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THE MELANESIAN LABOR RESERVE: Some Reflections on Pacific Labor Markets in the Nineteenth Century

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Recruitment of labor in the Pacific was one of the earliest methods of ending the isolation of island societies. The hunt for whales, seals, sandalwood, *bêche-de-mer*, coconut oil, pearl shell and pearls, and, indeed, the hiring of labor itself resulted in casual employment on ships or at shore stations.¹ Missionary settlements and brokerages were staging posts in the economic exchanges which linked local production with the Pacific borderlands. Prospection for staples at established posts continued throughout the nineteenth century and longer in the more remote areas of Melanesia. But with the spread of cash economies, casual beach markets gave way to commercial agriculture and mining; the decline in whaling in the southwest and northern Pacific coincided with the establishment of plantations; the primitive division of labor at shore stations expanded into a more complex and stratified system of processing, bulking, and shipping. Everywhere, too, the consequence of land alienation and political partition changed the scale of demand for labor and the elementary rules which governed casual recruitment and employment.

¹Dorothy Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood: A Study of the Sandalwood Trade in the South-West Pacific 1830-1865* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967); R. Gerard Ward, "The Pacific *Bêche-de-mer* Trade with Special Reference to Fiji," in R. Gerard Ward, ed., *Man in the Pacific Islands: Essays on Geographical Change in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 91-123; and H. E. Maude, *Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 233-83. A version of this paper was presented to Section 28 of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Auckland in 1979. I am grateful for comments by a number of colleagues and offer this revision in return.

Concern about the labor trade in the aftermath of the campaign against the Atlantic slave trade left a bulky documentation on recruitment by missionary pressure groups and colonial and imperial governments. One consequence of this collection of official records is that recruitment has been treated more as an aspect of settler politics than as the procurement of a scarce resource in commercial production. Another is the emphasis on the regulatory or legal contribution by officials, at the expense of an economic history of the staple markets, in terms of supply and demand, working costs or returns on investment. At a certain level, "kidnapping" is the entrepreneurship of the pirate, resorted to when supply was weak and competition strong. The entry of missionaries or imperial agents into this market undoubtedly influenced the condition of the labor trade in British dependencies.² But Britons were not the only recruiters at work, and it may be doubted whether this unilateral approach through the imperial records takes sufficient account of international variables influencing the labor market.

The two recent advances in Pacific history have modified the record. The work of Deryck Scarr, Peter Corris, and others emphasizes the active participation of Melanesian and Micronesian societies in early labor migration.³ There is less on kidnapping and more on collaboration by indigenous middlemen, less on legislation which was difficult to enforce, and more on the preconditions of mobility--scarce resources, changes in agriculture technology, local warfare and the impact of missionaries, recruiters, and naval patrols. Secondly, quite a different emphasis is given to the history of socio-economic change in Melanesia in the works of Stewart Firth, K. L. Gillion, and Pierre Gascher who stress the role of the

²O. W. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade in the South West Pacific* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1964); and "The Labour Trade" in Ward, *Man in the Pacific Islands*, pp. 124-43; W. P. Morrell, *Britain in the Pacific Islands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960, chap. 7).

³Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1973); A. A. Graves, "Pacific Island Labour in the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1863-1900," Ph.D. thesis (University of Oxford, 1979); "The Origins and Development of Pacific Islands Labour Migration to Queensland, 1862-1906," Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, Postgraduate Seminar, "Labour Migration within the Empire-Commonwealth from 1780," held in 1977 (I am indebted to the author for permission to cite from this research; Deryck Scarr, "Recruits and Recruiters, a Portrait of the Labour Trade," in J. W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr, eds., *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1970); and the introduction to W. E. Giles, *A Cruise in a Queensland Labour Vessel to the South Seas* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1968).

colonial state as recruiter and developer through land alienation, taxation, and subsidies to private employers.⁴

Much of the argument, however, is still about motivation and control, Melanesian mobility and Melanesian mobilization. Such discussions have their counterparts in contemporary labor market theory for undeveloped areas--particularly in studies of rural-urban migration.⁵ It would be anachronistic for historians to extrapolate unreservedly from recent investigations of contemporary migrant origins and employment patterns. But the models for arranging and interpreting data on migrations need to be kept in mind. They serve as a warning against the excessive simplicity of behaviorist and functionalist explanations of causation in the dynamic process of labor market growth over a century or more of economic and political change.⁶ And they should remind us that reference to individual or group motivation in seeking work entails a consideration of the system of production in which labor is employed.

For labor recruitment and mobility is only one aspect of production. In the history of Pacific labor markets, there is a very big gap in our information about the employers of labor, the scale of their enterprise and the market conditions in which they operated. Consequently, in this paper the focus is on regional interdependence, where early labor supplies were essential to prospection and investment and the failure of the region to meet demand from its own demographic resources at price levels

⁴Stewart G. Firth, "German Recruitment and Employment of Labourers in the Western Pacific Before the First World War," Ph.D. thesis (University of Oxford, 1973); and his "The Transformation of the Labour Trade in German New Guinea, 1899-1914," *Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 51-65; "The New Guinea Company, 1885-1899: A Case of Unprofitable Imperialism," *Historical Studies*, 15 (1972), 361-77; "Governors Versus Settlers. The Dispute Over Chinese Labour in German Samoa," *The New Zealand Journal of History* (October, 1977), pp. 155-79; Pierre Casher, "Regards sur l'administration colonial en Nouvelle-Calédonie de 1874 à 1894," Ph.D. thesis (University of Paris, 1969). The colonial factor can also be overstated, as a "superordinate variable;" see Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, "Socioeconomic Change in Oceania," *Oceania*, 48 (1977), 102-99. For a more balanced viewpoint relevant to Fiji's early labor market, see K. L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants, A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁵Kay Saunders, "Troublesome Servants: The Strategies of Resistance Employed by Melanesian Indentured Labourers on Plantations in Colonial Queensland," *Journal of Pacific History*, 14 (1979), 169. R. G. Ward, "Internal Migration and Urbanisation in Papua New Guinea," in M. Ward, ed., *Population Growth and Socio-Economic Change* (Canberra: New Guinea Research Bulletin No. 42, 1971), pp. 81-107; Richard Curtin, "The Patterns of Labour Migration in Papua New Guinea with Particular Reference to the Sepik Area," (personal communication). Karl Wohlmuth, ed., *Employment Creation in Developing Societies: The Situation of Labor in Dependent Economies* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

⁶For a useful summary, see G. K. Garbertt and B. Kapferer, "Theoretical Orientations in the Study of Labor Migration," *New Atlantis*, 2 (1970), 179-97.

which employers were willing or able to sustain. The "labor trade," then, was not simply an aspect of other commercial exchanges, but fundamental to the mobilization of resources within island-based economies with foreign capital and management. The dynamic changes in this trade reflected both external demand for staples and competition from a very different mode of production, in the case of commercial agriculture, through the expansion of peasant small-holdings and their refusal to alienate land.

If this line of analysis, in terms of regional market competition for the labor time of societies engaged in primitive accumulation and, more intermittently, in capitalist accumulation, is allowed, then it is useful to borrow another term from labor market theory, as applied in southern Africa, namely the designation of Melanesia and Micronesia as a labor "reserve." Queensland, Fiji, New Caledonia and even Samoa and Hawai'i recruited from this source area; and if the labor traffic to Peru in the early 1860s had continued to draw on Polynesia, there would be a case for extending the term to include other central and eastern groups. But, by and large, central and eastern Polynesia did not provide a regular market for emigrant labor until this century and in very different categories of employment. The reasons for this distinction are beyond the scope of this paper, though one may suggest, in passing, that earlier experience of market exchanges and earlier occupation by aliens who depended on local supplies of produce in Hawai'i, New Zealand, Tahiti or Samoa provided returns on peasants' labor time from the 1830s which discouraged sale of labor. Possibly the example of the Tolai of New Britain which looks unique in the context of late nineteenth-century New Guinea is an index of the difference between the economic history of western and central groups in terms of the way in which local peasant producers met local market demand. Such entrepreneurs are far from unique in early nineteenth-century Polynesia.

The regional approach to a central theme--production and labor--has, moreover, the advantage of reducing some of the fragmentation of Pacific history along metropolitan lines. The administration of Pacific markets was, in any case, a gradual and spasmodic process from the 1840s until the end-game of international partition. The theme of labor utilization, therefore, predates much of the formal imperial phase, just as it continues within and between Pacific island economies in the late twentieth century. The theme also reminds us that the development of the Pacific borderlands created poles of trade cutting across formal metropolitan controls. Even more than the history of Pacific staples (which is largely unwritten) Pacific labor history has a unity which the wide-ranging operations of recruiters and the elaborate regulations and international agree-

ments of human conservationists sought to comprehend. In the exploitation of the Pacific basin's resources, man was also an endangered species.

Because the organization of labor supplies was regional and indiscriminate, the catastrophic effects, rather than the integrative effects, were foremost in contemporary literature. Some societies were not given very much time to adjust their systems of agricultural production to new demands in conditions of demographic decline or political instability. Nor did they enjoy a very wide choice in the kind of production that was marketable, or the employment available, for the accumulation of a little stock necessary (to borrow from Adam Smith) for the division of labor. Indeed, labor was not divided very much within the ranks of Melanesian or Polynesian producers, in terms of economic specialization in the nineteenth century; and it might be argued that such a division ran along ethnic lines between indigenes and settlers in the small stratified communities that grew up around the Pacific ports. The kinds of stock available through the missions, traders, indigenous middlemen and returning wage laborers, moreover, were spread very thin; and although some artifacts such as steel axes and adzes undoubtedly released labor for other tasks and may have increased indigenous production, much of the articles of trade consisted of meretricious consumer goods, arms, and spirits.

Low levels of production, small internal markets, little vertical mobility into the ranks of entrepreneurs and principals were general features of the markets from which labor was drawn. Islanders did not always make a clear distinction between accumulation by sale of surplus or sale of labor. At various times and places they were willing to work on vessels, to collect and process produce, or to earn cash in public works. It was not unknown for them to organize more direct methods of accumulation by seizing ships and plundering stores. At other times, they refused to be recruited and yielded only to coercion, when the sale of crops or the sale of labor was not worth their while. Just as European exploitation of staples went through a prospection phase, so the main feature of early labor markets was prospection by the laborers and the absence of rigid specialization between peasant producers and workers for wages.

From the viewpoint of the planter or the administrator, this was not good enough. For, it is clear from the history of labor in the tropics that there are modes of production in which a casual labor force will not meet the operational requirements of regular inputs in a planned sequence--most typically in plantations and mines--without raising costs beyond a return on investment. Failing a ready labor supply, the accumulation of capital in the Pacific was accompanied by some extraordinary transfers from within the reserve and from Asia.

First, it is necessary to keep in mind a notion of scale for an overview of the period from the 1840s down to the First World War, when the structure of Pacific colonial economies was established. The overall pattern of migratory labor in our imperfect sources suggests two distinct configurations.

In one of these, the islands of Melanesia and Micronesia emerge as the major Pacific source area, 1840-1915, with a total recruitment of at least 280,000 laborers under various forms of indenture with a minor amount of casual labor.⁷ Queensland imported 62,475 laborers (1863-1900); Fiji some 20,000 Pacific islanders (1864-1911); Samoa, 5,746 (1885-1913); Hawai'i, 2,400 (1877-1887); New Caledonia in excess of 2,000 from Melanesia (1863-1885) and small numbers down to 1917; French Polynesia, at least 1,700 (1850-1885). Nauru under German rule imported some two thousand Micronesians and Peru imported perhaps an equal number of Polynesians and some Melanesians (1862-1863). There were other minor migrations to Guatemala and Mexico from Micronesia in the 1890s.

The above totals and estimates account for perhaps half of the islanders indentured in the Western Pacific (excluding unknown numbers recruited by vessels from an earlier period). The other half of the estimate was mobilized almost entirely from within German New Guinea which mustered some 100,000 laborers (1884-1915), compared with about 80,000 contract and casual workers in British New Guinea Papua (1890-1914). Small forces of two to three thousand Hawaiians and about two thousand New Hebrides workers were employed as plantation labor within their own islands. But Polynesians were not, in general, available on long indentures; nor were Fijians or New Caledonian Melanesians.

⁷For aggregates from different island groups, see Charles A. Price and Elizabeth Baker, "Origins of Pacific Island Labourers in Queensland, 1863-1904, A Research Note," *Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 106-21; Corris, p. 1; Firth, p. 56; J. A. Bennett, "Immigration, Blackbirding, Labour Recruiting: The Hawaiian Experience 1877-1887," *Journal of Pacific History*, 11 (1976), 3-25; various totals are given for Pacific islanders in Fiji, see Parnaby, p. 185, note 26. I have made this estimate from Central Archives of Fiji and Western High Pacific Commission sources: Fiji Labour Department, Plantation Register, Polynesia 1875-1916, 6 vols. (microfilm Rhodes House Library, Oxford); General Register of Immigrants, Polynesia 1870-1911. The latter source is incomplete, but the registration numbers of indentured laborers are continued in vol. 8 through the 1890s until 1911. See, too, *Fiji, Journals of the Legislative Council*. Council Papers, Annual Reports on Polynesian Immigrants, 1880-1914; Firth, pp. 156-57; Gascher, p. 19; and "Les problemes de main d'oeuvre en Nouvelle-Calédonie 1855-1900," *Cahiers d'histoire du Pacifique*, 1 (1974), 6-27; Archives Nationales Section Outre-mer (ANSOM), Oceanic, carton 35; see also Bryan H. Farrell, "The Alien and the Land of Oceania," in Ward, *Bêche-de-mer Trade*, p. 42 (this figure for New Caledonia would seem to be an error for J. C. Byrne's other exploits in the labor trade); Morrell, p. 172; Pamaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, pp. 12-13.

The second major configuration comprises Asians and other immigrants, more notable the 99,343 Chinese and Japanese recruited for Hawai'i (1852-1900); some 60,500 Indians recruited for Fiji (1879-1916); 22,000 Indo-Chinese, Japanese and Javanese for New Caledonia (1892-1915). There were smaller numbers contracted or migrating freely to Samoa, New Guinea, and French Polynesia (1860-1915) amounting to some 5,000 Chinese and a few hundred Javanese. In all, about 186,000 Asian laborers supplemented or replaced workers from the Pacific islands, 1850-1917.⁸ After the First World War, the indenture system continued within Melanesia, but Asian indentures decreased and disappeared for that area, while continuing as limited settler migration within Polynesia.

Restricting the analysis to pre-1914, there would seem to be three distinct periods in the growth of Pacific labor markets.

Prospection and External Demand.

The first markets grew out of early trading networks and were marked by irregularity of supply as traders depleted hogs, holothurians, sandalwood and seasonal surpluses of crops. This kind of prospection reached its peak in the operations of Pacific whaling fleets in mid-century, at a period of high labor costs experienced in various parts of the Pacific settlements during the Californian and Victorian gold rushes.⁹ At the same time, the effects of the dislocation of subsistence production and the release of some labor by new techniques and steel tools were felt in the northern New Hebrides and southern Solomons from the 1840s.¹⁰ The first labor vessel recruiting for Australia extended the practice of hiring gangs for the sandalwood trade to hiring labor for Queensland in 1847. By the early 1860s, therefore, a new network of labor brokers was well established and had begun to form its own cadre of suppliers who serviced the market, more

⁸Katherine Coman, *The History of Contract Labour in the Hawaiian Islands* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1903); UN Department of Commerce and Labor. Third Report on Hawaii, No. 66, Washington, 1906; Ching-chao Wu, "Chinese Emigration in the Pacific Area," M.A. Thesis (University of Chicago, 1926); Bernard Brou, "Les Javanais de Nouvelle-Calédonie," *Cahiers d'histoire du Pacifique*, 7 (1977), 19-47; Gillion, Appendix G.

⁹Sylvester K. Stevens, *American Expansion in Hawaii, 1842-1898* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Archives Publishing Co., 1951). Donald D. Johnson, "The United States in the Pacific. Private Interests and Public Policies," MA thesis (University of Hawaii, 1941), p. 241; Theodore Morgan, *Hawaii, A Century of Economic Change 1778-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948) p. 157.

¹⁰Shineberg, p. 162.

particularly in the Solomons. The piratical operations of recruiters for Peru in the early 1860s represented more extreme techniques to overcome resistance to demand in Polynesia and were yet another example of the ways in which plantation development and guano mining in the borderlands sought out labor by following the commercial networks already established with the islands.¹¹ But missionary and early colonial administrations in Polynesia were barriers to this kind of recruitment. The Melanesian reserve enjoyed no such protection. Indeed, the catalytic action of the missionaries, local warfare, depletion of resources, and frequent ecological disasters such as cyclones and drought may have hastened systematic recruitment.¹² Rival networks and the mutual exploitation of Melanesians and Europeans in a market where there were conventions but no legal redress soon earned recruiting its evil reputation.

At the same period, French occupation of New Caledonia and plantation experiments in Fiji in the 1860s impinged on the reserve and gave a stimulus to intraregional trade through administration expenditure on supplies and speculation in land.¹³ The transition from external to internal demand can be measured inadequately in the earliest trade records of New Caledonia and Fiji. The change is also summed up in the career of a recruiter such as Andrew Henry who settled in New Caledonia in 1865 and contracted with the administration to supply New Hebridean labor in return for a sandalwood concession and a plantation of 400 hectares at Oubatche, or in the careers of the more numerous European prospectors who moved out of labor trading into mining in New Caledonia and onto the land of Fiji.¹⁴

On the whole, there was little parallel mobilization of labor in Polynesia before the 1860s, when Chinese were imported into Tahiti, though Hawaiians worked as contract labor, following the stimulus of land and labor taxes levied in the 1840s and the beginnings of the so-called land reform which did much to confuse commoners' tenure and release estates

¹¹Stewart Watt, *Chinese Bondage in Peru: A History of the Chinese Coolie in Peru* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1951); W. M. Mathew, "The Imperialism of Free Trade: Peru 1820-70," *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968); Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, p. 13.

¹²Graves; Patrick O'Reilly, "Essai de chronologie des Nouvelles-Hébrides," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 12 (1956), 5-61.

¹³Georgette Cordier-Rossiaud, *Relations Economiques entre Sydney et la Nouvelle-Calédonie 1844-1860* (Paris: Société des Océanistes, 1957), pp. 61-82.

¹⁴Patrick O'Reilly, *Hébridais: Répertoire bio-bibliographique des Nouvelles-Hébrides* (Paris: Société des Océanistes, 1957), pp. 98-99; Bronwen Douglas, "The Export Trade in Tropical Products in New Caledonia 1841-1872," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 27 (1971), 168.

for sale.¹⁵ Compared with these developments, the introduction of French convict labor into New Caledonia was an eccentric and belated example of penal reform on the fringes of a reserve exploited from Queensland and Fiji, though it did have the result, when added to free settlement, of increasing demand for labor from within the reserve.¹⁶

Staples and the Labor Crisis.

In a study of the sandalwood market, Dorothy Shineberg has concluded that the terms of trade shifted against Melanesians through the arms traffic, dependence on employers and the increasing intervention of European governments.¹⁷ It is possible to isolate these factors as part of an explanation for the deterioration of conditions in the reserve, after the mid-century; but other changes seem more fundamental to labor supply. For example, in the 1850s, there were two important technological innovations which had a bearing on investment in tropical staples. Firstly, industrial chemists in France and Germany discovered how to manufacture a more homogeneous and cheaper vegetable oil by extraction from palm kernels and copra as a substitute for palm oil and coconut oil.¹⁸ Secondly, in 1851, advances in clarifying and granulating sugar permitted greater yields in the ratio of sugar to molasses and opened the way for considerable economies of scale on large plantations by the use of animal,

¹⁵Morgan, pp. 10-11, 134-37.

¹⁶J. B. Alberti, *Etude sur la colonisation à la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: Société d'édition géographique, maritimes et coloniales, 1909); Roselene Dousset, "L'implantation coloniale en Nouvelle-Calédonie de la prise de possession à la grande insurrection, 1853-1878," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 56 (1969), 305-11.

¹⁷Shineberg, p. 216.

¹⁸P. Baud, *L'industrie chimique en France* (Paris: Masson, 1932), p. 160; the earliest shipments of copra from India and the Pacific would appear to have been sold at Marseille from 1861; and in 1863, a cargo of 14,000 kilos arrived at Rotterdam, Marseille Chamber of Commerce archives, *Série OK "Commerce avec les colonies françaises"* 5 1857-1883; and "Les Nouvelles Hébrides au point de vue commerciale, Etude," ms. n.d. [1878] encl. in Riboul Grandval, 22 September 1879; and for the views of the Noumea Chamber of Commerce on island produce, *Série OK "Possessions transatlantiques et du Pacifique;"* German interest in copra and kernels is summarized in Ernst Hieke, *Zur Geschichte des deutschen Handels mit Ostafrika. Das Hamburgische Handelshaus Wm. O'Swald & Co.* (Hamburg: H. Christian, 1939); see, too, Charlotte Leubuscher, *The Processing of Colonial Raw Materials. A Study in Location* (London: Colonial Office, 1951), pp. 24-55.

water, and steam power.¹⁹ The brief cotton boom of the 1860s also gave point to land alienation and the plantation mode of production which had influenced thinking about development in the Pacific from quite early in the century.²⁰

The implications of these technological changes and the plantation model were felt first in the market for oil-bearing products suitable for bulk purchase and transportation and in the expansion of sugar cane planting. Brokers and shipping companies in Hamburg, Marseille and Liverpool, moreover, were encouraged to invest in the kernel and copra trade during the period of high prices for oil following the Crimean War. Sugar also enjoyed a high price for the refined variety in the expensive Australian market of the 1850s; and in the 1860s, raw sugar temporarily stayed its long price decline at about £25 per ton.

In the Pacific, German and French houses made the transition to copra collecting fairly quickly. From their base in Valparaiso, J. C. Godeffroy & Sohn had prospected in Samoa and Fiji from 1857 and used their mercantile resources to capitalize coconut oil and cotton production and coconut plantations in Samoa from 1867. The following year, their agent Theodore Weber paid higher prices for cutting and drying than for oil processing at all the company's agencies. The first recruitment of labor for the company's Samoa plantations was made in the Gilbert Islands and the Cook group, 1864-1867; and this production was supplemented by the older technique of prospection through trading stations which were pushed into Micronesia and multiplied in the central eastern Pacific, where copra exports begin to appear in trade returns in the early 1870s.²¹ The planter's staple was also the native smallholder's cash crop; and this dual production system began to make inroads into the main labor reserve in the 1870s when maize, cotton, and coffee were followed by copra cutting on Ambrim, Omba, and Efate. From a different commercial base, the copra trade encouraged Eduard Hearnheim to follow the Godeffroys into the Bismark Archipelago, and Palau group, the Marshalls, and the Gilberts from 1874. The Gilberts and Carolines, in turn, became a minor

¹⁹ *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 2 April 1857; and the chapter by J. M. Dixon in *South Pacific Enterprise. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1956), pp. 119-45.

²⁰ R. Gerard War, "Land Use and Land Alienation in Fiji to 1885," *Journal of Pacific History*, 4 (1969), 3-25; Deryck Scarr, "Creditors and the House of Hennings: An Elegy from the Social and Economic History of Fiji," *Journal of Pacific History*, 7 (1972), 104-23; J. C. Potts, "The Sugar Industry in Fiji, Its Beginnings and Developments," *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fiji Society*, 7 (1958-59), 104-30.

²¹ Firth, Thesis, chap. 1; *Messenger de Tahiti*, Pape'ete, 19 September 1873.

labor reserve for Godeffroy's Samoa plantations.²² Following the recapitalization of the firm in 1876, the Deutsche Handels--und Plantagen--Gesellschaft looked mainly to a plantation economy in Samoa and Melanesia for its prosperity and to the German government for subsidies and political support. Subsidies were refused in 1880, but the plan for a trading colony in New Guinea was actively promoted by the firm's banker; and Bismarck was guided towards approval of Germany's first venture into Pacific annexation.

Thus, in the two decades of the 1860s and 1870s, the scale of investment in Pacific staples and the territorial organization of production made significant inroads into the older trading networks based on barter and the spasmodic employment of labor. The political importance of this change coupled with British concern over the labor trade to Queensland was felt first in Fiji where the unstable government of Cakobau and the settlers of Viti Levu struggled with a load of debt and the problems of rapid development which led to the cession of 1874. One of the first tasks of Gordon's administration was to pay for the return of some 3,000 Pacific islands' laborers from 1875 and assist planters to import more.²³

The commodity boom and labor crisis were more general than the examples of Samoa and Fiji suggest. In Hawai'i they stemmed from the collapse of whaling which extended to shipbuilding, livestock production, and the viability of the Hawaiian government.²⁴ Inflation and the risks of trade during the Civil War disrupted the territory's exchange system; and as public and private indebtedness mounted, land became the ultimate collateral and speculative hedge against returns from new sources of income when a promising market opened with the growth of San Francisco and the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1869. The same factors that drew the trade of French Polynesia away from Valparaiso to California rescued the economy of Hawai'i. After a brief cotton boom and some experiments with coffee in the late 1860s, merchants and planters fixed on sugar cane as a likely staple. Because of the primacy of merchants who supplied capital and marketed raw sugar to refineries on the mainland, the Hawaiian industry was concentrated locally in plantation management and in the search for supplies of labor.

By contrast in Fiji, the major problem after cession was to attract any kind of capital to rescue traders, planters and government from the

²²Firth, "Transformation of the Labor Trade," p. 157.

²³Pamaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, p. 181.

²⁴Morgan, chap. 9.

network of debt owed to the Godeffroys or the house of Rabone, Feez, & Company in Sydney.²⁵ Sugar production showed no sign of supremacy before about 1879. Although there was a potential market in Australia and New Zealand, none of the small planters could finance mills of sufficient capacity to apply the most recent advances in production technology. Gordon, Thurston, and their successors, therefore, while laying the foundations of a paternalistic Fijian policy, were obliged to make considerable concessions to investors in the form of secure land titles and a labor supply. Taxation in kind, moreover, was not enough for fiscal purposes as a supplement to duties on imports. Fiscality and self-sufficiency demanded development and a major staple. Accordingly, land confiscation was reduced to manageable proportions by allowing about half of the settlers' claims to some 854,000 acres;²⁷ and the planters' preference for island labor from the Melanesian reserve was respected but supplemented by Gordon's preference for supplies of Indians on five year indentures with a government subsidy to meet one third of the cost. Special inducements in the shape of low-priced estates were offered to Stanlake, Lee, & Company and to the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) to begin planting and milling. Even so, CSR hesitated before accepting the risks of production on the Rewa and at Bau in 1879 and 1880 when Fiji seemed useful as a means of building up stocks of raw sugar for refineries operating under Australian tariff protection.²⁸ With Indian and Pacific labor and the organization of central milling, the company was large enough to survive the depression in sugar prices in the 1890s and construct a monopoly of fifteen mills by 1900.

The development of a Pacific sugar staple moved along different lines of production in Fiji, Hawai'i, and Queensland. Fiji's sugar exports rose to 46.4 thousand tons in 1903 and doubled again by 1914.²⁹ By then, too, Indian immigrants had some 6,767 acres under cane. Hawai'i had over ninety plantations producing just over half a million tons by 1912, controlled in groups by fewer and fewer merchant factors. The mainstay of the plantation labor force in the 1870s had been Hawaiians. But by the early

²⁵Scarr, "Creditors and the House of Hennings," pp. 104-23.

²⁶*Fiji Planting and Commercial Directory, 1879. A Handbook of Fiji, 1879.*

²⁷J. D. Legge, *Britain in Fiji, 1858-1880* (London: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 170, 193-94.

²⁸Michael Moynagh, "Brown or White? A History of the Fiji Sugar Industry 1873-1973," Ph.D. dissertation (Australian National University, 1978), chapt. 1, p. 14. I am indebted to Dr. Moynagh for the chance to read an early draft of this work.

²⁹Potts, Appendix 1.

1880s, about half of the 10,000 plantation workers were Chinese, plus a thousand or so Pacific islanders, while Hawaiians moved into semiskilled and skilled occupations along with immigrant *haoles*.³⁰ When Chinese immigration was opposed and replaced by new waves of Japanese, Koreans, Portuguese, and Filipinos, very few Hawaiians still worked as field hands or mill laborers. In Queensland, sugar-cane planting expanded most rapidly between 1880-1884, from 20,000 to 57,000 acres, and exports rose to 30,000 tons by 1885.³¹ Pacific islands' labor was not regarded as a permanent solution to labor shortages, and in any case was not confined to employment in the sugar industry. Projects for Indian immigration foundered on objections from the government of British India and the politics of antipathy towards Asian settlement. As central milling expanded with government assistance in the 1890s and plantations gave place to small holdings, the need for islanders in the industry decreased.

It should be remembered, however, that changes in Queensland's methods of production took time; and for the early 1880s the Melanesian reserve was under pressure from all three sugar producing areas in the Pacific. The fact, too, that island labor was of minor significance in Queensland's interest in New Guinea and that the Griffith government returned 600 laborers there in 1884 did nothing to lessen Queensland recruiters' operations in the New Hebrides or the Solomons.³² Anglo-German partition, 1884-1887, while safeguarding German labor supplies for Samoa, reduced the area open to British or French employers. In the privacy of a letter to Gladstone, Gordon deplored the possibility of Queensland politicians administering New Guinea as a source of supply,³³ but Gordon's own administration had to issue more licenses to Fiji recruiters who were stepping up their operations within the reserve up till 1885, according to the colony's plantations and immigration records.³⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that the final feature of this second period of labor market expansion is the cost inflation of recruitment and the differential wage scales offered under conditions of indenture. The topic

³⁰US Department of Commerce and Labor, Third Report on Hawaii, No. 66, Washington, 1906, tables for fifty-six sugar plantations, 1904, p. 424ff.

³¹Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, pp. 106-7.

³²Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, p. 115.

³³Parnaby, *Britain and the Labor Trade*, p. 117, n. 59.

³⁴Fiji Labour Department. General Register of Immigrants, Polynesia, 1870-1911; Fiji. *Journals of the Legislative Council* (annual reports on Polynesian immigration, esp. for 1880-84). No count has been made for these years, but a check of the islands of origin suggests a shift in immigration from the New Hebrides to the Solomons by 1884, a proportion maintained down to 1891 (Council Paper No. 21 for 1892).

is relatively unexplored and requires more work from regional business records than has been attempted so far. But, for a start, the usual bald statement that wages in Queensland were £6 a year, compared with £3 in Fiji, needs qualification.³⁵ The tendency in Queensland was for Pacific islanders' labor costs to rise with renewed indentures and periods of shortage. Experienced laborers could command as much as £15 a year in the late 1880s; and between 1863 and 1889, there was a six-fold increase in the amount of passage money. From the Fiji plantation records, it is also clear that passage money increased from £3 per head in 1877 to £4 by 1884. By 1888 some planters were paying £7 and £8 a head for New Hebrideans and Solomon Islanders and £6 for return passages. Wages for island labor in Fiji rose from £3 for first indentures for males in the 1870s to £7 in 1885 and £9 in 1889. Part of the reason for the success of Indian immigration lay in the increasing supply price of Pacific labor. Recruitment from this source collapsed from 1886.

Similarly, French recruitment from the New Hebrides for New Caledonia rose in price from 250 to 300 francs per head in 1873 to 600 for adult males by 1884. By 1882 after experimenting with the importation of Melanesians, the Hawaiian Planters Labor and Supply Company found that the cost per head for New Hebrides recruits at \$48.80 was more than double the cost of sources of imported European labor or Japanese settlers who paid part of their fare.

The preliminary conclusion on the economics of recruitment during the period of peak demand following plantation development seems inescapable: there was a rapid increase in costs and considerable difference in the unit price of imported labor from the 1870s until the onset of depression in 1885. What this meant in terms of working costs for planters, it would be unwise to guess without specific data on copra and sugar production. But it is also evident there were considerable pressures to diversify supply throughout the Melanesian reserve and beyond, as employers and some colonial governments sought to reduce the effects of a high supply price and weakening sugar and copra prices in the mid-1880s. It may

³⁵Pamaby, "The Labour Trade," p. 136; Graves; Gascher; information on costs can be gleaned from the Fijian General Register of Immigrants which lists scales. By 1887, passage money for Melanesians from the New Hebrides and Solomons had risen to £15 a head and the cost of repatriation was £5 to £7 a head. See *Journals of the Legislative Council, 1887*, Council Paper no. 36; by 1891 at the onset of the depression, wages for Melanesians on plantations ranged from £3 for new recruits to as high as £12 for experienced workers. For costs in Hawai'i, see Bennett. Wages for Indian task workers were probably lower than the "standard" levels cited: See Gillion, p. 110 and note.

well be, too, that increasing experience among returned laborers encouraged some market preference in recruitment and that there were shifts in the brokers' choice of supply within the reserve from the higher priced New Hebrides to the Solomons and Micronesia. This is suggested by the change in the incidence of recruitment for Queensland in the revised statistics provided by Price and Baker.³⁶ After the peak year of recruitment in 1885 when annual indentures numbered 5,273, the New Hebrides supplied a large but decreasing percentage of the colony's island labor, while the south Solomons increased their share of annual totals. The central and north Solomons fell within the German sphere of operations from 1888. The Loyalty Islands ceased to supply Queensland altogether from 1873 as production of cash crops and sale of labor to New Caledonia provided better returns. Moreover, after the New Caledonia revolt of 1878 (occasioned in part by forced labor) and the beginnings of mining development, pressure on New Hebrides supplies from the French increased. A preliminary survey of the origins of Fiji's Melanesian labor also suggests there was a shift away from the north and central New Hebrides in the late 1870s to New Britain, New Ireland, Buka, and Bougainville.³⁷ After 1886 when Pacific islanders declined rapidly as a percentage of Fiji's indentured labor, there was a further shift in origins to Malaita and back to the New Hebrides. But by then, like Hawai'i and New Caledonia, Fiji had adopted an Asian solution to the labor problems of the crisis period of the late 1870s.

Colonial Labor Systems

The labor crisis of the 1860s and 1870s was followed by increasing regulation of the labor market by colonial states. In many ways, this intervention was to remain the principal feature of labor mobility until shortly before decolonization in recent decades and it is still a feature of the economies of New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Such intervention, too, has an older history in the Masters and Servants legislation of other British colonies which found its way into the ordinances of British Pacific territories, while the desire to reform abuses in the labor trade which led to the creation of a Western Pacific High Commission in 1875 posed the question of regulation and control of islands of the reserve settled by British subjects. The legalities and operational difficulties of such expansive protection have been analyzed from the British viewpoint. But reform of

³⁶Price and Baker, table 1.

³⁷General Register of Immigrants, Polynesia 1870-1911.

the labor market in the Pacific, like control of the arms and spirits traffic closely associated with recruitment, required a measure of international agreement. If the British contribution to this movement through government agencies in Queensland or Fiji is to be fully evaluated, then parallel systems of labor mobilization have to be considered as well, in the case of French and German administrations.

A more fundamental reason than the international repercussions of philanthropy is that the partition of the Pacific entailed the partition of labor supplies. This much became clear to the French administration in New Caledonia which anticipated eventual British control over Fiji as early as 1871 and foresaw a stricter regulation of recruitment in the New Hebrides and in the labor trade between Micronesia and Tahiti.³⁸ The Fiji cession of 1874 and the evidence of abuses under the French flag (often by recruiters who were not French) provoked two reactions in Noumea. One was to give serious consideration to the annexation of the New Hebrides in 1875 when the Minister of Marine supported the New Caledonian case for protecting a source which supplied over five thousand laborers to plantations, mines, and public works between 1874 and 1882.³⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in broad agreement but envisaged a protectorate formula to cover recruiting without offending Britain and the Australian colonies.⁴⁰ A change of ministry postponed any action; and in the late 1870s, there were wider questions involving German manoeuvres in Samoa and Tonga and French consolidation of territory in the eastern Pacific which prevented the French government from sponsoring the mining and commercial investment planned from Noumea. At most, it was able to secure an exchange of notes in 1878 leaving the New Hebrides formally independent.⁴¹

The second response of the Noumea administration to increased competition for labor was to tighten up regulations on recruitment and

³⁸ANSOM, Océanie carton 42/16, Admiral Hamelin, report 14 November 1871, encl. in Minister of Marine to Director of Colonies, note n.d. [1871]; Océanie carton 35/3, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Marine, 26 October 1875; *Courrier du Havre*, 13 February 1873 (French kidnapping cases); Ministry of Marine to Rear-Admiral Lapelin, 26 February 1873.

³⁹Gascher, p. 15.

⁴⁰Archives des Affaires Etrangères (AAE), Océanie, Nouvelles-Hébrides, 1875-1883, IV Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Marine, 14 March 1876; Ministry of Marine to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 August 1875; Du Petit-Thouars to Jauréguiberry, 22 April 1879; Morrell, p. 190.

⁴¹Morrell, p. 199 and note.

employment in 1871 and 1874.⁴² Provision was made for government agents on recruiting vessels, three-year indentures, standardized wages (12 francs per month) and subsidies for repatriation. A similar system was organized for French Polynesia under local ordinances, and both territories arranged contracts with the Bordeaux firm of J. H. Tandonnet and other suppliers such as the ubiquitous Higginson.⁴³ With Indian sources closed and with settlers unwilling to allow Chinese immigration, French pressure on the reserve increased in the late 1870s and early 1880s as more land concessions were made to mining companies during the investment boom, 1881-1885.⁴⁴

Before the world price of nickel collapsed and Canadian competition ended New Caledonia's brief supremacy in 1888, the local demand for convict and Melanesian labor was aggravated by a temporary suspension of recruitment by the Ministry of Marine, 1882-83, following a report by the administrator on recruitment.⁴⁵ But at the end of the following year, Higginson's land purchases through his *Compagnie Calédonienne des Nouvelles Hébrides* gave the colony a greater stake in the group; and when a merger of his *Société Le Nickel* with a Glasgow copper mining company encouraged prospecting and recruiting, the suspension was lifted. There were further suspensions after revelation of abuses, 1885-89, but New Hebrides labor continued to enter the colony and there were still close to two thousand workers from the group registered in the 1891 census.⁴⁶ In 1893, new regulations were drawn up for both Melanesian and Asian immigration. Planters had already brought in some 542 Indians from French territories, 1866-1875; and Higginson employed 165 Chinese as mining labor in 1884. From 1890, New Caledonian employers turned to Javanese and Indo-Chinese sources, though these were only marginally

⁴² *Arrêté*, 2 March 1871 (New Hebrides recruiting); *Arrêté*, 26 March 1874; Maurice Mason, *La question des Nouvelles Hébrides* (Paris: University of Paris, 1960), p. 55; Gascher, p. 16; Charles Lemire, *La colonisation française in Nouvelle-Calédonie et dépendances* (Paris: Challamel aîné, 1877), p. 253.

⁴³ ANSOM Océanie carton 45/3 (for copies of contracts); *Messenger de Tahiti*, 10 May 1883.

⁴⁴ Dousset, pp. 308-9; Augustin Bernard, *L'archipel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*. (Paris: n.p., 1894), pp. 382-84; Laberti, pp. 220-35.

⁴⁵ Bernard, p. 384; D. H. Browne in *The Mining Magazine*, April 1911, pp. 303-4; AAE Océanie, Nouvelle-Calédonie IV, Courbet to Ministry of Marine, 17 February 1882, encl. in Ministry of Marine to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 June 1882; Gascher, p. 19.

⁴⁶ *Journal Officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Noumea, 9 April 1892.

cheaper, and debates on the utility of local Melanesian labor continued over the next two decades.⁴⁷

This French consolidation of labor regulations in 1893 left its mark on the neighboring reserve. The Anglo-French Convention of 1887 neutralized the New Hebrides as a source of diplomatic conflict but left the commercial warfare between the Compagnie Calédonienne and the Australian New Hebrides Company to continue unabated.⁴⁸ When the depression of the 1890s aggravated disputes over land titles, boundaries, and local labor supplies, British planters were at a considerable disadvantage under the licensing and inspection system required by the "Polynesian" labor acts of 1872 and 1875 administered from Fiji. French planters and the Compagnie Calédonienne were free to trade arms and spirits and were relatively unsupervised as they ranged throughout the New Hebrides and the Solomons in search of labor for settlement schemes.⁴⁹ When produce prices recovered in 1897, the expanding entrepôt trade through Noumea gave French settlers a preponderance which Bums, Philip, & Co. failed to counter in the face of Australian tariffs and British labor regulations. By the date of the Convention of 1906, two different labor systems were at odds in discussions between British and French delegates, and the French system prevailed. So much so, that by 1908 even the High Commissioner at Suva was opposed to a strict interpretation of labor regulations by the British resident commissioner in the New Hebrides for fear of "destroying the labour supply in these islands."⁵⁰ But he would not allow recruitment from the Gilberts or British Solomons, although this source was still open to German Samoa after 1893, on the strength of an understanding between the German government and the Foreign Office.⁵¹ The main result was a decline in the total numbers of annual indentures among British and French planters from 2,856 in 1908 to about 1,600 by 1914 and an increase in the lists of

⁴⁷Brou, p. 39. The debates can be followed in *Nouvelle-Calédonie. Conseil général: procès-verbaux*, especially for November 1898, pp. 166-62; November 1904, pp. 310-11; 1906, p. 759; November 1911, pp. 219-29.

⁴⁸For the Australian viewpoint, see Roger C. Thompson, "Australian Imperialism and the New Hebrides, 1862-1922," Ph.D. dissertation (Australian National University, 1971), especially Part 2.

⁴⁹Foreign Office Confidential Print, 5561, *New Hebrides*, 1887, Wyley to Fairfax, 17 August 1887; FOCP, 6311, Part 21, Thurston to FO, 5 November 1892.

⁵⁰Colonial Office Confidential Print, Australia, 199, Im Thurn to CO, 24 October 1908.

⁵¹FOCP, 6386, CO to FO, 27 March 1893; FOCP, 6442, Thurston to FO, 5 September 1893.

“abuses” reported to the Joint Court.⁵² British recruits worked for shorter indentures than French plantation labor, and there is a high proportion of native-grown copra in British exports from the New Hebrides for the pre-war period. But labor inspection was perfunctory all round; and in 1912, a report on labor conditions on the estates of the Pacific Isles Investment Company Syndicate, acquired complete with workers from two French planters, revealed practices closer to slavery than the letter of Convention regulations.⁵³ A revision of the protocols in 1914 enforced a better inspection system; and a steep rise in the supply price of labor to £12 and £15 a year--well beyond wages in the Solomons or Fiji--made planters more conscientious in their treatment of workers. In 1920, the first shipload of 140 Vietnamese provided another source of relief for the plantation mode of production.

Thus, the New Hebrides passed through the stages of labor reserve to an internalized recruitment and plantation system which had to compete with labor time devoted to native-grown copra and was divided between French and British official intervention. It is probable the deportation of New Hebrides labor from Queensland also influenced the market between 1904 and 1907, though no study has been made to determine how many of these experienced workers turned to copra production on their own account or became short-term recruits for the planters. What is certain is that by the late 1880s, a large proportion of the male population of the group had “served a term somewhere” and exercised a choice in disposal of labor time between Queensland, Fiji, local plantations, and native gardens and groves.⁵⁴ By 1914, two of these options had closed. Like the Solomons, where external recruiting ceased in 1912 after the development of Lever’s plantations, New Hebrides labor came under an internally-supervised system of controls with penal sanctions and declined to enter the labor market--especially the French section of that market.

By contrast, the importation of Melanesian labor to Fiji declined rapidly after 1885, during the depression, and then more slowly in the face of Indian immigration. The conditions of this alternative supply and the exclusion of Fijians from long indentures also include an element of govern-

⁵²COCP, Australia, 201, table D, pp. 70-71; and Table G “Native Indentured Labour.” There was still a large recruitment from outside the New Hebrides--some 1,600 annually, 1908-10; and there still were New Hebrides workers returning from Queensland--between thirty and fifty annually, ending with two in 1910.

⁵³COCP, Australia, 211, Mahaffy to High Commissioner, 26 February 1913 and enclosures.

⁵⁴FOCP, 5561, Pelley to Fairfax, 1 August 1887.

ment subsidy in repatriation costs, as there was in Tahiti and New Caledonia at the same period. But as the profitability of sugar was threatened by a price fall, 1883-1887, the burden of costs was transferred to the immigrants in the task work system protected by Acting-Governor Thurston's labor ordinance of 1886.⁵⁵ By the early 1890s, the condition of Indian labor in Fiji had become so bad that serious attention was given to subsidizing settlement schemes; and between 1897 and 1914, the government financed eighteen Indian settlements to provide smallholdings for two thousand peasant workers in the vicinity of plantations.⁵⁶

For German possessions, the option of externally recruited labor was not so easily available as for British, French, or Hawaiian planters and miners. Private investment by the New Guinea Company and state underwriting of development in Samoa and New Guinea depended largely on labor mobilization within German-controlled areas of Melanesia and Micronesia.⁵⁷ High mortality rates and strict supervision by Dutch and British authorities in Java and the Straits Settlements ended small convoys of Asians from these sources in 1900. As plantation investment concentrated on the Bismarck Archipelago, officials stepped up the pace of internal recruitment into one of the more closely administered systems of indentured and forced labor in the Pacific. Mortality rates for New Guinea's 100,000 laborers during the period of German rule, estimated at 250 per thousand, were among the highest in the Pacific and compare unfavorably with other tropical areas of migrant labor.⁵⁸ The incidence was particularly severe for some source areas in New Britain, New Ireland and Manus. And although a small casual labor market was allowed to develop, the hard-pressed administration which took over the bankrupt New Guinea Company kept the supply price low by fixing a standard wage, by using some forced labor from 1903, and by applying a labor incentive tax from 1907 as well as using penal sanctions. This policy rapidly built up the agricultural and general labor force expropriated by Australia, along with German settlers' capital stock, as an instrument of further plantation and mineral production under regulations which were a refinement of German regulations and preserved their essential features.

Germany's colonial intervention in the Melanesian market, therefore, might be said to have foreshortened the longer period of development

⁵⁵Gillion, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁶Moynagh, chap. 3; Gillion, pp. 136-39.

⁵⁷Firth, dissertation; US Consular Report. Labor in America, Asia, Africa, Australasia and Polynesia. Washington, 1885, for Consul T. Canisius, Apia, 16 May 1888, on the condition of the eight or nine hundred Pacific islanders on German plantations.

⁵⁸Firth, "Transformation of the Labour Trade," p. 53 (and personal communication).

through trade networks, investment in staples, and competitive and regulated recruitment typical of other areas in the reserve. Alone among German plantation enterprises, the DHPG followed the practice of supplementing from Asian sources after 1900; and it has been shown how this policy was resisted in Samoa where the importation of 3,800 Chinese between 1903 and 1913 resulted in a conflict of interests between the company, smaller planters, and the administration.⁵⁹ In New Guinea, the administration supported the cheaper option of recruiting Melanesians at a distance from plantations (an option which was curtailed in adjacent British and French groups); and officials also supported the employment of islanders from the Carolines and Marshall groups for Nauru and Angaur where Chinese workers proved particularly contentious and could appeal for protection to provincial officials in China. Such external patronage was effective for Indians in Fiji from about 1917 and later still for Javanese and Vietnamese in New Caledonia.⁶⁰ Diplomacy also won concessions for Japanese and Chinese in Hawai'i under American labor laws after 1898. The Asians' gain was the Pacific islanders' loss unless they were the object of special tutelage within the administrative structure of a colony, as in Fiji, or had learned to accumulate a surplus from cash crops, as they had in much of Polynesia and to a lesser extent in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides.

Conclusion

By its very nature, the history of migrant labor is multi-faceted and imbedded in the economies of source areas and areas of employment. The topic is, after all, only one aspect of the region's economic history in the preimperial and imperial phase; and as so much of the subject remains to be worked over, the contribution of labor cannot be assessed conclusively without reference to the topics of land, capital, business organization, or technology.

There are, however, three themes suggested by the foregoing which the development of wage labor from within the Melanesian reserve illustrates. The recent tendency to describe Melanesian labor markets in terms of voluntarism and the initiative of local brokers who carved out a business for themselves by supplying labor for Queensland requires modification in terms of the options open to Melanesians at various periods of staple production in the western Pacific. The reserve itself was much

⁵⁹Firth, "Governors Versus Settlers," pp. 155-79.

⁶⁰Brou, pp. 41-42.

wider than any single source area such as Malaita and includes several production centers and at least four administrative colonial systems. Recruitment through those systems calls for a theory of constraint on the choice of options open to laborers, as well as a theory of "voluntary" mobility and rewards. If the old reformist view that all labor traffic was a version of kidnapping is rejected, so must the latter-day view that labor is contracted independently of the economic system of production and control in which payment in money and kind is an alternative to primitive accumulation by other means, such as sale of crops. Conventional labor market analysis does not include the notion of temporary acceptance of conditions for the sale of labor, in the hope of investing monetary rewards or goods in other forms of production and exchange; nor does it include the notion of intervention by a colonial state to narrow the laborer's choice of employment. Both colonial regulations and the entrepreneurial factor are part of the history of production in the Pacific, to control as well as reform.

Early labor history in the region, therefore, is not concerned with contemporary problems of under-employment, or even the "cliometrics" of imperfect statistical records. It has its origins in very different stages of economic growth, when the techniques of accumulation were exploratory, and when there were quite different assumptions about wages and the division of labor in settler societies faced with seemingly bountiful opportunities in the tropics which were frustrated by distance, imperfect knowledge of local resources, and the value systems of potential sources of labor. It was a world closer to the labor crisis in the imperial tropics at the end of the slave trade, on the far side of the depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, than to the sources of merchant and state investment and the market technology available in recent decades. If any models were available, they were the West Indies or the Dutch East Indies. These analogies, rather than imperial doctrines of development, encouraged minor traders and even missionaries to invest in plantations. For most of the nineteenth century, such parallels were misleading because island populations did not become plantation workers in eastern Polynesia; and they had to be systematically mobilized in Melanesia by professional recruiters and with the assistance of colonial states.

If this notion of constraint is kept in mind, then a second major theme arising from the history of early Pacific labor markets is the linkage between Pacific businessmen and imperial partition in the Pacific. Such a connection is sometimes assumed rather than demonstrated; or it is rejected out of hand as a materialistic motivation in a story of imperial reform of abuses or "international rivalry." It is true, business did not

always move in harmony with government house--though the argument was often about means, rather than ends. But businessmen--merchants, traders, partnerships, mining companies, bankers--had their own pressure groups and clientage systems which reached back into metropolitan government circles for capital and political support. At the level of Pacific markets in the islands, the historian is faced not with a harmony of official and commercial interests within "national" groups, but rather "communal networks" (the New Caledonian *circuits de solidarité*), including both islanders and aliens, linked by commercial debt, religious allegiance, and later by hierarchical status as functionaries within an "administration" of elders, chiefs, and imported officials. Such networks could cut across "national" origins where traders or planters had a common cause to plead. How else can one explain British settlers' willingness to support French annexation of the New Hebrides in 1876, and again in 1913, or to change their nationality when linkages with Australia were weak and those with Noumea were strong;⁶¹ or the close cooperation between German planters, linked with Sydney merchants, and Australian military administrators in New Guinea; or the unwillingness of French merchants in eastern Polynesia to see French metropolitan tariffs damage their commercial connections with Sydney, Auckland, and San Francisco in the 1890s? The networks of patriotic expansionists and business communities married into island societies were not always concentric, though they sometimes tended to become so, as in precession Fiji or preannexation Tahiti and Hawai'i. Where early labor regulations were concerned, British planters on the edge of the Melanesian reserve had more to lose from strict observance of the "Polynesian" labor acts than their French counterparts, and neither group had anything to gain from the campaigns waged by influential missionary networks whose lines of communication could also muster support in colonial capitals and in London. The interests vested in Pacific labor markets were not necessarily imperial interests, unless, as in the case of German New Guinea and New Caledonia or in Gordon's Fiji, official patronage also favored the means of production developed and owned by settlers.

If these paradoxes are kept in mind, imperial partition can be considered, not as a necessary consequence of development by particular pressure groups, but as an incidental means of regulating the disorderly process of investment, land confiscation, and labor recruitment through the clientage networks already established in the islands. The roots of parti-

⁶¹COCP, Australia, 211, 1913; Julian Thomas, *Cannibals and Convicts* (London: Cassell & Co., 1886), p. 182; Tompson, p. 510.

tion lie in the development process itself, and much of this was experimental in the early nineteenth century and the object of quite different evaluations in the case of New Zealand, Hawai'i, or New Caledonia and Fiji before the remaining markets for produce and labor were occupied at the end of the century. If this is allowed, then imperial occupation also followed the division of labor which was part of development, as beach markets threw up their specialist clientele in commerce, evangelism, and agriculture and mining. When labor, too, became a source of rivalry following changes in Pacific staple production and the labor crisis of the 1870s, recruitment and settler schemes were contrived to meet demand, though it was no longer certain that the plantation model of production was the most suitable in conditions where islanders could be encouraged to turn their labor time to cash crops.

This latter point leads to a third theme, namely, the growth of alternatives to migratory wage labor. If it is agreed, from the foregoing, that the notion of a "market" (in the sense of a regular bargain between buyer and seller) is somewhat notional in the case of labor drafted onto plantations, then the history of cashcropping has to be considered as well. One approach might be to consider the purchase of labor time as a constantly evolving transaction before colonial regulation constrained choices by taxes, penal sanctions, and all the adjuncts of a coercive labor system; another might be to look at the history of copra, pearl shell, and other staples for evidence of credit advances and group indebtedness to merchant houses; a third is to look at the history of cooperatives in the Pacific. Until this is done, it would be unwise to accept the usual migratory models employing push-pull factors, or behaviorist maximization of choice ventures, to "explain" migration of laborers: firstly, because they lack this history of constraints explicit in much of the labor trade; and secondly they omit any reference to the role of producers in produce marketing systems which provided alternative avenues for accumulation, but which were also developed within the nexus of commercial and imperial networks and controls.

Pacific labor markets, then, were not simply functions of the interactions of aliens and islanders in what is often termed "culture contact." That contact was not, in any case, between whole cultures but between representatives within the exchange networks of patrons and clients (including missionaries who transacted new codes of behavior and value systems) at fixed points in expanding markets. In the course of time, a remarkable number of islanders (including converts to new religions) worked abroad. Regarded as an addition to subsistence agriculture, it is clear that labor was not at first mobilized by a lot of kidnappers in the

roadstead; nor was it simply attracted a century later by the bright lights around the ports. Rather, the productive resources of the islands had gradually been tapped and drawn into a world economy through increased demand for vegetable oils and other produce and minerals, partly through peasant production, but also through the application of plantation and industrial methods within island economies. The plantation model--the factory in the field--was a pervasive one as a way of maximizing profits promised by changes in European consumption and food processing in the nineteenth century. In organization, moreover, it has much in common with open-cast mining which made similar calls on regular supplies of labor in New Caledonia, New Guinea and the phosphate islands. Such modes of production had a lasting influence on the conditions of labor recruitment and other services in colonial economies. Yet these characteristic developmental institutions have little written about their functional records, their success or failure, compared, say, with cooperatives which are not characteristic of the nineteenth century or the late phenomenon of wage labor in urban centers in which Pacific islanders have been more recently caught up and spend their working lives.

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