

Chapter 14. Exchange Systems, Political Dynamics, and Colonial Transformations in Nineteenth Century Oceania

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This chapter characterizes Oceanic exchange regimes in terms of a continuum. It is suggested that there are a number of broadly parallel axes of difference along which very diverse exchange systems can be ranged. At one end are forms of exchange that typically transact like against like, that deploy quantity rather than qualitative rank difference, that often are based on food rather than valuables and are also articulated with brideservice rather than bridewealth.

These systems are also typically localized rather than regionally extensive, they exist within societies which are not economically specialized, they are characterized by intense and unstable competition, and values are generally non-convertible, that is, life and valuables circulate in distinct spheres and cannot be written off against one another. This regime of non-convertibility is epitomized by the Marquesas in Polynesia and many Austronesian and non-Austronesian New Guinea societies. The exchange regimes characterized by convertibility, regional differentiation, the use of valuables and categorically hierarchical relations are epitomized by Fiji.

While such a schematic analysis requires many qualifications, the broad continuum is important for the colonial histories in which indigenous systems are caught up. In general, “non-conversion” regimes are less able to exploit and incorporate the new possibilities for external and internal exchange that contacts with traders, missions, and the like, enable. Although there is a brief period of political efflorescence in the early nineteenth century in eastern Polynesia, the pattern is one of political decline, that contrasts sharply with the continuing dynamism of “value conversion” systems such as Fiji.

Introduction

Elaborate exchange systems have always been conspicuous features of Austronesian societies, and travellers' accounts frequently feature extended descriptions of activities described as trading or feasting. Even in relatively casual or shallow descriptions, it is often apparent that the practices witnessed were not merely economic transactions or ceremonies in a narrow sense, but events linked with kinship economies, with social reproduction as well as utilitarian traffic, that were often also evidently arenas for political competition.

Twentieth-century anthropology, particularly with respect to Oceania, extended these observations to a dramatic extent and made them the basis for fundamental theories of “the gift” and of reciprocity: while Marcel Mauss’s work was crucial theoretically and heavily dependent upon Pacific cases, Malinowski’s account of “the *kula*” became an ethnographic classic.

In some ways, however, the very prominence of these studies hindered an extended comparative understanding of Oceanic exchange. Malinowski’s texts, used again and again in teaching general anthropology courses, were decontextualized from the region that they dealt with and instead taken to illustrate general theses concerning reciprocity; “the Kula Ring” was paradoxically considered a unique system, yet also one that revealed fundamental aspects of human sociality, at least in its non-modern forms. Even a recent theorist can observe that the *kula* is “one of the most extraordinary phenomena for which anthropologists have been called upon to account” (Miller 1987:60). Discussion of this kind overlooked the extent to which the *kula* was articulated with other exchange systems along the northern coast of New Guinea and around southeast Papua, and the fact that certain other systems in the region, which also featured shell valuables, involved similar transactions, even though the exchange-paths did not constitute a circle. Paradoxically, also, most research on the *kula* has dealt with its manifestations in ethnographic localities and raised questions concerned with the representations of value, mortuary exchange, and other topics, within those sites, without actually attempting to grasp the regional properties of the system or its dynamics at that supra-local level.

This chapter does not review the anthropological literature on exchange in Oceania, or interpretations of the *kula* specifically (but see Specht and White 1978; Leach and Leach 1983; Macintyre and Young 1983; Gardner and Modjeska 1985; Keesing 1990; Thomas 1991). It instead attempts, in a very provisional way, to address the comparative agenda that seems to have been marginalized by the focused character of ethnographic research. I suggest some principles that could form the basis of a typology of Oceanic exchange systems, not with the intention of producing any static classification, but rather to suggest how significant differences in exchange made a difference at the level of political dynamics, that is, the capacities of particular social forms to expand, to generate stable relations of dominance and to be reproduced over long periods of time. These points are illustrated through reference to the indigenous systems, in so far as they can be reconstructed on the basis of ethnohistoric evidence from the contact period, in the western Solomon Islands, Fiji, and eastern Polynesia. It would not be adequate, of course, if such a discussion, based on evidence concerning societies undergoing transformation attendant upon European contact, was restricted to postulates concerning an imagined pre-contact order; it is more satisfactory, and quite feasible, to use this information to postulate processes (rather than states) and to examine the differing ways in which particular forms

of indigenous exchange were able to accommodate or respond to engagement with European trade. Indeed, the significance of discriminating among the variety of indigenous systems might be seen to arise from the better understanding they afford of the various histories of contact and colonialism.

Patterns of Difference

As has been noted, exchange is conspicuous in most Oceanic societies but does not everywhere have the same character. In some instances the events which observers found remarkable or which have been documented in scholars' accounts were presentations of food that appeared to have no links with any larger or regional trade system; in other cases, they were exchanges of valued artefacts — sometimes women's products such as mats, sometimes products of male woodcarving or stone work, otherwise shell valuables — that depended directly on wider transacting networks. These could, of course, exist together, and do not, in any case, exhaust the whole social field of exchange in any particular society; in addition to the collective events which were often of greatest interest to outside observers, exchange takes place in a more quotidian and domestic fashion and also in various secret ways — the services of sorcerers, for instance, may be purchased with valuables or in exchange for other services. Despite the great degree of diversity and the heterogeneous forms of exchange which may exist within particular societies, there are major axes of difference across which systems can be ranged. These relate particularly to the possible forms of substitution entailed in varieties of exchange and can be expressed by the following contrasts:

like-for-like <-----> like-for-unlike
quantity <-----> quality
food <-----> valuables
brideservice <-----> bridewealth
localized <-----> regionally-extensive
regional non-differentiation <-----> regional differentiation
competition <-----> hierarchy
values non-convertible <-----> value conversions

There are two important general points about these terms; first that they can only be useful once they are contextualized, as I shall proceed to do; clearly hierarchy and competition are not generally mutually antithetical, but in the context of exchange practices a particular juxtaposition can be made. Secondly, the several different continua frequently cannot be correlated, such that a case manifesting several attributes to the arrows' left may display other features or emphases that stand more to the right: an exchange system that proceeds mainly

on a like-for-like basis is not necessarily found in a society in which brides are compensated for by labour rather than wealth items. Hence, initially, these are descriptive rather than theoretically informed discriminations, but I will suggest that there is a significant underlying contrast, amenable to being explained and elaborated upon in a relatively economical way. Before taking this non-ethnographic approach further, the terms of these contrasts need to be elucidated further.

Like-for-like refers to exchange in which things of the same kind move in both directions, though typically at different times. For example, a group that has given pigs later receives pigs. Like-for-unlike entails movement of, say, food against valuables, or valuables of different kinds (or more importantly perhaps, of different rank or status) against each other. The first form of exchange almost necessarily turns upon quantity rather than quality, in the sense that there are primary media of exchange, such as live animals, and what is at issue are the volumes presented; while the second principle turns upon qualitative difference, on the specific associations of particular categories of things. Irrespective of the principles of exchange, the properties of dominant media are highly significant, in the sense that cooked or prepared foods, for instance, generally cannot have value for the receivers beyond the point of consumption; they cannot be recirculated as further gifts in the way that semi-perishable or non-perishable items such as mats and shell valuables can be. An exchange system based in food, in principle, does not afford much scope for accumulation and this also implies constraints on political dynamics.

These constraints cannot, however, be understood as crudely material or environmental factors. From the perspective of political economy, the most crucial issue is the extent to which it is possible for one sort of objectified value (in food, for instance) to be converted into another (in valuables, relations, persons, or services). The greater the range of possible conversions, the greater the scope for political actors to mobilize resources of different kinds and obtain strategic advantages over other competing groups, and the more scope, in particular, for the development of complex regionally-differentiated exchange systems in which some groups have central and others peripheral statuses. Where scope for value-conversion is limited, on the other hand, political competition is not necessarily less intense, but tends to take a more localized form and be articulated with unstable and localized hierarchies rather than regionally-extensive confederacies. For Papua New Guinea, this issue has been analysed particularly with reference to the difference between bridewealth and brideservice marriage compensation systems: the latter exemplify the principles that persons or labour can only be recompensed by persons or labour; such societies are typically characterized by restricted exchange and in extreme cases by high incidences of direct sister exchange. This logic does not apply merely to marriage, but also in other domains such as compensation for killings in

warfare; in bridewealth societies, deaths need not be avenged by further deaths but can be recompensed through payments of valuables, just as the wife is paid for in objects rather than services (Wood in press; Modjeska 1982; Godelier 1986; Godelier and Strathern 1991; see also Jolly 1991 for Vanuatu). These analyses and debates have been problematic partly because links have been made between a variety of distinct phenomena; in the Highlands case, there has been particular stress on correlating limited scope for substitution (what I have called non-conversion) with leadership by “great men”, that is by figures such as warriors and shamans, and on the other hand between high-substitution systems and “big men” who are first and foremost masters of ceremonial exchange.

Here I focus less on leadership and marriage and more on the major forms of ceremonial exchange; without attempting to theorize whole systems of social reproduction, I suggest that the issue of substitution makes crucial differences both for the expansive potentialities of indigenous social forms and for their responses to external contact — which in some cases can mean contact with other indigenous systems, as well as with the European-based world economy. Fiji and the New Georgia group exemplify systems in which elaborate value conversions were possible, while the Marquesas in eastern Polynesia, though not a typical Oceanic chiefdom from most perspectives, illustrates the political dynamics of a non-conversion system. So far as Fiji is concerned, it is worth differentiating the expansive and politically stratified confederacies of the coastal parts of the large island of Viti Levu, and the eastern parts of the archipelago as a whole, with the more localized societies of the interior of Viti Levu. Though both cases were arguably equally substitution-oriented, the more limited articulation with external exchange in the interior had important ramifications. The systems can only be sketched out in the most cursory way here, but more detailed accounts are readily available (for the Marquesas, see Robarts 1974, Denning 1980, and Thomas 1990; for early Fiji, see Williams 1858 and 1931, and Sahlins 1985; for twentieth century Fiji, see Sahlins 1962, Belshaw 1964, Toren 1990, and Thomas 1991; for New Georgia, see Hocart 1922, 1931, n.d.).

The Marquesas

At the end of the eighteenth century, Marquesan society was characterized by intensely competitive and unstable relations between the populations of particular valleys, which were usually referred to as “tribes” by most observers and ethnographers. Within most parts of the group, “tribes” were understood to be descended from one or the other of a pair of antagonistic brothers and thus fell into two divisions. Though these were not exogamous and were not internally unified in any continuous or politically consequential fashion, major conflicts were usually between groups in opposing divisions, who also met in aggressive competitive feasts. As was the case in parts of the western Pacific, there were

structural continuities and analogies between warfare and the competitive exchange that has been dubbed “fighting with food” (Young 1971).

Although there were a variety of forms of feasts and exchange-events, some of which were primarily commemorative, the usual form seems to have involved a major presentation of prepared food, in the form of cooked pork and preserved breadfruit, which was consumed by the receiving group on the feasting ground (the *tohua*), which sometimes took them a number of weeks or, reputedly, even months. At some subsequent date, the receivers would stage a reciprocating prestation, at which they would attempt to offer more cooked food; what was transformed by these gifts was a balance of shame and prestige, rather than a political relationship that had some content distinct from the competitive context itself, or a material economic relationship. Though the receiving group of course acquired food that supplemented their own production, they gained little that they could take away or turn to other purposes and the relationship produced was one of differentiated status, rather than hierarchy in any strict sense: the “winning” group had it over the “losing” one, but this supremacy might only be temporary and effected no permanent difference of rank. This was, therefore, a like-for-like system, in which the quantities rather than the qualities of the stuff exchanged were crucial, which was competitive, and which prompted efforts to expand production of what could be offered, but which was not transformative, in the sense that the outcomes of exchange events — however ignoble a particular group’s “defeat” — did not produce a relationship of vassalage or some other form of regional political dominance. It was also a system which operated on the basis of one-to-one relations between groups rather than systemically integrated series, even though each group engaged in competitive feasts with more than one enemy/exchange partner. That is, while group A might engage in rivalrous exchange with several others, B, C, and D, each of these relations took the same form:

- event 1) A ----- quantity x -----> B
- event 2) B ----- quantity x + -----> A
- event 3) A ----- quantity x ++ -----> B

Any ideal sequence would rarely be realized, because the groups might at any time shift from the feasting register to that of warfare — either for their own reasons or through implication in some conflict of their allies — and the outcome of this military encounter would displace whatever balance of prestige or shame arose from the feasting cycle. The fact that this schema is remote from any particular sequence of events, and of course neglects the nuances of practical competition, does not however alter the point that this mode of exchange is disconnected from a political dynamic which produces definite regional hierarchy, or stable relations of the quasi-feudal type, that, from somewhat different theoretical perspectives, both Valerio Valeri (1985) and Jonathan

Friedman (1981) have found to be characteristic of most eastern Polynesian societies.

What is conspicuous about this sort of system is in fact the degree to which various forms of exchange are insulated from one another: while there were numerous kinds of specialized production in the Marquesas and a trade in articles that were only found in certain localities, such as certain feathers used in ornaments, this was not linked with the ceremonial exchange that has been described, which did not feature like-for-unlike transactions. On the other hand, while marriage was of great political importance as a means of establishing or securing alliances, it did not produce an exchange relation or a rank order of any particular type; that is, there was no general rule that wife-takers ranked higher than wife-givers, or vice versa; in fact the content of particular relationships, produced through marriage or other links such as adoption, was highly mutable and dependent upon the practical deployment of links. Relationships between populations were thus characterized by equality in a formal sense, by reciprocal competitive presentations and by restricted exchange of spouses and children for adoption. The marked inequalities that existed derived from military strengths, productive capacities, and, in the contact period, from differential access to trade goods; they were not generated structurally.

Fiji

While Marquesan societies were, in the terms of my polarities, “non-conversion” systems — though they were nevertheless very different from the “non-conversion” systems that might be identified elsewhere, such as in Papua New Guinea — Fiji did and in many ways still does exemplify the opposed type, being characterized by great scope for value-conversion, by exchange entailing like-for-unlike transactions and by hierarchical ranking rather than competitive inequality.

The main occasions for ceremonial exchange in Fiji were known generically as *solevu*; though of diverse kinds, these mostly either marked some life crisis event — betrothal, marriage, birth, presentation of children to their mother’s people, death, and so on — or recompensed some service or assistance in warfare or need of some other kind. The substance of these presentations were *iyau*, valuables or manufactured articles for exchange, which in particular localities might consist mainly of pots (where local styles gave signatures to particular forms), wooden articles such as headrests or kava dishes, barkcloth (again usually of a particular, locally recognizable type), mats, and, in the post-contact period, a variety of introduced goods, particularly kerosene, items of household furniture, and manufactured fabric. Often accompanied, at least now, by live pigs and cattle, these presentations were encompassed in gifts of whale teeth, which were the focus of formal speeches and were handed between the senior men of giving and receiving groups. These teeth, *tabua*, were the “heaviest”

and “most chiefly” of valuables, were the substance of any important request or gift of atonement, and were strongly identified with women, not in the sense of standing for them symbolically, but in the sense that they figured as the proper exchange objects through which alliance was initiated and periodically expressed. Those presenting valuables at *solevu* were generally immediately given a feast (*magiti*), which figured as the acknowledgement of the prestation rather than as a counter-prestation or reciprocation.

Although some kinds of *iyau ni vanua* — the valuables of a particular land or polity — were the singular products of particular groups; other kinds, such as mats, were widely distributed and carried no local signature. However, there was a basic element of differentiation in the system that arose from the fact that any particular prestation did not recompense a previous offering of *iyau* but related to debts associated with kinship which were expressed rather than eradicated by presentations, and debts arising from assistance or from other activities. While it would in some ways be wrong to suggest that women were convertible into whale teeth or valuables generally — since their presentation produced a manifold state of indebtedness that had to be addressed in a variety of behavioural ways rather than a particular debt that could be repaid — this was a conversion-oriented system in the sense that its prestations were structured by difference, that is, by the matching of things against each other in a fashion that produced or displayed relationships. While the sheer quantity of food and manufactured articles presented was of course important, it was of less structural significance than the oppositions between particular kinds of things, and particularly between activities and relationships on one side and objects on the other.

In upland Fiji, the most prominent feature of alliance relationships was enduring indebtedness to the wife’s people, or to the mother’s side, from the point of view of the offspring. This was (as it still is) marked by substantial presentations of whale teeth and other valuables at various stages of betrothal and marriage, but was further expressed in presentations on the birth of the first child, on the occasion that children were presented to their mother’s people, and particularly on their deaths when whale teeth would flow back marking the enduring debt of substance to the maternal uncle. Because marriage exchange was generally restricted, the ranking implied at particular moments in alliance relations was generally equivalized through reciprocity. Hence an economy of kinship was articulated through the movement of *iyau* with a system of specialized trade in paths of alliance that entailed a dense mesh of obligation mutual indebtedness and political and military reciprocity. These links, then, were significant during warfare as they were in the Marquesas but with the important difference that valuables could be converted into assistance and services of various kinds; whale teeth could even be seen as a kind of capital

was not uniform and although it is generally stated as a categorical entitlement in ethnographic accounts, those who were *vasu* to the central places such as Bau could not appropriate in an unrestrained way, although some sources suggest that their relationship was a means through which Bauan wealth was dispersed, thus making the polity a fount of prosperity for its subjects. There is also, however, some evidence that Bauans reversed the relationship as they became more powerful, such that *vasu* were expected to *bring* property rather than take it away; this could only have been true of thoroughly subordinated subjects; relatively powerful allied groups certainly also paid tribute, but relations had a more reciprocal character, as is apparent from Williams' account of the visit of the Bauan paramount Cakobau to Lakeba, central place of the Lauan polity in eastern Fiji. While the Bauans received a particularly large canoe which was being manufactured probably with the assistance of Tongan craftsmen on the island of Kabara, they also brought some goods with them — “two handsome spears, more than 30 clubs wrapped in fine cynet, 20 whales' teeth, an immense root of yangona [kava] and several hundred fathoms of *lichi* or *masi* [barkcloth] from Kandavu” (Williams 1931:162-166). Only a few months earlier, however, another major presentation had taken place, associated with the presentation of the chief's daughter as another bride for Cakobau's father, Tanoa: the party took “an immense new canoe, 15 large packages of native cloth ... 7 large balls of cynet, 10 whales' teeth of from 1½ to 4 lb. weight” (*ibid.*:145). It was quite fundamental to Fijian polities that property of this kind did not remain with the receivers, but could be deployed in a great variety of ways to solicit a marriage, to secure military assistance, for redistribution within an elite, to consolidate a particular faction's power base, and so on.

While a great deal more could be said about the functioning and history of this system, the contrast with eastern Polynesia should be apparent: hierarchical relations in Tonga and Samoa as well as Fiji were indissociable from relations of exchange and alliance; in eastern Polynesia, on the other hand, dominance was grounded in “theocratic feudalism” and, where it was contested and insecure, as in the Marquesas, what was crucial was production of food and pigs, not access to or control over exchange.

Evolutionary and Non-Evolutionary Models

My main concern in this essay is to show how these two crude types — value conversion and non-conversion systems — respond quite differently to colonial contact in its early typically Oceanic form of trade with European ships seeking provisions and commodities such as sandalwood, tortoise-shell, and *bêche-demer*. Before discussing these histories, however, it is important to raise a larger issue about how these systemic types are thought to be associated. This is necessary in part because my substitution/non-substitution opposition is drawn from debates about New Guinea Highlands societies where analysis has usually been

frankly or explicitly evolutionist. Feil, in particular, suggests that western highlands societies are more evolved than those of the east (1987), and Godelier (1986, 1991) assumes that big man societies develop out of great men rather than vice versa. Although the analyses have undergone a good deal of refinement (Lemonnier 1990) and have been criticized in various ways (Strathern 1990), it is not clear that there is any positive formulation of a multilineal or cyclical transformational model that actually replaces a logic of from-to. The evolutionary view becomes particularly problematic if a broader range of Oceanic societies are considered since the Marquesas on the basis of some traditional criteria would have to be seen as a relatively “evolved” society: craft specialization was elaborate, there was hereditary leadership, notable inequality and so on. The Tongan and Hawaiian kingdoms are often classed together as the most developed and stratified Polynesian societies; in opposition to this evolutionary view, both Friedman (1981) and I (Thomas 1989) have emphasized not the degree of centralization or hierarchization from which perspective they may well be similar but instead the form of hierarchical reproduction which is distinctly different.

An alternative view could note the strong correlation between substitution or conversion systems and external exchange; the groups in which there is the most elaborate scope for conversion, say of services and kinship debts of various kinds into shell valuables, were also most densely associated with external trade: this is notable, for instance, for the Tolai, in New Georgia, in western Polynesia and in parts of the Massim region. On the other hand, the groups in which the life-for-life principle is most rigorously applied are also those excluded from wider exchange relations, such as the Umeda, the Kamula, and the Baining. This may not be true to the same degree of the Baruya, but they are not, in any case, on an extreme point of the continuum. If a regional-systemic perspective is adopted, it appears that the character of internal exchange is dependent on external articulations (cf. Gell 1992); this appears to be true, at least in a gross sense, where a wide range of cases rather than only the societies of the eastern and western highlands are considered. But my interest is not in proposing that it would be ultimately useful or informative to trace precise correlations on this point. The implication is rather that if the extent to which value conversions can be effected is linked with external exchange, then the systemic characteristics of particular societies can be related to the dynamics of regional trade systems rather than to some hypothetical and unilinear evolutionary index. Groups that were not in the early contact period engaged in trade may well have earlier been integrated into wider systems and were subsequently excluded for military reasons or because the nature of trade changed — the demands for certain articles may have ceased; routes may have shifted. While little will ever be known about such developments, it can safely be said that there were many changes — in demography, in production systems, in material culture — over time, that would have implied different configurations in trade routes. This would, in itself, imply

the possibility of change in both directions — toward great men systems as well as from them — but would only be part of a broader processual model that privileged the variety of possible systemic forms and transformations rather than evolutionary direction.

Indigenous Systems and Colonial Histories

No-one with a general knowledge of the Pacific today can fail to be struck by the differences between western and eastern Polynesia. Superficially, people appear to be more “westernized” in the east; this perception might be challenged in various ways, but it is true that there is little continuity between indigenous forms of social organization and hierarchy and almost no perpetuation of traditional ceremonies or of life crisis activities on anything but the most restricted domestic scale. What is particularly notable is the fact that throughout French Polynesia the traditional aristocracy is virtually invisible — in most places claims to chiefly status would be rarely if ever enunciated — while in Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa, on the other hand, indigenous rank systems have not only survived but been extended and entrenched under colonial rule, while chiefly elites are influential if not securely dominant in national politics.

This difference obviously owes a good deal to the colonial history itself; Tonga was under British tutelage rather than formal administration; in Fiji the indirect rule approach did much to codify and rigidify customary hierarchies and land-holding, as has often been noted. The French assimilationist approach, on the other hand, virtually swept the Tahitian aristocracy aside and refrained from any elaborate investigation or administrative use of customary social organization; the Americans in Hawaii and the Chileans in Rapanui behaved in a similar fashion. It is notable, however, that the divergence in response and development is conspicuous at quite an early point, even before the French annexed the Marquesas in 1842 and white settlers moved into Fiji in large numbers in the 1860s, prior to secession in 1874. In one case, what is manifest is decline — severe depopulation, a breakdown of traditional hierarchical forms and ceremonial activities. In the other, in Fiji, what is conspicuous is an efflorescence of political and military activity and a period of great expansiveness and dynamism, particularly so far as the Bauan confederation is concerned.

In the Fijian case, it is important to note that the key valuables for transactions today, as in the nineteenth century, namely whale teeth, were probably in the most limited circulation prior to the visits of European traders (although this point is not mentioned by most ethnographers who simply regard the teeth as the paradigmatic traditional valuable). It is popularly stated in Fiji that the “original” *tabua* were not whale teeth, but were made of some kind of ironwood; this may well be true, although some teeth very likely came into Fiji via Tonga where whales were occasionally stranded. There was very little significant contact between Fijians and whites before 1800 — though an epidemic of

dysentery occurred as a result of a shipwreck — but after 1801 sandalwood was discovered and sought after intensively in the period up to about 1814, when it had essentially been exhausted. William Lockerby, who resided in the islands in 1808-9 and who interpreted and facilitated trade, prepared a sort of guide to traders, including navigational directions, some Fijian vocabulary, and notes on reliable and not so reliable chiefs:

the Articles of Traid to pleas the Natives are Ivory Iron Work such as Tools the best plan is to carry a forge with you & make the tools to sute them knives & scisors Beads they are very fond of — White shels & Cloth the two latter are to be got At the Islands to windward of MyGoro [Koro] should you tutch their however Ivory is the Most Vallable Article Made in the form of a Whales Tooth and those of them that is possesd of any of them lays them up as graet riches as porshens for their Daughters & Making peace with their offended Supirurs etc. ([1972]:184).

Lockerby's assumption here is that ivory in some other form would be obtained and cut to resemble whale teeth; later, when whaling was being conducted extensively in the Pacific, mainly by American ships from New England ports and some English vessels, it was easier to obtain the actual whale teeth. After sandalwood became exhausted, trade contracted for a few years but soon developed again around different products for the Manila and Canton markets — *bêche-de-mer* and tortoiseshell. But because the routes of these vessels often did not intersect with those of the whalers, the teeth were obtained through rather circuitous paths. Whale ships frequently called at the island of Rotuma to the northwest of Fiji for provisions, and although the Rotumans did not themselves use whale teeth as valuables, they took these to exchange with the traders active in Fiji ("This island is a great resort for whalers from whom the natives obtain their whales' teeth"). Trade took place both directly and through white middlemen resident on Rotuma. Tobacco, which was conveniently light and compact in relation to its value, was given in return; it was said to be "worth almost its '*weight in gold*' at this place" (Cheever MS:23 June 1834). At about the same time Tahiti similarly became a port through which teeth were effectively transhipped:

I understand that Vandervort gave a great price for a few whales teeth here ... The people here natives and all have found out that teeth are valuable & ask a monstrous price for them — one large tooth that might weigh say 2 lbs. they wanted a dollar for — the Emerald was well supplied with that article of trade which are in great demand among Feejee-men (*ibid.*:5 August 1834).

This is indicative of the manner in which quite localized developments in exchange and in transactions between islanders and Europeans had broad ramifications that had effects on other islands great distances away.

To turn more specifically to transactions associated with *tabua* in Fiji, and their implications, it must be appreciated that the conduct and organization of trade was essentially upon Fijian terms to which foreigners were obliged to adapt. This was apparent even at the level of language use: the owner of a ship could presume in his instructions to the captain to stress that “it should be your first object to acquire a knowledge of their language” (Phillips MS). So far as transactions and the organization of collecting *bêche-de-mer* was concerned, the cooperation of chiefs was indispensable. *Tabua* were used, not so much in payment for *bêche-de-mer* as in ritualized presentations to chiefs made routinely upon arrival at a place and at certain other times. Trade was a two-level process: periodic high-value gifts to chiefs were a precondition for any economic engagement at all, while *bêche-de-mer* and tortoiseshell were reciprocated more directly to producers, and usually with guns, associated supplies (such as powder) and iron implements.

Although it is difficult to estimate in any precise way the *total* number of muskets and other goods which were imported, lists from certain ships are available. Eagleston’s trade, consisting of guns and many other “notions” (smaller articles such as beads) had cost \$3000; this included one lot of four hundred muskets, but it is not clear whether these were the only ones on board (Eagleston MS:250, 289). It appears to have been not uncommon to carry four to six hundred pounds (weight) of whales’ teeth, which, at about two pounds each, represented two to three hundred *tabua*. The profits from the sandalwood trade had been very high and even for the later period Eagleston frequently noted the “small cost” of what was received — “I bought nine head of beautiful tortoiseshell weighing thirty pounds; worth in the States \$360. I paid for same three muskets that cost \$1.25 each” (*ibid.*:282). However, the volume of what was given to Fijians was also very considerable, and the consequences of the introduction of huge quantities of guns and other goods have occasioned debate. In most discussions so far *tabua* have been neglected; the emphasis of most earlier writers and a few recent scholars has been the consequences of imports of guns, while some others have stressed continuity despite contact and the persistence of “paths of the land”.

Whales’ teeth probably substituted for the range of uses of prior forms of *tabua*; as was noted, this was a very wide range of ceremonial contexts, including installations to chiefly titles, at mortuary ceremonies and presentations of children to their maternal kin; from the start they were certainly used, as Lockerby noted, in marriage, which was indissociable from regional political relations. *Tabua* were also used to request and acknowledge assistance in political trouble and

war, and thus figured prominently in exchanges between chiefs and those referred to as the “teeth” or the “edge” of the land — the warrior-subjects who stood in a protective but privileged relationship to the sacred titleholders. In 1834 George Cheever witnessed a ceremony after a battle between Bau and Rewa where a Bauan man of chiefly rank had been killed. The warriors brought the body “ornamented with a white flag” to Rewa and after performing a chant seated themselves respectfully while the “king” presented them with spears, “about 100 fathom of Tapper”, and presented a *tabua* to the man who had actually killed the chief. After receiving their gifts the warriors reasserted their loyalty in a ritual manner by striking their clubs in the ground (Cheever MS:21 May 1834). Ordinary relations of this type would no doubt have been consolidated by the capacity of chiefs — who were virtually the sole recipients of whales’ teeth from traders — to draw on new supplies of valuables.

The use of *tabua* in more singular cases of political upheaval is exemplified by two cases, both involving violent conflict within elite families. In the early 1830s bad relations developed between Tabaiwalu, then the paramount chief of Rewa, and his son Koroitamana; ill-feeling was generated, as was typical, by rivalries between co-wives and their sons; the latter were, of course, potential and competing successors to the title. The conflict gradually escalated until Koroitamana, confident that he would be supported by a number of high-ranking men and warriors, assassinated his father. However, the chief’s principal wife, Adi Dreketi, successfully deceived the people of the town, leading them to believe that her husband was still alive but very weak and that he wanted his son killed. A meeting took place at which the general opinion was reputedly that Koroitamana’s conduct had been justifiable and provoked, but many also “feared the wrath of the king, in case he should recover”. Hearing of the uncertainty, the “queen” settled matters by taking “some whales’ teeth and other valuables and presented them herself to the chiefs, saying they were sent by the king to purchase the death of his son”. Whether the general belief actually was that the king was still alive is not clear; in any event, it was not long before Koroitamana was clubbed (Thomas 1986).

A case which had much wider ramifications for the politics of central and eastern Fiji in the 1830s was the “coup” — Fijians do make the analogy with the military takeovers of 1987 — against Tanoa, the paramount chief at Bau. There are various interpretations of precisely why dissent within Bau came to a head, which need not be reviewed here; a faction based around his half-brothers seized power, and Tanoa was fortunate to escape assassination himself, but was exiled to Somosomo between 1832 and 1836. From this base, and subsequently from Rewa, he began to build up his support amongst the people subject to Bau, but the process which was perhaps more crucial for his return to power was recovering the internal support of the Bauan clans. This was effected by his son, Seru (subsequently known as Cakobau), particularly through a steady stream

of gifts of *tabua* to the Lasakau group, who played a crucial role in a brief but decisive fight which actually displaced the rebel side (Waterhouse 1866; for further discussion and references, see Thomas 1986).

This remarkable capacity of the Fijian system — or at least of the chiefs of the first half of the nineteenth century — to absorb and put to use a new set of trading relations and imports might be taken to attest to a general theoretical principle about the capacity of local systems to appropriate introduced goods. While I have elsewhere argued that it is certainly important to recognize the processes of selective indigenous recognition and use of foreign contact, and to insist upon the historically particular character of the form of appropriation, here, however, it seems more important to emphasize the singularity of the Fijian system, which, as we have noted, is distinguished by the possibility of a wide range of conversions between services, valuables, debts, assistance and, not least, spouses. The fact that, paradigmatically, the whale's tooth stood for a woman meant that it was a signifier for and a means to an open-ended kin path of debt and exchange. As in any other system, marriage created a broader set of relations, but in the Fijian case these had distinctive political potential.

Moreover, and equally importantly, there was no contradiction between this positive process of deploying imports for political purposes and the production of what was to be extracted. The resources which the traders wanted were mostly not significant for Fijians. There is no suggestion that *bêche-de-mer* was eaten by Fijians; if so, it could only have been marginal to a diversified subsistence base. Curiously, tortoiseshell, which was used extensively in some Pacific material cultures, did not feature much in Fijian ornaments or regalia and sandalwood also was either not used at all or very insignificant. Although the preparation of *bêche-de-mer* did involve substantial commitments of labour, the activities were not unlike the collective efforts associated with certain projects such as canoe building, warfare, or preparing for ceremonies in areas away from one's home village. Fijians did not, in any case, agree to work continuously if there were other things that they wanted to do, and in some cases traders could do nothing but feel frustrated for some days or weeks when something exciting like fighting or a large ceremony took their workers away. It was also, of course, necessary to provision trading vessels but their relatively limited demands were met by different groups over quite a wide area — the scatter of islands in central Fiji, the Lau group and the coasts of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu — and could easily be accommodated. This was so because the ceremonial economy in Fiji was already developed to an enormous extent: there were many forms of intensive irrigated horticulture and food was routinely produced to be offered up for ceremonial exchange — in some areas specifically for barter through specialized production networks. When accounts are read of feasts at which many thousands of yams or taro and dozens or occasionally hundreds of pigs and turtles were

presented, it is not difficult to imagine the smaller needs of ships being relatively easily dealt with.

This is not to say that there were not problematic longer-term ecological consequences; for instance, Ward has pointed out that the quantity of firewood required to smoke and cure the *bêche-de-mer* was enormous and must have reduced coastal forests around Bau and those other parts of Vanua Levu which supplied the “fish” considerably. Over-collection diminished supplies of *bêche-de-mer*, while sandalwood was virtually obliterated in a short period. However, from a shorter-term perspective — usually the only one in which economies have a rationality — there was a good deal of compatibility between the interests of traders and the Fijians. The indigenous ceremonial economy did not depend upon goods which were being extracted to any excessive extent, while what was introduced was of considerable cultural and political use.

The contrast with the Marquesas is marked. While sandalwood was extracted early, by the 1820s and 1830s, the trade essentially consisted in exports of pork and other food in return for guns and related supplies. However, as we have seen, the Marquesan system did not function through value conversions in a manner at all similar to Fiji. Although there was a certain amount of internal barter, this was not the basis for relations of prestigious social value; inequalities were instead worked through and expressed in competitive presentations of food; these were connected closely with matters of the greatest ritual consequence, such as the commemoration of powerful shamans and chiefs. The estimation of individuals and groups was intimately connected with the capacity to stage such events, and to consume what was received.

More fundamentally, there was a direct contradiction between what ships wanted to take away and the basis of the Marquesan competitive feasting system. Pork was not only a crucial element of this political “fighting with food” but was also of ritual importance: certain animals were raised specifically for commemorative feasts for many ordinary people, as well as renowned chiefs and shamans. And there may not have been much scope for diverting beasts from feasting to trade: the evidence is not good, but it seems that there were never particularly considerable numbers of pigs in the islands. Supplying ships would thus certainly have undermined the other competitive and religious activities.

There are many travel books and official and missionary letters which convey a sense of disillusionment and apathy amongst Marquesans after the French annexation, and in especially intense and tragic terms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than repeating verbose and patronizing accounts of cultural despair, it is worth trying to specify precisely what it was about colonial contact in this case — in addition to the drastic character of disease and depopulation — which engendered such acute social and cultural decline. It may be that the conjunction of the form and purposes of indigenous exchange,

together with traders' demands, made it impossible to conduct certain ritual activities properly and at the same time diminished the status of the prominent people who had formerly focused their energies upon organizing such events. The dispersed and ineffective character of resistance at the time of French annexation is linked with the undermining of indigenous institutions, and to some extent to the character of those institutions, prior to contact.

While the account presented here is sketchy, its aim is to establish the possibility for a kind of processual, comparative analysis. This aims to avoid focusing exclusively either on static constructs of indigenous systems, supposedly occupying some imaginary time that is at once pre-colonial yet accessible to our vision, or on the other hand on colonial histories in which it is assumed that colonizers play the dominant role. Of course it would be foolish to understate the military and economic superiority of colonizers, but what I have tried to show here is that quite divergent paths of colonial history can be understood to have arisen partly on the basis of differences between the indigenous systems. I am not trying to advance a general argument that substitution-oriented exchange regimes in Oceania always fared better than non-substitution regimes; it is clear in some cases, such as New Georgia, that the violence of colonialism could obliterate indigenous dynamism if, for whatever reason, administrators opted for a repressive strategy. Contingencies are always significant; under other circumstances, there might have been a less destructive accommodation between indigenous society and external trade in the Marquesas, but it so happened that what were perceived to be military imperatives led the islanders to give away a supply of protein at a time of disease and intermittent famine — when they needed that food most. That is all too reminiscent of later colonial histories in other parts of the world.

Conclusion: The Distinctiveness of Austronesia

While Oceanic forms of exchange — encompassing kula-type trade partnerships, collective prestations of ranked valuables, competitive feasts and transactions closer to the old stereotype of utilitarian barter — are bewilderingly diverse, there can be no doubt that the prominence of exchange, in whatever form, is a pervasive and fundamental feature of these Austronesian societies. Even in eastern Polynesia, where regional trade is limited and in some cases nonexistent, localized competitive reciprocity was, as we have seen, central to the production, reproduction and transformation of hierarchical relationships. In western Oceania, however, it is also notable that the non-Austronesian societies of New Guinea were similarly exchange-oriented; this is true not only of the coastal regions which can be seen to have been heavily influenced by Austronesian populations, but also of the highlands, where there can hardly have been direct contact. This general congruence has permitted many anthropological discussions to ignore the Austronesian/Papuan distinction and argue comparatively about

“Melanesian” exchange, without reference to the linguistic and prehistoric differences. While this approach, like the earlier treatment of Melanesian leadership in terms of a generalized big man model, seems inadequate, I too have found terms developed for the analysis of highlands societies relevant, in adapted form, to the wider range of Oceanic variation. The parallels between Papuan and Austronesian forms present scholars with a peculiarly difficult problem: is it most likely that the two populations were autonomously similar in this respect; or should exchange systems in the highlands be seen as a long-distance product, though obviously one that is locally incorporated, of ramifying and expansive coastal exchange; or should forms such as the *moka* and *tee* be considered simply as independent developments, which very likely postdate the Austronesian settlement of coastal New Guinea and adjacent archipelagoes, but which have no particular connection with or dependence upon that change in the less immediate social environment? Any responses to such questions would, of course, be highly speculative; they would also be tentative because there are few models for addressing problems of such an order in either prehistory or anthropology: the first discipline’s interest in social processes is too limited, while that of the second in longer-term transformations has been equally attenuated. Given the evident expansiveness of exchange in many Austronesian societies, it would however seem worth exploring the possibility that these dynamics are inherently expansive and invasive and that in the longer run the movements of objects such as pearlshells may have effected the transposition of Austronesian forms of sociality, well beyond the apparent geographic and linguistic Austronesian boundaries.

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