3. Commerce, trade and labour

Understanding the history of European contact with the Solomon Islands and the nature of the local peoples’ social, cultural and economic lives is important if we are to appreciate the challenges that faced Charles Woodford, first as a young self-funded naturalist, and later as a colonial administrator. This was a complex, often challenging environment for any outsider.

The Solomon Islands were first sighted by European explorers when Alvaro de Mendaña de Neira and his company in two ships, the flagship *Los Reyes* (the *Capitana*) and the secondary ship *Todos Santos* (the *Almiranta*), sighted Santa Ysabel (Isabel) Island in February 1568. Mendaña was then a young man of 25; his second in command was Pedro Sarimento de Gamboa. The man who had promoted the idea of a voyage of discovery seeking the *Terra Australis Incognita*—the Unknown Land of the South—was Hernán Gallego whose journal became the most important record of the voyage. Gallego was the chief pilot. At Santa Ysabel de la Estrella the Spaniards built a light brigantine and with 30 men Mendaña explored the coasts of Ysabel (Isabel), Guadalcanal, Malaita and San Christoval (Makira) islands. On the east coast of Isabel they named a bay Estrella Bay (Port of the Star: Ghehe Bay) and on the northern coast of Guadalcanal named Port la Cruz (Port of the Cross: Point Cruz, now part of central Honiara). It has been said that the Spaniards also found small traces of gold at the mouth of the Mataniko River on Guadalcanal (Woodford 1890b: 1–8; Guppy 1887a: 192–256, 272–279 for comments on geographical names; Bennett 1987: 19–20). This led to the naming of the islands, Islas Salomon, the Solomon Islands. Mendaña and his crew then returned to Peru on in September 1596 intending to return in six months. Mendaña went to Spain to plead the case for more exploration of the Pacific but the wars between England and Spain intervened.

It was not until April 1595 that Mendaña again set out from Callao in Peru, this time with four ships, the *San Gerónimo* (the *Capitana*), the *Santa Ysabel* (the *Almiranta*), the smaller frigate *Santa Catalina* and the galiot *San Felipe*. The plans were to settle in the Solomon Islands. The chief pilot this time was a Portuguese-born navigator, Pedro Fernandes de Queirós (Lewis 1977). Instead of landing at Isabel and other known islands the ships reached Santa Cruz Island in the southern end of the island chain. Here they attempted to settle at Graciosa Bay but this was soon abandoned due to climate, attacks by local warriors and illness (see Yen 1973 for a report on the ethnobotany reported by Mendaña and de Queirós). Mendaña and his crew then returned to Peru on in September 1596 intending to return in six months. Mendaña went to Spain to plead the case for more exploration of the Pacific but the wars between England and Spain intervened.
further south than Santa Cruz. The island of Espiritu Santo (Vanuatu) was also discovered by de Queirós. His second in command, Luis Vaez de Torres, sailed through the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua in 1607 on his way home to Spain via the Philippines. The ships of de Queirós and Torres had become separated and de Queirós sought safety by sailing home to Calleo via the north Pacific and Acapulco. The Spanish then lost interest in the region and further discovery of the Solomon Islands was abandoned. With the deaths of Mendaña and then de Quiros in 1615, Spanish interest in the fabled riches of the Solomons faded (Jack-Hinton 1962; Amherst and Thomson 1901). All knowledge of the Solomon Islands passed from European history for the journals of discovery remained unpublished deposits in the archives in Madrid and Manila.

In the 18th century few ships touched the shores of the Solomon Islands. In 1767 Captain Philip Carteret of the Royal Navy anchored off Santa Cruz in the HMS *Swallow* and then sailed close to Malaita and Buka in the northern Solomons above Bougainville Island. Carteret named New Britain, New Island and the Duke of York Islands. Carteret is also credited with the ‘rediscovery’ of the Solomon Islands. Captain John Shortland sailing on HMS *Alexander*, one of the supply ships for the newly established colony at Botany Bay, passed south of Bougainville Island and sighted and named the Treasury Islands (Mono) and Shortland Islands (Alu and Fauro) in 1788. Shortland urged the Admiralty to chart the east coast of Australia more closely and subsequently Matthew Flinders was dispatched in the HMS *Investigator* to circumnavigate the Australian continent.

French interests also focussed on the Pacific after Jean-Francois de Galaup, the Comte de la Pérouse, was appointed to lead a voyage of discovery around the world in 1785. The main objectives were scientific, geographic, ethnological and economic, but political interests and the possible establishment of French colonies in the Pacific were also underscored. After the ships rounded Cape Horn, la Pérouse headed for Chile and Hawai‘i, then on to Alaska, California, Macau and the Philippines, Japan, and Kamchatka in Russia. He was ordered to investigate the establishment of the colony at Botany Bay in January 1788. Fortunately la Pérouse took the opportunity of contact with the Royal Navy in Botany Bay to send some of his journals and charts back to Britain on the HMS *Sirius*, one of the supply ships that had formed part of the First Fleet. After leaving Botany Bay the ships of la Pérouse headed north and were never sighted again. In 1793, while searching for the lost ships of la Pérouse that had been wrecked on the island of Vanikoro, the French explorer Bruni d’Entrecasteaux, who was also unsuccessful in sighting the main Solomon Islands group, sighted Vanikoro but was unable to land because of the dangerous fringing reefs. It was only in 1826 that Captain Peter Dillon was shown a French sword on Tikopia and told it came from Vanikoro that evidence of the wrecks was found. Dillon
later discovered cannon balls and anchors from the wreckage at Vanikoro. A memorial to la Pérouse was erected there in 1828 by Captain Jules Dumont d’Urville during another French voyage of discovery. It was not until 1964 that the wreck of la Pérouse’s ship, La Boussole (The Compass), was found off the coast of the island (Ballantyne 2004; Jack-Hinton 1962).

After the Spanish interest in the Solomon Islands declined, attention focussed on the Australian mainland to the south. British interests centred on the establishment of the colony in Botany Bay and Captain Arthur Phillip was instructed by the Home Office in London to use the resources of the Pacific Islands to supplement those available at the new colony. The first move was to Norfolk Island where flax, useful for sails, rope and clothing could be obtained. After 1800 there was evidence of declining stability in the Pacific Islands resulting from the depravity of beachcombers, sandalwood collectors, escaped convicts from New South Wales, whalers and traders. This was causing violence and dissent among the local peoples. In response to concerns about the actions of itinerant traders and beachcombers, the Rev Samuel Marsden formed the New South Wales Society for Affording Protection to the Natives of the South Sea Islands in 1813. The Imperial government in London then passed the first Act to deal with crimes committed on the high seas by British subjects (*The Offences at Sea Act* 1806, 46 Geo III c54) and subsequent legislation to allow for trial of murders committed abroad (*The Murders Abroad Act* 1817, 57 Geo III c53). However, these Acts were only implemented by the Crown to avert scandal to the British name (Ward 1948: 40–41). In reality, a policy of minimum intervention into the affairs of the Pacific still held sway. There was little mercantile interest in the Western Pacific, for trade and commerce needed little official protection. Missionary activity was only beginning and it was opposed to direct colonialisation in the Pacific islands. The Colonial Office shared these views. Apart from the colonies in Australia and New Zealand, official policy was to avoid any interference in the state of affairs of islands in the region. The British government spent over £15 million quelling the various Māori Wars in New Zealand and had little taste for colonising the rest of the Pacific (O’Brien 2009: 97). But it was the growth of plantation economies in Queensland, Fiji and Samoa and the resulting expansion of the Pacific labour trade that strained the minimum intervention policy (Ward 1994: 8).

Contact with the Solomon Islands and the islanders became more regular with the rise of Pacific sperm whaling in the 1830s. When winter closed the waters around Japan and the northern Pacific, American whaling ships moved south. Around February was a popular time for vessels to hunt in the warmer waters off the eastern Australian coast and along the eastern shores of Malaita, Isabel and Choiseul Islands. In the Solomon Islands, the Bougainville Strait between the Shortland Islands and Choiseul was a target area for migrating sperm whales

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3. Commerce, trade and labour
These whaling vessels were at sea for long periods, often years, and began to call in at isolated communities in the islands to resupply with timber, water, and trade for local produce. At first, relationships were generally peaceful for the whalers rarely stayed long and the villagers had yet to learn of the importance of iron and guns. Before long, however, a trade developed in hoop iron from wooden barrels, nails, and gimlets—boring tools with wooden handles used by seamen. Coastal communities became trading localities and the supply of iron, axes and nails passing through these villages meant that the people along the coasts were in a stronger economic position than their bush neighbours who had only traditional stone tools.

Andrew Cheyne, a sea captain from Northmavine in the Shetland Islands, was a successful bêche-de-mer and sandalwood trader who wrote of his extensive voyages throughout the Western Pacific between 1841 and 1844 (Cheyne 1852; Shineberg 1971). His schooner, the *Naiad*, was one of the first regular trading vessels to ply the coasts of the islands. His opinion of the Solomon Islanders was one commonly held at that time: ‘The whole of Solomon’s Archipelago requires to be surveyed, as the charts in use at present are very erroneous. Merchant ships passing through this Archipelago should hold no intercourse with the natives, as they are not to be trusted’ (Cheyne 1852: 31). Further to this he added:

... on no account should landing be made without a particular object, and then well armed. I allude chiefly to the Solomon Islands. You may perhaps pull in and go ashore without seeing a soul, but no sooner have you got a short distance from the boat, than they rush out from the thickets in hundreds. This has happened to one or two vessels at New Georgia, and the crews have with difficulty regained the boats with some mortality, and other severely wounded (Cheyne 1852: 71).

With the arrival of the ‘ship men’ (*tinoni vaka*: Roviana), some knowledge of ‘whitemen’, new technology and new diseases permeated the coastal, ‘salt-water’ communities in the Solomon Islands (Bennett 1987: 21). Communities inland, the ‘bush’ villages, remained largely isolated. This was the start of the island-based disparities. People with produce ready for sale to passing ships entered the commercial economy while those in the hills, especially on the large islands such as Malaita and Guadalcanal with a reputation for aggression, were pushed to the periphery. The people of these bush villages then became prey for the coastal people who had gained access to modern European weapons.

Meanwhile, between 1860 and 1900, the economy of the Australian colonies expanded rapidly. Trade, the influx of overseas capital for the growth of regional centres, the gold rush and the development of agriculture led to a boom economy. A booming economy needed a large labour force and immigration from Britain
and Ireland only partly accommodated that need. Soon good markets in China opened up for bêche-de-mer and sandalwood, and in Europe for turtle shell and marine shells, particularly pearl shell. These became important items used in the manufacture of women’s buttons. In the Solomon Islands the demand for turtle shell meant that traders needed local men to go on long-distance turtle hunts, especially for hawksbill turtles \((Eretmochelys imbricata)\). The number of turtles in the early part of the 19th century was high but intensive hunting was to deplete the populations in the New Georgia lagoons. As demand continued local men began to travel to the turtle grounds of the Manning Strait between Choiseul and Isabel. The high demand by traders meant that local people began to insist on payment in long handed tomahawks that could be used to cut timber, clear forest and manufacture fine quality canoes. People in the islands learnt quickly that they could manipulate the traders by controlling access to scarce resources.

Early traders, like Andrew Cheyne, were prepared to pay for bêche-de-mer and shell with old ‘Brown Bess’ muskets but the humidity, problems with loading and unreliability of cartridges meant that soon there was a demand for breech-loading rifles (McKinnon 1975: 303). The introduction of iron, taken from trade or from shipwrecked passing boats, changed forever the traditional economy. Iron tools reduced men’s labour and made canoe-making and forest clearing easier. Women’s labour was largely unchanged as they continued to use traditional gardening techniques like the wooden digging stick. Men therefore had increased time to spend on the production of shell ornaments and valuables and ‘politicking, ceremonials, legal disputes and fighting’ (Bennett 1987: 35, quoting Salisbury 1970: 10). Power became concentrated in the hands of the few men with access to iron and access to traders. Demand for produce by visiting traders and ships’ crews and demand for iron, tomahawks and then guns by local men resulted in an interlocking cycle. The coastal trader was tied to his local Big-man who had built up skills as a negotiator and regular supplier of produce. By manipulating indigenous culture, communal ties and ambition this Big-man could establish a power base that could be exploited for economic and political gain. This power base was much localised although powerful leaders from nearby regions could unite in time of warfare, ceremony or feasting. While the Big-man could exploit his connections he was tied to the trader who was the supplier of the material benefits of contact with the outside world of commerce (McKinnon 1975: 296). These relationships were inherently risky. They were created and maintained by volatile and constantly changeable personal power.
Blackbirding: The early kidnapping phase

In the early days, the few shore stations established by individual traders were not well protected and the trader had limited access to land. Usually they established a post on a small off-shore island. Some whitemen had tried to settle in the islands but the results were not successful. Benjamin Boyd, formerly a wealthy landowner, but by this time somewhat reduced in circumstances, attempted to establish a colony in 1851 called his ‘Papuan Republic or Confederation’ at Wanderer Bay on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. He disappeared while travelling inland. The bay is named after his schooner, the Wanderer. Boyd had been one of the first to recruit Pacific Islanders to work as shepherds on his sheep stations in the Riverina in 1847 but the men were unable to cope with the rigors of the winter climate. Under the Masters and Servants Acts 1845 (NSW) (9 Vic no 27) and 1847 (11 Vic no 9) they were free to leave their employment if they so desired and the New South Wales government, reacting to public concerns, released them from their indentures. This action has been acknowledged as the start of the ‘blackbirding’ or Pacific labour trade. The first group of South Sea Islanders brought in to Queensland came at the instigation of Robert Towns to work on the experimental cotton plantations he was developing at ‘Townsvale’ on the Logan River south of Brisbane. The outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 had depleted supplies of cotton to the English mills and cotton prices soared. For a while it looked as if cotton would be an important local industry but the use of British immigrants, many from city backgrounds, to clear scrub, plant the cotton and then harvest it, was doomed from the start.

When faced with a persistent labour problem, Towns hired the Don Juan and sent it to collect Pacific Islanders to be field labourers. The first shipment of 67 men arrived in 1863 under an arrangement of engagement for only one year but by 1866 Towns had imported more than 360 labourers from the New Hebrides alone (Moore 1985: 167; Beck 2009: 35). When the American Civil War ended in 1865, and better quality American cotton was once more available, the Australian cotton local market collapsed. Captain Louis Hope in the meantime established, in 1864, an experimental sugar cane farm at Ormiston near Cleveland that was worked by the indentured labourers brought in on the Don Juan. This was successful. By 1869 most cotton plantations on the Logan River had been converted into sugar farms. It soon became apparent that the first small independent sugar farms were inefficient at all levels of production (Graves 1993: 24). The only economically viable operation was large-scale plantation production but this required considerable capital outlay and a regulated labour force to clear fields, plant cane, harvest, and then mill the cane on site. As mills operated all day during harvesting, and cane cutting was labour
intensive, a resident labour population was needed. Plantation owners looked to the Melanesian islands to fill that labour need. These were the beginnings of the labour trade that was to last, at least in Queensland, until 1908.

The Pacific labour trade

In the 1860s stories of the kidnapping of local islanders who were taken to work the plantation fields of Fiji and Samoa and then Queensland began to circulate widely. The push by missionaries into the Solomon Islands, before establishment of colonial rule, meant that the British public was informed of regional affairs through a strong, politically astute, interlocking network of missionary, anti-slavery and naval interests. The naval officers who surveyed the islands came from a largely upper-middle class background and were strong promoters of ‘Christian humanity’. They were not just ‘floating policemen’ (Samson 2003b: 283). The naval ships came from the Australian Division of the East Indies Station formed in 1848 and were stationed in Sydney. Its role was to protect the Australian colonies and patrol the Western Pacific. In 1859 the Admiralty established an independent command, the Australia Station, partly to reflect the growing strategic concerns in the Western Pacific and in part due to the prosperity of the Australian colonies. The Australia Station was located in Sydney. The initial success of the naval presence in patrolling the activities of the Pacific labour trade was due to the use of small corvettes and frigates that were able to navigate the still mostly unsurveyed tropical waters of the Pacific.

Regulating the labour trade

The early excesses of the labour trade raised public attention to the lack of regulation. Henry Ross Lewin, formerly the recruiter on the Don Juan sent by Robert Towns in 1863, had by now purchased his own boat, the Daphne, licensed to carry only 50 recruits. In 1869, the sloop HMS Rosario under the command of Commander George Palmer and with the Acting Consul John Thurston on board intercepted it off Levuka in Fiji with a load of 108 Islanders. The Daphne, licensed to ship the workers west to Brisbane, was apprehended far to the east instead (Mortensen 2000: 5). Palmer and Thurston found the Daphne fitted up precisely like an African slaver ‘minus the irons’ (Morrell 1960: 177). Under the Imperial Offences at Sea Act 1806 (46 Geo III c54), and the equipment clause in the Slave Trade Acts 1806 (46 Geo III c52), 1807 (47 Geo III Session 1 c36), the consolidation of the Acts in 1824 (5 Geo IV c113) and the Slave Trade Suppression Acts 1839 (2&3 Vict c57 & c73) and 1843 (6&7 Vict c98), a ship could be detained and condemned by the Royal Navy if it were equipped with the signs of slaving,
such as open gratings rather than closed hatches, extra bulkheads and large planks that could serve as benches and beds, increased supplies of water, food and matting, and the presence of any irons and shackles (Mortensen 2000: 4).

Acting on this, Palmer sent the *Daphne* with a prize crew to Sydney under charges of slave trading. His lawyers in Sydney thought that the equipment clause would be sufficient to prosecute. Palmer’s ‘obsession with slaving’ led to political and personal disaster (Samson 2003b: 288). The Vice Admiralty Court in New South Wales dismissed the charges on the grounds that the slave trade suppression Acts did not apply to the Western Pacific although the *Daphne* had been violating colonial merchant marine legislation. Palmer was subsequently sued by the ship’s owners although he was later assisted with payment of his debt by the Admiralty. Palmer published his account of the cruise of the *Rosario* (Palmer 1871). The case, the publicity and the clear observations by Palmer that were ‘unequivocal, emotive and publically accessible’ (Samson 2003b: 288) gave much support to the naval position which was strongly anti-blackbirding. The case was reported widely in the press of the day (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 24 September 1869, 8 October 1869).

Political pressure on the Queensland colonial government to regulate the importation of Melanesian labourers who were being brought in to work the growing number of Queensland sugar plantations led to the passing of the *Polynesian Labourers Act* 1868 (Qld) (31 Vic no 47). The term ‘Polynesian’ was used as a generic name for any non-white Pacific Islander at that time. Albert Hastings Markham (1872: 230) in his review of exploration of the New Hebrides and Santa Cruz groups wrote: ‘But it [the Queensland legislation] is said to be of little use in ameliorating the condition of the unfortunate islanders, and the labour trade, with its attendant kidnapping, continues in full vigour’. The Queensland legislation did permit the introduction of a licensing system that meant that masters of labour vessels had to execute a recruiting bond of £500 and produce a certificate for each recruit signed by a consul, missionary or known person that the labourers had engaged voluntarily and with full understanding of the nature and conditions of their agreements. Scales of rations, clothing and a minimum wage of £6 a year were set for employment in Queensland. Sugar planters, especially the larger plantations where many workers were needed, had to pay labour agents between £5 and £7/10/- per worker at the start of plantation expansion. By 1876 the agent fee had risen to between £10 and £16 a recruit and then to around £20 in the early 1880s. This passage money led to a sharp increase in the additional costs associated with recruitment and transportation. Once employed on a plantation, the recruit had to be fed, clothed, and provided with accommodation and medical services. New contract recruits were paid the minimum wage of £6 a year but time-expired workers who re-engaged knew of the opportunities open to them and used their bargaining skills to secure
annual payments of between £6 to £8, rising later to £12 (Shlomowitz 1981:78). Employers had to post a £10 return passage fee with the Office for Pacific Island Immigration and after 1871, when the labour trade was more tightly regulated, pay a capitation tax of 10 shillings per recruit. This increased to 30 shillings (£1/10/-) per man in 1880 and then to £3 per man in 1885 (Shlomowitz: 1981: 71).

Subsequently the Queensland government passed legislation to revise the *Polynesian Labourers Act* 1868. The *Pacific Island Labourers Act* 1880 (44 Vic no 17) specified the number of recruits permitted on board vessels and further added employment controls and conditions (Moore 2013b: 3). It was again amended in 1884 (*Pacific Island Labourers Act* 1884 (Qld) (47 Vic no 12). Of importance was the creation of a Pacific Islanders’ Fund, under an amendment to legislation in 1885 (*Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880 Amendment Act* 1885 (49 Vic no 17). This Treasury fund was established to administer the employment bonds, to supervise the wages of deceased labourers and to hold hospital capitation funds. Pacific islanders were induced to deposit their wages in a trust account with the Queensland Government Savings Bank. Clive Moore (2013b) presents a comprehensive assessment of misappropriation of these moneys—especially the wages of deceased labourers and the unexpended return passage money of dead workers—held by the Queensland government in the Pacific Islanders’ Fund. The Queensland and the Commonwealth governments used this money to finance the administration of the labour trade, pay wages and expenses of Inspectors of Pacific Islanders and Government Agents aboard the labour vessels. Among other operational costs they later used the money to pay for the final repatriation of labourers in 1907 and 1908 (Moore 2013b: 6)

**Internal structure of the labour trade**

Irvine (2004) presents an excellent account of the costs of running a large central mill like the Colonial Sugar Refining Company’s Goondi Estate near Innisfail, north Queensland. It was estimated that it cost £25–£35 to bring a labourer from the islands and £26 a year to keep each man. Pay was set at £6 per man with rations, blankets, clothing, provisions, housing and medical treatment provided. Provisions were set by government regulations and included meat, bread, flour, sugar and rice as well as sweet potatoes and bananas. Men were provided weekly with tobacco, salt, soap and yearly with three shirts, four pairs of trousers, a hat, shoes, pipes, matches and knives. In return they had to work 10-hour days and were confined to ‘field work’ under the *Pacific Island Labourers Act 1880 Amendment Act* (Qld) 1884 (Irvine 2004: 16).
However, conditions varied and in times of economic depression, in order to cut costs, planters reduced the quality of food, clothing and accommodation and stopped paying for access to medical care (Graves 1993: 29). In the early days, before regulation, the labour trade was open to abuse. At that time labour, certainly non-white indentured labour, was regarded as an ‘impersonal asset and access to labour supplies was a frequent bargaining point in diplomatic negotiations between the Great Powers’, especially when those great powers were Germany and Britain (Munro, McCreery and Firth 2004: 155). In Fiji the labour trade began in 1864 but diversified in the mid-1880s when planters changed from sea island cotton to copra production and then to the more profitable sugarcane. Islanders were preferred on the copra plantations but increasingly Indian indentured labourers were used on sugarcane plantations (Shlomowitz 1986: 110). The labour trade in Fiji was not formally regulated until 1877. Yearly rates of pay were set at only £3 with food, shelter, clothes and medical care supplied by the employers. It has been estimated that between 1870 and 1911 more than 17,000 Solomon Islanders were recruited for the Queensland plantations and over 7,000 sent to Fiji (Price and Baker 1976: 110–111; Moore 2007: 217). Although recruiting for Fiji ended in 1911 some labourers remained indentured until 1914. In a further examination of the General Register of Polynesian Labourers Introduced to Fiji in the National Archives of Fiji, Siegel (1985: 46) found that of the 27,000 Pacific Islanders indentured there between 1865 and 1911, over 8,000 were from the Solomons.

Even well-connected gentry from England were among the many sugar plantation owners and investors. Included in the first volume of Amherst and Thomson’s The Discovery of the Solomon Islands by Alvaro de Mendaña in 1568 (1901, 1: lxxviii) is a photograph of a group of Guadalcanal and Malaitan men working on Foulden Plantation, the Queensland sugar cane farm on the Pioneer River near Mackay. The plantation had been owned by Francis Tyssen Amherst, the brother of Lord Amherst of Hackney, the editor of the Mendaña volumes. Francis Amherst and his partner, a cousin, had purchased Foulden in 1870 along with other selections and Amherst named it after his birthplace in Norfolk. Foulden Mill was built in 1872 and by 1877 the plantation was worth £20,000 and Amherst’s house was considered one of the grandest in the district (Moore 1985: 201). He represented Mackay in the colonial parliament and later bought neighbouring Farleigh selection in 1873. Francis Amherst died at sea on the way to England in 1881 and, following settlement of the estate, the two plantations were merged into the Farleigh Sugar Plantations Limited under Sir John Bennet Lawes, the inventor of chemical fertiliser.

Indentured labour on the Queensland, Samoan or Fijian plantations became the most important, regular means by which prized trade goods, fire arms, ammunition and metal tools were introduced into the local communities in
the Solomon Islands. The continuous employment of indentured labourers for more than 40 years ‘reinforced and considerably extended patterns of proletarianisation initiated in the region by whalers, sealers, sandalwood gatherers, bêche-de-mer fishermen, missionaries and settlers’ (Graves 1993: 219). The vast amount of European-made commodities that were brought back by labourers, as well as the beach payments made upon recruitment, were all rapidly incorporated into the Melanesian system of customary exchange. The trade box, and its contents purchased in the sugar towns, became essential markers of a young man’s success overseas. The goods distributed within the traditional systems of reciprocity enabled young men, in a culture dominated by old men, to gain status and prestige. Other social and cultural issues explain why young men signed up for indentured labour. These young men were at an intermediate age when they were often excluded from important religious and ceremonial roles. When bride-price was expensive and controlled by the older men, young men found that the status goods added to their chance to gain a wife. Some men were escaping from punishment for offences committed in their communities and others, especially later in the trade, were keen to learn about Christianity or seek medical care in plantation communities (Laracy, Alasia et al. 1989: 115).

An opponent of the Pacific labour trade, the Russian-born scientist and ethnologist Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay, wrote a strong letter to Commodore Wilson of the Royal Navy Australia Station condemning the trade and followed this with a comprehensive account of his observations in the Western Pacific. Miklouho-Maclay was a respected figure in 19th century science in Australia. His letter of 8 April 1881 was published with little additional comment in some Australian newspapers (The Sydney Morning Herald 21 April 1881: 7; The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser 21 April 1881: 3). However, while the letter to Wilson was published by the papers in 1881, the official account, Kidnapping and Slavery in the Western Pacific, was not published by the House of Commons until 1883 (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1883a: 82-85). It contains important information on the internal dynamics of the labour trade. Miklouho-Maclay made some direct observations on why islanders recruited or were forced to recruit for plantation labour when he wrote: ‘About 15% are taken by means of different artifices and lying promises’, ‘about 15% are sold by relatives and Chiefs’, ‘about 10% are obliged to leave their islands, being pressed by various enemies’, ‘about 25% are returning labourers, who, having convinced themselves that their property was stolen by their own people, prefer to go away’, ‘about 25% inquisitive, mostly young people, anxious to travel, or wishing to get arms, powder, &c, &c’, ‘about 5% pressed by want of food, after a hurricane, repeated dry seasons &c, &c’, and ‘about 5% by force’.
Because pay was deferred to the end of a labourer’s contract, the time-expired worker had about £18 (£7,000 in current values). Those who re-engaged could argue for higher wages on the ground that they were experienced. Towards the end of the labour trade these men could ask for annual wages of between £26 and £32 (The Queenslander, Saturday 19 October 1895: 741–743). Workers were encouraged, even pressured, to spend their deferred pay in shops, known as Kanaka stores, directly or indirectly linked to the plantation. This system of deferred pay, credit and purchase arrangements called ‘truck’ was a means of controlling and stabilising the labour force (Graves 1993: 185 fn7). Although those working on estates located near towns could avoid the exploitative aspects of plantation trading by shopping in the town stores even these communities were largely controlled by merchants with economic and political connections to plantation owners. Itinerant, often Chinese, hawkers set up stalls near the labour lines to cater for the Melanesian labourers.

During their employment workers added to their trade box. This was a pine or deal-framed chest about 3 feet (approx. 1 metre) long with an 18 inch (approx. 0.5 metre) square end with handles and a lockable lid (Wawn and Corris 1973: 81, 123; Docker 1970: facing 260; Ivens 1918: 225). A sub-enclosure in the comprehensive list of papers to and from the Imperial government concerning the labour trade gives some idea of the trade items contained in one man’s box at the end of three years employment (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1873: 247, 248). In the early days, men returned home with one musket, one fathom of Turkey Red material—a hard-wearing fabric dyed red using the root of the madder herb that would not fade or bleach in the sun, commonly made into shirts and shawls—24 yards of navy blue serge, one white sheet, one axe, a 12-inch knife, a 10-inch knife, a six-inch knife, a belt and sheath, a pair of scissors and a comb, a mirror, four tins of powder—presumably skin powder—3/4 lbs of beads, pipes, rings and four Jew’s harps, two lbs of lead shot, one box of firing caps, two yards of grey calico, needles and thread, two lbs of tobacco, one ‘mission’ hatchet, matches, soap and scented oil, one blanket, one pair of trousers, and one shirt. Men were keen to purchase playing cards, musical instruments like mouth organs and concertinas, and in addition to the tomahawks, files, knives and gimlets they brought saws, nails and hammers, fishing lines and nets, cooking equipment, mirrors, razors, and matches (Graves 1983; The Brisbane Courier 9 December 1892: 5–6; Examiner, 12 February 1907: 7). These personal trade items were not considered a problem for Queensland customs officials. However after a ban on trading firearms and ammunition to islanders was put in place in 1884 officials kept a keen eye for Snider-Enfield rifles that flooded the arms trade after 1870.

The Snider-Enfield was a converted muzzle-loading Enfield that had been fitted with a breech block mechanism. It was invented by the American Jacob Snider...
in 1869. The conversion increased the capabilities of the rifle. They were widely used by the British Army during the Māori Wars in New Zealand that lasted until 1872. The army then replaced the Snider-Enfield with the more accurate Martini-Henry guns (D’Arcy 1987: 57–58; Beck 2009: 135). As a result, large numbers of obsolete rifles flooded the international arms market. There was a ready trade in old guns in the Pacific and little attempt at regulation despite the concern in official circles (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1887a). While British subjects were banned from dealing in the arms trade, the illegal sale of firearms continued (Graves 1983: 94–95). After 1884, in place of banned guns, men returned from plantation labour with cash and bought firearms from French and German traders who could still legally deal in arms (Foreign Office to Colonial Office 16 October 1893 CO 225 44 17601). This led to numerous incidents in the Solomon Islands when attempts were made to stop non-British traders trading arms and ammunition (Beck 2009: 50). Guns did not change the function of warfare in traditional society—it remained a means of maintaining individual and group prestige that required all deaths to be avenged even those accidental deaths that occurred in the faraway cane plantations—but the form of warfare was modified to accommodate the use of firearms, ammunition and tomahawks.

European trade items became part of gift-giving that was in accordance with custom and tradition. The whole moral, economic, social and political structure of Melanesian society was built around exchange and reciprocity, and the failure of both settlers and administrators to understand this came to be a principal reason for the many and varied land disputes. For the young men to acquire status, access to law and knowledge, and eventually access to women, they had to distribute their prestige goods. As more young men went to the plantations, and more returned, the migratory network evidenced a marked rise in the composition of social gift-giving. When returnees were landed back near their home communities, these young men were seen by ships’ captains and crews to hand over their boxes to relatives and to chiefs without complaint, for immediate redistribution. This was evident on Malaita where the traditional cultural systems were the least impacted by European settlement (Graves 1983: 103). The trade box system brought about major changes in the social and economic structure of customary exchange but did not undermine it. In fact the returned workers and their trade boxes reinforced the long-standing relationships in traditional society (Graves 1983: 123–124).

Regulating the Queensland labour trade

The Queensland government, stung by the poor publicity surrounding the labour trade and the actions of Queensland vessels in the New Hebrides and
the Solomon Islands, appointed Government Agents on all labour vessels from 1872. The Queensland government could only legislate for the actions of the trade within the colony and on Queensland ships not in the islands outside its jurisdiction. By this time the jurisdiction of the Australia Station had been widened to include the Solomon Islands and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The kidnapping phase had ended and largely voluntary recruitment was occurring despite condemnation by humanitarian groups and mission activists. Of course, voluntary recruitment had many shades of meaning in theory and practice, determined by the conduct of captains and crew on board labour vessels. The quality of the men appointed as Government Agents and vessel masters was fundamental to the regulation of the trade, but men of quality and substance did not sign on to be labour vessel crew. Government Agents were issued with instructions and copies of the legislation but as shown in the log of James Lane, Government Agent on the *Lizzie* that sailed to Joannet Harbour and Sudest Island between December 1883 and July 1884 under the command of William Wawn, the record provides almost no information on the recruiting practices undertaken or on the conditions aboard (Queensland State Archives Item ID7866).

In 1880 a labour vessel master could receive £16–£20 a month and a recruiter £9 a month while at sea. £1 was allocated for the beach payment for each man recruited. In the early days, the Government Agent was paid £10 a month while at sea but later, in order to attract a better type of applicant, six permanent positions were created with a salary of £200 a year (Giles and Scarr 1968: 10). By 1890 these prices had risen to £35 a month for the captain, £13–£15 a month for the agent and the beach payment risen to £5 for each man. This was usually paid to the family or to the ‘passage master’—or ‘beach captain’—often a local chief who was responsible for signing the men on (Graves 1993: 29). ‘Passage’ came to be the term used to describe the place of recruitment (Giles and Scarr 1968: 15). Passage money was mostly paid in trade goods, or a combination of cash and trade. Costs for recruiting were rising and there was open competition from recruiters from Fijian and Samoan plantations as well. In Queensland, medical attention for indentured labourers was not made compulsory until 1880 when provision was made for the construction of Pacific Islander Hospitals, but these were located apart from the general public hospitals that serviced the white population (Saunders 1976). Planters and the government were jointly responsible for the financing of these hospitals as both were loath to spend money on labourers at the expense of the general white public. The ‘Kanaka’ hospitals were an abject failure. In less than six years, the four hospitals at Maryborough, Mackay, Ingham and Geraldton (Innisfail) were deemed a financial failure. By 1890 all were closed (Saunders 1976: 49).
The labour trade was complex and constantly changeable, subject to the rise and fall of the sugar industry. Attitudes to the presence of Pacific Islanders in the mainland towns in north Queensland varied. The growing labour unions in the Australian colonies were strongly against the recruitment of South Seas Islander labour but their concerns were for the future of white labour. The actions of the Australia Station in dealing with ‘outrages by natives on British subject’ in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were reported annually to the Admiralty and presented to the House of Commons. Still, Royal Navy officers saw their role as suppressing the trade and their humanitarian message carried far (Great Britain. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers 1872, 1881 and 1887a; Royal Navy (1886–1896); Woodford papers PMB 1290 Items 8/21/1–8/21/12). Apart from its contact with the Royal Navy, itinerant traders, labour recruiters and members of the Melanesian Mission, the Solomon Islands was little known to the general public either in Australia, or even less, in England.

The fabled riches of the Solomons

As contacts increased, ideas about the supposed resource riches of the Pacific also increased. Travellers like Walter Coote (1882, 1883: xiv–xv) wrote that the position of the Australian continent made it a natural outpost for annexation of the chain of islands that ‘are the Solomon Islands, an archipelago of great resources, which, although at present practically unknown except by reason of the dark tragedies so often enacted around its coasts, will quite certainly, before long, be regarded as among the most valuable and important of all the South Sea groups’. The idea that the Solomon Islands were a source of fabled riches took a long time to die. However, in the eyes of the officials in the Colonial Office, Southern Africa had productive land and rich minerals. It also had a large resident, albeit coerced, labour force and indigenous chiefly structures that could be manipulated. The Solomon Islands was the very antithesis. The British government was slow to bring any legal or administrative control over the isolated islands in the Solomons group or the Gilbert and Ellice Islands north-east of the Solomons. The growing impression was that any expansion of interests into the Western Pacific was the province of the Australian or New Zealand colonies. The economic expansion of the Australian colonies made New South Wales, and the main port of Sydney, a secure base for regional trade and the expansion of mission activity into the Pacific. This primacy of economic influence was not turned into political ascendancy by the British government until it was forced to act.
Trade and traders

Colonial culture was profoundly materialistic. White people, predominantly men, went to the Pacific for trade, investment or to establish plantations (O’Hanlon 2000: 24). Local peoples saw Europeans in terms of the economic and political benefits that could accrue from trade and labour. While this trade structured social relationships, these were inherently fragile. Life for European traders in the Solomon Islands was fraught with difficulty, if not with physical danger. Collecting turtle shell and pearl shell was susceptible to market fluctuations; sandalwood and bêche de mer collecting declined in the 1860s, while in the 1870s the demand for coconut oil used in soaps, chemicals and explosives increased. Theodor Weber, the Samoa-based agent for Hamburg traders Johann Caesar Godeffroy und Sohn, had perfected the use of kiln-dried copra by 1869. This resulted in a virtual monopoly of export copra for Godeffroy. As a result, the poor quality, locally-produced coconut oil and the beach trade in badly treated sun-dried copra were supplanted by large-scale shipments of high quality kiln-dried copra to Europe. It was estimated that about 250 coconuts, the product of three trees, could produce between 20 and 30 quarts of oil (Anon 1888b: 476). Once the production of oil could be made more profitably and cleanly from dried copra, the small-scale native produced coconut oil export was doomed (Maude and Leeson 1965: 433). In Samoa, Weber established the first large-scale commercial copra plantations in order to reduce the level of dependence upon the irregular supply of locally harvested produce (Kennedy 1972: 263). Large-scale plantations under company control meant that Godeffroy could manage both the supply and the demand for coconut oil and the by-products of processing. But in the Solomon Islands small-scale coastal trading in copra was still the norm. Some pearl shell was available and the use of ivory nut (Metroxylon salomomense) increased the diversity of products. Ivory nut was not to be a successful export product. The nuts contained a considerable volume of water and could deteriorate if badly treated. The main market was Germany, where they were used as wheels on roller skates and cheaper buttons, but this market was small, fickle and the product from the Pacific was considered second-rate. Better quality material could be sourced from South America.

For physical protection from attack and from malaria, most early traders in the Solomons based themselves on islands in sheltered lagoons, such as in Roviana Lagoon, or off the coast, like Mbara off Aola and Uki ni Masi off Makira. These areas were defensible or places to which traders could easily retreat if necessary. White men could not easily travel inland for fear of attack from the bush tribes and small trading vessels could be raided from coastal communities (Heath 1974a: 22). Generally the trader was backed by a Sydney-based merchant who provided financial loans for the purchase of a small schooner or cutter, and trade goods. The debt was reduced when the backer was provided with product.
Others hired a trader who owned a small coastal vessel and the backer was the sole buyer of product. In the early days, the profit margin for the trader was high but as the number of traders increased margins fell. The on-selling profit was of distinct advantage to the backer. In either case, the trader was both physically and economically exposed while the Sydney-based backer had control over demand and supply. The sort of trade goods demanded by local people were practical implements, fishing gear, coloured calico, clay pipes and twist tobacco. Hatchets and tomahawks could be readily adapted into working tools and weapons but the main trade currency was tobacco. Because the demand for it was high, the profit and loss for the trader was largely determined by the market price in Sydney (Bennett 1987: 53). American twist tobacco was especially popular as it was soaked in molasses or rum, with each piece wound into two overlapping halves that could be easily divided and cut with a sharp knife (Hays 1991: 94). Right through the 1880s, the price for stick tobacco in Sydney remained reasonable at about 2 shillings a pound. Cheap twist tobacco was so poor that it was known as ‘sheepwash’ and Sydney traders were prepared to sell it to white men for as little as 1 shilling a pound (Maude and Lesson 1965: 429). In 1887 a trader could buy 26 sticks of tobacco to one pound weight and so could purchase about 260 sticks for £1 (20 shillings equals £1). At the same time, one ton of copra (approx. 1,000 dried copra kernels) cost £3. In effect, local villagers could expect to receive about 700–800 sticks of tobacco for one ton of copra (Bennett 1987: 53–55). Prices of course fluctuated, as did quality. Traders and local people bargained for better prices when copra was scarce. Because the trader was dependent on the supply of native produced copra it was in the interests of local people to keep supplies low and the price high. One ton of copra cost traders about 25 tomahawks or 700 to 800 sticks of tobacco depending on quality. At the same time, in 1887, 2 dozen Hurd’s tomahawks at 30 shillings [£1/10/-] a dozen cost £3 from Hoffnung & Co, a large wholesale store in Charlotte Street, Brisbane (British New Guinea. Annual report 1887: Correspondence and Report of Special Commissioner, New Guinea, Respecting the Return of Louisiade Islanders to Their Native Islands: 4). Local people would have been quick to understand the dynamics of beach trading.

When traditional culture was still strong, European trade goods and the labour trade stimulated the development of a dual economy—the cash economy was beginning to intersect with the subsistence economy—traders occasionally dealt with dogs’ teeth, porpoise teeth and shell arm rings, and foreign trade goods circulated within the customary exchange system (Bennett 1987: 54). In German New Guinea traders introduced ceramic arm rings made in Europe especially for this complex mix of traditional and non-traditional exchange (Beck 2009). In the early days, many trading stations were only manned for part of the year
and some traders had a ring of trading locations where tropical product was collected. These stations were visited periodically on the annual trading voyages by white men who lived almost permanently aboard small sailing schooners.

The number of permanent or semi-permanent coastal traders was always small. Carl Ribbe, a German naturalist, wrote that when he visited the Solomon Islands in 1893 he knew of only about 20 stations and as many traders (Ribbe 1903: 76; Bennett 1987: 59). Ribbe’s visit was made following the German annexation of the northern Solomon Islands in 1886. Although non-German traders suspected him of being an agent of the Deutsche Neu-Guinea Kompanie, the Commander in Chief of the Royal Navy Australia Station was requested to provide him with assistance in his travels (Admiralty to Colonial Office 23 December 1893 CO 225 44 21629 & 1 January 1894 CO 225 46 186). He must have been well-connected. From his home in Radebeul near Dresden in Germany, Ribbe later issued a comprehensive printed catalogue of Lepidoptera collected from the Bismarck Archipelago and Solomon Islands (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 7/38). For example, in 1896 he listed for sale a male Ornithoptera victoriae regis [Rothschild 1895] possibly collected on Bougainville for 25 marks or approximately £12/10/- (current value about £4,500). Obviously from Ribbe’s catalogue a good natural history collector could make a reasonable income from privately funded expeditions to the Pacific.

The traders mentioned by Ribbe, however, were a cosmopolitan lot; mostly drifters, beachcombers and remittance men. Prominent coastal traders around this time were Fred Howard, a German, based at Uki ni Masì between 1877 and 1890; J. C. Macdonald, a Canadian, who was established at Santa Ana in 1881 but who soon moved via Aola to Siniasoro on Fauro in the Shortland Islands in 1885; and Lars Nielsen, a Dane, based at Savo in 1877, Mbara Island off Aola in 1887 and then at Gavutu (Ghavutu) off Nggela in 1891. Frank Wickham ran away from home in Somerset and after being shipwrecked in the Bougainville Strait settled in the Roviana Lagoon (Bennett 1987: 58–60). Jean Porret, a Frenchman, was based at Kau Kau (Kaoka) plantation in 1896, and Peter Edmund Pratt (known by a number of names such as French Peter and Edmunds Peter Pratt) and his brother Jean Pascal Pratt (or Jean Pierre Pratt), both French, were based on Simbo Island and at Hombuhombu, a small island off the Munda coast and close to Roviana Island, from 1896 to 1900 (Ribbe 1903: 268 shows Peter Edmund Pratt collecting copra from local people protected by an armed escort). Pratt had also purchased land at Mbilua on Vella Lavella. The cost was £33/18/- paid in Snider rifles and ammunition (Woodford to Thurston 17 July 1896, WPHC 4/IV 284/1896). Oscar and Theodore Svensen and partners bought Crawford Island (Tavanipupu) in Marau Sound in 1896 and paid £10 in trade (Woodford to Thurston 26 November 1896, WPHC 4/IV 475/1896). They established a large and profitable trading station on Crawford Island (Tavanipupu) in Marau Sound,
sheltered from the south-east trades by Marapa Island. From here in 1892 Svensen expanded into copra plantations (Marau Co to Woodford 10 July 1896 CO 225 50 21650). He subsequently became known as ‘Kapitan Marau’ by the local people. He made friends with the islanders as well as European traders and the crews of labour vessels (Bennett 1981: 175). Because he was Norwegian, Svensen was not subject to the regulations prohibiting the trade in arms and ammunition and despite his genuine friendship with Woodford firearms were later brought into the protectorate on his company steamers, Kurrara and Aldinga (Foreign Office to Colonial Office 21 February 1893 CO 225 44 2995). Another foreign citizen was Frank (Franz Emil) Nyberg, identified as a Russian Finn by both Woodford and Captain Edward Davis of the HMS Royalist (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 1/2 Diary 11 May 1886; PMB 1290 Item 8/21/6: 1891). This is essentially correct, for all Finns born before 1917 were citizens of the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland. Nyberg had been a seaman on the labour vessel the Venture before settling at Santa Ana as a trader (The Sydney Morning Herald 21 June 1889: 8; Jari Kupiainen pers. comm. 2014). These foreigners could circumvent the regulations that prohibited British subjects from selling arms and ammunition to natives and this was a major flaw in the regulations.

Alexander Ferguson, who like many of the local traders married a local woman, was a close friend of Gorai the chief of Alu (Shortland) Island who named his nephew Ferguson. Ferguson, a partner with the Cowlishaw Brothers, bought tropical product for sale in Sydney. Many traders like Theodore Svensen and William Hamilton had also been involved in the labour trade (Bennett 1987: 56–57; Johnston 1980). Even those who lived for some time in the islands were still at risk. Fred Howard was killed in January 1891 by Malaitans looking for guns and ‘blood’ money paid by the Uki ni Masi people. J. C. Macdonald’s boat crew were killed and his boat seized in Marau Sound in 1879. Lars Nielsen was attacked collecting copra off the beach at Rendova in New Georgia in 1889 and two Malaitan men working for Peter Pratt were killed at Rendova in 1888 (Bennett 1987: Appendix 6). Some traders or their workers were killed in retaliation for the deaths of labourers who had died in Fiji or Queensland but others were attacked in revenge for the desecration of graves and shrines (Bennett 1987: Appendix 6: 390–396). Motives were complex and often unclear at the time.

Traders occasionally acted as intermediaries in cases when the Royal Navy was seeking to punish local men for attacks on ships’ crews. Undoubtedly they did so for personal advantage. Naval action could do little long-term damage and could only destroy villages accessible from the shore. The withdrawal of trading facilities was more effective, at least in the early days, but when the number of traders increased the threat of trade removal ceased to be effective. The threat of naval action could suppress disquiet over shady business transactions
but both traders and later missionaries could be seen as agents of retribution. The complex relationship between traders and their producers was open and volatile: Norman Wheatley, then based at Nusa Zonga off the Munda area in Roviana Lagoon, was known to give arms to Hiqava, the baMana of the Kekehe polity centred on the chiefly village of Sisiata in Munda, who used them in head hunting raids to Choiseul and Isabel. Long handled tomahawks and firearms made coastal communities formidable, and while not the only reason for the increase in activity, certainly gave New Georgia men an advantage in raiding. In the volatile area in the north-west islands, at the intersection of trade, warfare and ritual was predatory head hunting.

Head hunting in the northern islands

In an economic analysis of the increase in head hunting in the late-19th century McKinnon (1975: 300) reports that
to trade big-men had to obtain shell and centralise its collection. The shell turtle had to be hunted in competition with others who were anxious to enter trade with Europeans. Although raiding and head hunting were most probably features of this inflationary or expansive period of New Georgia societies, it is also clear that head hunting and turtle hunting were not mutually exclusive.

As the turtle population was depleted around New Georgia, raiding parties hunted further afield and spread to Choiseul and Isabel Islands. The larger the raiding party the greater the status of the organiser and the greater the economic gains. It was in this atmosphere that the status and reputation of Big-men like Gorai (Koroi: Parkinson 1999: 214–215) of the Shortland Islands, Ingava (Hiqava) of Roviana, Muke of Simbo and Bera and his son Soga of Bugotu (Bughotu, Mbughotu) on Isabel grew (McKinnon 1975: 303; Jackson 1975). While it is indisputable that head hunting expanded in the late-19th century there is some difference of opinion over the reasons why it did so. After having been shown inside a men’s house at Oneavesi (Honiavasa) in Roviana Lagoon Charles Woodford was to write: ‘it is from New Georgia and the adjacent islands that head hunting is carried on to its fullest extent. Among these natives it appears to be a perfect passion’ (Woodford 1888a: 360, 375). Head hunting also had a special season. The peak time for raiding, and trading, was determined by the availability of the Canarium indicum (ngali) nut during the north-westerlies that blow between October and March but most especially during calm weather in November and December before the onslaught of the wet season (Aswani 2000: 60; Hocart 1931: 303). This was also the peak turtle hunting season and so both events were ritually coordinated. This growing season was the best time for
bonito, the fish that served as a major focus of ritual activity and economic activity, and a complex seasonal calendar was built around these social, economic and ritual activities (Burman 1981: 255). The \textit{ba\textbar ara} was responsible for the coordination and timing of activities relating to gardening, feast-giving, warfare, head hunting and trading, and they and their ritual priests held the knowledge of the ceremonial cycles.

Recent ethnographical and archaeological evidence suggests other motives apart from ideas that it encapsulated the people’s spirituality and was an expression of economic rationality (Dureau 2000: 7). Certainly, endemic warfare as a result of wealth acquired by trading with Europeans was noticed by traders, missionaries and naval officers. The early view that the introduction of iron, guns and metal axes led to the intensification of head hunting downplays the historical complexity of predatory head hunting that emerged from the expanding and contracting regional polities and changing indigenous ideological entanglements. These began well before the 19th century (Aswani 2000: 39). It is most probable that head hunting had been practiced by the maritime dwelling people of Roviana Lagoon for several generations, perhaps even centuries, before the arrival of Europeans. Aswani and Sheppard (2003: S53), in a comprehensive and finely crafted paper, suggest that a considerable shift in local social and political economies and in religious structures resulted in a major shift in settlement patterns and political centralisation in Roviana. This occurred as early as the 16th century. In the pre-colonial period the rise of powerful chiefs resulted in the ‘burgeoning ritual, economic, and political activities including predatory head hunting and inter-island trade’ (Aswani and Sheppard 2003: S69). In the pre-colonial period Roviana and Simbo war parties were allied and raided, and traded, with people in Vella Lavella, Ranongga (Ranoga), Kolombangara (Kolobangara/Nduke), and the Marovo Lagoon. Raiding, trading and turtle hunting later extended to Choiseul, Isabel, the Russell Islands (Parvuvu and Mbanika), and north-west Guadalcanal.

The people living on islands in the wider New Georgia region mixed, intermarried and traded both ceremonial valuables like clam shell ornaments (\textit{poata}, white clam shell rings), \textit{bakiha} (fossilised clam shell rings favoured for its reddish/yellow tinges), and shields (\textit{lave}), as well as important food stuffs, like taro, \textit{ngali} nuts and betel nut (\textit{Areca catechu}) (Miller 1978: 289–292; see also Aswani and Sheppard 2003: S66 Fig 5: Young Roviana man with shell decorations, photograph taken by Walter H Lucas in 1899; Brunt and Thomas 2012: 240). An extensive trade network extended from Vella Lavella to Simbo, Ranongga, Kolombangara and on to Roviana Lagoon. But when European traders entered this region, first Simbo and then Roviana became the centres of customary trade and the local chiefs (\textit{ba\textbar ara}) became wealthy (Schneider 1996: 82). Like systems in other Melanesian areas, customary trade across the
islands was a successful, functioning, integrated system with its own internal
dynamism. It was not static but changed with population movements, absorbed
new technologies and goods, was interrupted by warfare and feuds, and was
subject to the changing fortunes of groups of people and individuals (Hughes
1978: 310). Some groups were in a more advantageous position than others due
to their location to traditional resources. Later, their proximity to distribution
centres of trade goods enhanced their economic and political power.

Trading expeditions (qalo), turtle hunting and bonito fishing (valusa) could
facilitate raiding expeditions (qeto minate) especially as head hunting intensified
(Schneider 1996; Nagaoka 2011: 23). With the growth of Austronesian-speaking
communities in the Marovo and Roviana Lagoons, the pre-historic long-
distance trading networks retracted. These were replaced by more intensive
local systems. This inter-island trading was made possible by use of specialised
trading canoes (gopu) (Aswani and Sheppard 2003: S56, S57). Intricately carved
and decorated war canoes (tomoko (Roviana), magoru (Marovo), niabara (Vella
Lavella)) were between 12 and 18 metres in length, took more than 2 to 3 years
to build, using traditional stone and shell tools. The large war canoes were
estimated to be able to carry up to 50 warriors (Zelenietz 1983: 95 quoting from
Somerville 1897 and Woodford 1888a). They were kept in canoe houses (paele)
that measured 20 metres by 10 metres by 10 metres in height that also served as
repositories for human heads taken on raids. Tomoko were well-crafted, long,
narrow, blackened canoes that had raised prows and sterns decorated with
cowrie shells, nautilus and pearl shell with identifying figureheads (ṉuzu: Roviana;
toto isu: Marovo) carved to represent the spirit figure Tiola. Tiola,
meaning ‘man go to fight’, appeared in physical form as a dog and was the main
oracle, the ancestral spirit, in Roviana mythology (Nagaoka 2011: 87). A stone
statue of Tiola, placed in the principal shrine, was said to turn in the direction
of attacking foes. He was said to originated in Nduke (Kolombangara) and then
flew to Nusa Roviana where he taught people the art of building tomoko and
paele, both shaped after his form (Thomas, Sheppard and Walter 2001: 566).

Archaeological excavations of the hill-fort (toa or togere: hill) on Nusa Roviana
and at Saikile on nearby Ndora Island indicate that large-scale aggregation and
centralisation of political power began more than 300 years ago in the Roviana
Lagoon area. Nagaoka (2011: 292) dates the occupation of Bao—a site inland
from present day Munda—to 700–400 BP and the occupation of Nusa Roviana
to 400–100 BP. This indicates that people from Bao, inland from the present
day settlement of Munda, moved to the barrier reef islands around 400 BP.
Here intensified head hunting, new political and economic structures, new
rituals and ideology, alliance trading, and the manufacture of shell valuables
emerged in a setting of shifting demographics and tribal interactions (Sheppard,
Walter, Nagaoka 2000: 10; Nagaoka 2011). Production of valuables intensified
with the use of European tools that were made by skilled craftsmen, *matazoṉa*, who were often captives taken on raiding expeditions. When European traders began using traditional shell ornaments in transactions with local people this led to inflationary pressure that expanded social and political networks. With customary trade networks intersecting with European trade it became important for chiefs to have a resident trader within their vicinity. In coastal districts more than one *baṉara* vied for the support of their followers. These associates could be from kinship or alliance groups but had to be recruited in a domain of active competition. For this reason large-scale organisation and alliances for head hunting under the control of one powerful chief were dynamic and volatile (Nagaoka 2011: 328).

Research in Roviana, based on archaeological investigations and oral history, confirms that the migration of the people of Bao to Nusa Roviana under the direction of the chiefly ancestors, *Luturu-Baṉara* and *Ididu-Baṉara*, was undertaken in the mid-17th and early-18th centuries (Thomas, Sheppard and Walter 2001; Nagaoka 2000 reports it to be 13–15 generations ago). On the island of Nusa Roviana three villages and three social divisions were established: Kokorapa (middle) on the headland facing the lagoon and the mainland, Kalikoqu (lagoon side) on the beach facing into the lagoon proper, and Vuragare (ocean side) facing towards Blanche Channel. Above the three villages was a large hill-fort (Thomas, Sheppard and Walter 2001: 550–551). In order to attain and keep political power semi-hereditary chiefs (*baṉara*) and paramount chiefs (*baṉara tuti baṉara*) required sanction from dead ancestors (*mateana*) from whom spiritual power was derived. Priests (*hiama*) mediated between the spirit world and the *butubutu*, the local land owning group. The acquisition of heads became the material form by which *mana* (efficacy) or *minana* (potency) was bestowed by these ancestors. To be *mana* was to be potent, efficacious, true and successful (Keesing 1984: 138). Success in human efforts resulted from the responsiveness of the spirits and the use of ritual charms (Schneider 1996: 82). This efficacy guided human actions, for *baṉara* required spiritual sanction to finance and lead head hunting raids (Hocart 1931: 309). In the communities of the lagoon, valued ancestor skulls were placed in separate shrines (*hope*) or skull houses of chiefs (*oru*) with the trophy skulls of the denigrated enemies displayed in the communal canoe houses (*paele*) (Sheppard, Walter and Nagaoka 2000; Nagaoka 2011: 64; see Brunt and Thomas 2012: 172 for a photograph of chief’s skull decorated with shell valuables).

Head hunting was a way of denying enemies access to their ancestral *mana*. The captured head was displayed or transformed into *kibo*, over-modelled human likenesses (Wright 2005: 239). Like skull shrines, canoe houses and other ritual houses (*zelepade*) were places of *mana* where the worlds of the living and the dead met (Walter and Sheppard 2000: 305). *Zelepade* were small ornamented
buildings about one fathom long (6 feet, 2 metres), one fathom wide and two fathoms high (12 feet, 4 metres) that contained ritual objects for fighting weapons. It was the temporary resting place for the body of a dead chief (Nagaoka 2011: 69). The local chiefs consummated their power with the control of local shrines, ancestor skulls and sacred artefacts, including war canoes. Human heads of an enemy and the abduction of captives both served to ritually nurture the ancestor spirits (Hocart 1931: 303; Aswani 2000: 57; Nagaoka 2000: 13). The completion of new tomoko and the construction of paele and zelapade were celebrated with a communal feast and with the sacrifice of the blood of head hunting victims.

Highly ritualised warfare structured local village relationships. Along with this came the rise and fall of Big-men and changes in regional economies (Dureau 2000: 77–78). Warfare also altered demographic patterns. People on Isabel, Choiseul and other islands were forced to move further away from the accessible coasts and retreat inland to safer regions. Ritual was involved in removing pollution on warriors, in calling on the ancestors for blessings, and in gathering the supernatural power of the warring spirits. Ritual cleanliness was especially important for the long-distance raiding parties as the raiding party could be lost at sea if an unclean person were to be included (Aswani 2000: 59). Roviana elites—the chiefly and priestly families—gained ancestral efficacy and political legitimacy by presenting offerings to ancestral shrines. Their power and wealth gave them control over the means of production, most notably of shell valuables, taro and ngali nuts used in ceremonial feasting. Only chiefs could amass the power and wealth to command the construction of war canoes, to fund rituals and organise head hunting expeditions (Aswani and Sheppard 2003: S61). The greater the power to control the forces of nature and man, the greater the social, political and economic status.

Political power was demonstrated by the accumulation of this wealth, by increases in feasting and gift-giving, formation of strong patron-client relationships, the establishment of larger gardens and houses, sponsoring the construction of canoe houses and ritual war-houses, and the building of larger canoes. Expansion of economic activities meant that more captives (pinausu) were acquired to support these activities. Captives taken by abduction would either be adopted into families or used as servants by the Big-men. In the New Georgia region these captives were obtained during warfare or purchased from other areas. This rise in powerful leaders in turn led to the attraction of more young men eager to serve Big-men and share in the gains of trade and warfare. Undoubtedly, the introduction of European technology made the construction of canoes, canoe houses and men’s houses easier but the need to dedicate these houses to the mateana represented by natural phenomena such as meteors,
3. Commerce, trade and labour

shooting starts and rainbows led to the rise in head hunting observed by local traders, missionaries and naval officers patrolling the waters of the Solomon Islands (Nagaoka 2000).

The need for human heads fulfilled two important desires: ‘First: the general belief that a man’s greatness is in proportion to the number of human victims whom he has slain’, and ‘Second: the prevalent belief that on a great occasion, such as that of building of a tambu-house … and especially that of launching a canoe, a human head is essential to propitiate the spiritual powers’ (Guppy 1887b: 16; Penny 1888: 46–47; Anon 1888a: 563). Taking captives and heads weakened one group, the victims, and strengthened the other group, the victors (Dureau 2000: 83). The heads of enemies, stripped of their *mana*, were placed in the communal men’s houses where they symbolised the power of the leader and warriors. In their own country, the beheaded spirit became a malign spirit that could roam the forests killing anyone it came upon (Dureau 2000: 80). Conversely, the heads of kin and family were placed in ancestral shrines where their power served to strengthen the community (Dureau 2000). The skulls of ancestors were venerated at shrines while the skulls of enemies, detached from the bodies and removed from their home became ‘metaphorically converted into animals and detachable objects’ (Aswani 2000: 62).

Control of kin, the accumulation of human skulls and the shell valuables of the localised kin group, as well as command over sacred paraphernalia, afforded the chiefs control of the means of production to organise and finance raiding and trading expeditions and to control ‘the means to bring into fruition the supernatural powers of *mateana*’ (Aswani 2000: 49). The intensification of head hunting was a result of this complex polarising of political and economic power stimulated by interaction with traders and labour recruiters. It was also brought about by the shifting alliances, migrations and territorial displacement of peoples in the wider region. Warfare and disease reduced local populations. Local groups fought among themselves and were subject to retaliation measures by the Royal Navy when white traders and their workers were murdered in retribution over shady business deals, in attempts to secure valuable goods or for use of their heads for ritual and ceremony (Hviding 1996: 109).

Certainly, the introduction of European tools and weapons gave elite groups the power over gift and commodity production that afforded them access to wider political alliances, larger raiding parties and subsequently more slaves to manufacture shell valuables and foodstuffs. The pre-contact period saw the construction of massive coastal fortifications on the barrier islands and large, densely occupied coastal settlements. Chiefs gained control of the wetland taro production and food surpluses sustained feastings and the redistribution of valuables that could be used to finance raids, pay compensation for the use of other warriors and chiefs, and pay for ritual killings and assassinations.
Woodford, later writing about causes of depopulation in the Solomon Islands, noted that the depopulation of Isabel, the Russell Islands and the west end of Guadalcanal 'had been going on for at least three or four centuries, owing to the head hunting and slave raids carried on in those islands by the natives of New Georgia and adjacent islands' (Woodford 1922b: 69; Aswani 2000: 53). Head hunting raids were part of a ritual ceremonial cycle and warriors from New Georgia raided and traded with people on the Russell Islands, the Visale area on Guadalcanal, Zabana and Bugotu on Islander and Lauru on Choiseul. This was not one sided. Warriors from Roviana, Vella Lavella, Simbo, Ranongga and Rendova in the north also raided coastal communities around Marovo Lagoon in the south (Hviding 1996: 89, 92). Raids on neighbouring groups were mainly for revenge, assassinations or enmity killings but the distant islands were raided for trophy-heads and slaves (Aswani 2008: 185). Failure in raiding or the death of a chief was attributed to lack of efficacy and to appease the ancestor spirits a child (vaela) was sacrificed to restore social order (Schneider 1996: 87–88, Wright 2005: 239). Woodford (1890b: 155–157) described one such ritual conducted by the chief of Kalikoqu, Nona (Nono), that was witnessed by the trader John Macdonald in 1883 (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 1/4 Diary 1 September 1886; Nagaoka 2011: 64).

The New Georgia region was socially dynamic with groups of people aggregating to Roviana Lagoon, which indeed became the centre of head hunting. But chiefs in the Marovo Lagoon tried to secure a monopoly over the trade in clamshell valuables. Fossilised clam shells, quarried from the east side of Mount Kela on Ranongga, were intricately carved into large fretwork plaques. These barava are believed to be important land title deeds owned by clan groups (Richards and Roga 2004). Other valuable shell rings came from fossilised giant clams found in the interiors of low-lying rocky barrier islands. The secondary level valuables, made from cone shell or clam shells, were found in the water barriers between the offshore islands and beaches facing the coastal lagoons. It was important for the local leaders to control access to these areas in order to monopolise the manufacture of shell rings as the ownership of these rings was a statement of power, wealth and efficacy (Hviding 1996: 95).

In the meantime, raiding from New Georgia across to Choiseul spread south. With the rise in the number of guns available, head hunting spread beyond Bughotu in southern Isabel to Savo, northern Guadalcanal and northern areas of Malaita (Jackson 1975). What followed was the movement of more people into the hills and into protected settlements. It was the sight of apparent empty villages on the coast and deserted fishing camps that evoked the idea of apparent depopulation in the islands. The idea firmly held by missionaries, administrators and ethnologists was that the ‘natives’ were a dying race (Rivers 1922). Warfare and long-distance raiding certainly led to a significant number of people being
killed or relocating in Choiseul and Isabel but the progressive depopulation of coastal areas in New Georgia, subject to local raiding, assassinations and internal feuds, commenced much earlier than the 1880s (Aswani 2000: 61–62). The intensification of head hunting intersected with the arrival of traders, labour recruiters and settlers. It created an unstable political and economic environment and began to impinge on the growth of commerce and trade (Sheppard, Walter and Nagaoka 2000: 9–10).