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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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HAPKAS CHRISTOLOGY AS RESISTANCE AND INNOVATION IN *THE MOUNTAIN*[*]

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Abstract
This essay assesses a *hapkas* christology in Papua New Guinea. A declaration of Jesus as "good man true" in Drusilla Modjeska's *The Mountain* is located in relation to *hapkas* themes of indigenous agency, communal transformation, and hybridity, each in dialogue with New Testament themes of genealogy, redemption as gift, and Jesus as the new Adam. This *hapkas* Jesus who is "good man true" is then placed in critical dialogue: first, with Melanesian masculine identity tropes as described in anthropological literature and second, with Papua New Guinean christologies, including *wantok*, brother, and protector. The argument is that a *hapkas* christology acts in ways that both resist and innovate in the reception of the gospel across cultures. This demonstrates how a received message of Christian mission can be creatively transformed in the crossing of cultures and a *hapkas* christology provides resources in the tasks of contextualisation in a rapidly globalising world.

Key Words
Christology, gospel, ancestor, genealogy, Drusilla Modjeska, post-colonial, indigenous

INTRODUCTION

In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" It is a question asked in the particularity of time and space. As such, it can only be answered in particularity. This is evident in the response—"You are the messiah"—, which draws on the unique history of Old Testament hope and critiques the expansion of the Roman empire.

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[*] This is a reduced, revised, and particularised version of "Cultural Hybridity in Conversion: An Examination of *Hapkas* Christology as Resistance and Innovation in Drusilla Modjeska's *The Mountain*," *Mission Studies* 36 (2019): 416–41. My thanks to the peer reviewer of *Mission Studies* for initiating the possibility and the editors of *Mission Studies* and *MJT* for their constructive responses.

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How might the question be answered among diverse cultures? Can other cultures use different words? As they do, how might the backgrounds of their history and the context of their cultures generate christological critique? With these questions, the particularity of the christological question is equally an examination of the complex interactions between the one and the many, the particular and the global.

This essay will examine one response to Jesus' "Who do you say that I am?" question in a contemporary novel, *The Mountain.* Acclaimed by Moore as Papua New Guinea's (PNG's) best historical novel,[1] it is a story of love and loss set within the nation's transition to independence and quest for economic viability in a globalising world. Book one is set during the five years leading up to independence in PNG in 1975. It ends with a "gift child": a *hapkas* boy. Book two describes the boy's return as an adult, the child of an indigenous mother and a western father, to the land of his birth. The novel offers the following description of one Independence Day celebration:

> Of all the applause, of all the cheers, the greatest is for the Christian missions, the priests who cross the stadium with their crucifixes and their bibles. Bigger even than independence and the bird of paradise flag … The appearance of God in paradise … "Jesus" … "good man true" ... "He die on a tree. Very good. He die for PNG."[2]

What fascinates is not only the remarkably positive portrayal of conversion and transformation (the literary parallelism of the repetition of "applause" and "cheers" to clarify the focus on "Christian missions"), but, more intriguingly, a distinctly contextual response to the "Who do you say that I am?" question. In contemporary PNG, Jesus is not the messiah. Rather, he is "good man true," a term introduced by one of the fictional characters in relation to an understanding of indigenisation—"The appearance of God in paradise" who "die for PNG." The potential and limits of this contextual christology are examined in this paper.

This essay is driven by two interests. First, my personal story, including my childhood in Papua New Guinea, resulting in an ongoing interest, as an outsider to Melanesian cultures, into how that country is, and has been, located. Second, the potential of fiction as a source for theology. For missiologist Stanley Skreslet, fiction offers important insights that can expand "mission studies, especially by giving attention to women and non-

[1] C. Moore, "Crossing the Border into Fiction," *History Australia* 9 (2012): 249–50.
[2] D. Modjeska, *The Mountain* (Australia: Vintage, 2012), 291.

Western missionary actors."[3] Skreslet's claims are tested by the examination of one particular book, *The Mountain*, written by a woman (Drusilla Modjeska), with a focus on non-western characters. This essay tests Skreslet's challenge, reading "good man true" as a *hapkas* christology. This will occur in four steps: first, examining how in *The Mountain* themes of ancestor, gift child, and *hapkas* are developed through character and plot; second, positing a distinct christological shape to "good man true" ... "He die for PNG"; third, locating a *hapkas* christology in relation to Melanesian anthropologies, in particular the discussion of big man and great men; and fourth, placing this *hapkas* christology in dialogue with recent PNG christologies. What results is an indigenous response to the christological question: "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the *hapkas* Jesus, gift from the ancestors.

Drusilla Modjeska as Author

Drusilla Modjeska is an English-born writer who has lived in PNG and Australia. She lived in PNG prior to independence, from 1966 to 1971. Then from 2004 onwards, she made frequent return visits to PNG, working with David Baker, to bring Ömie art to Australia.[4]

Author of nine works of non-fiction, Modjeska declares that *The Mountain* "is not a work of history, ethnography or anthropology. However … I draw upon the work of historians, linguists and anthropologists."[5] This includes the work of anthropologist, Elisabeth (Libi) Gnecci-Rusone, whom Modjeska utilises as she examines the ways in which the cultures of PNG and Christianity intersect.[6] Modjeska may claim *The Mountain* is a novel, yet historian Clive Moore notes that "the level of accuracy in descriptions of people and places is so good that any ex-PNG hands will find themselves making guesses."[7] The interplay between claims of fiction and academic research makes *The Mountain* an intriguing book to analyse.

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[3] S. Skreslet, *Comprehending Mission. The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012), 188.

[4] This is documented in S.B. Balai and J. Ryan (eds), *Wisdom of the Mountain: Art of the Ömie* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2009).

[5] Modjeska, *The Mountain*, 427.

[6] The work of Gnecci-Rusone is described in D. Modjeska, *Second Half First: A Memoir* (Sydney: Knopf Random House, 2015), 311, and Gnecci-Rusone is acknowledged in Modjeska, *Mountain*, 431.

[7] Moore, "Crossing the Border," 249–50.

While Modjeska claims *The Mountain* is fiction, the art she describes is real. The book's front cover is painted in the black lines distinctive of Omie art, while each chapter offers a reproduction of Ömie art.[8] In real life, *The Mountain* was illustrated by the tribe of people of whom it is telling a story. The curator of the National Gallery of Victoria, Gerard Vaughan, describes Ömie art "as one of the world's great art traditions."[9] In working with the National Gallery of Victoria, the Ömie people formed a collective, the Ömie Culture Group, who took the initiative of seeking external help in establishing a business. The decision-making process, which stretched over four years, was communal. The Ömie maintain authorship, delegating the older women to "authorise the telling of ancestor stories."[10]

In researching this article, I became aware of Ömie art held by Te Papa Tongarewa, the Museum of New Zealand. I was privileged to be able to visit and see four pieces as part of their Pacific collection.[11] The colour contrast is stunning, particularly the yellow and reds *of Omie Mountains, Eggs of the Dwarf Cassowary, Beaks of Blyth's Hornbill and Spots of the Wood-boring grub* alongside the white and blacks of *Ground-burrowing Spider*. The lines are strong and bold. Each piece suggests a unique way of looking at the world. For example, the criss-cross lattice lines of Tail-feathers of the swift when sitting in the tree invite a looking up into a two-dimensional world. A newsletter held by Te Papa provides information regarding Ömie culture and affirms the quality of the art.[12] The artistic techniques are described as

[8] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 428: "The Omie icons that appear at the head of each chapter of *The Mountain* are used with permission of Omie Artists and the Omie chiefs."
[9] G. Vaughan, "Foreword," in Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom*, 7.
[10] D. Modjeska in Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom*, 23.
[11] These are listed as: *Omie Mountains, Eggs of the Dwarf Cassowary, Beaks of Blyth's Hornbill and Spots of the Wood-boring grub* by Botha Kimmikimmi (FE012819); Ground-burrowing Spider by Brenda Kesi (FE012820); *Chief's prestige cloth* by Sarah Ugibari (FE012821); and *Tail-feathers of the Swift when sitting in the Tree* by Sarah Ugibari (FE012822). Five other pieces were not available for viewing (FE009993, FE 009991, FE009987, FE009995, and FE009988) but are described in the Te Papa Pacific Collections as coming from the Mt Lamington area, the mountain on which the Ömie live. See Balai and Judith Ryan, *Wisdom of the Mountains*, 89. My thanks to Nina Tonga and Grace Hutton, Te Papa Pacific Collections for their flexibility and willingness to access these art pieces for me on 7 September, 2016.
[12] Z. Schwimmer and S. Blunt, "Tapa Cloths of the Northern District, Papua-New Guinea," *Pacific Arts Newsletter* 9 (1979): 6–11.

sophisticated and precise, while the cloth is "artistically striking."[13] Techniques of abstraction are evident, while the Ömie style is distinct in colouring and design from neighbouring tribes. In some areas, the cloth is farmed, with trees carefully pruned to ensure that the tapa that is produced from the bark has no holes. These descriptions affirm that this is art, the creativity of a complex and well-organised culture.

The complexity of this interplay between fiction and real life, between art and the academy and across cultures is theorised by Modjeska in her memoir, *Second Half First*. Modjeska wrestles with how she, an English woman living in Australia, might write from a Papua New Guinean point-of-view. Modjeska finds agency when recalling how her earlier writing, her research into the biographies of women, had freed her from "the binary opposition of either/or—same or different, like or unlike, their culture or ours—shrinking the ground between."[14] Her earlier writings include a PhD on Australian women writers, later published as *Exiles at Home*. Hence, she writes with an academic training in how to read literature in dialogue with life. For Modjeska, "an artist is not a matter of surmounting, or of refusing, or even of juggling, but of bringing the values and knowledge of heart and belly into the work."[15] It involves the weaving of imagination, lived experience, and careful research. Modjeska acknowledges in *The Mountain* the value of letters and diaries from those who lived in PNG, along with an Australian Research Council fellowship, which she was awarded to investigate the interplay of race, gender, and the arts in post-colonial Papua New Guinea.[16] *The Mountain* is thus a creative narrating shaped by academic research in dialogue with real life detail.

My argument is not that Modjeska has written a christology. This is beyond the limits she has set; *The Mountain* is a novel. Rather, I follow Ricoeur, who argued that while authors invest meaning in a text, all texts have a surplus, in which a reader experiences new modes of being.[17] The *hapkas* christology I shall outline is surplus to Modjeska's intention, yet as I shall argue, is consistent with the lines of plot and character created by her

[13] Schwimmer and Blunt, "Tapa Cloths," 6.
[14] Modjeska, *Second Half First*, 283.
[15] D. Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1999), 111.
[16] Modjeska, *Mountain,* 427–32.
[17] P. Riceour, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 88.

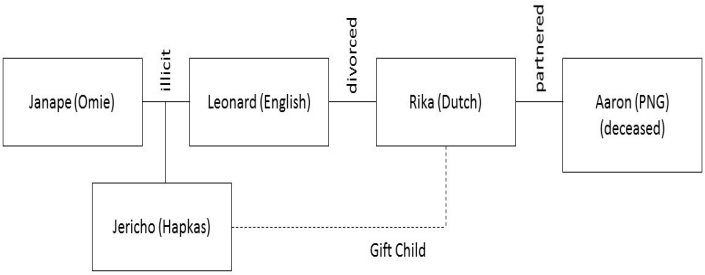
work.

TEXT: *THE MOUNTAIN*

The Mountain begins with a prologue. Set in 2005, Jericho is introduced, ready to return to PNG after a thirty-year absence. The book then jumps back in time (book one), narrating life in PNG between 1968 and 1973 through the eyes of Rika, Jericho's mother. Book two then tells of Jericho's return between 2005 and 2006 to the land of his birth. A final epilogue provides an unexpected twist, befitting a novel work of fiction. *The Mountain* contains themes including the role of ancestors, the gift of a child, and the development of *hapkas* play in post-colonial cultures.

a) "The ancestors give us Leonard"

The following chart summarises the birth narrative with regard to Jericho.[18]



Jericho is central to *The Mountain*'s plot development. He is described as "gift child" and *hapkas* boy. For the Ömie, the key actors in Jericho's birth and then return to PNG twenty-two years later, are the ancestors:

> The ancestors give us Leonard. We give you [Jericho] to Leonard. And you [Jericho] return. Ancestor gift. The child who left us, who we call Jericho, has returned, the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls. Jericho, the name from the ancestor story of Leonard.[19]

This speech, made in book two, by an Ömie chief, proclaims ancestor agency. The white man (Leonard) is not the active agent in the engagement

[18] My thanks to Lynne Taylor for her technical expertise in constructing the chart.
[19] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

between cultures. Rather it is the ancestors who "give" Leonard.[20]

A theology of ancestors is introduced in book one when the main characters, Aaron and Rika, are approached by an old woman.

> *Aya* Aita wanted to know whether being baptised, which she wasn't, would mean her passage to paradise could be extended to include her sister … who, being dead, she hadn't seen for many years … Would she do better to be remain unbaptised, a woman of the old ways, and join her sister with the ancestors?[21]

The missionaries have arrived with the rite of baptism. This has introduced into an established tribal culture an alternative way of belonging and a different set of allegiances. It has generated *Aya* Aita's concern, that baptism would, in the afterlife, result in separation from those who had not been baptised. In asking the question, she is questioning agency. "She wasn't asking … *about* paradise … She was asking who *owned* this white-man knowledge."[22] It is a recognition of the value of knowledge, not as intellectual, but as it relates to the bearing of children.[23] This interaction, the question of who owns ancestor knowledge in relation to children, foreshadows the speech of the Ömie chief in book two. The white man might have knowledge, but so do the ancestors, who provide the child as the ancestor gift. This is a key theme of *The Mountain*. For the Ömie, all of life is a gift from the ancestors. One way that ancestors are understood is through the birth of children.

b) Gift child

The final chapter of book one of *The Mountain* is titled "The Decisive Moment." An Ömie woman arrives at Rika's house in Port Moresby with Jericho, a "gift child from the mountain."[24] The child has been sent to Rika,

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[20] This is an emerging pattern in the Pacific. R. Edmonds, *Migrations. Journeys in Time and Place* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2013), 143, notes the "direct human connection between the descendants of those who had fallen out in the colonial past." This account asserts indigenous agency, while avoiding hagiographical accounts of the missionary.

[21] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 205.

[22] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 205. Italics in original.

[23] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 206: "Martha didn't think it was wealth Aita was asking about, but babies. Hadn't she turned toward towards where the women were sitting? Hadn't she put her hands to her eye, made the shape of a camera?"

[24] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256.

so that she can teach him "the new ways."[25]

Shocked, Rika realises that this child is the son of her husband, Leonard, who has slept with an Ömie girl, Janape, while doing research in her village. Book one began with Rika, childless and married to Leonard. It ends with Rika divorced from Leonard, recently widowed from Aaron, suddenly becoming mother to this "gift." Hybrid notions of kinship offer a different way of being in community.[26] For Rita this "gift child" is redemptive: "Could it be that redemption *was* possible? That she could return from the closed, dark place where she'd been these last few weeks? That fear and shame need not rule all of her life?"[27] Rika experiences redemption as individual, from the rule of fear and shame. Yet, her redemption is possible because of hybrid notions of kinship. In Christian theology, redemption is essentially woven with understandings of a child as gift.[28]

Book one is narrated through the eyes of Rika, book two through the eyes of Jericho, returning as an adult to his birth village. He hears the pronouncement by the Ömie village chief, both of ancestor agency and child. The gift has movement: a departure ("We give you [Jericho] to Leonard") and a reappearance ("And you return").[29] The return is in hope not only of individual redemption, but of communal redemption. This becomes clear to Jericho the next morning: "Standing in the morning sun with these bark-cloth women, Jericho is startled into a thought … Here is the mountain's wealth. Here is how he can help. Their cloth is art in any terms. It's contemporary, it's bold and it's beautiful."[30] The tense is passive. The thought ("Here is how he can help") comes to Jericho as he stands, among the bark-cloth, in continuity with the ancestors.

Between books one and two, Jericho has grown up and found work in art

[25] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 254.
[26] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256: "'Children don't belong to just one person,' Aaron was saying … 'In our world children are adopted, or taken by other people in the family, in the clan. It's common. Not remarkable.'"
[27] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256.
[28] For discussion of the role of the gift child in the cultures of Papua and New Guinea, see D. Richardson *Peace Child. An Unforgettable Story of Primitive Jungle Treachery in the 20th Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1974); and D. Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts* (Bloomington: Bethany House, 2006). The link between understandings of a child as gift in *The Mountain* and the work of Richardson is the speculation of the author, not the Ömie people.
[29] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.
[30] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 353.

galleries in London. When he returns in book two, the Ömie village, needing economic sustainability, wants to engage in eco-tourism. But Jericho realises he can provide a different sort of redemption. He has "new ways,"—the skills and networks to place Ömie art among western investors.[31] In this way, he can be ancestor gift, an instrument in ensuring sustainable economic redemption for the village.

The redemption through Jericho, that is an individual gift for Rika in book one, becomes a gift for the village community in book two. The ancestors give and as a consequence, the western art gallery system is creatively engaged to sustain an indigenous people.

c) *Hapkas*

The word *hapkas* is introduced in book one, when Jericho is brought to Rika. It is thus defined in the narrative in relation to themes of ancestor and gift child. Jericho is *hapkas* biologically, from an Ömie birth mother and an English father.[32] The word is Tok Pisin, an official language of PNG. *Hapkas* is defined more fully in book two: "*Hapkas*. It's a great word. My kids use it all the time. They call themselves *hapkas.* I'm from the Sepik, their mother's from Milne Bay. It's a point of pride. Makes them interesting … Haven't you heard of hybridity."[33] In book one, set between 1968 and 1973, those who are *hapkas* live not in the privileged university quarters, but in Hohola, a local housing slum. In book two, set between 2005 and 2006, *hapkas* has become "a point of pride. Makes them interesting."

There is a further dimension of *hapkas* in the name Jericho. This is present in the speech by the Ömie village chief in book two, in which he pronounces Jericho as "the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls."[34] In the Old Testament, Joshua is an agent of salvation, who leads his people to "make a great noise" when attacking a Canaanite city, Jericho. Perhaps the Ömie village chief has got the name confused and Jericho is meant to be named Joshua. However, taking the use of Jericho as intentional offers an intriguing understanding of *hapkas* given that it invokes the presence in the Canaanite city of Jericho of Rahab, who shelters the spies in

[31] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 256. For more on this see Modjeska, *Mountain*; and Balai and Ryan, *Wisdom of the Mountains*.
[32] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 253.
[33] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 278. Italics in original.
[34] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

Joshua 2. This sets up an interesting parallel with *The Mountain*, for just as Rahab is within the walls of Jericho, so Janape (Jericho's birth mother) is within the Ömie village. Is the parallel deliberate, a plan conceived (pun intended) by the ancestors?

This parallel would then suggest that Janape has "sheltered" Leonard, in a similar way that Rahab shelters the spies from Israel. I am not arguing that Rahab engaged in a sexual relationship with the spies (as Janape did with Leonard). Rather, I am noting the redemptive parallels, in which the actions of both Rahab and Janape involve them becoming the birthmothers of "hapkas" children who will be agents of redemption. This name of Jericho offers a subtle, yet transformative application of the Christian narrative, given that in Matthew 1, Rahab is named in the genealogy of Jesus as an ancestor of Jesus.[35] This makes Jesus "hapkas," enriched by the blood of a Canaanite woman. In this reading, the agency of Rahab/Ömie as indigenous women results in children, who are "hapkas," woven as ancestors into narratives of redemption. The "ancestor story of Leonard" has been co-opted by the Ömie to explain their actions, of how indigenous people act when "spies," whether those in the Joshua narrative or western researchers, conduct research among indigenous people.[36]

The term "hapkas" thus works at two levels. First, biologically, in the birth of Jericho. Second, religiously, in the transformative reading by the Ömie of the Scriptures, "the ancestor story of Leonard,"[37] in which Janape becomes Rahab and Jericho a "hapkas" redeemer in the ancestor line of Jesus. This invites a set of christological questions. Might the Ömie response to the question by Jesus ("Who do you say that I am?") involve themes of ancestor agency, gift child, and "hapkas"? Might this be an indigenous appropriation that explains why Jesus is "good man true" who "die for PNG"?

[35] Rahab's actions are commended in the New Testament in Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25.

[36] For a detailed reading by an Old Testament scholar, see J. J. Krause, "Aesthetics of Production and Aesthetics of Reception in Analyzing Intertextuality: Illustrated with Joshua 2," *Biblica* 96 (2015): 416–27, who argues Rahab is presented as an example of faith in the God of Israel. Thanks to Dr Mark Brett for suggesting this reference and comments on an early draft of this paper.

[37] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 351.

AN INDIGENOUS CHRISTOLOGY IN NEW TESTAMENT DIALOGUE

Three themes in the text of *The Mountain* have been identified: ancestor agency, gift child, and "hapkas." Given the celebration of Jesus as "good man true" who "die for PNG", might these offer an indigenous Christology? It is unlikely that Modjeska explicitly sets out to offer an indigenous christology in *The Mountain*. It is, however, consistent with the call by Skreslet for missiology to read historical fiction from outside the West and consistent with moves within post-colonial theory to encourage writing that is "around, through, out of, alongside and against."[38] What follows therefore, while "surplus" to Modjeska's intention, is authentic to her writing: an imaginative christological engagement with her imaginative work. In response to the christological question ("Who do you say that I am?") we hear an Ömie answer: You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors. This christology will now be considered in dialogue with the New Testament.

We begin, first, with **ancestor**, which has potential correlations with an important dimension of New Testament christology. Matthew's Gospel begins by locating Jesus as descended from the ancestors who include David and Abraham (Matt 1:1–17). Luke's Gospel locates Jesus as descended from the ancestors back to Adam (Luke 3:23–38). Each genealogy has a different structure and content. Yet, each affirms the agency of God, active in human history. The need to explain faith through connection with ancestors also plays a significant role in the Old Testament books of Genesis and 1 Chronicles. Genesis contains seventeen genealogies. They play a role theologically in affirming God's agency in history and are structured to develop the flow of the narrative.[39] 1 Chronicles contains eighteen genealogies. These have a different structure to Genesis and are structured theologically to address issues of election and promise.[40] Naming ancestors is important in Scripture, both as a literary form and in affirming the agency of God, who is active in human history. This is most clearly embodied in the way Jesus is introduced in Matthew and Luke. The genealogy in Matthew

[38] A. Wendt, *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English Since 1980* (Auckland: Auckland University Press 1995), 3.
[39] J. W. Wright, "Genealogy," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 345–50.
[40] J. H. Walton, "Genealogy," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. B. T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 309–16.

affirms the agency of God in the reality of human life.[41] This is consistent with the understandings of the Ömie elders, who locate the begetting of children as the gift of ancestors, active in human history.

We turn secondly to **ancestor as gift**. The Synoptic Gospels begin with the birth of a child. This child will bring salvation (Matt 1:21) through the solidarity of being Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:23). Paul interprets the "us" by locating the gift of salvation through Jesus in relation to the original ancestor, Adam. Christ is the one in whom eternal ancestry is located (1 Cor 15:21–22), which has ancestor links to Genesis 2:7 (1 Cor 15:45–49). This offers an ancestor Christology in relation to the gift of resurrection.[42] In Romans 5, Adam becomes a type, in relation to the entry of sin into the world. Both 1 Corinthians and Romans offer a christology of gift based on solidarity between Adam and the rest of humankind. Salvation is woven into human history in genealogy. The ancestors are active, and the weaving of salvation into human history is both explained and attained through genealogy.

We move thirdly to "**hapkas**." This can be developed in relation to being fully human and fully divine. In *The Mountain*, Jericho is understood as being both Ömie and English. He is, in blood, fully Ömie and fully English. One cannot take a "hapkas" and divide the one person internally into the tribal affiliations of their birth parents. A dual identity in one person is essential to the salvific role Jericho finds himself playing. Given this understand of hybridity, a clearer set of understandings of christology is clarified. In Jesus, we have full identification with humanity and full identification with divinity. He is both the son of Joseph and begotten of God, pain-bearer and divine. This dual identity is essential to his salvific role, in which the "unassumed is the unredeemed."[43] He is, in the words of the Chalcedonian definition of faith "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation..."[44] The notion of "hapkas" as introduced in *The*

[41] For more, see S. Taylor, "Where Does Mission Come from? The Genealogy of Jesus as Deep Mission," *AJMS* 11.2 (2017): 28–35.

[42] Kreitzer, *Biblica*.

[43] The maxim of the Greek Fathers, including Athanasius, Cyril, and Gregory.

[44] Council of Chalcedon (451), *Definitio fidei* (G. Alberigo et al., [eds], *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta*, vol. 1: *From Nicaea I to Nicaea II [325–787]* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2006], 137: ἕνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν Χριστὸν υἱὸν κύριον μονογενῆ, ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως ἀτρέπτως ἀδιαιρέτως ἀχωρίστως γνωριζόμενον ... English translation in

Mountain is a contextual lens by which to appreciate the Christian claim for full humanity and full divinity.

Hence the three themes of *The Mountain*, in which the ancestor gift of a "hapkas" child becomes a source of redemption for his community, has rich christological resonances. Jericho is a new Adam for his family and clan. Essential to Jericho being a "good man true" for the Ömie people of PNG is a hybrid notion of kinship: "Children don't belong to just one person … children are adopted, or taken by other people in the family, in the clan. It's common. Not remarkable."[45] This is no accident but was planned by the ancestors from before time. In the "hapkas" person of Jericho comes redemption, a way for the Ömie, as family and clan, to flourish after colonisation. This requires sacrifice. To continue the christological links, Jericho's Ömie birth-mother, Janape, becomes a Mary figure. Her son is removed from her care, not by death on the cross but by the Ömie village. In both cases, it is for the sake of the tribe, because "children don't belong to just one person." The new Adam is located in sacrificial, redemptive communality. Jericho is an incarnation of both colonial and indigenous identity.

Thus far, I have addressed the christological question of "Who do you say that I am?" in relation to Ömie people by engaging plot and character of *The Mountain*. Biblical themes of genealogy, Christ as the new Adam, and Jesus' identity as fully human, fully divine have been brought into conversation with Jericho as a "hapkas" child who is ancestor gift. How does the christology of "good man true" sit in relation to cultural constructions of identity? This question can be addressed by examining Melanesian anthropologies and Papua New Guinean christologies.

MELANESIAN ANTHROPOLOGIES

My argument is that Melanesian anthropological perspectives allow us to see Jesus as "good man true" as a Christology of cultural critique. Anthropology has theorised power in Melanesian cultures through the tropes of great men and big men.[46] The contrasts between great men and big men in local cultures

Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 2 (Translated Texts for Historians 45; rev. ed.; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 204.

[45] Modjeska, *Mountain,* 256.

[46] M. Strathern, "Introduction," in *Big Men and Great Men. Personifications of Power in Melanesia* (ed. M. Godelier and M. Strathern; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

is developed by Nicholas Modjeska.[47] Historically, "great men" was the title given to leaders who were known as warriors. They emerge in societies that prioritise hunting, fighting, and ceremony.[48] In these societies, social relations are reproduced by ritualised transactions. Influence is exerted through control of "the material and symbolic reproduction of their society."[49] This results in a hierarchical culture, with a strong tribal unity.[50]

In contrast, "big men" was the title given to leaders who were known for their ability to make deals.[51] They emerge in societies that prioritise gardening, pig husbandry, and exchange manoeuvring. Influence is exerted through production and exchange of wealth, in a society that values prestige-credit and gift-indebtedness. This results in a "new social order" that values "political economic entrepreneurs."[52] Modjeska applied the tropes of great men and big men to the societies of PNG, suggesting the titles arose in different social worlds. One social world is that of PNG in history. The other social world is PNG today: "The enchanted great men of a more heroic age have been displaced by political economic entrepreneurs."[53] Given this anthropological analysis of societies of PNG in general, how is Jericho positioned in *The Mountain*? How will he wield influence as an agent of

1991), 1–4, at 1. My thanks to Joel Robbins, for his suggestions after hearing a presentation of this paper at the International Association Mission Studies, Korea, August 2016.

[47] N. Modjeska, "Post-Ipomean Modernism: The Duna Example," in Godelier and Strathern, *Big Men and Great Men,* 234–55, at 240. The alert reader will note the shared last name of anthropologist Nicholas Modejeska, writing about great men and big men and author Drusilla Modjeska, writer of *The Mountain*, offering a "good man true" christology. In *The Mountain*, Rika is married to Leonard, an anthropologist from England, who conducts fieldwork among the Ömie people. In real life, when Drusilla Modjeska first lived in PNG, she was married to an anthropologist, Nicholas Modjeska, who conducted fieldwork among the Duna people. This is further evidence of the interplay between real life and academic research in *The Mountain*.

[48] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 252.

[49] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 238.

[50] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 249.

[51] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 240. For an examination of big man funeral rites, see G. Bustos, "Bikman and the Text in Context: Contextualizing the Gospel in Papua New Guinea," in *Living in the Family of Jesus. Critical Contextualization in Melanesia and Beyond* (ed. William Kenny Longgar and Tim Meadowcroft; Archer Studies in Pacific Christianity; Auckland; Archer Press, 2016), 101–126. Bustos examines how this big man ritual has been incorporated into the Good Friday liturgy, to honour Jesus' death.

[52] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 252–53.

[53] Modjeska, *Big Men and Great Men*, 253.

redemption for his people?

Jericho is certainly not a great man by these definitions. Raised in London, he has no ability in hunting and ceremony. Returning to PNG, he makes no moves to bring war to save his people.

Is Jericho then a big man? Jericho does certainly bring influence through his access to the art networks of London. He also possesses skill in the exchange manoeuvring necessary for Ömie art to be sold to western investors. Thus, Jericho does embody one dimension of the big man. But unlike the big man, he is the boy from Hohola, carrying the stigma of being "hapkas" and being raised in another country. He is not likely to possess the language skills needed to communicate as a big man. Further, he is not a wealth creator. He does not have skills in pig husbandry and thus cannot exert influence through production.

In *The Mountain*, Jericho is portrayed as able only to recognise gift, rather than produce gift. "Here is the mountain's wealth. Here is how he can help. Their cloth is art in any terms. It's contemporary, it's bold and it's beautiful."[54] Thus he can only act as a big man from below. His task is to lift up the Ömie art, to give it pride of place. In so doing, he is not honouring his own production, but that of the Ömie women. Modjeska describes the role of the *duvahe*, Ömie women who make the painting. She names them as chiefs, with an authority not from lineage but from wisdom. They have a "*moral* authority" gained because they are "the custodians of the knowledge and the trees, and the dyes, and the designs, and the stories told through the cloth."[55] Using the categories of Melanesian anthropology, Jericho is neither great man nor big man. Rather he is "hapkas" man from below. Jericho is using his skill in exchange manoeuvring, first to move between Ömie culture and western culture, second in lifting high not the men but the women, third in elevating not his production but the production of his tribe.

Anthropology, particularly when considered in relation to Melanesian culture, enriches the christological echoes of Jericho in *The Mountain*, clarifying modes of resistance and innovation. The titles of great man and big man bring into sharp relief the description in *The Mountain* of Jesus as "good man true." Jesus will die for PNG, not as a warrior leader nor as a deal maker. He is being defined in innovative resistance to common understandings of leadership within the societies of PNG. This is a hybrid—

[54] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 353.
[55] Modjeska, *Mountain*, 215 and 220. Italics in original.

"hapkas" even—christology, in which the identity of Christ is located in relation to culture, in ways resistant and innovative, continuous and discontinuous. Jesus is a "man" in ways continuous with great man and big man; he is "good," in ways discontinuous with understandings of leaders as great and big.

A common critique of contextual theologies is that they prioritise culture over gospel. This is not the case when "good man true" is placed alongside the Melanesian cultural understandings theorised by anthropology. In social worlds that value the great man and the big man, Jesus is the good man. He is neither a warrior leader nor an entrepreneurial transactor like Jericho. He becomes a redeemer of his people not through fighting, hunting, producing, or dealing but through service across cultures. Yes, Jericho is a networker, not because he is a political economic entrepreneur but because he is ancestor gift. Yes, the ancestors are from a more heroic age but they work not by recalling the past but in embracing a future in which the "hapkas" Jericho is a conduit for transforming redemption across the richness of two cultures: one art-making (Ömie), the other art-valuing (western). Yes, Jericho is a male, but as a "good man true," he lifts up the women of his tribe, acting as curator for their custodial knowledge and moral authority. This argument is based on reading anthropology, exploring what the full humanity of "Who do you say that I am?" might mean for the Ömie of PNG.

CHRISTOLOGIES IN PNG

We have considered regional anthropologies in the Melanesian cultures of Oceania. How does the Christology of "good man true" sit in relation to the christologies of PNG? *Melanesian Journal of Theology* becomes a significant gift, a scholarship spanning over thirty years. There is no evidence of "hapkas" being used. This suggests that *The Mountain* is offering something unique. However, three christologies are present: those of Christ as "wantok," brother, and "tatapa" (protector). Each will be discussed in relation to "hapkas" themes of ancestor, gift, and identity as fully human, fully divine.

Christ as "wantok" is a prominent theme. Tanda argues that all sectors of Melanesian society are interwoven through the "wantok" system,[56] while Mani argues "wantok" must be "an essential element in any Melanesian

[56] P. A. Tanda, "An Analytical Evaluation of the Effects of the Wantok System in the South Sea Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea," *MJT* 27 (2011): 6–39, at 6.

theology or missiology."[57] The "wantok" system provides an understanding of communal lifestyle. "Wantok" is, like "hapkas" a term from Tok Pisin, an official language of PNG and refers to a way of being in community, a "family based system that seeks to create new relationships to ensure that life is not threatened."[58] Reciprocal behaviours like give and take are priorities in the strengthening of relationships. This becomes a social security system, part of the Melanesian Way,[59] by which the vulnerable and needy are cared for.

Having clarified the history, Mani then examines the changes in PNG post-independence. He argues that individualism, produced by western education and the embrace of western ethics, has undermined the values of the "wantok" system.[60] It has been negatively connected with corruption.[61]

Can "wantok" be redeemed? Mani suggests there are traces of the "wantok" system in both Old and New Testaments, and in particular develops Hebrews 2:10–15. All humanity is treated as "wantoks" because Jesus Christ is our "wantok."[62] Hence, the "wantok" system is God-given and God-used, "inwardly, to gather for tribal relationships; and outwardly to search for new relationships."[63] Working with the gospels, Cabrido suggests that in the encounter with the Syro-Phonecian woman (Matt 15:21–28), Jesus can be understood as working within a "wantok" framework. This includes, from a Melanesian perspective, Jesus' gift of initiating a relationship, not only with her but also communally with her tribe.[64] "Jesus did not only heal a sick daughter. He began the healing of relationships, which—for a Melanesian—is the mark of wholeness and salvation ... In time, with His resurrection, the *wantok bilong Jisas* will include ... the 'least', lowly ones."[65] This reading, in understanding Jesus as the "wantok"

[57] M. Mani, "A Theological and Missiological Response to the *Wantok* System in Melanesia," in Longgar and Meadowcroft, *Living in the Family*, 57–78, at 78.
[58] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 60.
[59] B. Narakobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, 1980), 7.
[60] Similarly, Ako Arua and Dfaniel John Eka, "Wantok System," *MJT* 18.1 (2002): 6–17, at 9: "The wantok system has become a personal thing, rather than a group-oriented thing."
[61] Arua and Eka, "Wantok System"; and Tanda, "An Analytical Evaluation."
[62] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 67–68.
[63] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 72.
[64] John Aranda Cabrido, "*Wantok Jisas*: Reading Matthew's Story of the Canaanite Woman (15:21–28) in a Melanesian Context," *MJT* 30.1 (2014): 17–35, at 30–31.
[65] Cabrido, "*Wantok Jisas*," 31.

of the vulnerable, challenges notions of nepotism[66] and favouritism seen in post-independence understandings of "wantok." This is a creative christology. It is in continuity with understandings of "wantok" as shaped by a Melanesian worldview, in which "one cannot act ethically without a belief in the supernatural."[67] It resists "wantok" as favourite. Instead, it locates "wantok" in relation to Jesus, who is a "good man" who acts in ways that are sacrificial and attentive not to favourites—including "big men" and "strong men"—but to those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

It could be argued that "hapkas" would enrich this "wantok" theology. If Jesus is fully human and fully divine, then he is not only a "good man" exemplar. He is also the empowering channel through whom any individual can "in Christ" participate in the fully divine ethical acting of Jesus, the true "wantok."

A second Melanesian christology is that of Christ as **brother**. Dan Seeland reflects on the impact of urbanisation on tribal identity and notes that despite a post-independence increase in "the complex web of relationships that now characterises Melanesia ... primary identity still resides with the clan."[68] He describes the historical importance of relationships with neighbouring ethnic groups, in the form of alliances and trading partnerships. "Prosperity, for the individual, as well as the clan, is safeguarded through the principle of reciprocity."[69] Seeland thus suggests a way of relating shaped by ethics, as people act in a manner consistent with the pattern of brotherhood. This includes those outside the clan: "Behaviour, not blood, seems to be the key."[70] Having conducted this post-independence anthropology, Seeland then develops a christology, working primarily with Romans 8:29, in which Christ is the "firstborn among many brothers." This has a number of implications in relation to "hapkas" themes of ancestor, gift, and identity. First, the focus on "firstborn" resonates with an ancestor christology. Second, the affirmation of "hapkas" christology becomes a way of working across clan boundaries not only by marriage and not only in contemporary PNG, but in living from historic patterns of reciprocity. Third,

[66] Andrew Murray, "What About the *Wantok* System?" *MJT* 32.2 (2016): 134–147, at 137.
[67] Mani, *Living in the Family*, 59.
[68] Dan Seeland, "Christ my Brother: Shifting Primary Identity in Melanesia from Clan to Christ," *MJT* 22.2 (2006): 60–73, at 61.
[69] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 62.
[70] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 64.

Seeland's observation that behaviour, not blood is the key, provides a christological reframing of "good man true." Jesus comes, not as big man or great man but as a good man, acting like a brother. The act of reciprocity initiated by Jesus the firstborn brother is a sacrifice in which the life of the firstborn is gifted in order to re-build an alliance with the human clan.[71] Fourth, the act of reciprocity is framed by Seeland as a relationship of fulfilment rather than a replacement. It is not that Christianity replaces the existing clan relationships. "Properly understood, however, Jesus' call to discipleship is not a call to love the clan less. It is a call to love Christ more."[72] Hence Seeland's use of Romans and his understanding of Christ as firstborn provides a distinctly ethical christology.

However, further work is required, given that Seeland seems to view Jesus not as a person in a clan from Galilee and a tribe from Israel, but as an individual. Seeland does not seem to recognise that at the time of the writing of Romans, Christianity understood itself as still within the tribe of Judaism. The complex work done by Paul in Romans 9–11 is about trying to maintain the clan connections and honour the ancestor Abraham. These further trajectories might strengthen Seeland's brother christology.

Christ as "tatapa" (protector) is a theology articulated by the Teop people, who live in North Bougainville Province. In Teop understandings, the practice of "tatapa" was undertaken daily, as evening fell. The practice—of planting stakes around the circumference of the village, spreading a powder from the fruits of a special tree and chanting to the ancestors—was understood to create an invisible protective shield, or hedge. This protected the whole village from attack by evil spirits. Ivihi then develops a christology of protection: "For Christians today, the *tatapa* represents Jesus as protector."[73] This christology is sourced from biblical images including God as fortress (Jer 16:19; Ps 91:2), hedge (Job 1:10), and shield (Eph 6:16; Ps 91:4). Christ as the protector is like a big man (warrior), in that he takes the place of the spirits of the ancestors, who had been strong warriors, in order to drive away the evil spirits. The protection comes from Christ, who has entered the worldview of these people, as fully a Teop of North Bougainville as any ancestor warrior. Yet this Christ is a stronger big man, given that as one person, he provides the protection previously needing to be provided by

[71] This has similarities with Cabrido's "wantok Jisas" reading of Matt 15:21–28.
[72] Seeland, "Christ my Brother," 65.
[73] Ezekiel Ivihi, "Tatapa: Christ the Protector," *MJT* 26.2 (2010): 19–21, at 20.

many ancestor warriors. This christology works within existing cultural frameworks, responding to a world inhabited by spirits. "Christians cannot eliminate evil spirits; nevertheless, God will punish evil spirits in the fiery furnace."[74] This "tatapa" christology offers an indirect link to the good man, with Christ able to deliver the righteous through sacrifice, not strength.

Locating a "hapkas" Jesus who is "good man true" in relation to other Melanesian christologies suggests a christology that is unique, yet has strong resonances. "Hapkas" is a generative yet critical theology. It provides ways to move beyond tribalism, inviting a "wantok" theology to be located not in tribal identity, but in micro-acts of neighborliness. This is clarified by the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). It could be argued that the relationships between Samaritan and Jew are located historically in "hapkas" identities. Yet in the parable, those who inherit eternal life in "hapkas" Christ are those who are "good man true" neighbours. This is defined not by tribal identity but by how one treats those who are need. What remains is for all who hear to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Hence the "wantok" is "tapata" for all "brothers" (and "sisters"), not through tribal identity but through inclusion in the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from the ancient ancestor seeking to redeem all peoples.

Conclusion

In sum, I have examined *The Mountain*, paying attention to author and text, to argue for themes of ancestor, gift, and "hapkas" agency. I have located these themes in conversation with biblical themes of Jesus as the new Adam, gift from the genealogy of Israel, fully human and fully divine. This provides a way for the Ömie people to respond to the christological question of "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors. This is a christology of resistance and innovation; affirming ancestor agency yet challenging Melanesian masculinity tropes.

This "hapkas" Ömie christology is an imaginative exercise by the author. It is not the stated intention of Drusilla Modjeska, nor the articulation of the Ömie people or a living Ömie theologian. Nevertheless, when located in relation to Melanesian cultural tropes of great men and big men, it offers a creative christology that shares lines of continuity and discontinuity with

[74] Ivihi, "Tatapa," 21.

Melanesian cultural constructions of power and identity, leadership, and relationships. It demonstrates that contextualisations of theology, when viewed from within host cultures, are both generative and critical. "Hapkas" provides a model of conversion of gospel reception as a transformation within existing cultural frames, in ways that critiques existing notions of power and identity.

In developing its christology, the early church applied a range of titles to Jesus. The titles were understood to offer important clues in understanding Christian faith. Another way to respect particularity in christology has been to assert formulations like a Lukan or Pauline christology. The intention of these christologies is not to suggest a full disclosure of the nature and work of Christ, but rather to appreciate particularity and affirm specific communities. In a similar way, the development of a "hapkas" christology in this essay is used to foreground the nature and potential of indigenous titles as a distinct and unique contribution, without making claims for a full disclosure of the nature and work of Christ. Further work is needed to consider how hapkas christologies might work in other contexts, including PNG and Oceania and to compare and contrast with Creole christologies developing in the United States.[75]

Such are the possibilities when fiction is examined christologically within the particularity of the cultures from which they emerge. It allows us to hear an Ömie answer to the christological question: "Who do you say that I am?": You are "good man true" for PNG because you are the "hapkas" Jesus, gift from ancestors.

[75] C. P. DeYoung, *Becoming Like Creoles: Living and Leading at the Intersections of Injustice, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019).