the final stop on the journey of their ancestors prior to the cessation of warfare, they are duty-bound to continue to constitute themselves as a viable interclan community at that specific site. This normative understanding is reflected in the indigenous Keenok term used as a metonym for village space in general (*‘takambi’*), which refers to the open field in front of a feast house, historically a rare site of inter-clan gathering. It is also a stressful place, where people live at close quarters with more distantly related others with whom there are long, potentially multi-generational histories of animosity lying just beneath the surface of everyday interaction. For example, during a contestation over the distribution of government infrastructure funding, one man expressed his anger by wielding a machete against the foundation pole of the house of a man with no direct involvement in the dispute – but whose kin, two generations previously, had reportedly drowned his grandmother.

A key dimension of Asmat life, experienced in intensified form in village space, is clanship. In contrast to areas of forest, owned by particular persons, village space is divided

into clan-owned territories. As a result, the experience of being in the village is saturated with clan categorisations. People alternate between talking, eating and resting in houses on their own clan land and visiting the houses of relations in other clans. A clan (*'je ti'*, literally, 'long house canoe') is comprised of two sections: a founding, upstream half, which metonymically stands for the clan as a whole (*'je ti'*, or *'aipmu ep'*), and a younger 'downstream half' (*'aipmu sene'*). This terminology relates to a pre-pacification residence pattern in which each clan had an individuated bachelor's house (*'je sera je'*) adjacent to the river, behind and around which family homes were built, at sites of collective gathering (see Mansoben 1974:43). This social formation – of two opposed, complimentary but competitive segments that unite in opposition to another unit of the same type – permeates Asmat life at large. Thus, the eight clans in Er village form into upstream and downstream village halves of four clans respectively. At a higher level, these four-clan units join together as a village in contradistinction to Er's co-located twin village, Sa. Clan membership is patrilineal, and the preferred marriage form is sister exchange between halves of a clan. However, this normativity is tempered by an openness to contingency, and, in the case of descent, a strong valuing of 'having the same', in which people 'look at the situation' and divide out a set of children between their parents' and grandparents' clans so that they are peopled in similar numbers. Likewise, it is not uncommon for people to shift to another possible clan identification if their present situation becomes strained, a form of improvisation which makes the question of appropriate marriages both more flexible and complex than the normative preference above might suggest. For the purpose of delineating the relationship between multiple forms of dependency, two observations are in order. The first is that the scalar organisational forms which pivot around clanship described above are only fully realised through cycles of collective social action. The second is that such activities are organised by a village-wide ritual class (*'tese uu'*, male leaders, *'tese tewes'*, female leaders), with specialist roles within feasting, distributed in such a way that any feast requires the collaboration of the entire village as an inter-clan body.

Asmat ideas about dependency find expression in the nearly constant exploration of the possibilities of 'demand sharing'. This term refers to the forthright requesting of food, money or other valued articles from anyone who might have them (and can reasonably be approached) with extreme social and ethical costs for anyone who would seek to withhold what they have in the face of requests (Peterson 1993). Gifts given in these circumstances produce attenuated forms of obligation, constituting ongoing interdependent bonds between parties who have the right to make claims on each other in future interactions rather than any form of direct or certain repayment. In the Asmat setting, the elemental image is of someone without food presenting themselves to kin, who, seeing they have nothing, immediately divide food with them. I use the term 'divide', rather than 'share', because it acknowledges that the giver is left with less. The presence of consumables therefore raises a dilemma within the flow of reciprocal dependence and obligation: whether to eat by oneself (the ultimate fantasy), or to divide with others (Munn 1986:13). The underside of the positive relation-making productivity of gift giving, in this kind of social world, is the steady awareness of being excluded from what others are being given, or are eating by themselves (Leroy 1979; Munn 1986). Indeed, every relation-making act may register as a 'turning away' by others not included in the action (Robbins 2004:196).

In a social world in which lack is the fulcrum of social relations, one's relationships with others are often the grounds of autonomy. From the point of view of personhood, whether people primarily understand themselves as individuated social actors, or experience the embeddedness of their existence within social relations (LiPuma 2000:131–2), is strongly informed by the perspectival roles they play in ongoing negotiations around food distribution. For those in the position of having nothing, eliciting food from others may not

only ameliorate lack, but also give the receiver a sense of their own self-sufficiency, with their portion interpreted as proof of their relationship with the giver, and of their pulling-power more generally. This can be seen in Asmat people's preference for eliciting food from kin and affines through shared bodily co-presence (cf. Widlok 2013:21), rather than via verbalised asking, which would create feelings of shame for the demander. Askers hope that their presence, for example, at a time when food is being prepared, will prompt others 'to remember' ('*ingat*') them; conversely, having to ask would indicate that those with whom they are present have 'forgotten' ('*lupa*') them, and have to be reminded. This receiving is often experienced against the backdrop of an implicit contrast with near or imagined others, not co-present, who have not received a portion and who therefore are not eating. Within kin relations, this pattern of claim-making follows certain contours. In brief; parents divide food with children; grandparents, who no longer feed their adult children, divide with their grandchildren; while those categorised as siblings divide with each other. This autonomy-focused asking is also employed beyond kin networks. For example, a key interlocutor was blind and so unable to gather food. This left him highly dependent on others for his continued existence, and potentially marginalised in social and political life. However, he was skilful at forming relationships, particularly with non-Papuan migrants and visitors – including this fieldworker – and adept at extracting money from them, which he then divided amongst his kin network, something that bolstered his political standing. He saw his ability to elicit goods to reflect, not the kindness of others, but rather his power, which was founded in his refined ritual knowledge and close relations with ancestral agencies. Dependency, for him, was not opposed to autonomy but rather the royal road to it. The experience of reliance is, ironically, individuating, as the successful elicitation of items from kin and affines stands as proof of an actor's capacity to mobilise relations (Strathern 1991:198).

While those receiving food may experience it as a sign of their own pulling power, for those in the position of dividing their articles with others, the moment of distribution may be experienced as one's own lack of autonomy. 'Autonomy', here, refers less to 'independence' or 'freedom', than to the capacity to 'self-organise'. The presence of others who have nothing is compelling, and those in possession of items may feel forced to divide in ways that they resent. For example, one man returned to the village from a few days' fishing with over forty fish. Within minutes of his arrival, relatives from within his clan, who had at other times given food to his household, entered his house to request a portion through their bodily co-presence. He was left, in despair, with only one fish for himself. The peril of dividing is not only that one ends up with less, but that one's autonomy as a divider, and as a decision-maker regarding who to include, could be scuppered by the sudden appearance of others, who elicit goods via their self-presentation. Thus, in the field, on more than one occasion, I received visits in the black of night from adoptive kin with village-level government jobs who, having received their wages that evening, were keen to divide a portion of their pay with me. In each case, the callers were running around in the dark in a frenzied attempt to divide their wages in a manner of their choosing, in the hope that they could disperse the funds to recipients of their choice before other relatives, with whom relations were not at that moment a priority, could call on them at their house and compel the wage-earners, through their presence, to give them a portion of the money. In a society where distribution is most oft prompted by demands, and the ideology of possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962) holds no sway, the act of moving across village space to divide funds proactively was a radical attempt to safe-guard the givers' autonomy. Thus, to avoid this situation, some village-level government officials and others who receive regular wages – approximately 20 people out of a population of 2000 – have developed a work-around, taking goods on credit from trade-stores, with the debt to be closed retrospectively when their wages arrive. Embracing debt, here, is part of a broader strategy that allows people to

control the conditions in which they eat their wage, and avoid kin descending en-masse, and prompting it to be divided in one go. In these instances, whether or not a feeling of autonomy is realised is decidedly perspectival, reflecting the observer's subject position relative to the division of items.

It is lack-focused dependency that shapes the realisation of autonomy and social coordination as ideals across space and time. The presence of items propels ongoing dynamics of gathering and dispersal. As the division of items is elicited through social co-presence, this dilemma is navigated through the organisation of who is together, where, at what time. For example, a man who had moved to his forest camp to reduce the time that would be required to find food while he made a new dug-out canoe, simultaneously opened his gardens to ethnically-Indonesian ironwood loggers. Upon payment, he would travel back, past the village, to an administrative post to shop, before returning to his forest camp without visiting the village for fear of requests. While he attempted to avoid the obligation to divide by minimising his co-presence with others, those in the village who had the right to stay at his forest camp promptly moved there, in order to obtain a share of the goods yielded via the granting of permission for the extraction of trees on his land. Lack, here, is a primary fulcrum of the extension of social relations across space. People's movement to and from kin located at various sites is often driven by a desire to obtain a share of items, or conversely, to manage the drama of how to distribute any items obtained.

While Asmat people at times framed movement between forest camps and the village in complementary terms, it is often fraught. The ideal picture, described to me, perhaps nostalgically, is a pattern that existed some decades ago, prior to pacification. In this model, one half of a clan journeyed to the forest camp to stockpile sago and smoked fish, which they would bring to the village and divide with relatives in the other clan half, who, in return, had guarded empty houses, replacing any leaking wall or roof panels (*véné*), protecting belongings, and restocking firewood. In practice, this movement of people and items is experienced with ambivalence, and the complementarity of forest camp / village interdependency is at times more idealised than realised. Across village and forest camp, each spatial setting is inflected with a lack of specific, much-yearned for, consumables seen to characterise the other. In the village, one is distant from food gathering sites, while in the forest camp, there is little tobacco, sugar and coffee, substances which are obtainable either at kiosks in the village or at the administrative post on the other side of the river. Those remaining in the village constantly complain that their family 'did not remember' them (*'tidak ingat'*), by not giving them enough food on their return to the village, or by not returning in a timely manner. Likewise, those returning from the forest camp with stockpiles of food complain that those in the village are 'greedy', 'eating (until the food is) finished' and leaving them with nothing. This ambivalence and jealousy is particularly heightened in the village, where the combination of the density of housing settlement and living alongside more distantly related others ensures that one is often acutely aware of what neighbours are eating. Thus, one family who lived at the edge of a clan-boundary often complained of hearing their waged neighbour, who was not obliged to divide with them, frying food in store-bought cooking oil, a highly desirable substance unobtainable to them due to their relative lack of money.

INTERDEPENDENCY IN RITUAL FEASTING

This quotidian movement to and from the forest, structured around the production and division of food, is punctuated by socially intense gathering in the village for periods of coordinated ritualised work, either around long-running ancestral feasts or the Catholic

celebrations of Easter and Christmas which are patterned on the feast form. The tension between autonomy and social coordination is replayed in intensified form within village space in the ritualised coordination of feast house construction. Almost all contemporary Catholic Asmat villages have a feast house, or are contemplating rebuilding them.⁶ Feast house construction has occurred many times in living memory, perhaps as often as every four years since 1979, when feast houses were reallocated after being banned in 1964 by Indonesian government representatives because of their association with inter-group warfare (Sowada 2002:53–7). Prior to 1964, there were multiple types of longhouse building in Asmat, including clan bachelor houses (*'je sera je'*) and a variety of types of inter-clan feast houses (*'je pokombi'*) constructed as part of different ritual cycles. Upon their reintroduction, however, villagers were only given permission to build one longhouse per village settlement, an inter-clan feast house. This, necessarily synoptic account, which greatly simplifies the ritual process, will serve as a foundation for my exploration in the final section of this paper of a present-day feast house construction initiative derived from this pattern.

Both historically, and in the present across many Asmat settlements I have visited, the question of whether or not to build a feast house is the primary social, cosmological, and political question of collective life. Indeed, prior to pacification in the 1960s, Asmat people lived in a dispersed manner, often hidden in make-shift forest camps on small tributaries from major rivers, gathering together as inter-clan level social formations *only* when producing feasts and engaging in the inter-group warfare and headhunting, which necessarily followed it. Feast houses are not only key to social gathering but also to Asmat socio-historical consciousness. The process required to make feast houses, and the resulting architectural structure, places people in relation to the spirits of their forebears, who make themselves present in the house and have traditionally been seen to assist in the predation of enemies. This is perhaps why the feast house is said to be a mirror image of the banyan tree, where Asmat people placed the bones of their deceased, and where their spirits (*'ndumup'*) reside. Likewise, when Asmat people come to envisage a new social form, the feast house structure (see Fig. 3) is central to their imagination of it. Thus, the Catholic church for the villages of Sa and Er is patterned on the structure of a feast house, and framed around a number of clan hearths. Villagers have devised a clever portmanteau term for the building, *'gereje'*, which blends the Indonesian word for 'church' (*'gereja'*) and the *Keenok* term for 'feast house' (*'je'*), although tellingly, in passing, villagers often refer to it simply by the term for 'feast house' (*je*).

People say that the daily gathering and dispersal outlined above 'cannot be organised' (*'tidak bisa diatur'*). However, during feasting, people come together as 'one roof', coordinating work activities together in line with the feast's ritual timeline. The image of 'one roof' (*'véné mamnak tokorn'*), literally 'one eye roof', or seeing one roof, also stands for one descent line from originary ancestors, and is glossed in Bahasa Indonesia as *'satu atap'*. In this context, it refers to the final stage of building a feast house in which clan groups tie hundreds of palm leaf panels to the house frame so that they are mutually imbricated (see Fig. 4). The strength and waterproofness of each panel relies on its coordination and overlap with those adjacent to it, embodying the social condition of being 'of one thought' (*'bersatu'/satu pikiran'*) or having 'one direction' (*'satu tujuan'*). This coordination is enacted through feasting and is difficult to achieve at other times.

The inter-clan coordination of feasting stands in contrast with everyday forms of dependence. While everyday sociality is based on the accrual and division of items between particular kin in response to lack, feasting is predicated on strictly organised clan-based labour. First villagers form as clans, dispersing to the forest in parallel social formations to gather building materials, before recongregating at the village, as an inter-clan formation, to construct the house (see Fig. 5). The internal space of the feast house – which is framed

Figure 3: The internal space of one half of the feast house in Er, looking from the central, ancestral hearth back towards hearths owned by four of the village's clans. Image courtesy of the author.



Figure 4: Villagers standing on the roof beams of a feast house installing palm leaf roofing panels over their respective clan hearths, in the village of Er, 2017. Image courtesy of the author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



Figure 5: Interclan labour planting the feast house foundations, Er village. Image courtesy of the author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



around a series of clan-owned hearths, positioned either side of a 'parental' fireplace ('*wir*'), where ancestral figures are said to reside – is at once a product and image of parallel clan-based labour, mapping a village's social organisation, history and political hierarchy. It is

also a template of village unity, which structures future discussions held in the house, as well as other types of feasts. Made of softwood, palm leaves and rattan, a feast house typically lasts about four years before being left to decay, knocked down, and then rebuilt. This rebuilding process *is* itself the feast, and can take months of coordinated, ritualised work, the time structure of which is determined by a cycle of ancestral songs sung in sequence by ritually appointed leaders. While there is, therefore, a hierarchy of knowledge and decision-making, villagers cannot be forced to coordinate themselves to complete the feast. Its driver, in this egalitarian milieu, is villagers' communal excitement. This resonates with Émile Durkheim's (1995 [1912]) account of 'collective effervescence'. Durkheim gives a vivid, visionary account of the 'stimulating and invigorating effect of society' (1995 [1912]:211), as it is instantiated through coordinated gathering in settings in which dispersal is the norm. For Durkheim, 'collective effervescence' generates the categorically distinct experience of the sacred, in which individuals find themselves subsumed within collective patterns of action. However, in the Asmat case, the remarkableness of social coordination is grounded not in the 'sacred' collapse of the individual into the collective, but rather, in reflexively working *across* and through the multiple axes of segmentation in Asmat social life, in ways that transcend the resistance usually posed by villagers' everyday guarding of their autonomy. This excitement is structured around the imminent possibility of the feast's failure (Keane 1997:27). Many steps materially determine the timing of the next. For example, the cutting of the palm fronds for the walls and roofing panels fixes the timing of their mounting, which must happen while they are still green. There is much at stake here; if it is felt that one clan is not fully participating, villagers will become disgruntled and abandon the feast in anger, dispersing to their respective forest camps, prompting retributive punishment from ancestors, and much rancour.

'SAGO' *VERSUS* 'RICE' AS COMPETING MODES OF DEPENDENCY

I now examine how this normative indigenous pattern of ritualised inter-clan interdependence is being warped as Asmat is incorporated within broader structural orders. In particular, I analyse how the social formation required for feasting, outlined above, is being perturbed by new forms of dependence that have emerged in an era of decentralisation. To do so, I describe a decentralised government grant programme, before turning to a critical indigenous discourse about new forms of interdependency that are emerging alongside the increased presence of the state and wider economic markets in Asmat social worlds. My analysis, here, centres on the distinction between 'sago' and 'rice', two foodstuffs which typify contrasting modes of collective action. I then examine an attempt to coordinate these two modes of dependency within feasting via a case study in which a novel attempt was made to integrate them both within a feast house construction project which innovated on the normative ancestral pattern outlined above. This analysis is an attempt to think along with my interlocutors, and develop productive analytical categories out of their own incisive reflections on, and attempts to come to terms with, tensions between co-existing forms of dependency which pull them in different directions.

In a society where much time is spent reckoning with the social implications of the value of having the same, the prospect of establishing privileged access to non-local sources of value is simultaneously alluring and perturbing. The primary focus of collective attention during my fieldwork, in this regard, was 'The Allocation of Village Funds' ('Alokasi Dana Desa', henceforth ADD). Indeed, throughout my 18 months of PhD fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, contemporary patterns of gathering and dispersal were more strongly shaped by the

schedule of government money distribution than by the necessities of rituals or the seasons, as my English language student, quoted at the begin of this article, observed.

ADD is a nationwide central-government program of 'community driven development' which provides infrastructure funding devolved to the village level. It is part of a raft of broader macro-structural changes in Indonesia's post-Suharto, 'Reformasi' era, in which government planning and service provision have become increasingly decentralised, and delegated to 'regencies' ('kabupaten'), 'sub-districts' (known as 'distrikt'), and villages ('desa') (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2013).⁷ Across Papua, the grant is pulling once-marginal areas into the orbit of state distribution politics with speed and intensity, both because of its scale, and because its administration is devolved to villagers (cf. Stasch, this issue). ADD, as a moment when villagers gather together, evokes the spatio-temporality of feasting while potentially reshaping it, as the implications of Asmat division and use of government money warps the bonds of interdependence and autonomy that are the grounds of the feasting. In Asmat, ADD began in 2015. In 2017, 870 million rupiah of funding (approximately 86,000 Australian dollars) was allocated for the village of Er, with similar amounts given to each of the other 220 villages across the regency. The money is released to village officials to administer at two points throughout the year, alongside detailed project specifications. Funded projects might include permanent housing, water tanks, boardwalks, diesel electricity generators and funding for village-run educational and health programmes, alongside a more discretionary 'operational' budget, the use of which is determined by the village head. In the Sawa Erma region, cash is brought to the bank at a nearby administrative post. It is withdrawn by village officials and brought over the river to the village, in the company of a government appointed witness ('pendamping'), where it is deposited at the central hearth of the feast house. Following the witnesses' departure, the distribution of funding is determined through a discussion between village officials, ritual leaders, and villagers. The use of this village grant is the only time in which Asmat villagers, who have little to access money, can all obtain cash at the same time. Particular networks of villagers may obtain small, irregular windfalls by selling food to Indonesian settlers or each other, through logging activities, sporadic tourist visits, or one-off sales of woodcarving or weaving, such as via an annual 'cultural festival' in the region's main town (Powell Davies 2016). However, there is no other time when all members of a village receive money together.

From villagers' points of view, ADD is understood to have been given by the central government 'for the community to enjoy', *i.e.*, to eat. In most cases, villagers do not perceive the funded infrastructure to be necessary. For example, raised ironwood boardwalks built in village space, above the swampy ground below, are perceived to be so inessential that they are often dismantled under cover of darkness, plank by plank, for firewood. Rather, the grant's successful implementation is viewed as 'proof' ('bukti') which must be produced to show the government that the village is a viable community, evidenced by villagers' capacity to work together collectively. Indeed, the central question for Asmat people is not what is built but how the money will be divided, and who will receive a share. This approach to ADD – and its social fascination and frustration for Asmat people – in part reflects that there is no existing indigenous regime of collective property ownership that the shared custodianship of village infrastructure can easily be mapped on to.⁸ While Asmat sociality is founded on mutuality produced via 'sharing', this is in fact predicated on individual ownership, as items are divided out *in terms of* the owner's particular networks of social relationships. The local management of government funding packages therefore articulates with Asmat sensitivities around social inclusion through the division of wealth. The division of the money causes no end of tension, especially between villagers as a group and their village-level government representatives, who are in a position to appropriate the

money before it is divided and who are privately under much pressure from their family and clan members to do so. I view the social relations produced through ADD as a form of dependency, not because villagers are economically reliant on grant payments for their subsistence, but rather because the scheme, as we shall see, supports forms of sociality which people yearn for but can only realise through state funding disbursements.

I turn now to the question of how Asmat people's encounters with state money distribution reshapes forms of interdependency required for feasting. This is something about which my interlocutors care a great deal. In the twin villages where I worked, ritual feasting projects had stalled due to a lack of excitement, which made it difficult for villagers to constitute themselves as an inter-clan community in line with the pattern outlined above. In Sa, a *jimi pir* feast, held to renew strained social relationships, rather than taking a few months, was unfinished after ten years, in part because the death of one of the participants was a cause for mourning. In Er, the building of a new feast house, which I will return to below, was repeatedly delayed, taking over eighteen months to complete, rather than one or two.

Against this background, over a sugared coffee on my veranda, I asked one of my interlocutors why he thought villagers were disinclined to engage in feast house construction. My interlocutor is a knowledgeable ritual figure from the village of Sa, in his forties, with mastery of the cycles of ancestral songs which form the temporal template for ritual feasting. After some thought, he replied:

They [other villagers] want [building a feast house] to be with money. They could build it, but [if they do,] who is funding it? That's what they said, yes? My concern was, if it is Sago Asmat's work, then I think that Asmat needs it. If it is Rice Asmat's work, it is only half Asmat. This I can say. Why does building a feast house require funding? We can't use custom? How's that? ... [A feast house] with [non-traditional] ironwood planks, beams? I don't know, but I don't need that feast house. I need a palm frond roof feast house, a softwood feast house. That's my only concern. Cancel it, that's okay. But try to make it like that [with non-traditional materials] and I'm concerned. For me, for myself. Look, the feast house has to be made by real Asmat people. Not half Asmat people. It is my wish. Not Money Asmat.

The man distinguished between 'Sago Asmat' and 'Rice Asmat' as two modes of work. This conceptualisation of contrasting modes of feast house construction is premised on the indexical potential of food items. Munn (1986), with her landmark mobilisation of the Peircean semiotic categories of indexicality and iconicity, famously argued that at stake in food-sharing, in the Massim region, was the extension of social space-time. By adopting foodstuffs as analytical categories, my interlocutor's account plays on a similar association between feeding and socio-history, in which the processes involved in producing or procuring sago and rice stand as metonyms for broader, opposing modes of collective action. Likewise, by distinguishing between forest materials, such as palm frond roof panels and softwood, versus 'new' materials, such as ironwood beams and planks (which, due to the density of the wood, must be cut with a chainsaw), my interlocutor employs a similar structure of argument, drawing the same contrast between modes of ritual work from the point of view of the resulting feast house's materiality presented as an index of the spacetime of different feast house construction processes.

'Sago' Asmat, in this analysis, refers not simply to the quotidian production of sago as a basic foodstuff, but rather to the highly structured production of food to support a feasting community, as it is organised within ritual timespace. Much like the collection of building

materials, within the timeline of feast house construction, time is specified for villagers from each clan to go to their respective areas of forest in parallel and to process sago to feed workers across the feast. The coordination involved in this parallel labour is socially remarkable, and stands out against everyday patterns of dispersal. It produces one of the most moving moments of feasting, when, at intervals, women from across the village bring sago and other food items inside the feast house to feed those gathered there, depositing it all in a single, undifferentiated pile at the central, ancestral hearth.⁹ The food is then divided out to each clan by a ritual specialist, and then divided within each clan by one of its senior figures. This unification and re-division of food items across the entire village community is so poignant that it has been taken up as a key aspect of Catholic liturgy in the celebration of Easter and Christmas. Indeed, the redistribution of contributions from each clan across the village feasting community as a whole stands in contrast with the structure of everyday division of food items, outlined above, in which food is divided out by those who have it to those who do not in response to lack.

'Rice' Asmat's work refers to a contemporary mode of feasting framed around the consumption of store-bought goods contributed by non-Asmat people from beyond the village, such as visiting state officials and tourists. Rice, as a substance, operates as a metonym in two ways. On the one hand, the distinction between rice and sago evokes an ethnic distinction between Asmat people, whose primary foodstuff is sago, and Indonesian settlers and others, who are understood to eat rice as a staple. On the other hand, rice is also a metonym for a broader category of food that is described, using an Indonesian language phrase, as 'chemical goods' ('*barang kimia*'), or junk food. This includes tobacco, sugar, coffee, tea, instant noodles and tinned fish. There is a, perhaps nostalgic, discourse that consuming these items is a key contributor to contemporary Asmat people's poorer health, compared with their pre-contact forebears, which is indexed by a perceived decrease in the size and stature of people's bodies. Despite this, these substances are irresistible and socially-fascinating, to the extent that, as outlined above, the pursuit of them often animates villagers' movements between forest and village space. In the case of coffee, sugar and tobacco, one aspect of their remarkableness lies in their fatigue-defying qualities, and indeed, they support valued forms of sociability, as nicotine, sugar and caffeine provide power for people to sit up for hours, late at night, talking with kin. The ability to buy them, in a setting with limited access to money via wage labour, is also a valued marker of one's masterful capacity to engage with a broader economic system. Likewise, were one to receive them from inter-ethnic outsiders, such as Indonesian settlers or state actors, this giving may be construed as 'proof' of one's privileged relationships, against a background awareness of others whose (lack of) relations with the giver has not enabled them to receive a share.

My interlocutor characterised 'Rice' Asmat, as a mode of action, as being only 'half Asmat'. Where 'Sago' Asmat is premised on coordinated, parallel work, 'Rice' Asmat is predicated on eliciting items from beyond the village community, and dividing them amongst it. My interlocutor's critique is not aimed at the value of each mode of work per se, nor is there an ethic that making food is a more worthy mode of accumulation than eliciting it from others. Rather, he is concerned with the spatio-temporality that each form of work produces. 'Sago' Asmat generates socially meaningful co-presence *through* ritualised constructive work, while 'Rice' Asmat is a sociality founded not on work but rather through shared attention around items that are *already there*. In this mode of action, food does not have to be worked into being, but simply exists waiting to be eaten, an alluring situation which mirrors Asmat people's imagination of modernity beyond the village (cf. Stasch 2014:204), which appears as a contrast to their life of quotidian food-gathering. While the inter-clan interdependency of 'Sago' Asmat is difficult to produce, 'Rice' Asmat offers something of a shortcut to social gathering. Where 'Sago' Asmat's interdependent

work requires coordinating with other peoples' minds, and the temporal horizon of ritual structure, 'Rice' Asmat is animated in no small part by a contagious fear of missing out. The prospect of not receiving a share of already-existing items, which will be divided out whether one is present or not, is highly motivating, drawing people together through space. This is why, as mentioned previously, people return to the village well in advance of the scheduled date of ADD, to make sure they do not miss out on a share. Where 'Sago' Asmat achieves the unification of people as 'one roof' *through* work, 'Rice' Asmat brings people together around already present dividable objects which do not evoke indexical inter-dependency. At stake in 'Rice' Asmat, is the question of whether a focus on external bounties elicited via demanding comes to erode an internal capacity for self-organising as an inter-clan social formation, something I explore via a case study below.

THE HOUSE THAT THE ALLOCATION OF VILLAGE FUNDS BUILT

Concretely, this case study follows an attempt to transform the momentum of social gathering for ADD into the building of a feast house. Throughout 2017, Er village's most senior ritual leader sought to replace the village's decaying feast house. There had been an unusually large number of deaths – some related to an outbreak of measles, subsequently declared a national health crisis – which, according to the leader, was ancestral punishment for the feast house's disrepair. Despite agreement that it must be replaced, there was little excitement for the project. Villagers were primarily in their forest camps, returning only for ADD. The leader's difficulty here reflected contemporary challenges to ritual authority, in which government officials were often more able to orchestrate inter-clan social gatherings through their access to funding.¹⁰

The leader's response was to link feasting to ADD, so that they were 'mutually supporting' ('*saling mendukung*'). He commandeered an ADD project – rebuilding a 70m walkway – in the hope of channelling the excitement surrounding it into momentum for the feast house, which would be demolished and rebuilt using the coordinated labour force gathered for the boardwalk. Ignoring the project budget, the leader organised villagers 'the customary/ritual way' ('*cara adat*'), with people working in synchrony until completion, at which point the funding (minus the cost of materials and tobacco for the workers) was divided in the feast house equally between clans, and then to households. The work process in some ways resembled a truncated feast. The labour of dismantling the old walkway and building a new one took place over two days. Much like the construction of the frame of the feast house (see Fig. 5), ritual leaders coordinated the villagers' work as an inter-clan unit, channelling their intense excitement, as they removed the walkway's boards, joists and bearers, before replacing the foundation poles that were rotten (immediately appropriated by village women as firewood) and rebuilding the path with new materials. As work neared completion, men joked that each other's wives were already boiling water – for the sugar and coffee that would imminently be bought with grant funding.¹¹

The strategy of blending inter-clan work with government money distribution caused much excitement. While the structure of the division of grant money in some ways evoked ritual food sharing, this proved difficult to channel into feasting. Rather than being eaten together at the feasting site, as per 'Sago' Asmat, the division of government grant money did not draw people into the leader's feasting plan. As villagers took the government money back to their houses, where tobacco and sugared-coffee was consumed, its circulation created new vectors of sociality that drew people away from the centralised inter-clan feast site.

What is more, the presence of money prompted the creation of an alternate type of spacetime which cut across that required for feasting – namely, gambling. Gambling has been a productive analytic for tracking social and economic transformations in the Pacific, and Pacific peoples’ understandings of their own social worlds, as the two *Oceania* special issues devoted to it attest (Pickles 2014; Zimmer 1987). For the purposes of this analysis, I set aside economic considerations, instead examining gambling as a frontier of ‘space, time and rules that creates excitingly structured contexts’ that reshape ritual timespace (Pickles 2019:1). For villagers, gambling is socially fascinating for the same reasons as ADD is, in that it involves the division of items according to rules which are dissonant with the norms that govern everyday egalitarian interdependency. Card playing is mostly seasonal (Hayano 1989), and was reportedly introduced to the village by ethnically Indonesian employees of a logging company in around 1992, and has become more visible in the 2000s following the periodic influx of money from decentralised infrastructure grants like ADD. The game uses two decks of cards. Five players each receive twenty cards (leaving 8 left over, unused). To begin, each person must play a run of three cards of a suit before participants continue to play or add to runs of a suit or cards of like value, with the first to use all his cards the winner. The game’s name, in Bahasa Indonesia, is ‘connect play’ (*‘main sambung’*), although villagers refer to the game, and invite each other to play, using the Keenok term *‘címjím’* – meaning to help pull a large tree, that is to be made into a canoe, from where it was felled to the river’s edge.

The spatio-temporality of gambling involves social gathering that has feast-like intensity. Villagers play in peoples’ houses for hours, often from afternoon, through the night, until dawn, before resting and beginning again the following afternoon, with multiple games in play simultaneously (see Fig. 6). Unlike the division of food items, often consumed immediately, currency circulates until players disperse, exhausted. Players who win tend not to quit and go home, but rather continue to play, marking their success by sending onlookers to village kiosks to buy items such as tobacco, sugar, coffee, and candles, as night approaches. The items are divided amongst players and onlookers alike – something that draws people in to watch the game, a kind of centripetal force (Mimica 2006:114) which runs parallel to, while undercutting the possibility of, the sociality of feasting. This continues until all the money in the village has been spent at kiosks, run by Indonesian teachers from the village schools.

While gambling generates socially intense gathering, its temporal organisation cuts against the idealised coordination of feasting, as it involves competitive exchange rather than labouring in parallel as part of a broader project. When I asked ‘why gamble?’, I was told ‘I see red or blue (the colours of the two highest-value bank notes); someone has

Figure 6: Multiple games of cards being played on the veranda of a house in the village of Er. Image courtesy of the author. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



money in their hand and I think, maybe I can pull it from him' – that is, from someone who may not, ordinarily, be obliged to divide with you. This 'pulling' (glossed in Bahasa Indonesia as 'tarik') of money from the hand of another, cuts against the original meaning of the word 'cimijim', which refers to coordinated, collaborative effort. Indeed, ritual leaders protested the now conventionalised use of this term – a 'sacred word' – to describe an activity that they say 'isn't good.' Rather than working collaboratively, gamblers focus on trying to frustrate rivals' play by 'guarding' ('jaga') which cards have been played and which are unaccounted for, hypothesising who might have them and playing to prevent them finishing their hand. This produces a socially fascinating moment when, in winning, a player transforms the division and circulation of money into eating alone. Indeed, players often tried to extend the rules of gambling beyond the game, avoiding the division of winnings with kin because since it had been won, it was inalienably the player's.

Gambling's magnetism for Asmat people is evoked by the image of 'eating cards' ('makan kartu'). It is said that police, from a nearby administrative post, once brought a group of gamblers to the station following complaints made by their wives. The police reportedly punished the players by forcing them to eat two decks of plastic-coated playing cards, saying 'if you love cards so much, why don't you eat them!' This image of being forced to eat that which should circulate, conveys both the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the fantasies gambling elicits, and villagers' own sense of the sway it holds over them.¹² Gambling channels the spatio-temporal order of feasting interdependency and its modes of co-presence and social coordination in ways that are captivating whilst simultaneously undermining them.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined dependency, not in terms of how one party is ascribed to rely on another, but rather, from the point of view of how multiple forms of dependency in a given setting interrelate. Taking the interconnection between different modes of interdependency as an ethnographic subject offers a privileged vantage-point for interrogating the spatio-temporal organisation of social life. Such an approach is particularly valuable in cases such as that of the Asmat, who find themselves being incorporated within broader macro-structural orders at a rapid pace via initiatives such as 'The Allocation of Village Funds', a decentralised national grant to build the village across Indonesia. Attending to how village-level implementation of the grant warps everyday forms of dependency, from quotidian food distribution through to interdependent ritual action, allows us to see what the village is for Asmat people. That is to say, the village is not socially salient because it is a site of permanent, or even functioning infrastructure – but rather, because it is a site of periodic socially intense inter-clan co-presence, which stands out against the time and space of everyday life. There, daily life is centred around kin dependency, and the polar values of autonomy and social coordination, articulated through ongoing practices of demand sharing, which lead people in their patterns of movement towards, or away from, village space. The timespace of ritual feasting, produced through socially-remarkable interdependent labour, stands out against this background. ADD perturbs this; complex interclan labour, or 'SagoAsma't, in my interlocutor's terms, is supplanted by 'Rice Asmat', a mode of social coordination organised around eliciting items from beyond the village rather than the ritualised timeline of feasting. In the final section of this article, I analysed a case study of a contemporary attempt to manage the contingency resulting from new forms of dependency. This involved bringing outside elements that perturb ritual feasting into it – or, put differently, extending feast-making practices to encompass 'Rice Asmat' as a competing mode of social formation.

This warped the time and space of social gathering in feasting, and the social coordination that underpins it, potentially preventing the joining together of people as ‘one roof’ from being realised. This strategy is creative but not emancipatory, as feasting embraces, whilst becoming contingent on, new types of forces outside of the community’s own labour that are difficult to control. This suggests that the stakes of dependency are not simply the constitution of persons, social relations, or life projects, but rather the question of communal viability more broadly. Relations of reliance may intersect in ways that undercut the possibility of realising valued modes of social formation, and the orders of space and time through which they are instantiated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank the *Keenok* people of Sawa Erma for their friendship, a debt that can never be repaid. Special thanks to Adam Ndo, Rufus Sati, and Fr. Vince Cole for their ongoing conversations, which have strongly informed this paper. I thank the Agats-Asmat Catholic Diocese for its support of my fieldwork, and the following organisations for funding my degree, research, and participation in the Ascriptions of Dependency workshop at the European Society for Oceanists Conference in 2018: the Cambridge Australia Trust, the University of Cambridge Fieldwork Fund, the Anthony Wilkins Fund, the Evans Fund, the Richards Fund, the William Wyse Fund, and Pembroke College, Cambridge. Warm thanks also to Tom Bratrud, Ingjerd Hoëm, and Keir Martin for their hospitality in Oslo at the continuation of the workshop in 2019. Special thanks to my supervisor, Rupert Stasch, for his masterly supervision, and to Neil Maclean, Jadran Mimica and Anthony Pickles for their useful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript. Thanks above all to Sophie Hopmeier, who makes this work possible.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The fieldwork that informs this article was cleared by the PhD Committee of the University of Cambridge Department of Social Anthropology. All interlocutors consulted gave informed consent to their participation in the project.

NOTES

1. Throughout this article, terms in italics are in the indigenous Papuan *Keenok* language, whilst those underlined are in Bahasa Indonesia, the regional *lingua franca*.
2. For an account one of historical trajectory of ideas about dependence between Africa and Melanesia, see Smith, this issue.
3. This was comprised of six weeks in 2013, five months in 2015, and 18 months across February 2017 – August 2018.
4. Robbins (2004: 196–7) argues that the expectation that everyone will negotiate this tension is unique to Urapmin culture, via a comparison with other Melanesian material in which the values of ‘willfulness’ and ‘lawfulness’ are not reckoned with by all, but rather exemplified by different genders. The literature cited above, and my own ethnographic experience, lead me to think that this tension may be an aspect of Pacific lifeworlds more generally.
5. For an account of how social gathering between the village and forest camps has been reorganized in response to COVID-19 transmission, see Powell Davies (2020).
6. From my experience of travelling widely across the Asmat area, Protestant villages are less likely to have feast houses, partially because they were dissuaded from building them by Protestant missionaries, rather than encouraged, as they were in Catholic areas. For a comparative study of Protestant and Catholic approaches to missionisation in the Asmat area, see De Hontheim (2011).
7. Elsewhere in Indonesia outside of Papua, different terminology is used to describe analogous structural governmental levels.

8. Even feast houses, which are constructed collectively, are comprised of a series of clearly demarcated hearths owned by particular clans. The closest extant example of corporately owned items I saw during my fieldwork were food gifts, made by a host village to guests of another, which were not to be eaten by the recipients immediately but rather brought to their village as a unit and then divided amongst the village as a whole, most likely per clan, by ritual leaders at their feast house's central hearth.
9. During the process of feast house construction, but before the frame of the house and flooring is erected, food is simply deposited in a centralized spot on the work site ('*takambi*').
10. The Catholic priest in the area saw Asmat people's increasing reliance on ADD as a foundation for collective projects to be a worrying form of dependency that existentially undermined the 'self-reliance' of the church community. As such, while the church reluctantly accepted an ADD payment as part of the grant's operation, the funds were used for discrete infrastructural upgrades and not allowed to fund church activities.
11. In this joking about the appetites of other men's wives within the spacetime of feast-like social gathering, there is perhaps an echo of the ceremonial wife exchange ('*pepsé*', in *Keenok*, or '*papisj*', in central Asmat languages) that accompanied feasting prior to the intervention of Catholic missionaries. I thank Jadran Mimica for this insight.
12. I thank Anthony Pickles for his help unpacking this image, particularly regarding the horror that being forced to eat elicits in Melanesian settings where food sharing is constitutive of social bonds.

REFERENCES

- VON BENDA-BECKMANN, F. and K. VON BENDA-BECKMANN 2013. *Political and Legal Transformations of an Indonesian Polity: The Nagari from Colonisation to Decentralisation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- DE HONTHEIM, A. 2011. *Devil Chasers and Art Gatherers: Intercultural Encounters With the Asmat*. Fernelmont, Belgium and Paris, France: E.M.E. (Éditions Modulaires Européennes) & InterCommunications s.p.r.l.
- DURKHEIM, E. 1995 [1912]. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York, NY, USA: The Free Press.
- FERGUSON, J. 2013. Declarations of dependence: Labour, personhood, and welfare in southern Africa. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(2): 223–242.
- . 2015. *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*. Durham, NC, USA and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- HAYANO, D.M. 1989. Like eating money: Card gambling in a Papua New Guinea Highlands Village. *Journal of Gambling Behaviour* 5(3): 231–245.
- KEANE, W. 1997. *Signs of Recognition: Powers and Hazards of Representation in an Indonesian Society*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, USA and London, UK: University of California Press.
- LEROY, J.D. 1979. The ceremonial pig kill of the south Kewa. *Oceania* 49(3): 179–209.
- LIPUMA, E. 2000. *Encompassing Others: The Magic of Modernity in Melanesia*. Ann Arbor, MI, USA: The University of Michigan Press.
- MACPHERSON, C.B. 1962. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- MALINOWSKI, B. 2002 [1922]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London, UK: Routledge.
- MANSOBEN, J.R. 1974. Some notes on Keenok social structure. In M.T. WALKER (ed), *Asmat Papers Part 1*. Jayapura, Irian Jaya, Indonesia: University of Cenderawasih, pp. 39–56.
- MARTIN, K. 2021. Dependence. In F. STEIN, S. LAZAR, M. CANDEA, H. DIEMBERGER, J. ROBBINS, A. SANCHEZ, and R. STASCH (eds), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Cambridge, UK: The University of Cambridge. <http://doi.org/10.29164/21dependence>
- MIMICA, J. 2006. Dreams, *Laki*, and mourning: A psychoanalytic ethnography of the Yagwoia 'inner feminine': Part II: Soul and the oneiro-dynamics of luck. *Oceania* 76(2): 113–132.
- MUNN, N. 1986. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Durham, NC, USA and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- MYERS, F.R. 1991. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, USA and Oxford, UK: University of California Press.
- MYHRE, K.C. 2016. Introduction: Cutting and connecting—'Afrinesian' perspectives on networks, relationality, and exchange. In K.C. MYHRE (ed), *Cutting and Connecting—'Afrinesian' Perspectives on Networks, Relationality, and Exchange*. New York, NY, USA and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, pp. 1–24.
- PETERSON, N. 1993. Demand sharing: Reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers. *American Anthropologist* 95(4): 860–874.
- PICKLES, A.J. 2014. Introduction: Gambling as analytic in Melanesia. *Oceania* 84(3): 207–221.
- . 2019. *Money Games: Gambling in a Papua New Guinea Town*. New York, NY, USA and Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books.
- POWELL DAVIES, T. 2016. *Objects of Knowledge: Truth, Incommensurability and Social Relations at the Asmat Cultural Festival*. MRes Thesis. Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge.
- . 2020. From the bubble to the hearth: Social co-presence in the era of COVID-19 in Asmat, Indonesian Papua. *Oceania* 90(Suppl. 1): 14–20.

- ROBBINS, J. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, USA and London, UK: University of California Press.
- ROBBINS, J. and A. RUMSEY. 2008. Introduction: Cultural and linguistic anthropology and the opacity of other minds. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(2): 407–420.
- SMIDT, D. 1993. *Asmat Art: Woodcarvings of Southwest New Guinea*. New York, NY, USA: George Braziller, Inc.
- SOWADA, A.A. 1990. Primary Asmat religious and philosophical concepts. In T. SCHNEEBBAUM (ed), *Embodied Spirits: Ritual Carvings of the Asmat*. Salem, MA, USA: Peabody Museum of Salem, pp. 65–70.
- . 2002. The decline, suppression and rejuvenation of Asmat culture and art. An historical approach. In U. KONRAD, A. SOWADA, and G. KONRAD (eds), *Asmat: Perception of Life in Art*. Mönchengladbach, Germany: Kühlen Verlag, pp. 47–68.
- STANLEY, N. 2012. *The Making of Asmat Art: Indigenous Art in a World Perspective*. Canyon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Publishing.
- STASCH, R. 2008. Knowing minds is a matter of authority: Political dimensions of opacity statements in korowai moral psychology. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(2): 443–453.
- . 2009. *Society of Others: Kinship and Mourning in a West Papuan Place*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, USA and London, UK: University of California Press.
- . 2014. Primitivist tourism and romantic individualism: On the values in exotic stereotyping about cultural others. *Anthropological Theory* 14(2): 191–214.
- STRATHERN, M. 1991. One man and many men. In M. GODELIER and M. STRATHERN (eds), *Big Men and Great Men: Personifications of Power in Melanesia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 197–214.
- WAGNER, R. 1974. Are there social groups in the New Guinea highlands? In M. LEAF (ed), *Frontiers of Anthropology*. New York, NY, USA: Van Nostrand, pp. 95–122.
- WIDLOK, T. 2013. Sharing: Allowing others to take what is valued. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3(2): 11–31.
- ZEGWAARD, G.A. 1959. Headhunting practices of the Asmat of Netherlands New Guinea. *American Anthropologist* 61(6): 1021–1041.
- ZIMMER, I.J. 1987. Gambling with cards in Melanesia and Australia: An introduction. *Oceania* 58(1): 1–5.
- ZUBRINICH, K.M. 1999. Asmat cosmology and the practice of cannibalism. In L.R. GOLDMAN (ed), *The Anthropology of Cannibalism*. Westport, CT, USA and London, UK: Bergin & Garvey, pp. 123–141.