Trade and Labour

Through the labour traffic I suppose no island has been so much affected by contact with the white man. Change is going on so rapidly that it is very difficult to write of things as they are; what is true to-day may be very different to-morrow.


This chapter begins with an outline of the first Malaitan contacts with outsiders from beyond the Pacific and then examines labour migration up until 1914. Malaita provided more indentured labourers in the external Melanesian labour trade than any other island in Solomon Islands or Vanuatu (the New Hebrides). Malaitans travelled to Queensland and Fiji on 14,447 indenture contracts between 1870 and 1911 (Table 1), out of a total of 24,865 contracts for all Solomon Islands, equalling 58 per cent. Malaitans also took part in the internal protectorate labour trade starting between the 1900s and 1910s. Accurate statistics for this internal trade begin in 1913, and from that year through 1940, 36,596 labour contracts were issued to Malaitans, 67.6 per cent of the 54,110 total (Table 7, Chapter 10). The total number of Malaitan labour contracts (including those before 1913) would be higher by a few thousand.

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1 Hopkins, ‘Mala and Its People’, *SCL*, June 1908, 9.
Figure 2.1: Christie Fatnowna with the model ship made by Jack Marau. Marau, a Guadalcanal man at Mackay, made this ship, modelled on the labour trade vessel that brought him to Australia. He is thought to have been from the Malaitan colony at Marau Sound on Guadalcanal. At Mackay he married a Malaitan woman and always lived with the Malaitans. In his final years, he lived with Norman and Hazel Fatnowna; they inherited the model when he died. It was photographed in 1988, with Norman's brother Christie.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.
The chapter explores the external labour trade (beyond the Solomon Archipelago) and argues that these experiences were at the base of all changes that occurred on the island before the Pacific War. The internal labour trade will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Along with the other two changes I highlight—the arrival of Christianity and government—participation in external wage labour was instrumental in providing unity through Pijin English, the acquisition of trade goods, the ability to work with groups beyond one language area and initial contact with Christianity and literacy. The labour trade created a new level of sophistication and understanding of the world beyond Malaita. The size of Malaita’s population made this large labour movement feasible, although it was driven by a lack of economic opportunity on the island, two points still valid today. The Malaitan diaspora within Solomon Islands remains larger than that of any other island group and influences many contemporary issues in the modern nation. The fourth element in the transformation of Malaitan societies, which becomes clear at the end of this chapter, is Malaitans’ ability to change creatively. Malaitans have always displayed great flexibility and practicality in adjusting to changing circumstances. Without this ability they could never have survived and flourished as they have.

Similar to most Pacific peoples, Malaitan contact with the world outside the archipelago began with occasional visits by ships along their coast. Slowly, these increased as European explorers, naval expeditions, whalers and traders passed through. Early contact was seldom onshore, since most visitors felt safer trading from their ships to surrounding canoes. Malaitans, with no idea of what was to come, were curious and wanted to possess the strange items offered. The first time any Malaitan was able to communicate with a foreigner was in the 1820s, and then again in the 1860s and early 1870s, when castaways lived in the lagoons. Until then, communications were by miming and offering items in barter trade.

Participation in plantation labour led to the earliest large-scale introduction of foreign manufactured items and the beginnings of the adoption of new ideas and technologies. The effect of the outside world was slower to leave its mark on Malaita than in the Western Solomons, Makira and some Polynesian Outliers, where whalers and traders made an earlier impact. However, once Malaitans became the main Solomon Islands labour force on overseas plantations and farms in Queensland and Fiji, and to a lesser extent in Samoa and New Caledonia, and then in the twentieth century within the protectorate, the impact on the island was extreme.
The sheer size of the Malaitan involvement in the circular labour trade—58 per cent of all Solomon Islands labourers working in Queensland and Fiji (1870–1911) and around 68 per cent within the protectorate before the Pacific War—indicates the importance of the movement of Malaitans, predominantly males, away from their island. I argue that there must have been significant depopulation once new diseases were introduced, but there is no way to be sure of the precontact population size, other than that it was substantial. The trade in labour meant that the majority of the island’s young adult males began leaving for several years and usually returned with new material possessions, which altered their standing in their communities. This chapter contends that Malaitan culture had already irreversibly changed before any European lived permanently on the island in the 1890s, able to observe local behaviour or know the size of the population. If we take introduced languages as an example—pijin versions of English and Fijian—thousands of Malaitans already spoke or understood these languages to varying degrees in the 1890s, and many had achieved rudimentary literacy. The quantity of European goods and chattels introduced brought about huge changes both in technology and in the ownership and control of resources.

Much of the literature on Malaita comes from anthropologists who have seldom taken historical documentation into account. Ian Hogbin in the 1930s is the early anomaly, and then more recently Ian Frazer, Ben Burt and David Akin have successfully straddled anthropology and history. Most others, partly because of their training and the earlier foci of the discipline, chose to ignore, or underestimated, the impacts of early outside influences on Malaita. A similar pattern exists elsewhere in the Solomons and in Near Oceania generally. There were early studies, such as geographer Richard Bedford’s New Hebridean Mobility (1973), or historian Judith Bennett’s MA thesis ‘Cross-Cultural Influences on Village Relocation on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, c. 1870–1953’ (1974), which show that wider analysis has been possible for 40 years, although in the main ethnographic history was not pursued. Aside from Peter Corris’s excellent Passage, Port and Plantation (1973), which dealt with Solomon Islands labourers in Fiji and Queensland, all of the major labour trade historical studies are Queensland-based and share a reverse fault to the anthropological writing: they are largely document-based and display little understanding of anthropology. Only my Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay (1985) concentrated on one island (Malaita) and
only Corris and I (and Bennett for her *Wealth of the Solomons* (1987)) spent time interviewing Malaitans in the islands. Of the work published by historians on the overseas labour trade, only Patricia Mercer’s *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander Settlement in North Queensland* (1995) and my *Kanaka* (1985) draw from large bases of oral testimony. Hopefully, the way forward will be for historians, geographers and anthropologists to work in a multidisciplinary manner.

**First Contact with the Outside World**

Malaitans first experienced foreigners from outside the Pacific Islands in 1568 when a Spanish expedition led by Alvaro de Mendaña y Neyra visited Malaita. On Palm Sunday, 11 April, the Spaniards sighted Malaita from neighbouring Isabel Island. Later, a brigantine left the other ships at Port Cruz (now Honiara) on Guadalcanal and set off southeast, coasting past elongated Rua Sura Island and on to Marau Sound, a Malaitan colony on Guadalcanal. The ship crossed Indispensable Strait and reached Malaita on 25 May, entered ‘Are’are Lagoon at Uhu Passage, then sailed along the coast and anchored at Rokera (Ariel Harbour), which they named Port Ascension. The visitors also landed at the large Su’upaina Bay, a short distance from Cape Zélée, the southern-most point of Small Malaita. Attacked at Uhu by 25 canoes, the Spanish returned fire with their arquebuses, killing and wounding some of the attackers. At Ariel Harbour they were met by a crowd of 200, although there was no close interaction, and at Su´upaina once more there was an altercation dispersed with gunfire. Like many of these early exploratory visits to Pacific islands, two aspects stand out: the defensive violence of the visitors and lingering after-effects, such as disease. Anthropologist Daniel de Coppet believed that a memory of the visit lingered into the twentieth century, recounted because of an epidemic disease that spread from the contact, although the oral history is hazy and this could have followed later European visits instead.²

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After the Spanish visit, the Solomon Islands disappeared again from European view, hidden by the vagaries of poor navigational science until a further round of exploration in the eighteenth century. Malaitans made occasional contact with Europeans, such as the occupants of a canoe seized near small Da`i Island off the northwest end of Malaita in 1767 by Philip Carteret on HMS Swallow. Two years later, Jean-François-Marie
de Surville, on board *St Jean-Baptiste*, passed east of Malaita, keeping well out to sea. The next contacts were probably a quarter century later when, in 1790, Lieutenant Ball, sailing from New South Wales, travelled north along the east coast of Malaita, and two years later when *Recherche* and *Espérance*, commanded by Bruny D’Entrecasteaux, sailed close by Small Malaita, searching for the ill-fated Pérouse expedition. Another French explorer, Dumont d’Urville, also left his mark on Malaita when he sailed along the southwest coast in 1838, naming the southern and northern ends of the island Cape Zélée and Cape Astrolabe after his ships.3

Once the British settled at Sydney, New South Wales, in 1788, merchant vessels began to use routes to Asia just east of the Solomon Archipelago, passing by Malaita, or travelled through Indispensable Strait on Malaita’s west side.4 While actual landings were rare, the ships must have been visible and the regular canoe traffic between Malaita, Guadalcanal, Gela, Ulawa, Makira and Isabel would have come into some sort of contact with these foreigners.

### Whaling

Malaitans were never central to the substantial whaling industry that developed in the archipelago between the 1820s and the 1860s. With the Atlantic whaling ground in decline, whalers began to ply their trade in the archipelago and around similar islands off east New Guinea. The fleet was bolstered by the addition of some of the vessels used to transport convicts to New South Wales.5 Whaling vessels began to sail close to Malaita onwards from 1800, and by the 1820s there is evidence of some limited direct contacts between their crews and Malaitans.6

Whaling and associated trading altered power balances among Solomon Islanders. Ships from southern Pacific ports began to sail north to the Solomons and New Guinea from May to November, while others sailed south out of Micronesia during the rest of the year. Whalers were bound by the migratory habits of whales—they usually take the same paths in their annual movements north and south through the Pacific—and by

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5 Moore 2003, 104–09.
the availability of suitable sheltered anchorages to enable replenishment of supplies of food, water and timber, without aggressive interactions with the local people. Simbo (Eddystone), Mono (Treasury) Island just south of Bougainville, Makira, small Santa Ana and Santa Catalina islands, and Sikaiana Atoll became early favourite haunts of whalers while they pursued their prey nearby. A subsidiary trade in pearl-shell and turtle-shell increased in the 1860s, supplemented by *bêche-de-mer* (which required beach processing) north of Malaita around New Georgia, Kolombangara and Simbo. Whalers restocked their supplies close to whaling grounds, wherever there were safe anchorages and friendly people, and where possible they avoided the inner coastlines of the Solomon Archipelago—the shores of New Georgia Sound and Indispensable Strait—which were not properly surveyed until the 1860s and 1870s.

The islands that the whalers chose benefited enormously from the barter that developed, and the new material possessions it brought increased their power. The vast lagoons in the northwest Solomon Islands, with their many reefs and islets, made them a good centre for trade and refreshment of ships’ supplies. Although east Malaita has some excellent harbours, as well as Lau Lagoon and Maramasike Passage, there is a similarity to Guadalcanal’s Weather Coast in that much of the coast is exposed. Coupled with a lack of barter items, this made Malaita unattractive for regular visits. We know that the *Alfred*, under its master Edwin Cattlin, landed on Malaita in 1827 (see below) and was also in the vicinity between October 1828 and April 1829. Cattlin returned to Malaitan waters again on the *Australian* between December 1831 and February 1832. Other whalers presumably followed a similar pattern, but they left no records. The whalers, and later labour recruiters, traded large quantities of hoop iron and steel tools such as axes into the archipelago. These made swidden horticulture less laborious and freed up men for more extensive, almost imperialist extensions of warfare. While interisland raiding had been slowly increasing in range and amount for around 300 years, the large numbers of steel axes traded into the northwest Solomon Islands were used to extend existing trade for turtle-shell, and for head-hunting and

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7 Moore 2003, 117–22; Bennett 1987, 24–44.
8 Gray 1999.
9 Richards 2012, 17.
10 Woodford 1922; Aswani 2000, 53.
slave-raiding activities. Missionary Walter Ivens recounted the effect of the new weaponry on the efficiency of these raids beginning in the 1850s and 1860s:

The presence of English ships in the Solomons in these two decades, and the distribution by them of iron tomahawks, gave great impetus to the head-hunting. These tomahawk-heads were mounted on a long handle by the Rovoiana people, and received the name kilakila (stone axe). The use of them spread as far south as Sa’a and Ulawa, and the name ‘kilakila’ went along with it … Later on head-hunting raids were made on Maana oba village on the island of Ngwalulu, on Malu’u in Suu, on Fokanakafo near Uru, and on Langalanga.11

On many islands the raids forced coastal groups to move inland for protection. By the 1880s, these raids had depopulated considerable areas of New Georgia, Isabel, Choiseul, the Gela Group and the west coast of Guadalcanal. While areas of Isabel were stripped of population by New Georgia raiders, Gao and Bugotu people from Isabel also participated; it was never a one-way movement out of New Georgia. As Ivens indicates, occasionally these raids reached the north and central coast of Malaita, usually through Isabel intermediaries. Malaitans suggest that their bowmen and their parrying skills with large shields were more than a match for the close-combat long-handled steel axes wielded by the men from the northwest islands. These raids must have had some impact, but there is no hint that they caused large-scale depopulation.12

Royal Navy Australia Station (RNAS) statistics show that Malaitans were trading with Europeans during the late 1870s, although they must have been very frustrated that they were unable to obtain large amounts of iron and tools and weapons, the equal of the supplies flowing into neighbouring Makira and the Western Solomons.13 As described in Chapter 1, Malaita had been at the centre of an indigenous trade network based on shell and teeth valuables, then, over a couple of decades, the power focus shifted. This was the first large-scale contact with the outside world and a bonanza for those who participated. Judith Bennett’s research provides an outline of the level of contact: she found records from around 150 whaling ships

11 Ivens 1930, 186.
12 McKinnon 1975; Chapman and Pirie 1974, 215–17; Codrington 1891, 305, 345; Fox 1958, 179–81, 189; Aswani 2000. The raiders had the advantage of steel axes but these were only superior in close fighting. They only used small shields, which were easy for Malaitan bowmen to get around.
13 RNAS, Yearly Estimates of the Solomons Trade, including New Britain, New Ireland and the Admiralty Islands, Captain Purvis, 30 Sept 1879, 15.
visiting the Solomons between 1800 and 1890. The peak of Solomons whaling was in the 1840s and 1850s, and then began to wane in the 1860s when many American ships were recalled due to the Civil War, and as whale oil became less essential for industry because of easier access to petroleum oil, and technical advances in processing copra for oil.¹⁴

Most of these early contacts took place at sea rather than on shore, and whalers usually chose the smaller islands where there was less chance of large-scale attacks. Initially, the Islanders paddled out to the ships to exchange their food stuffs for hoop iron, glass, knives, fish-hooks, cloth and tobacco. However, over several decades as the whaling trade continued, whalers became more familiar with some ports and local leaders, felt comfortable enough to spend time on land, and trade items became more sophisticated.¹⁵ Wood, water, fruit and vegetables, artefacts, shells, and turtle-shell were traded for iron, steel, guns, tobacco and glass. ‘Slaves’ (women and children captured in indigenous raids) were also used to provide sexual services.

Apart from prestige value, access to iron and steel reduced male gardening and canoe-building workloads considerably, while increasing the size of gardens, which allowed more pigs to be fed, and more time invested in ceremonies and warfare.¹⁶ The influx of iron and steel caused communities near whaling ports to prosper and long-established trade linkages began to change. Malaitan shell and porpoise-teeth currencies had for generations been important trade items linking Malaita to the surrounding islands. Earlier, ‘Are’ are and Small Malaita had dominant links with Makira, but then onwards from the 1840s Makira began to gain the upper hand since Malaitans had nothing of value to barter with whalers and traders. Bennett’s research suggests that between 1850 and 1870, on average three whaling ships a year visited Makira Harbour, each staying a few days.¹⁷ Malaita’s lagoons were numerous but not commodious, and the warlike reputation of Malaitan men made Europeans wary. Strict Malaitan sexual codes meant that women were not available to satisfy the lusts of the crews.¹⁸ Aside from contacts with a few castaways and the occasional passing trading or whaling

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¹⁴ Bennett 1987, 360–65; Townsend 1935.
¹⁷ Bennett 1987, 28–29.
¹⁸ Ibid., 29–30 provides examples of Makira professional prostitutes (ura) and unmarried women, as well as slave women on other islands, providing sexual services to Europeans. This was a variation of traditional practices in which women were exchanged to cement alliances.
ship, Malaitans remained outside the early nineteenth-century spread of European influence into the Pacific.\textsuperscript{19} They were mostly unable to obtain the European manufactured items that were becoming common elsewhere unless they traded for them at surrounding islands.

This changed quickly once the indentured labour trade to Queensland and Fiji began in the 1870s and Malaitans became avid participants. It is true that there was kidnapping and illegality at the beginning, but taken over the full period, from the 1870s to the 1910s, Malaitan participation in the external labour trade was largely voluntary. They had at last found a commodity to trade: fit young male bodies. They were motivated primarily by their desire for iron and steel tools, and obtaining guns, first unreliable muzzle-loaders and then, increasingly, more powerful and accurate breech-loading rifles. These were put to use to defend and advance the interests of descent groups in the jockeying for regional dominance on Malaita, and as a defence against marauding raiders from further north. Tobacco was another large import. This restored Malaitans’ dominance among Solomon Island societies and their interactions with others added to the tropes of Malaitan violence and unpredictability.

**Castaways**

Once European ships began frequenting the Pacific Islands, one side-product was deserters and castaways—men who survived wrecks, were downloaded from ships, or chose to remain in indigenous communities they had visited on voyages. Their effect on host island communities has long been debated.\textsuperscript{20} Bennett notes that between the 1850s and the 1870s some 30 deserters from whaling ships lived on Makira, giving the people there a level of early familiarity with outsiders that did not exist on Malaita.\textsuperscript{21} There are only a few references to shipwrecked mariners surviving on Malaita for a few years. Peter Corris mentions a ‘Lascar’ supposed to be the only survivor from an English brig captured by Malaitans in the 1820s. Fourteen Englishmen and six other ‘Lascars’ perished, and the sole survivor was rescued in the late 1820s.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Corris 1973b, 6–23; Bennett 1987, 21–44; Moore 1985, 33–36.
\textsuperscript{20} Maude 1968, 134–77; Campbell 1998; Bargatzky 1980.
\textsuperscript{21} Bennett 1987, 29–30, 41.
\textsuperscript{22} ‘Lascar’ usually means a sailor from the Indian subcontinent. Corris 1973b, 12; Smith 1844, 203–06; Bennett 1987, 29–31.
Another early European resident on Malaita, John Matthews, known as Doorey, was second officer on the whaler Alfred out of Sydney, which reached Malaita in December 1827. The ship was attacked and several crew members were killed, and Matthews lived on Malaita for an unknown number of years. In *Pageant of the Pacific*, Rhodes recorded that in September 1831 Captain Harwood of the whaler Hashemy was trading at Malaita when he received a message written on a piece of bamboo. Mathews warned that the people were about to attack the ship, however, the message was undated and Harwood decided that it was old. Matthews was not located.

The next outsider to reside on Malaita seems to have been John (Jack) Renton, a Scottish seaman and the only survivor among five deserters from the American guano ship Renard in 1868. He and his companions drifted almost 2,000 kilometres in one of the Renard's boats before landing at Maana’oba Island off the northeast coast of Malaita. His four companions were killed and Renton was taken to Kabbou, a Lau Lagoon bigman on Sulufou artificial island, where Renton lived from 1868 until 1875. It was during this period that labour recruiting vessels out of Queensland and Fiji initially ventured to Malaita, the first arriving in late 1870 and early 1871. In August of 1875 Renton was rescued by the crew of one of these, the Queensland ship Bobtail Nag.

Renton learnt the Lau language and participated in life on the lagoon for eight years, and there are indications that he developed close relationships, yet the account he left us is disappointingly shallow. He returned to Malaita as an interpreter on a recruiting ship in late 1875 with gifts for his adopted family, but he never visited the island again and died in 1878. One thing Renton helped to bring about was the rise of Kwaisulia, the leading Lau passage master (the ‘in-between’ men who controlled the interface between the labour recruiters and potential labourers) from the 1880s until the 1900s, described later in this chapter.

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24 Rhodes 1937, 253 (no source is given); Bennett 1987, 350 records the Alfred in 1828–29, but not the Hashemy.
25 Moore 1985, 35–36. Renton subsequently was employed as a Queensland government agent who accompanied recruiting ships on their voyages, until he was killed in 1878 at Aoba Island in the New Hebrides while aboard the Mystery. His account of his life on Malaita and the logs of his voyages were published in Marwick 1935. Also see the novels by Holthouse (1988) and Randell (2003).
Figure 2.2: John Renton managed to get this piece of wood with its message on both sides to the *Bobtail Nag* in August 1875:
‘John Renton. Please take me off to England. The chief of this island asks a present from you. Won of the ship’s crew come on shore that I can speak with him. Shipwrecked on this island about 5 years ago’.
Source: Queensland Museum.

Strangely, a new Malaitan trope appeared in relation to Renton in 1988, when the Queensland-based historical sensationalist author Hector Holthouse published a book on Renton’s adventures titled *White Headhunter*, with a subtitle trumpeting *The Extraordinary True Story of a White Man’s Life among the Headhunters of the Solomon Islands*. This was followed by a 2003 novel of similar subject by Nigel Randell, *The White Headhunter*. While the titles might have been useful to sell books, they are poor descriptions of the people of Lau Lagoon, who were not head-hunters like those of New Georgia or Isabel. It would seem that the Renton story is already compelling enough to sell books without embellishment, but these authors nevertheless added to the Malaitan tropes.

Through Lau’s links to Small Malaita, Renton may have heard that another group of castaways arrived on Small Malaita’s eastern coast at Port Adam on 1 June 1873. The barque *Plato* out of Newcastle, New South Wales, was wrecked near New Caledonia on 10 May; the crew sailed north in small boats, heading for Makira, but they overshot their target. Nine of them were killed the next day, and only John Collins was kept alive. He was rescued by HMS *Renard* and transferred to HMS *Dido*, which had been tasked with returning men kidnapped by the *Nukulau* (see below). Both ships proceeded to Port Adam, where they found the America schooner *Hallie Jack* trading, and captured three of the murderers.26

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26 *Queenslander*, 15 Nov 1872.
Royal Australia Naval Station

This capture was legal because in 1817 the supreme courts of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) were given authority to try serious crimes committed in the Pacific Islands. Beginning in 1821, the British Navy annually detached a ship from the East Indies fleet to patrol the Pacific. In 1843, the *British Foreign Jurisdiction Act* extended British law to cover subjects beyond British territory, utilising concepts of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘protectorate’ to enable Britain to establish a system of jurisprudence in consular courts without the costs of formal annexation. This was applied in the Pacific, and once the British Royal Navy’s Australia Station (RNAS) began operations out of Sydney in 1859, Malaita came within the jurisdiction of its ships.

One early visit was from Captain Erskine on HMS *Havannah*, which patrolled waters surrounding the island in 1850. The ship called at Port Adam between 21 and 24 September, edging her way into the uncharted bay. Two descriptions of the visit have survived. The villagers gathered to watch the strange craft approach:

> A canoe or two came off to within 60 or 80 yards of the vessel, the natives holding up cocoanuts, and throwing themselves down in their canoes, at the same time striking their breasts to represent being killed, and calling out Matè-matè (which I believe means to kill)—No offer would induce them to come alongside.²⁷

The next Malaitan reaction was to evacuate 30 women and children in a large canoe. A boat was lowered from the ship and a pantomime developed with up to 14 canoes venturing out and suddenly turning back, the men clearly terrified but curious. When the next day dawned, canoes ventured out to the ship to trade and a party from the *Havannah* went ashore. There were 20 houses in a village on one of the islands just offshore, and the crew began to trade: the most sought-after items were red cloth, tomahawks, knives and bottles. Activity was heard in the village on the nights of the 22nd and 23rd, but when the crew again visited on the 24th the village was empty.

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²⁷ Vigors 1850, 202. The word may have been ‘*matai*’, which in Lau (also used at Walade) means ‘to be ill’. The same word seems to have been used elsewhere in the Solomons in a similar way in 1565 to discourage the Mendaña expedition. It may refer to diseases brought by foreign ships. Amherst and Thomson 1967 [1901], see section ‘Narrative of Gallego’, 31.
There was contact on land, and local etiquette displayed when a leader at the village noticed that Lieutenant Pym was lame and asking him to be seated. The crew felt that this was not the villagers’ first contact with Europeans and that perhaps whalers had visited, with unfavourable results. Philip Vigors described the men as naked except for cane hoops around their waists, shell, nut and human teeth necklaces, and shell armlets worn just above the elbow. They also wore cane bands on their ankles and on their upper arms, and their hair was cut short, although ‘some few had clotted wisps of a reddish colour and nearly 10 inches in length’.28 Charles Moore noted that the points and the inner cartilage of the men’s noses were perforated with a piece of bone inserted across the nose and pearl-shell nose plates attached, facing up the nose.29 Each house was walled with cane and had two rooms, one open at the sea end and the other closed with a door. The floors were also of cane, covered with mats. Their weapons were clubs, 1.5-metre bows, arrows and 2.7-metre spears. There were canoes and finely made fishing nets up to 55 metres long with shells for floats. One item from the visit is now in the British Museum: a pattern-strap armband in the style of south Malaita or Makira. It includes two blue glass beads that must have come from an earlier visiting ship. Since more ships had visited Makira, the beads were probably traded in from there.30

Settlement of Australia and New Zealand increased the British Pacific presence. After the passage of Queensland’s Polynesian Labourers Act in 1868, and Britain’s Pacific Islanders’ Protection Act in 1872, the British Navy began to traverse the Solomon Archipelago more regularly. An 1875 revision of the latter created the position of high commissioner with jurisdiction over all British subjects in the Western Pacific, and this was followed in 1877 by an Order-in-Council that established the Western Pacific High Commission (WPHC). Fiji became a Crown colony in 1874 and from 1877 until 1952 its governor was also the high commissioner.31

The first attempt to apply British law to Malaitans came in 1873–74, when the three Malaitans were captured by HMS Dido for the murder of crew members of the barque Plato (mentioned above), to be tried in the Supreme Court of New South Wales. One of them died on the

28 Vigors 1850, 209.
29 Moore 1850.
30 Burt 2015, 14.
31 Bach 1983; 1986. In 1952, the WPHC headquarters was moved to Honiara and the position of BSIP resident commissioner was incorporated into that of high commissioner.
Dido’s voyage, poisoned from eating stick tobacco, possibly a suicide. The legalities of the case relied on the murdered men being in the ship’s longboat, and therefore under British Admiralty jurisdiction, but because the boat was aground on Malaita, the men had to be released and sent home.32

Map 8: Sketch of Port Adam from the visit of HMS Havannah in 1850.
Source: Vigors 1850, 201; redrawn by Vincent Verheyen.

The earliest WPHC deputy commissioners were often captains of RNAS ships on patrol through the islands. Then the high commissioner appointed Hugh H. Romilly in 1883 as the first deputy commissioner specifically for Melanesia, with a brief to regulate the excesses of the Fiji and Queensland labour trades. Soon Malaita began to be visited regularly by RNAS ships and the WPHC began trying to regulate the labour trades.33

Malaitan Labour Migration, 1870–1914

Jack Renton’s years of residence in Lau bridged the period when change was beginning. The earliest known labour kidnapping in the Solomons occurred in 1857 when 14 men were taken to Réunion in the Indian

32 Scarr 1967a, 38, 305 n 5.
33 Romilly 1893; Moore 2003, 133–35.
When the first British labour trade schooners began sailing around the coasts of Malaita in the early 1870s, the people had had little contact with the world beyond the surrounding islands. Malaitans, like other Pacific Islanders, participated in the labour trade for a variety of reasons: while some were kidnapped in the early years, in the longer run their primary reason for going abroad was that circular labour migration was the only way for them to obtain the European trade goods beginning to circulate throughout the islands.

There are two distinct periods of movement of people to work outside Malaita. The first began in 1870–71 and continued for about 10 years: it often involved violence and coercion, but even in these years there are cases, such as the men who knew Renton, in which the circumstances are more complex and involved a degree of voluntarism. The second phase was circular migration, when the movement of labour became more regular, albeit still with great complexity: there were skirmishes, attacks and disputes along with regulation on both sides. Although there was still occasional kidnapping during the second phase, it involved bigmen and passage masters who aided and abetted the recruiters for their own gain, and the continuing circulation and return of labourers to their villages. The violent kidnapping days of the 1860s (in the New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands) and 1870s tainted the whole labour trade and left an impression, played on by detractors and early generations of historians, that the whole process was based on illegality.

What motivated participation from Malaitans and other Solomon Islanders, New Hebrideans and New Guineans is one of the least understood aspects of the labour trade. There are also issues about the legitimacy of the whole process. Is it correct to distinguish only between what was legal and illegal under British law? Today, Australian descendants of these labourers certainly do not see it this way and regard themselves as the descendants of kidnapped slaves. In earlier writing, I introduced the term ‘cultural kidnapping’ to describe the entire exploitative process. During over 40 years of research into this subject I have tried to distinguish between what was clearly kidnapping and what was voluntarism, although there is a large grey area in between, and I can discern aspects of slavery and trickery that linger in the British, French and German Pacific colonies, regardless of legal abolition. It was not de jure slavery, but in many ways...
aspects of the Pacific labour trade were de facto slavery.\textsuperscript{35} That said, along with other labour trade historians, I distinguish between contemporary emotional and political statements based on often dubious oral testimony with no basis in documentary evidence, and the overwhelming evidence of Islander agency in the process, gained from several types of sources and thoroughly researched since the 1960s.\textsuperscript{36}

As John Taylor notes in his study of north Pentecost, ‘The degree to which Melanesians chose to enlist does not undermine the reality of European exploitation, both on the beaches and passages of Island Melanesia and on the plantations themselves’.\textsuperscript{37} The explanation involves both physical and ‘cultural kidnapping’, with the latter term describing the process by which young Melanesians continued to be lured with cheap but desirable trade goods for many decades after physical kidnapping ended, along with their lack of understanding of the legal aspects of indenture agreements. The process proved irresistibly attractive to many youths and young men, particularly on Malaita. Even the missionaries became resigned to the labour traffic. The Anglican Melanesian Mission’s \textit{Southern Cross Log} for August 1897 provided an honest assessment:

Little boys listened eagerly to tales of the wonders to be seen in the white man’s land, and talk among themselves of the coming day when they shall make their venture, just as little white boys weave romances of the wondrous exploits that they are going to perform when they are grown up. As soon as, or even before they reach the legal age (for a Melanesian’s real age is a very uncertain quantity), they are off at the first opportunity, with a delicious spice of adventure to flavour the start, as they slip off in the recruiting boat, a company of choice spirits, and ‘snatch a fearful joy’ by eluding their parents, guardians and teachers. The parents are supposed to be compensated by a present of various articles to the value of £2 for each boy, but practically the whole of this, or the equivalent in native money, is forfeit as a fine to the local chief for allowing their boys to go.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35} Allain and Bales 2012. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Moore 1985, 47–48; 2015b; Moore and Mercer 1993. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Taylor, 2008, 55. \\
\textsuperscript{38} ‘The Labour Traffic in Florida’, \textit{SCL}, Aug 1897, 9.
\end{flushright}
Although the Melanesian Mission decried the labour trade, the process by which that mission collected youths as students, first in Auckland and later on Norfolk Island (discussed in Chapter 3), was strikingly similar. As Taylor suggests, Islanders’ perceptions of the labour trade and the ‘mission trade’ were ‘more ambivalently fraught, displaying a mixture of both division and complexity’.39

There is also an overlap between colonial labour venues. We know that some individuals worked in several colonies or returned on multiple occasions to one colony, or worked overseas and on several contracts within the protectorate. This means that our statistical emphasis can only be on the number of contracts, and we cannot equate those with the number of individuals who recruited. Beginning in 1871 and continuing until 1904, there are records of 9,298 Malaitan recruits bound by indenture contracts to work in Queensland, 14.7 per cent of the total circular migration of Pacific Islanders to that colony. Between 1870 and 1911, 5,149 contracts similarly bound Malaitans to work in Fiji, 19 per cent of the total number of indentured Islanders who went there, and 62.6 per cent of those who went there from the Solomons.40 A few hundred worked in Samoa and New Caledonia.41 The level of Malaitan participation in the internal labour trade is even larger and no other island in the Solomons or Vanuatu comes anywhere near this level of participation in either the external or internal labour trades. Overwhelmingly, they were young males aged between 16 and 35 years. Only 3 to 4 per cent of the Malaitan labourers in Queensland and Fiji were female.42 When plantations were established within the protectorate, Malaitan males continued to dominate the workforce. Their nearest rivals were from Guadalcanal (15.3 per cent).

39 Taylor 2008, 56.
40 I have excluded Bougainville and Buka from these figures.
41 Corris 1973b, 150; Munro 1990; Shineberg 1999; Meleisea 1980.
42 This is based on my reading of Price with Baker 1976, Siegel 1985 and Bedford 1973, which indicate that the Malaitan pattern is not duplicated in Vanuatu.
Table 1: Solomon Islander indentured labourers in Queensland and Fiji, 1870–1911.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>1870–87</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1888–1911</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1870–1911</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td></td>
<td>971</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>10.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choiseul</td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>85</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>2,467</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,613</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>2,935</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,402</td>
<td>21.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>182</td>
<td></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>329</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makira</td>
<td></td>
<td>509</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td></td>
<td>520</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>617</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,689</td>
<td>6.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaita</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>2,727</td>
<td>4,943</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,082</td>
<td>2,422</td>
<td>9,504</td>
<td></td>
<td>14,447</td>
<td>58.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rennell &amp; Bellona</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temotu</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td></td>
<td>130</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>164</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,642</td>
<td>4,420</td>
<td>10,062</td>
<td></td>
<td>11,912</td>
<td>2,881</td>
<td>14,803</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,865</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Price with Baker 1976; Siegel 1985; Corris, 1973b, 149. The Fiji statistics are not considered fully accurate until after 1876.
The labour trade was also shaped by the imposition of and changes to international borders. For instance, in the archipelagos off east New Guinea in the early 1880s, there was a resurgence of the earlier kidnapping phase by Queensland’s recruiters, followed by the proclamation of a British protectorate over southeast New Guinea in 1884. This ended the Queensland labour trade around east New Guinea and recruiters refocused on the Solomons and the New Hebrides. At the same time as the British annexation, Germany declared a Schutzgebiet (a mercantile territory) over northeast New Guinea. Between 1886 and 1899, this was extended into the northwest Solomon Islands: the Shortlands, Choiseul and Isabel (but not the New Georgia Group or Mono Island) were incorporated into German territory. This German move restricted British Queensland and Fiji recruiting ships to the New Georgia Group (from which very few recruits came since they had other ways to get trade goods) and the central Solomon Islands, with a concentration on Malaita and Guadalcanal. The Santa Cruz Islands and other outlying islands, including Rennell and Bellona, were not added to the BSIP until 1898 and 1899, as part of German and British negotiations over what became German and American Samoa, Tonga and other colonial territories. Although some small-scale recruiting continued across colonial borders, these territorial claims largely controlled the nationality of recruiters. Malaita became central to the British labour trade to Queensland and Fiji.43

The early decades of the labour trade—a moving labour frontier that preyed on an untapped labour reserve—involved considerable kidnapping and deception. Historians agree that during the first 10 years of recruiting at any Pacific island, the predominant methods were likely to involve illegality. A visit by the Nukulau recruiting out of Fiji in 1871 is symbolic of the very worst excesses in the early labour trade. The Nukulau kidnapped along the Malaitan east coast, at Isabel and in the northwest Solomons, before returning to Fiji with 89 captives. Sixty men were transhipped onto the Peri to go to a plantation on Taviniu Island, but a mutiny occurred, the crew was killed and, horribly, the vessel drifted 2,900 kilometres across the Pacific to Queensland, where it was found by HMS Basilisk in early 1872. Thirteen of the Malaitans survived by eating about 30 of the others. Eleven were returned to Malaita on HMS Dido in 1873.44

44 Burt 2002; Queenslander, 15 Nov 1873; Australasian Sketcher, 29 Nov 1873.
The British labour trade reached its lowest point in 1871, the year Anglican Bishop John Patteson was killed on Nukapu Atoll in the Reef Islands, seemingly in retaliation for labour trade kidnapping. The voyage of the Nukulau was not the only early voyage to involve illegality. Two voyages (1871–72) by the Carl out of Fiji became infamous for kidnappings at many islands and a massacre that took place on board. Also in 1871, the Helen under Captain H. McKenzie was recruiting for New Caledonia around Sa’a on Small Malaita. At least five Ulawa men swam ashore from the ship at Sa’a, having been taken against their wills. The Helen used the typical kidnapping method of luring canoes out to the ship and then smashing them and forcing their occupants on board. Some Malaitans

45 Kolshus and Hovdhaugen 2010.
who were kidnapped managed to return home within a few years, rich in European goods. Ben Burt gives an early 1870s example. Misuta and others from Kwakwaru in east Kwara’ae were kidnapped from a canoe while bonito fishing near Leli Atoll. Their families, presuming they were dead, sacrificed pigs to their ancestors, but then Misuta returned after a term as a labourer, stayed a short time and then reenlisted of his own free will.\textsuperscript{48} Other men kidnapped in the 1870s did not return to Malaita until 30 years later, such as Amasia and Lau’a, who came back with Fijian wives and culture and were involved in spreading Christianity.\textsuperscript{49} Despite the excesses in the early years, over the decades between 1870 and 1911 Malaitans became willing participants, just as they were when the internal protectorate labour trade began in the 1900s. The process became a rite of passage for young men and a regular source of trade goods for their families, and later provided a way to pay taxes imposed by the government. The motivations for enlistment and the characteristics of the work remained much the same from the late 1870s until the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{50} However, in my writing on the labour trade since the 1970s, I have felt uneasy about this simple division between legal and illegal recruiting, based largely on European definitions and classifications. This is why I introduced ‘cultural kidnapping’ as a term to communicate how the whole labour trade was exploitative for its duration, preying on Pacific Islanders who had different values systems from the Europeans who convinced them to agree to indenture contracts they could not understand. While it is true that many chose to participate, it was never an equal bargain and, as I noted earlier, their descendants in Australia today keenly press the argument that the process was akin to slavery.\textsuperscript{51} Taylor argues correctly that the motivation for men and women to leave their islands was not just to obtain material possessions such as iron, steel, guns and tobacco.

\begin{quote}
I would further suggest that in travelling to the destinations offered by the labor recruiters, people from north Pentecost and elsewhere equally sought intellectual and spiritual cargo, cultural capital, and a more intimate knowledge of the encroaching Western culture.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{48} Burt 1994, 87. \\
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 88–89. \\
\textsuperscript{50} Moore 1985, 23–46; Corris 1973b, 24–44. \\
\textsuperscript{51} Moore 2015b. \\
\textsuperscript{52} Taylor 2008, 56.
\end{flushright}
The same applies to Malaita and other islands. Having mixed with people from other island groups on plantations and farms, and after interactions with Indigenous Australians, Malaitans brought home new words, languages, plants, material culture, social habits, dances, songs, spiritual dimensions, and partners. Malaitans also carried back various Fijian practices, for instance kava drinking (which continued until the 1930s in west Kwara’ae), a style of outrigger canoe, and new food plants and magics. Ben Burt mentions that the Kwara’ae also brought back sweet potatoes, ‘red tapioca’, ‘short bananas’ and ‘big red chickens’, expanding their diet. David Akin, with experience in neighbouring Kwaio, mentions new varieties of taro and yams, bananas, sugarcane and sweet potatoes, plus pineapples and papaya and ornamental plants and trees, all introduced through the labour trade.53

As well, inadvertently, the indenture process both suited established gender and age roles in Malaitan society, and stretched existing roles. The recruiters wanted strong young males. Women were not generally available to be recruited, and the small numbers who left the island usually did so as partners of men. Because of Malaitan beliefs related to pollution during menstruation and birth, it was always problematic to have women cooped up with men for months on small, crowded recruiting ships, or later on the plantations and farms.

Malaitans did not practise male initiation of the sort that occurred in many Near Oceanic societies, and this allowed unmarried teenage and young adult men to travel more freely. Not yet fully functional members of their communities, they were adventurous and often keen to escape the rigidity of village life. They could advance themselves by spending several years in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa, New Caledonia or, starting in the 1900s, on plantations within the Solomons; returning with a box of foreign trade goods, they could distribute them for social credit within their communities. The circular nature of the labour trade tapped into existing patterns of residential mobility and customary mechanisms of compensatory religious sacrifices to ancestors. This made it possible for Malaitans to travel, yet remain safely within their cosmologies and religions. Mortality rates were high, particularly in the first six to 12 months of new contracts in the external labour trade, when recruits were exposed

53  Burt 1994, 100, 112, 147; Akin 2013a, 17.
to potent new diseases. But for them the benefits outweighed the risks. Malaitans used the labour trade as their way to gain the coveted products of European technology, and thereby transformed Malaitan society.

Because of Near Oceanic cultural characteristics, the labour trade did not lead to capital accumulation, although it did enhance agricultural development. Recruits converted most of their cash into overpriced manufactured goods, since there was no need for cash until head taxes were introduced in the Solomons in the early 1920s. These European goods—tobacco, iron and steel items, glass, cloth, guns and so forth—were consumables that boosted individual and collective prestige, but (except for steel axes) did not last long. Very few of these early trade items have survived in the islands: there are a few antique axe heads and Snider rifles still extant, as well as some porcelain armbands and glass beads of European and Asian manufacture. Examples of these still exist in shrine areas and as heirlooms on Malaita, and in museums.

With steel tools, male tasks such as garden-clearing and boat- and house-building were accomplished more quickly, releasing men for other tasks. The new tools made forest clearing for gardens up to four times faster. If we can extrapolate from Salisbury’s research on New Britain in the 1950s, and Townsend’s research in the Sepik and Godelier’s work with the Baruya, both in the 1960s, the introduction of metal tools enabled an increase in the size of gardens. Men’s time was freed up, which was then invested in warfare, ritual and exchange, while women’s garden and pig-rearing work increased. Steel axes also enabled men to work alone in forest clearing, as opposed to the team work necessary for clearing using stone axes and fire. Larger gardens meant more pigs could be fed, which presumably increased the size of mortuary and other feasts. The new technology revolutionised shell wealth manufacture, which may have inflated brideprices. Steel tools increased gender inequality and, along with the firearms introduced at the same time, caused other large-scale changes.

54 Shlomowitz 1987; 1990a; 1990b.
55 Gesner 1991; Beck 2009. Peter Sheppard from the University of Auckland has noted that ceramic armbands are occasionally found in shrine areas in the Western Solomons. Since there was little participation in labour migration from this area, these armbands would have been introduced by traders and whalers. Oceanic Anthropology Discussion Group (www.asao.org/asao-listserv.html, accessed 11 Oct 2007).
56 Salisbury 1962a, 110, 220; 1962b; Townsend 1969; Godelier 1986. I have benefited from discussions with David Akin on this topic.
Figure 2.4: Recruiting at Maanakwai in north Malaita.
The sketch by William Wawn, a labour trade captain, shows a typical Malaitan recruiting scene. Two boats were always used, one staying off shore to guard the boat on shore.

Figure 2.5: Malaita men in the 1920s at the age typical of labour recruits.
Source: Coombe 1911, 268.
Plantation Culture: Malaitans and Foreigners

In the 1980s, Roger Keesing used the term ‘plantation culture’ to describe the elaborate social codes evolved between all groups on the ships and on the plantations and farms.57 Others have used the term ‘contact culture’ with a similar meaning.58 It may well be that the *wantok* (‘one talk’, or sharing a language) concept began in Queensland and Fiji where men from one language area, or neighbouring areas on one island, or from one island, came to regard each other as friends, even when they were not close kin. The same applied to labourers working within the protectorate in the twentieth century. The term may also come from sharing a single voyage. Alan Lindley, who lived in Solomon Islands between 1952 and 1969, remembers old men saying ‘you me two fella one scoon’, meaning that they both travelled on the same schooner to the plantations, an explanation of brotherhood beyond kinship.59

In Queensland, Malaitans worked initially in the sugarcane, pastoral and maritime industries, and could be found anywhere from cattle stations in the Gulf of Carpentaria to the pearl and *bêche-de-mer* industries of Torres Strait, and in the sugar industry along the Queensland coast and into northern New South Wales.60 The sugar industry absorbed the vast majority, but even there the nature of their employment altered over time. From the late 1870s, government regulations began to restrict the Islander labourers to unskilled work in tropical agriculture, and 1892 legislation excluded them from work in sugar mills, leaving them as field labourers. Around the same time, the industry also began to be transformed from an initial plantation base (large farms with their own mills) to a central milling system where associations of growers owned their own mills (with the help of government finance). In the 1890s and 1900s, Malaitans in Queensland were more likely to be working in small groups for farmers than within large labour forces on plantations. And there were always anomalies; photographs exist of teenagers working as house servants, proof that restrictions to field labour did not always apply.61

57  Keesing 1986b.
58  Schwartz 1962.
59  Alan Lindley, Adelaide, notes provided to the author, 2013.
60  Census of Queensland, 1891, *QVP* 1892, 3, 1, 391; 1901, 2, 956.
61  Moore 2008b.
Early Malaitan labourers in Fiji worked on cotton plantations, although most their experience was of sugarcane plantations and later (1890s onwards) on coconut plantations. The small numbers who made their way to Samoa worked on copra plantations, and the few in New Caledonia were involved in different kinds of unskilled labour—working on cattle stations, coffee and sugarcane plantations, and mixed farms, as boats’ crews and in other types of transport.62

Malaitans did not work overseas only with other Solomon Islanders; in all of these colonies they worked in mixed groups that included other Pacific Islanders and Asians. In comparison with the next largest Pacific groups,63 Malaitans were usually of outstanding importance.64 They became still more prominent when recruiting of New Hebrideans began to decrease in the early 1890s; by 1894, Solomon Islanders permanently outnumbered the others and Malaitans were always at least half of them.65 In Fiji, Solomon Islanders made up some 30 per cent (8,228) of the Islander workforce before 1911. New Hebrideans were the majority (14,198), along with a few thousand from the eastern New Guinea archipelagos and the Gilbert and Ellice islands, but the much larger group came from Asia, overwhelmingly from India (60,965).66 In comparison with the next largest Pacific Islands groups,67 the 5,149 Malaitan contract labourers were extremely dominant, even more so than in Queensland.68 In the German colony of Samoa, the numbers are more difficult to ascertain. The German Solomon Islands extended south to Isabel Island until the end of the nineteenth century, and Germans were still able to recruit within the British Solomon Islands until 1914. However, most of Samoa’s workforce came from the archipelagos off New Guinea, and Malaitans remained a small minority. The New Caledonia statistics and dates are also not firm, but a few hundred Malaitans and other Solomon Islanders worked alongside a few hundred Indians, 33,000 Javanese and around 10,000 to 13,000 labourers from the New Hebrides.69

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62 Corris 1973b; Meleisea 1980; Shineberg 1999.
63 Epi (5,084), Tana (4,241), Guadalcanal (4,188) and Ambrim (3,464).
64 Moore 1985, 6. These figures are deceptive as they count indenture contracts not individuals. There were 62,000 contracts, but probably only about 50,000 individuals since many enlisted more than once.
65 Ibid., 328.
66 Lal 1983.
67 Santo (1,820), Malakula (1,699), Tana (1,176), Guadalcanal (1,214), and Isabel (1,211).
68 Siegel 1985, 48–49.
69 Munro 1990.
Their British, French and German employers were imbued with European racial stereotypes common in the second half of the nineteenth century; these mixed ideas about a ‘Great Chain of Being’ with newer Darwinian concepts. Europeans placed themselves on the top of the scale, with some variations in the rankings of other races. Melanesians were placed near the bottom, just above Indigenous Australians, with local variations, such as in Fiji, where the indigenous people were judged superior to New Guineans, Solomon Islanders and New Hebrideans. A generation before the Pacific labour trade began, Britain had accepted slavery as normal (it was outlawed in the 1830s) and slavery had only been abolished in the United States a few years before the first Solomon Islanders were taken from their islands to work on plantations. Slavery continued to be legal in some other European jurisdictions until late in the nineteenth century. Thinking resembling the racial justification for slavery was used to justify entrapment of Pacific Islanders, and even more liberal Europeans regarded the Islanders as ‘niggers’ and ‘savages’ who could be exploited brutally.

How much Malaitans understood the contempt with which they were viewed is difficult to discern. Three things are clear. First, Europeans were almost uniformly frightened of what they regarded as a Malaitan propensity for violence, whether against recruiters working Malaita or on the plantations and farms in the colonies and the protectorate. As Ben Burt notes, ‘Malaitan military strength was undiminished and indeed enhanced by the labour trade …’. Second, Malaitans seldom acknowledged the supposed superiority of Europeans or other racial and ethnic groups of labourers. In fact, often they seem to have felt superior themselves, and failed to absorb the message that they should know their lowly place in the European race-class hierarchy. In the Introduction, I suggested that they in fact played on the fear that others had of their inclination toward violence. The third point is that before the Second World War, Malaitan men had already worked with men (and some women) of many ethnicities and races for over 70 years. Much is made of the effect of Solomon Islanders meeting Black Americans during the 1940s, and although this was clearly influential in shaping thinking that led to Maasina Rule, it was not a totally new phenomenon.

70 Quotation from Burt 1994, 103; see also Moore 1993.
71 Price with Baker 1976; Munro 1990.
72 Akin 2013a, 139–40. The Black Americans were different in that they appeared not to suffer the indignities of shared poverty that would have been the case with nineteenth-century contacts. Many Black Americans were comparatively well-educated and politically savvy, and able to articulate hopes for a future free of oppression.
The Recruiting Pattern

Malaita dominated the labour trade in the 1890s and 1900s, with the majority of Queensland and Fiji voyages visiting the island. The graphs below are from the Queensland labour trade; no similar detailed research findings exist for the Fijian labour trade, although the pattern would have been similar. My research from the 1970s suggests that the largest number of labourers travelling to Queensland (and presumably also Fiji) came from east Small Malaita (Walade and Sa’a), east Kwaio and Kwara’ae, Lau and Langalanga lagoons and Suu’aba Bay in To’aba’ita in the far north.73

Ships often spent between one and several weeks around Malaita. Most were dependent on sails, which shaped some of the contact patterns. Bays and passages that were difficult to access were often overlooked, or could only be entered by the ships’ small boats. Captains and recruiters also had favourite areas, where they were friendly with a local passage master, or had recruited large numbers in the past, or where they knew there were large populations.

Recruiting vessels circled the island, loitering at favourite passages where passage masters mustered the men and received substantial rewards. Even though labour enlistment became something of a rite of passage for young men, recruiting was dangerous, with the chance of attack and ambush always present, even in the 1900s and 1910s. When recruiting vessels arrived they usually set off a charge of dynamite to let inland people know that recruiting was occurring. The hulls of the Queensland vessels were painted white with a black streak at least 15 centimetres wide on both sides just below the covering-board and, while recruiting, they had a 46-centimetre black ball hauled up the main mast as a clear signal to those watching from shore. The ships’ whaleboats were painted red and worked in pairs, one going ashore and the other covering from several metres out, ready to shoot if necessary. The Fiji vessels used different colours. Bargaining took place on the shore. ‘New chums’—those who had never before left their islands—were hired at the base rate: £6 for Queensland and £3 for Fiji. There was also always a beach bonus as a present for the recruits’ relatives on shore, an equivalent to a customary exchange gift. Experienced recruits were able to bargain for a higher annual wage and in later years cannier labour recruits asked that their beach bonuses be given

73 This is illustrated by Map 7 in Moore 1985.
to themselves in cash for their own use. This could cause problems since their families often felt that no exchange bargain had been struck and they sometimes extracted revenge on the next labour trade ship that called in.\textsuperscript{74}

Graph 1: Migration of Pacific Islanders to Queensland, 1863–1905, showing total migration, and numbers from Solomon Islands and from Malaita Island. The black section indicates Malaitan recruiting.


Graph 2: Migration of Pacific Islanders to Queensland, 1863–1904, showing ships’ voyages that visited Malaita Island.

Source: Moore 1981a, 66.

\textsuperscript{74} Shineberg 1999, 18.
Labour trade ships were usually two- and three-masted schooners, brigs and barquentines ranging from 100 to 300 tons. Both of these ships visited Malaita many times. One of the voyages in Map 9 is by the *Helena* in 1893.

Source: State Library of Queensland, neg. 2245.

Maps 9 and 10, based on eight Queensland voyages between 1881 and 1900, are typical of many dozens of voyages from that colony and from Fiji. Some ships sailed up just one coast and stopped at a couple of passages. Others spent several weeks working around the island, calling at some passages more than once.
Map 9: Typical recruiting voyages around Malaita, 1881–95.
Source: Moore 1981a, 155.
Map 10: Typical recruiting voyages around Malaita, 1897–1900.
Source: Moore 1981a, 156.
The captains and recruiters knew the local passage masters, gave them presents and arranged for inland recruits to come down to the coast at a prearranged time. There was a high level of collaboration. The passage masters are too often left out of the equation; certainly the bulk of the recruiting could not have been accomplished without their cooperation.

Several points need to be stressed at this stage with bearing on my argument that what made Malaita different was primarily its people’s large-scale participation in the labour trade. First, the overseas plantation experience was very cosmopolitan. Malaitans learnt to work with other Pacific Islanders, Asians and Europeans. While most preferred to spend their after-work time with their own wantoks or at least other Solomon Islanders from surrounding islands, Malaitans were exposed to many different cultures and ethnicities: British, French, German, Indian, Singhalese (Sri Lankan), Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, New Hebridean, Micronesian, Polynesian, Fijian, Samoan, New Caledonian and Indigenous Australians. Second, the experience of young Malaitan males as labourers working outside of their island changed their place within power structures when they returned home. Although returning labourers were obligated to distribute their new wealth for the communal good, they also achieved a more important position in society than their brothers who stayed at home. A third important element, the introduction of new diseases brought home by returning labourers, will be discussed later.
Away from home, these men were freer than they had ever been before, even though they were indentured labourers bound by fairly draconian legislation, both the Masters & Servants Acts—which were applied also to other labourers, including Europeans and Asians—and legislation designed specifically to govern the working lives of the Islanders. Most of them settled down fairly quickly once they had adjusted to the new experiences of regimented work within specific time frames, the strangeness of industrial and agricultural machinery and implements, new animals and assertive overseers, and urban life and a colder climate. They operated socially in the new environment in ways that European colonists seldom understood. Most Europeans cared little for the Islanders so long as they worked hard and stayed out of trouble. Although Islanders socialised and preferred to live in language and island groups, and obeyed local community leaders, they were largely free of customary authority. Those who stayed for longer periods became part of the lower end of the Queensland or Fijian working classes.  

They all learnt quickly to speak Queensland Pijin English or the Pijin English used in Fiji (along with Pijin Fijian) and Samoa. Many of the longer-term overseas residents also spoke good English. A few spoke some Hindi, French, German

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76 Siegel 1982.
or Samoan. Some labourers had even picked up Pijin languages on Malaita before they departed. Many also became literate through overseas Christian ‘Bible schools’, although some simply memorised hymns and Bible passages, which they could recite to perfection. Pijin English and Fijian was so widely spoken on the Malaitan coast in 1896 that the first resident commissioner, Charles Woodford, who spoke Fijian, found little problem communicating when visiting since he could always find ex-labourers to communicate with or act as interpreters.

Trade Goods on Malaita

In later chapters I will return to the topic of indentured labour during the protectorate years. Although Malaita was several decades behind some islands in getting access to European goods, we need to consider the consequences of huge quantities of trade goods inundating the island before World War II. There are records of in excess of 51,000 Malaitan indentured labour contracts between 1870 and 1942. Any calculation of wages earned and repatriated home must reckon the number of recruits, the proportion who reengaged, the numbers of men and women (except for first contracts, women earned less), the level of mortality and the extent that wages were spent outside of Malaita. Nevertheless, the value of goods earned by Malaitans under indenture from 1870 through 1942 must have exceeded one million pounds sterling, most of it earned after the 1880s. The modern equivalent is difficult to calculate, but, conservatively, it would have been at least AU$200 million in 2015 values, and probably much more.

Just over 9,000 Malaitans entered contracts to travel to Queensland as indentured labourers from 1871–1904. The majority were first-indenture labourers paid £6 per year on standard three-year contracts, for both males and females. Labourers who reenlisted in the islands had already served one or more contracts in Queensland, Fiji, Samoa or New Caledonia, and received from £6 to £12 per year. The information on beach bonuses is

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78 Woodford 1896, 20 June, 17; Siegel 1982, 17.
79 www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php (accessed 8 Jan 2015). I have used 1900 and 2015 as my two comparative years. Based on the increase in the value of £1, one can use real price (£94.41), labour value (£364.00) or income value (£549.54). If we convert this to dollars then the amounts double. If we take the lowest option (real price) the amount is £94 million ($188 million).
fragmentary, but indicates that in early decades the standard rate varied between 10 shillings and about £2, usually paid in goods.\textsuperscript{80} Queensland’s time-expired labourers—those who were reindentured in the colony—received between £16 and £25 per year (1884–1901), depending on their skills and the length of the contract. As noted, time-expired females were always paid less, but they too received more pay commensurate to experience. These time-expired labourers dominated Queensland’s Islander workforce during the final decades of the century. The last category was an elite but ever-diminishing group, generally called ‘ticket-holders’—835 Islanders (including some Malaitans) already in the colony in September 1879. From 1884 on, this group were exempted from all subsequent restrictions, and in effect they became colonists. Some of them owned small farms and boarding houses.\textsuperscript{81}

Payment was made annually (1863–76) and then biannually (1876–1907). One of the myths of the contemporary Australian South Sea Islander community is that their ancestors were never paid (and hence slaves). Contrary to this, at Mackay, the main sugar-producing district, the Islanders were using bank accounts as early as 1875 (because officials banked part of their earnings), and 10 years later when the government began compiling annual banking statistics, 61 Islanders had together deposited £251. Between 1888 and 1904, the government published a full record of the total number of accounts and their credit and debit transactions. Mackay had 1,271 individual Islander account holders in 1892. The total amount deposited fluctuated, with £5,985 the highest level in 1893. Transactions also varied, but during an average year £2,900 was deposited and a similar sum withdrawn. In 1892, Islanders in Queensland had £18,641 in the government savings bank. Individual deposits were usually small, most no more than £5 or £6, although there is evidence from Maryborough of Islanders with up to £50 in their accounts.\textsuperscript{82} There is no doubt, then, that they were paid, though there clearly could have been some trickery—we know trade goods were often sold at inflated prices, Islanders did not always understand the value of the various coins, preferring large coins to small ones, and to some of them banking would have seemed a mysterious process.

\textsuperscript{80} Shlomowitz 1979a, 20 n 25, 73; 1981; Moore 1985, 72–74.
\textsuperscript{81} Shlomowitz 1979a, 85, 90–94; 1982.
The minimum amount to pay 9,187 three-year Malaitan first-indenture contracts and a beach bonus of £1 each is £174,553. There was a high death rate in Queensland: 24 per cent of all contracts and approximately 30 per cent of individuals. After 1885, only 15.6 per cent of the wages of deceased Islanders were returned as trade goods to relatives; between 1871 and 1884, the return rate was even lower. Given that labourers reengaging in the islands and Queensland were better paid, earning £10 to £20 a year, the total amount paid to Malaitans in Queensland before 1908 is likely to have been around £300,000, and if we deduct one-third (for deaths) it is still £200,000. Not all of this made its way back to Malaita, but a large amount did.83

The Fiji labour trade with Malaita operated between 1870 and 1914 with over 5,000 indenture contracts.84 The legislative framework that governed the trade was established in two ordinances in 1877 and 1888, and the evidence from before 1877 suggests that the earlier pattern was similar. Labourers could be engaged on up to five-year contacts, although most were for three years. They were mainly adults (defined as over 14 years of age) and were paid a minimum of £3 per year, although youths as young as 10 (from 1877) or 12 (from 1888) or 16 (from 1908) were legally able to be recruited at £1 per year. Until 1891, experienced male recruits continued to receive £3 per annum, but the average wage increased. It was between £4 and £6 in the mid-1880s, £6 per year 1885–1903 and £8 per year from then until the end of the labour trade in 1914. The £3 legal minimum was observed until 1904, but thereafter most new recruits received £6 per year, in keeping with the competitive market. Most female recruits received £3 per year throughout the period, but after 1883 experienced female labourers reenlisting we paid between £4 and £6 per year. Time-expired labourers were paid around £10 per year.85 Beach bonuses would have been similar to those of Queensland recruits—around £1 to £2, paid to relatives, or to the recruits themselves if they insisted. If we take the lower £3 figure as the base for our calculations (until 1885, about half of the total), along with the usual beach bonus, up until 1885 Malaitans in Fiji were paid around £27,000. Workers after 1885 often earned more—around £5 a year plus a beach bonus—probably well in excess of £40,000 or £50,000. Given wage variations and deaths while away, the total would have been no less than £50,000 or £60,000.

83 Moore 2015a.
84 Siegel 1985.
85 Shlomowitz 1986.
Figure 2.9: At Mackay, Hugh Hossack owned one of the larger ‘Kanaka stores’, shops that catered predominantly to Islanders. They bought their trade boxes and their contents there, and were allowed to store their possessions there. The photograph shows how central Islanders were to Hossack’s trade, and his relationship with them.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Within the Solomons between 1913 and 1940, Malaitans undertook 36,596 indenture contracts (see Table 7, Chapter 10). Workers could contract for periods of between one month and two years, and in 1908 and 1909 three-year contracts were permitted. Ralph Shlomowitz and Richard Bedford found that data on the distribution of the lengths of contracts was available only for 1913, 1914 and 1919, but in these years
there was a clear preference for two-year contracts, a pattern that is also indicated by more fragmentary and anecdotal evidence. Initially (up to 1922), labourers were paid £6 per year and a beach bonus of several pounds, paid in tobacco, axes, knives and cloth, not cash. The bonus varied between £1 and £12 and Malaitans on two-year contracts received the highest bonus: £1 to £3 (1909–13); £3 to £5 (1915–16); and £8 to £12 (1921–23). In 1922 the Advisory Council recommended that the bonus be limited to £7. The bonus system was abandoned altogether in 1923 when the wage was increased to £12 per year. In 1935, during the Great Depression, the minimum labourer’s wage was halved from £1 to 10 shillings a month, with a decrease in the beach bonus from £6 to £3. Between 1915 and 1919, 7 per cent of the labourers reengaged, and between 1935 and 1940 17 per cent did so.\(^86\) Mortality was high, probably in excess of 10 to 15 per cent, and we have no clear idea of how often contracts of deceased labourers were paid out. A conservative estimate would suggest that Malaitan labourers should have been paid in excess of £700,000 between 1913 and 1940, mainly in the form of manufactured goods, although once taxation was introduced in the early 1920s (5/-, later reduced to 1/- per adult male) wages were paid partly in cash. Once more, this translates into huge quantities of manufactured items (including enormous amounts of stick tobacco) and cash reaching Malaita. The extent of the beach bonus was considerable, as was the amount of goods paid to passage masters around Malaita.

Mortality robbed thousands of Malaitans of a chance to return home from Queensland and Fiji. My calculations suggest that about 2,170 Malaitans died in Queensland during the labour trade.\(^87\) Death rates on Fiji plantations were also high—23 per cent—an indication that around 1,840 Malaitans may have died there. Death rates on protectorate plantations were lower, but still high.\(^88\) Others deliberately chose not to return, or lost contact with their families and were presumed dead. Even so, they may still have remitted goods home with other Malaitans, or relatives may have received government recompense through the government agents. Based on Queensland calculations, less than 16 per cent of the wages of deceased Islanders were returned to their next-of-kin.\(^89\)

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86 Planters’ Gazette, 8 Dec 1922, 1; Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988, 67.
89 Moore 2015a.
Even accepting that many of the trade goods were overpriced and of poor quality, this substantial influx of foreign manufactured items into Malaita (and other islands) before the Second World War has never been properly considered. The beach bonus paid to the relatives was the initial recompense. In one 1880s example, this consisted of ‘400 sticks of trade tobacco (twenty-six to the pound), three axes, two dozen assorted fishhooks, a fishing line, four knives, a belt, a sheath knife, a pair of scissors, a heap of clay pipes, and a dozen boxes of matches, the whole estimated in value at between 30s, and £2’.90 Interpreters received the same types of items in larger quantities. The passage masters amassed the most foreign items and lived in semi-European style. Kwaisulia of Lau Lagoon collected a vast array of European goods at his ‘Adagege home. In 1892, Sam, a bigman at Maanakwai and at ‘Aioo Island off of east Kwaio, had a copy of a whaleboat—actually a clinker-built boat painted red, with sail and oars—given to him by the captain of the _Lochiel_. He worked for several ships as interpreter: on the _Helena_ in 1892; and on the _Para_ in 1894 between Port Adam and Fokanakafo, for which he was paid 300 pounds (136 kilograms) of tobacco and another boat. James Goodrich, commander of HMS _Royalist_, described him as having ‘been a long time in Queensland, and talks English fairly well’, and as ‘the most intelligent Solomon Island native I have met’.91

Returning labourers brought the most foreign possessions to Malaita. Some of these were clothes that soon perished or were discarded. Malaitans arrived back resplendent in the new clothes, such as this group at Waisisi, west ‘Are’ are in 1887:

I had taken a boatload of natives to a beach with their boxes and other personal belongings. They had dressed themselves in all their finery for the occasion of their homecoming, wearing coloured shirts and ties, trousers and coats, and hats too if they had them. None of the head-gear fitted, and being merely perched on the tops of their fuzzy mops of hair, they were no protection whatever from the sun.92

When the _Helena_ returned labourers from Queensland in 1892, the 64 returnees had spent approximately £300 to fill their trade boxes, each weighing around 100 kilograms.

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90 Melvin 1977, 33–34.
92 Cromar 1935, 239.
The goods were not particularly remarkable for their variety. In value, and sometimes in bulk, tobacco was the most important item. There were cases of the ‘weed’ weighing over thirty pounds, for which £5 sterling each was said to have been paid. Parcels of pipes, from the common clay to the stylish briars, and a gross or two of matches were natural corollaries. Assortments of axes, hatchets, cutlery, calico, and coloured hand-kerchiefs were common to all. Saucepans and billycans were also in evidence. Amongst the uncommon articles were musical boxes, a bundle of score music, bathing pants, gingham, pomatum [perfumed ointment used to groom the hair], fancy soap, and some shells being taken back to where they had been gathered.93

Guns and ammunition were the most sought-after items. After 1884, importing firearms from Queensland and Fiji was outlawed, limiting but not stopping the arms trade. False bottoms were added to trade boxes and dynamite and cartridges were often found wrapped inside innocent items.94 Control tightened after 1898 when Resident Commissioner Woodford insisted that all recruiting ships call at Tulagi, pay an annual £100 licence fee, complete a medical check on all passengers and crew and allow a search for contraband.95 Guns still reached Malaita nonetheless, such as a Winchester repeater rifle smuggled on the *Sydney Belle* in 1906.96 It was also still possible to get firearms locally through traders in the Solomons, such as Oscar Svensen at Marau Sound, Guadalcanal, and from French and German labour traders.97

Tens of thousands of firearms reached Malaita in all, although their numbers must have become more limited after the mid-1880s and even more in the early twentieth century. In the 1920s, the district officer attempted a census of firearms on Malaita: 1,070 were identified from one district in the north, an indication perhaps of around 10,000 guns

93 Melvin 1977, 7, see also 7–9. The reference to the shells is tantalising, but nothing further is known.
94 Graves 1983 provides the best summary of the nature of the trade goods brought back from Queensland.
95 Smith 1898, diary from the *Sybil II*, 7 Feb.
96 QSA POL/J29, In-Letter 01574 of 1906, Brisbane Commander of Police to Inspector-General of Police, Sydney; BC, 2 Jan 1906.
97 Bennett 1981a, 174–76; QSA GOV/A33, IG to US, CSD, 8 Sept 1898. A good example of weapons seized is from the *Sybil II* in 1897, before the ship left Queensland: 14 Snider rifles, 2 revolvers, 370 cartridges, 1 bayonet, and 2 pounds of gunpowder. A less thorough search would have meant these ended up in the islands. For instance, *Sydney Belle* was searched twice before it left Queensland, but Woodford still found gunpowder and cartridges on board when the ship reached Tulagi. QSA POL/J29, 2719 of 1897; GOV/A39, GA A.H.K. Ussher to IA, 29 Oct 1903.
on the island at the time. In the Western Solomons, trade goods, particularly guns and axes, exacerbated internecine fighting and led to potent, marauding indigenous head-hunters and slavers who roamed the nearby islands. The effect of the influx of foreign goods on Malaita was internal, not external as it was with the people from the northwest. The influx of European material items quickly changed Malaita. Guns became necessary extensions of male weaponry and prestige. Missionary Walter Ivens described the consequence of the spread of firearms on Malaita as a ‘thirty years’ war’ that decimated the island.

The possession of rifles set up a state of war and lawlessness among a community that hitherto had been more or less at peace, and whereas homicide had been confined before mainly to the killing of those accused of black magic or of adultery, or had followed the infraction of some tabu or the wounding of some man’s pride, men now killed either for the sake of killing or in order to get for themselves some desirable object owned by another. Big Mala, through the introduction of firearms, became a place of high-handed dealing by sets of bravoes, a place where fighting-parties made life insupportable to the ordinary peaceably disposed individual. It was the ambition of every young Mala man to own a rifle, and there were very few among them whose ambition in this respect was not gratified.

Not all of the returnees brought back large quantities of goods. Woodford reported in 1886 on one man from west Malaita who returned from Fiji aboard the Christine. He had worked there for four years, the first three at £6 a year and the final year at £12. Earlier he had worked in Queensland. He had a trade box, but its main contents was a small cash box containing £40 in gold sovereigns. He had brought back sugar, and purchased tea and tobacco from the ship’s captain. The man was planning to work in Samoa after a short stay. In his negotiation over the tobacco he complained at the price, and when told it was cheaper than he could buy it in Suva, he replied ‘yes, but you pay no duty’, showing an understanding of European finances.

While the external labour trade progressed, more permanent traders settled in the Solomons, at Tulagi, Gizo, New Georgia’s lagoons, Savo, Uki, Makira, Santa Ana and Guadalcanal, but not Malaita. As Judith Bennett observes, their presence was important, not only for providing

98 Ivens 1930, 43.
99 Ibid., 45.
100 Ibid., 43–44.
101 Woodford 1886.
a regular supply of foreign goods but also in demonstrating the usefulness of the items.\textsuperscript{102} From the 1890s onward, the supplies gained via the labour trade were supplemented in west `Are`are and Langalanga by trade goods received from European traders based at Marau Sound.\textsuperscript{103} As early as the 1900s, Rev. Hopkins, familiar with north Malaita, wrote that the standard of manufacture of day-to-day artefacts was becoming cruder. Bows and arrows, spears and clubs, bowls for food, nets, combs, shell breast plates, armlets and nose ornaments had all become less well constructed and harder to obtain.

The more they get the use of tools from outside, the less skilful gets their own work. Guns of all sorts replace the old weapons, and kettles, saucepans, etc., exempt them from making the old native bowls. What they do make is made anyhow, and not with the old patience and toil.\textsuperscript{104}

The new items, particularly steel tools and rifles, also entered established customary networks; they were hired out in exchange for shell currency, and could even acquire a sacred status.\textsuperscript{105}

**Kwaisulia and His Family**

The labour trade created a new group of important Solomon Islanders: the passage masters and interpreters. There were many on Malaita: Bobi Ledi from Rakwane, at Fokanakafo, east Fataleka; Peter Waimaku and Tom Miuldo at `Ataa in the south of Lau Lagoon; Fo`alanga and his son Peter Sua from Walade on Small Malaita; and Kwaisulia from `Adagege in Lau Lagoon.\textsuperscript{106} The key points of contact for all foreigners, they were the translators and negotiators, the middle-men who enabled the labour trade to operate reasonably safely. Their support could aid or negate missionary endeavours, and the protectorate government also tapped into their powers. They achieved a status different from the \textit{aofia}, \textit{fataabu} and \textit{ramo} triumvirate, although they drew on elements from the old leadership system and were able to negotiate with the new.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Bennett 1987, 45–102.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Bennett 1981a.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Hopkins, 'Mala and Its People', \textit{SCL}, June 1908, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Akin 1999a, 250 n 12.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Moore 1985, 45, 52–53, 90–93.
\end{itemize}
‘Adagege islet is next to Sulufou. It had been built by refugees from further south and taken over by Sulufou as a women’s birthing island, then subsequently ritually cleansed and used for a village. Kwaisulia’s father was from an inland descent group on the mainland opposite the lagoon and had married into a Sulufou chiefly family, providing him with good connections. Born in the 1850s on ‘Adagege, Kwaisulia had been a friend of Jack Renton, the Scottish castaway who lived on Sulufou from 1868 to 1875 under the care of chief Kabbou. After his rescue from Malaita, Renton visited Lau again as an interpreter and recruiter in 1875, on the brigantine Bobtail Nag, which led Kwaisulia and others to enlist for Queensland. He stayed in Queensland for six years and returned home fluent in Pijin English. There is no clear evidence on where he worked: we know he visited Brisbane and was mightily impressed, and he may have worked around Rockhampton, a prosperous, mainly pastoral district. Kwaisulia must have worked on one three-year contract at £6 per year, with the addition of board and lodgings, minimal health care and a passage home. He would then have negotiated a new, more lucrative contract, probably for another three years.

After his return home in 1881, Kwaisulia soon became the major Lau passage master, and consequently, between the 1880s and his death in 1909, the most powerful bigman in north Malaita. He had the language skills and enough savvy of European ways to negotiate with the recruiters. Described as about 177 centimetres high, and a strong, dark-skinned man with a powerful build, his manner evinced authority and his words held sway. He was never a Christian and opposed Peter Abu’ofa’s plans to begin QKM missionary work in Lau in 1894 (see Chapter 5). He was initially antagonistic to the Melanesian Mission’s encroachment on his power base in the lagoon when they wanted to establish a base at ‘Ataa in 1898. However, he welcomed the presence of that mission’s Rev. Arthur Hopkins, sent to live at Ngorefou in the lagoon in 1902 (see Chapter 4). Presumably he felt that the prestige of having his own white man outweighed the disadvantages.

Kwaisulia managed to build up his importance to a degree that Europeans sought him out before dealing with anyone else from Lau, or indeed in most of north Malaita. He managed to amass great wealth from the labour trade and usurped the legitimate chiefly line of Sulufou. Once Kabbou

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107 Corris 1973b, 255, 260.
died in the mid-1880s, Kwaisulia was able to take over the leadership of `Adagege and Sulufou. He lived in style on fortified `Adagege, with European furniture given to him by labour trade captains, and his own whaleboat. His wealth in rifles, ammunition, dynamite and other trade goods, plus barbed wire, clothes, clocks and music boxes, was part of his power.\textsuperscript{108} Explosives were his undoing when he died while dynamiting fish in 1909. Hopkins described Kwaisulia as on one occasion wearing ‘a white drill suit, spotlessly clean, sun helmet, sash and a broad smile’,\textsuperscript{109} but he was just as capable of holding court wearing pyjama pants.

Kwaisulia’s oldest son, Jackson Kaiviti (Kai`figi), was baptised while working in Fiji, then on his arrival back home returned to his ancestral religion. He succeeded his father as the next leading Lau passage master and bigman. They befriended recruiters, naval captains and finally Resident Commissioner Woodford, to whom Kwaisulia rather imperiously sent greetings when he first took up residence at Tulagi in 1897. The short-staffed protectorate was also capable of using the family’s authority. In 1902, Woodford’s deputy, Arthur Mahaffy, asked Jackson Kai`figi to arrest two murderers from just south of `Ataa. Another son, Timothy (or Tom) Kakalu`ae, flourished once government was established on Malaita. Kakalu`ae joined the constabulary in 1921, rising to the rank of corporal in 1927. He also played a role in the 1927 punitive expedition to avenge the deaths of District Officer William Bell and his tax-collecting team in Kwaio (see Chapter 10).\textsuperscript{110} He was appointed government headman for Lau in the late 1920s and remained in this role until 1941. By the 1930s, Kakalu`ae’s power in Lau was as great as his father’s had been, and like his father he refused to become a Christian. The government backed him, although it was clear that as the 1930s progressed Kakalu`ae became more corrupt, failing to untangle his own interests from those of the protectorate. This led to his dismissal in 1941.\textsuperscript{111} For a short time Kakalu`ae was Maasina Rule Head Chief for Lau, but he soon found this incompatible with his loyalty to the British and became a bitter enemy of the movement.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 259–60.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 263; Hopkins 1928, 155.
\textsuperscript{110} SCL, June 1900, 1; SCL, Nov 1910, 89; Hopkins 1949; Keesing 1992b, 180.
\textsuperscript{111} Keesing and Corris 1980; Akin 2013a, 59, 159.
\textsuperscript{112} Akin 2013a, 250, 269–72.
For almost 30 years, Kwaisulia managed to use the power and authority of the colonial economy and state to his advantage, and his sons inherited his power. From the next generation a grandson, Christopher Igilana (England) Kwaisulia, was involved in the Christian Remnant Church from the 1950s until the 1980s.\(^{113}\) Igilana Kwaisulia also led a Lau delegation to `Are`are in 1945 to find out about Maasina Rule, and returned as a strong supporter. Kwaisulia and Kakalu`ae, pagan father and son, permanently transformed the authority structure in Lau Lagoon between the 1880s and the 1940s, while Kwaisulia’s grandson attempted to reform Malaitan Christianity to his own political ends.

Their close relative Jack Taloifulia, born on Sulufou Island in the 1870s, was around 16 years old when he was taken to Mackay on a labour trade schooner; he remained for some 16 years and became the star pupil at the Anglican Selwyn Mission. In the 1900s, once the announcement of deportation of the Islanders was made, he asked to be sent to the Melanesian Mission’s college on Norfolk Island to be trained as a missionary before returning to Malaita. He reached Norfolk via Brisbane, Sydney and Auckland, providing him with knowledge of large cities. Because he was much older than the rest of the students, Taloifulia did not learn easily, and he preferred the farm and chapel life outside of the classroom. After two years, he returned to Malaita and in 1904 began a mission school on land at Fouia on the mainland opposite Sulufou, despite the opposition of his uncle Kwaisulia. In recognition of his devotion, he was taken to Siota to study to be a deacon and in 1919 returned to Siota to study for the priesthood.\(^{114}\) Taloifulia became an Anglican priest, a different path from that of his other Sulufou relatives, but he was just as important among the Lau.\(^{115}\) These generations of Lau men covered the roles of passage master, warrior, chief and Christian leader, and show just how much change took place in the lagoon over the decades.

### The Trope of Violence: Real or Imagined?

The Introduction raised the trope of violence as one of the markers of modern Malaitans. The labour trade provided guns, exacerbating Malaitans’ abilities to fight each other. Malaitans were not more violent

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\(^{114}\) Moore 2013c, Taloifulia entry.

\(^{115}\) Tippett 1967, 163–70.
than their neighbours; indeed, the head-hunters and marauding slavers of New Georgia were clearly more fearsome. However, on plantations and back on Malaita, the increased fighting enabled by new technologies enhanced their reputation for ferocity, unequalled by any other island group who worked as labourers in Queensland or Fiji, except perhaps the Tannese from the New Hebrides. The labour trade vessels and their whaleboats were also easy targets for attacks. This is quite a claim to fame, considering that all Pacific Islanders sometimes used violence to solve disputes, and while we must be wary of creating false tropes, the evidence of attacks on ships at Malaita is substantial (see Chapter 7).

Bishop Cecil Wilson, for instance, described Malaitans in Queensland in the mid-1890s as ‘mostly as wild as hawks’ and excessively proud of ‘their nationality’. Many Europeans in Queensland were murdered by Islanders in the 1890s, particularly by Malaitans. Folk memory at Mackay records that Europeans believed that it was easy to know the origin of a murder: if the victims’ head was smashed or missing then the culprit was sure to be Malaitan. Iron bars and lumps of lead on ropes, whirled around to add momentum before making contact, were favourite methods of despatch, as were the ubiquitous axes, cane knives, clubs, bows and arrows. ‘Swaggies’ (tramps) and other isolated men were favourite targets. Often swaggies were not missed and as solitary travellers they were easy to kill. Similarly, on Malaita, warrior bounty-hunters often chose to kill isolated women and children alone in gardens rather than pick a fair fight. The compensatory death was all that was necessary.

In Mackay in 1894, after the murder of a European woman, the local paper railed against the Malaitan perpetrators, who had been sentenced to death:

The first blow is struck in the district to free it from the terrorism of the Malayan Islanders. The attitude of these Kanakas deserves something more than passing notice. At the present time fifty per cent of the Polynesians in the district are natives of Malaya, while ten years ago the proportion was only about 15 per cent. The habits of the Malaya boys are of particular interest. Their thirst for blood is notorious …

116 McKinnon 1975.
118 Wilson, OPMM, Nov 1895, 153.
119 ‘Swaggies’ is an Australian term for itinerant workers who carried a ‘swag’, usually a folded blanket enclosing their possessions.
120 Moore 1993.
Of recent years the aggressiveness of these boys in the district has become unbearable. Apart from any graver offences of which Malaytan Islanders may be suspected, it is notorious that they boast of the impunity with which they can defy their employers and commit crime. White men who have lived in the district for years, now sleep with revolvers near to hand, and admit the terrorism inspired by this class of boys … [It] is the boast of the Islanders that the white man dare not hang them. It is argued also that, if we hang Kanakas, reprisals will follow in the Island trade, and to this we reply that, hanging or no hanging, the Malayta boys would cut off the first ship they could, and would murder any whiteman they could get a show at.121

In Pacific cultures, the physical and spiritual worlds intermingled; medicine, magic and religion were inextricably mixed. Illness and death were often not seen as the natural results of diseases, epidemics or old age, sickness and death. Even what were clearly accidents could be explained as having supernatural causes. Sickness was a direct punishment for misconduct, inflicted by ancestors who had to be appeased if the ailing individual was to survive. Malaitans believed that disease epidemics were caused by antagonistic spirits, ever circulating in the sky, waiting for a chance to commit a malevolent act. Murders and often other deaths, either from sorcery or by physical violence, had to be avenged to maintain social equilibrium.122 Melanesians in Queensland and Fiji were exposed to new diseases, and death rates were extremely high, which exacerbated the problem.

The major killers were ‘droplet’ and virus infections. ‘Droplet’ infections (where droplets of saliva are passed on through sneezes and coughs or from singing or projecting the voice loudly) spread easily in confined spaces; they could be from virus or bacterial diseases. Measles, influenza, whooping cough and diphtheria are in this category. Pneumonia, bronchitis, pleurisy, and respiratory tract infections such as tuberculosis (then called ‘consumption’, and widespread amongst nineteenth-century Europeans) were an extension. Infectious diseases, particularly measles, Rubella, smallpox and chickenpox, also killed people, although a single attack could provide lifelong immunity for survivors. Colds and influenza, which could be particularly fatal in a community with no immunity, are both caused by viruses; they do produce immunity, but of a shorter duration. Other diseases came from contaminated food or water,

121 MM, 22 Nov 1894.
or drinking vessels or food utensils. Diseases of this type, such as bacillary
dysentery (gastroenteritis), affected the gastro-intestinal tract, and little
immunity was acquired from an attack.\textsuperscript{123}

The three-year circular migrations continuously exposed fresh supplies of
labourers to the new disease environment. Ralph Shlomowitz calculated
that the crude death rate of Melanesians in Queensland in the first year of
their indentures was 81 per 1,000, more than three times that of the long-
term Melanesian immigrant population. Evidence suggests that those
who survived the first three years in the colony had every chance of living
to old age, remembering of course that, statistically, people died much
younger in the nineteenth century than today. The deaths from diseases
were of young men in their prime, aged 16 to 35 and judged medically fit
when they first arrived. The death rate of Europeans in Queensland over
the same period, of all ages, was 15 per 1,000. The death rate for European
males in the colony of similar age to the Melanesians was around nine
or 10 per 1,000. The Islanders, including Malaitans, responded to the
high mortality with retaliations.\textsuperscript{124} Malaitan responses were multifaceted,
varying from outright revenge by murders and other forms of physical
violence, to the sabotage of crops, farm animals and machinery, to
intertribal fights and reactions targeted inward such as suicide and sorcery.
Sorcery is an immeasurable dimension in a historical context such as this,
invisible but devastatingly potent for those who believe in its power.\textsuperscript{125}

Knowing exactly how to analyse behaviour overseas is difficult given that
we have only fragments of evidence and the complexity and dynamism of
the scene. The violence was always noted in Queensland, but how does it
relate to other cultural practices? We need to be careful in portraying overt
practices—dance, dress and even performing rituals—as an indication
that ‘culture’ is or is not being maintained overseas in any simplistic sense.
Oral evidence indicates that during the lifetimes of the original immigrant
Islanders, religious and magical practices figured prominently in the
Queensland community.\textsuperscript{126} Presumably the same was true for Fiji, Samoa
and New Caledonia. From photographs, we know that \textit{sango} dancing
was performed in Fiji. This dance and accompanying panpipe music
were part of \textit{maoma} (mortuary) rituals and exchange cycles performed

\textsuperscript{123} McArthur 1981, 3, provides a clear summary.
\textsuperscript{124} Shlomowitz 1987; 1989; Moore 2015a.
\textsuperscript{125} Moore 1993.
\textsuperscript{126} Mercer and Moore 1976.
throughout north Malaita and imported south into Kwaio in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In Kwaio, it was performed into the 1910s or early 1920s as part of bounty collections and associated rituals. Soon after, the government eradicated bounty-hunting, and *sango* rituals, at least in Kwaio, were modified solely into mortuary events. They continued to be performed regularly, in Kwaio approximately every two years, for the associated ancestors. Akin explains that *sango* rituals include strong fertility symbolism and that women play a role (though not in dancing or panpiping). It is important to note that *sango* dancing can sometimes be performed for entertainment, meaning that the Fiji photographs are not on their own evidence that *sango*’s ritual aspects were maintained there.

*Mao*, another dance found all over Malaita, was performed and perhaps invented among plantation communities in Queensland. The lyrics for the Kwaio *mao* songs include Lau language and archaic Pijin English, presumably Kanaka Pijin English from Queensland.127

Slit-drums and body ornamentation, augmented with trade store beads, were all part of plantation culture overseas. But was this secular practice, and what changes or continuities occurred in people’s thinking? Akin stresses:

> the extension of taboos and ancestral practices abroad was (a) highly varied from person to person or group to group, and no doubt varied over time, and (b) this was all part of a long-term process of extending the areas exempt from taboo practices from home to abroad and then back again to ever-growing areas of the Solomons.128

The participation of Malaitans in the colonial labour community continued over several decades, increasing in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Although there were always long-staying Malaitans, large numbers recruited for only one three-year contract. Each individual had their own form of relationship with their ancestors, and we know from modern Kwaio examples that some Malaitans can place ancestral relationships into abeyance, to be restored at more suitable times. And not all rituals have to be performed at central shrines by priests. The short-term labourers suffered most from the unfamiliar disease environment and presumably they (and their families at home) reacted most strongly in terms of seeking compensation. Malaitan males poured off their island and on to Queensland and Fijian plantations and farms in the 1890s,

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127 I am indebted to David Akin for discussing these points with me, Nov 2015.
even more so in the 1900s, at a rate of over 1,000 each year, in far greater numbers than from any other island. An even larger number left Malaita each year during the first three decades of the twentieth century to work elsewhere in the protectorate. Mixed with Malaitan beliefs and behaviours, this was a potent cocktail and may well partly account for their reputation for violence. On the plantations they faced new situations equipped with strategies both new and old. As I have stressed, we cannot presume inflexibility, or that the situation in 1901 was the same as in 1871. On Malaita, imported diseases significantly increased mortality and the excess of guns certainly made internecine fighting easier and more deadly there.129

Conclusion

Malaitans exhibited complex responses to ‘plantation culture’ and to adopting Christianity and other foreign influences. They returned home much changed and in turn changed Malaitan society. Our knowledge of Malaitan ways of dealing with travel to foreign places, whether within the Solomons and therefore within their ‘eight isles’ world view, or overseas, is partly based on historical information but also on contemporary observations. In the 1970s, Judith Bennett interviewed 27 Malaitan ex-labourers: although she noted the ‘spiritual vulnerability’ among the predominantly traditional believers, it was also clear that they carried with them relics of shell valuables associated with ancestral shrines that they used to keep themselves safe.130 David Akin’s interpretation, based largely on his knowledge of the Kwaio, is similar:

People negotiated with their ancestors new ground rules for proper behaviour abroad: to follow taboos where possible but waive them as necessary. Like so many other things, taboo observation, and taboos themselves, changed over time and varied from person to person, and those who stayed in Queensland and Fiji longer were less likely to observe taboos, among other reasons because more of them became Christians. Models developed for religious practices abroad extended older principles for adjusting, mitigating, or waiving ancestral taboos at home, in ways that allowed men to live a normal life while away. Many of these models are still applied by non-Christian Malaitans on plantations or in towns.131

130 Bennett 1993, 137, 175, 186; 1981a, esp. 143.
131 Akin 2013a, 23.
This assessment is also supported by the observations and writings from other anthropologists of Malaita, such as Roger Keesing and Ben Burt.\textsuperscript{132}

There are well-established mechanisms used by followers of ancestors while away from their island. My own oral testimony work in Queensland in the 1970s, and my 40 years of observation of Malaitans on their own island, elsewhere in the Solomons and in Australia, plus the research and writing of Noel Fatnowna, a well-known Malaitan in Australia, confirms the ability of Malaitans to adapt to foreign circumstances.\textsuperscript{133} As Akin says, our knowledge is made easier to ascertain because some Malaitans still practise their pre-Christian beliefs, allowing observation of similar contemporary behaviour.

David Akin’s research makes clear that followers of ancestors had (and still have) the capacity to participate in travel without undue disruption to their religious rituals:

Malaitans quickly developed new strategies for managing religious rules in places where they had little control. The chief difficulty was interactions with foreigners, both European and Melanesian, who did not know, let alone observe, the behavioural rules or taboos that ancestral spirits enforced among descendants. At home, even Malaitans from the same language group followed different taboos enforced by their specific ancestors, and rules that a person observed at home and abroad were key identity markers. In recruiting, taboos could become problematic as soon as a man entered a ship’s hold if women were known to have trodden the deck above, since men could not be underneath women or places they had walked.\textsuperscript{134}

When away from their home territories, Malaitans were unable to make full sacrifices to their ancestors through their priests. Before they left home they took precautions to ensure that they were protected while abroad and promised to fulfil all obligations once they returned home. Priests had responsibility to carry out sacrifices to protect labourers abroad and to give thanks and compensation when they returned. Labour recruits also carried ‘small magic’ with them in the form of ritual objects and substances when they travelled. They used these items in small shrines within their homes when overseas. For some Malaitans, travel to plantations was fully protected by priests who placated their ancestors and enabled an

\textsuperscript{132} Keesing 1986b; Burt 1994.
\textsuperscript{133} Mercer and Moore 1976; Moore 1985; Fatnowna 1989.
\textsuperscript{134} Akin 2013a, 22–23.
easy transition back into the cultural system when they returned home. However, there were always others who lost or had less protection when they departed from Malaita, because they had been kidnapped or ran away or were escaping some crime or offence. These Malaitans were more vulnerable and susceptible to conversion to Christianity, as were those who reengaged on second or multiple contracts—the ‘time-expired’ men and women or ‘ticket-holders’. Such ‘alienated’ Malaitans found membership in a Christian congregation reassuring and if they eventually returned to Malaita they were more likely to return to mission stations than their home villages.

Figure 2.10: This photograph, of a Malaitan canoe in Fiji, presumably manufactured and decorated there, is one of the most remarkable from the overseas plantations. The image, from a collection by A.M. Brodziack & Co., was probably taken in the 1880s. The canoe is in Walu Bay, an old local shipping area and Solomon Islander settlement. Source: Max Quanchi Collection.

Travel to plantations became a rite of passage for young men, and continues today as Malaitans move in and out of Honiara and other urban and plantation areas. They have been able to do this continuously and successfully for over 140 years, confirming that they have a flexible ability to deal with the spiritual and other cultural consequences. From the 1870s until the 1930s and 1940s, the majority of these Malaitan labourers were traditional believers, not Christians, although as I argue in the next few chapters there were also large numbers of Christians, even though they retained many
ancestral beliefs. Despite the desire for the financial and material rewards of wage labour, they were able to participate in the labour trade because they possessed cultural mechanisms to smooth the transition from Malaita to the plantations and their return. However, one consequence was probably increased Malaitan violence at home and abroad.

The next four chapters discuss the spread of Christianity on Malaita. After participation in indentured labour, Christianity was the most important force for change on the island before the formal arrival of government. Chapter 3 looks at Malaitan Christianity overseas as a necessary precursor to the spread of Christianity on Malaita. These chapters deliberately separate the different missions because they had quite different motivations and beliefs. They also detail the names of the people involved, with the aim of returning individuals to the historical record. This will also facilitate future studies of the development of Malaita’s colonial and postcolonial elites.
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