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The informal economy in Monsoon Asia and Melanesia: West New Guinea and the Malay world

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Abstract

This is the third in a series of papers concerned with the intellectual history of the 'informal economy' and its relevance to current concerns in Papua New Guinea (PNG; the eastern half of the island of New Guinea). Proceeding from the observation that monetized informal economic activity in PNG has been of relatively limited importance, the paper seeks explanations by comparing two stylized constructs, *Monsoon Asia* (where the informal economy is dynamic) and *Melanesia* (where it is limited in scope and contribution to livelihoods). Papua (occupying the western half of the island of New Guinea) is seen as a meeting point, or zone of transition, between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*. A long history of 'trading and raiding' on this frontier marked the encounter between ceremonial exchange, as practiced by Melanesians, and the system of tribute imposed on Papuans by Moluccan sultanates. Limited economic specialization and exchange in *Melanesia* contrasted with the *Asian* household economy, enmeshed in complex social hierarchies and systems of occupational differentiation. Historically, the Malay Archipelago engaged in a world trading system, into which it drew west New Guinea/Papua over millennia. Travelling peddlers played a key role in the archipelagic trade system, demonstrating the antiquity of the informal economy tradition in the cultures of *Monsoon Asia*. The paper seeks explanations for the comparative absence of that tradition in *Melanesia*. Finally, it examines the recent and rapid emergence of an informal economy in Papua, dominated by non-Melanesian immigrants, in the wake of the incorporation of (Dutch) west New Guinea into the Republic of Indonesia in 1963.

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West New Guinea and the Malay world**

John D Conroy, Visiting Fellow, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University

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Table of contents

1. Monsoon Asia and the island Pacific	2
2. The 'missing middle' in Melanesian economies	2
3. Specialization, exchange and social stratification in <i>Monsoon Asia</i> and <i>Melanesia</i>	4
4. Where <i>Monsoon Asia</i> met <i>Melanesia</i> : west New Guinea and the Malay world	6
5. Long-distance trade in the pre-colonial world	7
6. New Guinea in the archipelagic trade system	14
7. Trade between Moluccans and Papuans	17
8. Trading and raiding: <i>Sosolot</i> , <i>Kain Timur</i> , and slavery	19
9. Commerce and cosmology in the zone of transition	24
10. Some historical accounts of trade in the archipelago	27
11. <i>Orde Baru</i> : the Indonesian ascendancy in Papua	36
12. Conclusion	41
Bibliography	44

1. Monsoon Asia and the Island Pacific¹

Economic debates in the 1960s, concerning the simplifications of empirical reality involved in macroeconomic modeling, introduced the concept of ‘stylized facts’ to the social sciences². The use of this approach for other purposes (for example, attempting to identify ‘regularities’ in historical processes) is subject to risk, for an understanding of context is essential to the interpretation of historical narrative. With this difficulty in mind, the material in this paper – introducing an opposed pair of simplified cultural entities, styled *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia* – is presented with all due diffidence. These constructs are offered as heuristic devices, for the purpose of suggesting the singularity of aspects of traditional economic life in an idealized *Melanesia*. The intention is to examine the extent of specialization and exchange in this stylized *Melanesia* and to contrast it with traditional economic systems in *Monsoon Asia*. This in turn should permit us to consider the implications of any *Melanesian* economic ‘singularity’ for the extent and character of ‘informal’ economic activity in that cultural region, and in particular for the case of Papua New Guinea.

Melanesia and *Monsoon Asia* represent settings in which economic structures and social systems are thought sufficiently similar (within each group) and different (between the groups) as to produce strongly contrasting patterns of specialization and exchange. The component parts of our *Melanesia* are restricted to western Melanesia (primarily Papua New Guinea, but including Solomon Islands and Vanuatu as sufficiently cognate for the purposes of comparison). The western half of the island of New Guinea (comprising the present-day Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua) is treated here as a zone of transition. It may be included properly in an historical *Melanesia*, but is today neither politically nor demographically so. Its population is progressively less Melanesian, as the in-migration of ‘Malay’ Indonesians continues. The term ‘Malay’ is employed here because the intention is to consider the Malay/Melanesian interaction over an historical period commencing long before the emergence of modern Indonesia. Our *Melanesia* also excludes Fiji, which occupies a somewhat transitional position between the classical Melanesian and Polynesian cultural types, as well as having (in modern times) a substantial population of Asian origin.

2. The ‘missing middle’ in Melanesian economies

In the island economies of contemporary *Melanesia* a marked disjuncture persists between economic activities occurring in their monetized, or ‘modern’ sectors, and those typifying their traditional or ‘subsistence’ sectors. The orthodox economist’s notion of ‘transition from subsistence’ is predicated on a necessity to bridge a gap between traditional and introduced economic activity, thus enabling the

¹ My thanks to Ron Duncan and Bill Stent for their continued support and to Ian Hughes, Robert Cribb and Chris Healey for helpful comments. The work has benefited from comments by participants in seminars at Deakin University (Geelong), the Australian National University, and at KITLV, Leiden, during 2012.

² The term is said to have been introduced into the economic literature by Nicolas Kaldor, provoking a famous retort by Robert Solow, to the effect that ‘They may be stylized, but are they facts?’

fuller participation of an indigenous people in the monetary economy. While it is a commonplace to say so (and also to remark upon the supposed 'affluence' of rural Melanesians), it nonetheless remains true that a substantial majority of Pacific islands people depend on subsistence agriculture and fisheries for their livelihoods to a greater or less extent – a generalization which remains most true in the Melanesian states. Thus, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a Pacific regional review of agriculture described the sector as 'fundamental' to the Melanesian economies, with subsistence agriculture still 'significant' as a proportion of GDP in each (Commonwealth of Australia 2006, table 1).

When they are compared with other developing nations at similar levels of per capita income, it is apparent there is a 'missing middle' in these Pacific economies. This is a gap between the introduced ('formal' or 'corporate') economic system and the traditional system of subsistence production (albeit modified by varying degrees of participation in cash cropping) based on households' access to land, forests and fishing grounds. While practically all productive activity takes place towards either end of this spectrum and it has proved difficult for Melanesians to make the transition from one end to the other, there is comparatively little autonomous Melanesian economic activity occurring on the middle ground between them, in the SME (small and medium enterprise) and microenterprise (or 'informal') sectors. The decision to exclude west New Guinea from our stylized contemporary *Melanesia* is validated by observing the degree to which 'Malays', rather than native Melanesians (or 'Papuan'), dominate these intermediate sectors in the provinces of Papua and West Papua, in Indonesian New Guinea.

External trade in raw materials and the activities of Government form the bedrock of the monetized economy introduced into the Pacific by colonialism and international trade. By contrast with other economies subject to these same influences, including those in *Monsoon Asia*, the introduction of the 'modern' economy to Melanesian countries took place in situations in which land resources were relatively abundant and the specialization of labour was comparatively ill-developed. In these traditional economies households were largely dependent on their own resources and labour to satisfy needs for food and shelter. The writer's review of the literature on Melanesian 'subsistence affluence' (Conroy 2012b) involved an examination of 'closed economy' models of PNG subsistence agriculture (Fisk 1962, 1964; Stent 1984). This considered accounts of New Guinea 'stone age' trade, principally that of Ian Hughes (1977), and asked whether the benefits of such trade (what economists call the 'gains from trade') were sufficient to invalidate the assumptions of the 'closed economy' analysis of 'pure' subsistence agriculture. The question turned on the degree to which exchanges between households and groups were of limited economic (as distinct from social or political) significance, in a system displaying comparatively limited division of labour and trade between specialized economic actors. This is not to deny the importance of traditional exchange in the psychological and political universe of its participants, but rather to accept that, as Ian Hughes noted, most Melanesian communities possessed the resources for self-sufficiency and their trade served a variety of ends. In general, Melanesians lived to trade, rather than traded to live. Such dealings were a world away from the impersonal economic relationships typical of the introduced market economy, and have not always proved a good preparation for participation in it.

3. Specialization, exchange and social stratification in *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*

The limited extent of specialization and exchange in our stylized *Melanesia* was in marked contrast to traditional economic systems in *Monsoon Asia*. There the tradition of household crafts and manufacturing, the use of 'general purpose' monies as a medium of exchange, and the development of a complex division of labour, facilitated domestic trade. While the great majority of households remained anchored in agriculture, families developed post-harvest and off-farm sources of income to supplement their agricultural livelihoods. With declining land availability and urbanization, households no longer able to rely primarily on agriculture became increasingly dependent on trade, services and petty manufactures, in addition to wage labour, for livelihood. While some, perhaps especially members of ethnic minorities, prospered and grew to operate medium- and large-scale enterprises, most continued to operate modestly at the level of the household, pursuing a wide range of trades and occupations, often drawing on multiple sources of household income.

This brief account does not do full justice to the complexities of the *Monsoon Asia* situation. A fuller discussion would include reference to the need to secure and manage water for irrigation systems, to the evolution of political systems to assure the necessary control and administration of irrigation and to the appropriation by political and bureaucratic elites of surpluses generated by such systems. It would consider the emergence of castes of specialized artisans and service-providers catering to the needs of a population with substantial income disparities and differing degrees of access to land, and of an institutionalized system of slavery. It would also take into account the activities of states engaged in maritime trade. As Ronald Findlay (following Benda, 1962) has pointed out, 'the interaction between coastal regions, where foreign goods, ideas and people enter the country, and inland regions drawing on agrarian surpluses to sustain royal administrations and religious establishments, has long been recognized as a fruitful way to look at the history of Southeast Asia' (Findlay 2012). All of these factors contributed to the relative complexity of social structure and occupational differentiation in much of traditional *Monsoon Asia*, by comparison with *Melanesia*. For, while social stratification was a feature of some traditional Pacific societies (notably in Polynesia) those of *Melanesia* were characterized by a fairly general lack of ascribed social status.

Melanesian societies do not appear to have thrown up the degree of economic and occupational differentiation (or landlessness, for that matter) sufficient to create 'Asian' patterns of productive activity and income distribution. Charles Rowley made a distinction between ex-colonies in Asia and colonial New Guinea which supports this contention:

'The Asian colonies had been civilized states, with centralized governments, religions expressing the highest aspirations of humanity, written languages, codes of law, often with a longer history, and achievement, on any basis of assessment at least comparable with those of the colonisers' (Rowley 1966, 3).

This provided a contrast with other territories (including our *Melanesia*) located in

‘areas which before they were colonies had been occupied by stateless societies ... [and whose peoples] before the setting up of colonial administration lived in tribal or village communities, or in smaller groups of kinsmen; where there was no state, no institution for justice or the rule of law, no protection but that of kinship, no written language, no impersonal administration, or cash economy or means of saving or investment in raising living standards ... [such areas] owe their very shape and boundaries ... to the colonial powers which grouped them into units for administration’ (Ibid, 4).

Rowley described the New Guinea village as a ‘social micro-cosm’, whose people

‘could know nothing of the state authority which was a basic regulating factor in the environment of the Asian rice village, or of the solace and harmony of the great religions’³. As in the typical pre-colonial rice village, there is a three-fold base for subsistence, in agriculture, handcrafts, and the use of animals or fish, from the area which by custom belongs to the villagers. But, apart from the difference in technology, the Asian village was *integrated into a wider economic, social and political order* (emphasis added); and to the extent that it depended on regulation of water for the padi-fields, and on flood control, the sale of the rice surplus and so on, it was dependent on the state and its bureaucracy’ (Ibid, 35)⁴.

Many contemporary Asian householders, rural and urban, are self-employed in what has come to be known as the informal economy⁵. The informal economy, or ‘sector’, is a source of income for people who cannot be accommodated in formal wage-earning jobs, and for agricultural households, many of which are in food deficit, either because they are landless, or because their land-holdings are insufficient for their needs. Monetized informal economic activity serves as a means of alleviating poverty and sustaining livelihoods among these sections of the population. While there is some comparable economic activity in contemporary Melanesian town and countryside, it is much less diverse and of considerably less significance overall. Hence the characterization, made above, of the informal economy as a ‘missing middle’ element in the evolving Melanesian economic structure. *Melanesia* was slow to lay foundations for informal economic activity in the monetized economy introduced by colonialism, just as an autonomous Melanesian small and medium enterprise sector – the other component of the ‘missing middle’ – has been tardy in emerging.

³ This statement, together with Rowley’s earlier remark implying Melanesians lacked knowledge of ‘religions expressing the highest aspirations of humanity’, derives from a somewhat Hobbesian view of Melanesian social and political life. Thus: ‘Among the Asians who knew him, the Papuan ... seems to have had a reputation for savagery which may be partly accounted for as the expression of tensions bred in small, highly competitive and insecure societies’ (Rowley 1966, 36).

⁴ The contrast between a *Melanesia* composed of small ‘stateless’ societies and a stylized *Monsoon Asia* set in a wider political and economic order is not empirically watertight for, as Professor Robert Cribb commented (pers. comm. 15 Oct 2012) there were ‘significant stateless areas in Malay regions e.g. Toraja, the Dayaks and the Batak’, occupied by ethnic groups which, although not directly engaged in long-distance trade, nonetheless produced traded commodities. Such exceptions emerge inevitably from messy reality; stylization is a device intended to generate broad, albeit defensible, generalizations which will enable an argument to go forward. The test is whether the final construct is sufficiently robust in the face of inconvenient details.

⁵ For an introduction to the idea of the informal economy, see the writer’s paper ‘Intimations of the Informal Economy’ (Conroy 2012a) which examines the concept in a variety of economic and historical settings, including the Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain during the colonial era.

4. Where *Monsoon Asia* met *Melanesia*: west New Guinea and the Malay world

Monsoon Asia and *Melanesia* are contiguous, a circumstance making contrasts between them all the more piquant. The western half of the island of New Guinea is now encompassed within the political boundaries of Asia. But from ancient times, proximity made this outer margin of Oceanic culture (and in particular the lands of the present-day Indonesian province of West Papua) a zone of contact and influence for the peoples of Southeast and East Asia. It was a zone of transition where (to continue the vein of stylized fact) the ceremonial exchange of *Melanesia* confronted tributary relationships imposed by force of the more centralized political structures of *Monsoon Asia*.

Contact between these two cultural entities extended thousands of years into the prehistory of the region, during which there was movement of peoples, crops and technologies across the Wallace line. Jack Golson (1971,126) described the island of New Guinea as 'a locus of ancient settlement ... exposed to influences from seminal areas in Asia and its archipelagos which it had the opportunity to absorb, to transmute, and perchance to transmit' eastward further into Oceania. By the time of initial European contact with *Melanesia*, in the sixteenth century, 'the economy of the entire Oceanic realm, including New Guinea, was based ... on a complex of tubers and tree fruits of basically South-East Asian origin. Throughout the region these were normally associated with the same three domesticated animals, pig, dog and chicken – again of Asiatic ancestry' (Ibid, 125). However there was a limit to the pre-historic spread of crops, animals and technology to, and through, Melanesia. Golson surmised that

'An ancient South-East Asian agriculture based on the tubers and fruits that were diffused into the South Pacific must have antedated the cultivation of the cereals, rice and millet which never reached New Guinea or Oceania at large in pre-European times' (Ibid., 135).

Rice and 'foxtail' millet appear to have emerged in China by 6000 BC. With the southward movement of early Austronesians, their settlements appear to have produced less grain, relative to *Colocasia taro*, breadfruit, banana, yam, sago and coconut. Bellwood (1995, 99) surmised this change might 'reflect a shift away from rice' for environmental reasons. It was due to 'the gradual shift from a seasonal subtropical climate into an ever-wet equatorial one as colonists moved southwards from Taiwan and the Philippines towards the equator'. Austronesian 'agricultural colonists' advanced to reach the western fringe of Melanesia by about 1500 BC, through equatorial islands where 'the prevailing climatic conditions probably promoted an economic reliance on tubers and fruits'. This circumstance offers 'a convenient explanation as to why cereals should have been absent in Oceanic economies beyond western Micronesia; the northern New Guinea passageway into Oceania is completely equatorial' (ibid., 104). A further circumstance was the pre-existence in New Guinea of 'primary agricultural development', which might have lifted the population densities of coastal communities 'to outsider-resistant levels', thus further inhibiting the entry of rice-cultivating peoples (ibid., 106).

The failure of grains to become established in Melanesia was a circumstance of great significance for patterns of social organization; indeed it was the agronomic basis for Charles Rowley's distinction between 'Asian rice villages' and the 'stateless societies' of New Guinea. Golson had posited a dichotomy between an agricultural region – our *Monsoon Asia* – producing storable cereals, and

another – *Melanesia* – dependent on more perishable staple crops, tubers and sago. This division also had implications for the possibility of specialization and long-distance trade. The most durable Melanesian staple food – sago – was still much less suitable than rice for storage and long distance carriage, whether by sea or land. In Melanesia, sago entered into short-distance trade between island and coastal communities. It was also the staple of certain well-documented and relatively long-distance maritime exchange systems, permitting some food-deficit communities to support themselves by voyaging and specialized trade. Sago (along with other commodities) also entered into trade on the margins between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*. Asians had long been trading on the boundaries of Melanesia and some Melanesians had been drawn into a greater world trading system long before the colonial period. In general, however, the scale at which rice was exchanged in *Monsoon Asia*, especially by sea, made possible more advanced patterns of specialization than occurred in *Melanesia*. With few exceptions, the typically small Melanesian agro-economy was – while engaging in some advantageous trade – nonetheless obliged to maintain the capacity for self-sufficiency.

5. Long-distance trade in the pre-colonial world

A scholar of pre-modern Indonesian trade, J C van Leur, left an influential account of the antiquity and complexity of the international trading system in which the societies of the Malay Archipelago were enmeshed prior to the arrival of European mariners in the sixteenth century⁶. His *Indonesian Trade and Society* (Van Leur, 1955) was concerned with the historical role of the peddler as the foot-soldier of trade. It is of particular significance here because this theme jibes well with our interest in the informal economy. Charles Rowley had written of the Asian village as integrated ‘into a wider economic, social and political order’, and for Van Leur this integration was a process in which the travelling peddler played an essential part. Van Leur’s work suggests him as a precursor of the idea of the informal economy, perhaps worthy of comparison with other observers who are discussed in the writer’s study of the antecedents of this concept (Conroy 2012a).

In Van Leur’s account, the trade carried on by ‘agrarian civilizations’, such as those of the ancient Mediterranean basin, had in common the activities of two distinct classes. These were ‘wealthy money-holders’ and ‘travelling pedlars’. ‘For the first, trade was a matter of occasional investment of capital; for the second it was an occupation – peddling’. Trade was not generally the primary concern of ‘money-holders’, for the classical *polis* of the Mediterranean was not dominated by “bourgeois” economic life, but [by] war, booty, and political tribute’ (Ibid 1955, 60). The application of this binary construct to pre-modern Asian trade has been much criticized. Nonetheless it provides useful insights into the pre-colonial relationship between Monsoon Asia and Melanesia, and even retains some resonance in the conditions of contemporary west New Guinea. These contentions, and their relevance to the idea of the modern informal economy, will be explored at length below.

⁶ For a map of principal trade routes across the archipelago, circa 1500 AD, see Robert Cribb, *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History*, at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/tradec15.html?zoomview=1>

The scope of 'petty' trade described by Van Leur was much greater than merely local: 'Early trade moved over regions as far-flung as did the trade of later times, and was just as much "world trade"'. The phenomenon was observable, moreover, in widely-divergent societies:

'Trade as a secondary occupation, whether accompanying farming or independent crafts, alongside trade as a self-sufficient profession, and both forms mixed up with the antithesis "local trade" and "long-distance trade" – agrarian civilizations such as those of Russia and Java still possessed all this at the time of nineteenth century research, while historical research on the origins of modern capitalism ... has revealed the same sort of forms in pre-capitalistic and early-capitalistic periods there' (Ibid. 1955, 53).

The activity of peddlers in Van Leur's pre-modern world trade system involved both barter trade and monetized exchange and can be seen as antecedent to the phenomenon of 'informality' in modern market economies. As in the period described by Van Leur, such modern activity is not a purely domestic or localized affair. In the 1930s he recognized remnants of an international peddler trade in Europe (Ibid, 63) and he would not have been surprised by contemporary manifestations of this phenomenon. These include West Africans sending home suitcases full of mobile phones from Hong Kong and ethnic Russians on the trans-Siberian railway carrying textiles from Shanghai. Modern 'informality' consists in failure to conform with the norms of the bureaucratic market economy. But Van Leur's peddlers were not, indeed *could* not, have been informal in that sense, since their trading arose in a 'pre-' or 'early-capitalistic' milieu (as Van Leur described it). While such trade was generally consistent with norms imposed by contemporary authority, that was a far cry from the requirements of the modern bureaucratic state. It is primarily in the *culture* of their trading that they foreshadowed the modern informal economy. That is no slight matter, however, since the culture of Van Leur's peddlers underlies the modern 'micro'-entrepreneurial temperament, as exhibited in the contemporary 'informal sector'.

The Malay Archipelago was linked into the trading system of the ancient world, initially through India, and later also through China. Sriwijaya, a south Sumatran 'thalassocracy' centred on modern Palembang, dominated the flows of maritime commerce through Southeast Asia between the seventh and eleventh centuries AD (Hall 1976, 63). Some centuries later Malacca, on the Malayan Peninsula, established itself as the dominant entrepôt for the region, reaching its pinnacle of activity and influence in the fifteenth century before falling to the Portuguese in 1511. Together with the West Java port city of Bantam, which flourished in the sixteenth century, these were exemplars of Findlay's cosmopolitan settlements, entry points for 'foreign goods, ideas and people'.

Van Leur maintained that, despite expansion in the areal extent and numbers of participants, the dynamics of the system itself underwent very little change 'for at least two thousand years up to and into the seventeenth century' (Ibid. 1955, 67). The achievements of this world system were such that sixteenth century Portuguese mariners found in Asia, including the Malay Archipelago,

'regions where there was a complex of shipping, trade, and authority as highly developed as the European: forms of political capitalism at least as large in dimensions as those of southern Europe ... shipping in bottoms many of them carrying more than those used in European merchant shipping; a trade in every conceivable valuable high-quality product carried on by a great multitude of traders; merchant gentlemen and harbor princes wielding as great financial power as did the merchants and princes of Europe' (Ibid. 1955, 117).

With the annual monsoon winds dictating the cycle and patterns of voyages, travel was laborious and time-consuming. Trade along the length of the Malay Archipelago was overwhelmingly (Van Leur contended) 'a small-scale peddling trade, a trade in valuable high-quality products', which alone could yield the margins necessary to justify lengthy sea voyages. Some 'merchants of position and wealth' voyaged on their own account, but they were more likely to send others, including trusted slaves, on their behalf. Van Leur's 'money-holders' could place factors on vessels or station them at 'staple ports'⁷ or they might take a stake in *commenda* ventures⁸, but the ships were mostly crammed with individual traders, each with his own pack. Van Leur spoke of Javanese junks, 'with their holds divided into small compartments into which the many traders each of them stored his cargo' (Ibid., 142). This was a trade with pronounced characteristics. These included

'a large number of pedlars with small cargos and a small capital, a limited number of ships and a resultant overabundance of "shipper-passengers", products in small quantities, long trading periods, as many markets as there were towns and ports, each one with its own money, its own weights, its own measures, its own customs: from these few factors alone the character of international Asian trade can be determined' (van Leur 1955, 214).

Van Leur's description of the character of Asian trade, written in Dutch during the 1930s, became influential, particularly after its translation into English in 1955. W F Wertheim, who had been associated with the project to make Van Leur's work more widely available, praised the latter's 'attempt to break loose from the Europe-centered view which up to now has dominated western historical writing on Asia'. He was perhaps the first scholar to recount Van Leur's celebrated trope, that the dominant tendency in Dutch colonial historiography had been to survey the Indies 'from the deck of the ship, the rampart of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading-house' (Wertheim 1954, 168). Wertheim accepted the 'travelling peddler' proposition, describing peddlers as 'perhaps rather prosperous, but socially they stood very low and were widely separated from the actual rulers in the coastal towns - the harbor princes with their relatives and officials'. The wealth-holders who financed trade 'were either members of the ruling aristocracy carrying on incidental trade and in many cases owning trading ships, or merchant gentlemen belonging to a small patrician class close to the aristocracy in social position' (Ibid, 169). Again, Philip Curtain in his widely-read *Cross-cultural Trade in World History* (1984) accepted that in the 1590s 'most of Asia's seaborne trade at this period was a peddler's trade, where merchants rented space on a ship and went along with their goods' (Ibid, 134).

⁷ Ports designated by local authority, for example the Sultan of Bantam, as the point of import and export, to facilitate collection of levies and to enforce monopolies and other trade restrictions

⁸ Combining aspects of a loan and a partnership, a *commenda* arrangement allows an investor (or group of investors) to place capital or commodities with an agent/manager who will trade with it and return the original stake with a share of profit. The investor risks capital while the agent risks time and effort.

The most systematic examination of Van Leur's ideas is by Meilink-Roelofs (1962). While her argument was wide-ranging, discussion of it here is largely restricted to her treatment of the role of the peddlers. Briefly, she charged that their status was inflated, for two principal reasons. First, Van Leur had seriously understated the importance of bulk (that is, high volume/low value) cargos. Further, he had not sufficiently recognized the operations of an important category of substantial, independent merchants. These were distinguished from the aristocrats and elites by being commercially-oriented, rather than politically-connected (Ibid, 5). They formed a third class of traders, distinct from small peddlers and 'wealth-holders'. These propositions challenged Van Leur's account of a trade based essentially on luxury goods, and conducted within a binary social formation in which the role of travelling peddlers was exaggerated.

As 'bulk' commodities, Van Leur had instanced rice, salt, earthenware and pepper, while high value items included 'the finer sorts of spices, such as nutmegs, cloves and mace'. Cloth of finer quality was in the latter category while the red and blue calicos ('trade' cloth) from India were likely in the former (see Meilink-Roelofs 1962, 329 n.24). As she pointed out, the movement of bulk food cargos, and especially rice, was essential to the dynamics of Malay Archipelago trade. *Entrepôts* such as Malacca and Bantam were chronically unable to meet their own food requirements and could not have flourished without imports. Substantial, commercially-oriented, merchants were able to trade bulk commodities such as food grains profitably because they could secure economies of scale in transport and marketing. Small peddlers, limited to what they could carry, were obliged to deal in more valuable wares.

While Meilink-Roelofs made out her case for Van Leur's general neglect of the bulk trade, there is at least one specific instance in which he showed himself fully aware of the issue. It is, coincidentally, an instance which brings us closer to *Melanesia*. The spice production areas of the Moluccas, where good agricultural land was scarce, were also food-deficit zones. Given the scarcity of arable land, food production was competitive with high value spice crops grown for export. Located in eastern Indonesia ('the rest of which was accustomed to the much more primitive diet of sago') the Spice Islands imported large volumes of rice, mainly from Java. While slaves and the poor made do with sago, better-off Moluccans consumed perhaps 9000 tons of rice annually, requiring 150 sixty-ton junk-loads, by Van Leur's estimate (Ibid, 1955,209-10). It was also necessary to import sago, primarily from less-favoured Moluccan islands, but even from as far afield as New Guinea, in *Melanesia*.

Wertheim had accepted Van Leur's vision of an Asian commercial system without any significant cadre of substantial merchants, independent of the aristocratic or patrician elites. Later commentators appear to favour Meilink-Roeslofz's account, agreeing that such a class did exist, and that it was significant. Anthony Reid, for example, noted that Van Leur's own data suggested that 'in a typical vessel more than half the cargo was owned by one or two substantial merchants'. Moreover, Van Leur had given insufficient attention to the role of the *nakhoda*, more the *commander* of a major merchant vessel than its captain, 'a truly entrepreneurial figure having a major role in commercial transactions in the market'. Van Leur had been too concerned to emphasize 'the small-scale nature of the trade and its utter differentiation from the types of trade developed by modern capitalism', while his 'dichotomy' among trading classes was 'far too extreme' (Reid 1993, 90-91).

Van Leur has also been accused of misunderstanding ancient trade due to a misreading of Max Weber, leading him to over-emphasise the political nature of such trade and its 'negligible' proportions (Brand 1976, 35). His adoption of Weberian modernization theory has been examined, with more complimentary conclusions, by Blusse and Gaastra (1998). Whereas Weber had regarded 'the personalistic forms of organization which characterized traditional society' as obstacles to the extension of markets in pre-modern trade, Blusse and Gaastra credited Van Leur with having shown that problems posed by such factors had been largely overcome in Malay Archipelago maritime trade. In that system

'The monsoon system favoured regular navigation, forms of credit and commenda had developed to a markedly high level of reliability, and finally the very well-developed bureaucratic institutions represented by sea laws and port regulations assured the proper conduct of traffic between the various nations at port polities such as Melaka [Malacca]. This was the dynamic maritime trading world into which the Europeans made their entrance and found themselves a niche' (Blusse and Gaastra 1998, 1-2).

Van Leur asserted that Asian trade had reached a stage of *mercantile* capitalism comparable with that of the early European intruders into the Malay Archipelago (Vogel 1998). This is evident from his remark concerning the 'complex of shipping, trade, and authority as highly developed as the European' which the Portuguese found in Asia in the early sixteenth century. Mercantile capitalism could accommodate such phenomena as the travelling peddler trade, which was among the forces giving coherence to the pre-modern Asian trade system. But the later advent of 'advanced industrial' capitalism in Europe opened up a gap between it and mercantile Asia. By the nineteenth century, colonial domination and the relative decline of Asian mercantile capitalism had obscured the achievements of precolonial Asian trade. Van Leur's assertion of the 'autonomy' of Asian history was a necessary corrective to 'traditional colonial historiography', which had 'wrongly projected the nineteenth and twentieth century domination by Europe back into earlier centuries' (Vogel 1998, 32-33).

This was a grand theme, but one of less significance for our present purposes than Van Leur's account of the peddlers. It is inconsequential whether they were (as Van Leur had believed) one half of a binary social formation, or simply an element in a more complex trading structure. That issue has been resolved by fairly general consent in favour of Van Leur's critics. His misjudgment is much less important than his identification of a distinct and significant group, abundantly documented in the historical sources, whose members were recognizable predecessors of the modern informal 'micro-entrepreneur'. Later, in relation to *Melanesia*, it will also be opportune for us to revisit Van Leur's other distinct group of traders: the 'wealth-holders', with their propensity for 'war, booty and political tribute'.

Van Leur left an account of a major Indonesian *entrepôt* which included descriptions of traders and their activities. Many of them were the small peddlers with whom this account is concerned and their ethnicities reflected the wider system of which they were a part. When in 1596 the first Dutch fleet arrived at Bantam (*Banten*) on Java, and after the completion of formalities, 'there came [aboard] such a multitude of Javanese and other nations such as Turks, Chinese, Bengali, Arabs, Persians, Gujarati, and others that one could hardly move' (cited by Van Leur 1955,3). In particular, Bantam was 'the southern staple of Chinese trade'; wealthy Chinese merchants were politically influential; they sent slaves as agents on sea trade, gave out capital in *commenda* to itinerants; financed import trade with China and

managed Chinese capital sent for speculation; and they engaged in usury. Media of exchange used throughout the archipelago reflected both the diverse origins of traders and the character (and degree of incorporation into monetary exchange) of their destinations. Chinese 'lead cash', threaded on string, Spanish and Portuguese coinage, Chinese trading money of bar silver, Persian silver bars, Achinese gold taels, direct barter reckoned on the basis of money calculations, barter conducted in terms of nutmeg equivalent (on Banda Island), gold and silver bracelets in the eastern regions, while elsewhere 'pieces of cotton were means of exchange and measures of value' (Ibid. 1955, 136). Along with the foreigners resident in Bantam were many 'foreign' Indonesians, traders from the full stretch of the archipelago. While elites, including the Chinese, lived within the city walls, others, 'Buginese, Bandanese, Banjarese, people from Ternate, Macassar, and eastern Java – were to be found settled in the suburbs ... [where] the great mass of travelling peddlars found shelter, on an equal footing with local traders and craftsmen, together making up the whole lower-class group of Indonesians and foreigners' (Ibid. 1955, 139).

The reference to traders from Ternate and Banda reminds us of the spice economy of the Moluccas [*Maluku* in modern Indonesia] close to the eastern extremity of the archipelago, for which Bantam was a major port of transshipment. The wealth generated by this trade had, over millennia, drawn the Indonesian islands into a wider trading system. In turn it attracted the Portuguese and, later, the Dutch and English into the archipelago. The principal spices in this trade were cloves, nutmeg and mace. Cloves were then still unique (at least in their cultivated and high-value form) to a small group of Moluccan islands including Seram and Ambon, as well as parts of the northern Moluccas (now Indonesian *Maluku Utara*). Nutmeg and mace were found most abundantly on the Moluccan island of Banda. The northern Spice Islands were the domain of a number of Islamic sultanates which had emerged under the influence of the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit. For our purposes the most important of these were Ternate and Tidore. In general the Spice Islands suffered food deficits, requiring them to import rice in bulk from Java, and sago from Eastern Indonesia and even New Guinea.

The port of Grise (*Gresik*) in East Java was central to the bulk rice and wholesale spice trades when the Dutch arrived in the Archipelago at the end of the sixteenth century. They discovered, in addition, a thriving retail trade pursued along a triangular path involving Malacca and Bima (on the east Indonesian island of Sumbawa) as well as Grise. We have Meilink-Roelofs's (1962, 84) description of this trade, taken from the contemporary account of a Portuguese traveller, Pires.

'Merchants from Malacca ... [along with] passengers, or members of the crews of the big junks, embarked with their merchandise - mostly cloth - for Java. In Java they sold their best textiles for cash (Chinese copper coins), and other trivia, and then went on to Sumbawa (Bima). There they bought cheap cotton cloths with the merchandise they had brought with them from Java and exchanged these and the cash for nutmeg, mace and cloves in the Spice Islands'.

Meilink-Roelofs notes that Pires did not visit the Moluccas, though he gathered information in Malacca and Grise on the commerce of Banda. There traders from the Kei and Aru island groups, further east towards New Guinea, were said to bring in sago and gold, together with 'dried parrots and birds of paradise'. These latter products were luxuries, valued for their plumes, which were eventually 'bartered

by the Bandanese for textiles and so, via the Bengali merchants, they ultimately came into the hands of Turks and Persians who used them for the plumes on their headdresses' (Ibid, 95).

Pires reported the high valuations placed by Moluccans on the better textiles. As reported by Mielink-Roelofs (Ibid, 95), Pires had suggested that good quality cloths brought by Javanese traders 'made the captains of the junks *objects of veneration* (emphasis added) to the local inhabitants, giving them so much power that, as Pires put it, they 'used to take command of the country and bought as they wished as long as they stayed there ... and they used to fix a price for the people in the country'. In the Hakluyt translation of Pires by Armando Courtesao (1967 [1944], 207), these Javanese captains are described instead as having been 'adored'. Either way, these are interesting versions of Pires' account, which may take on some significance when we come to discuss the trade in 'heritage' cloths (*kain timur*) from eastern Indonesia between Moluccans and Papuans. For, on Banda and the other Spice Islands 'fine materials were not only used as clothing but were also collected as treasure, in the same way as copper gongs, ivory, and fine porcelain. The coarser sorts [of cloth] were also indispensable to the Bandanese as these were needed to meet the requirements of the traders bringing sago from the islands further east, from Halmahera to New Guinea' (Mielink-Roelofs, 96).

Among the Moluccan islands, Tidore and Seram are of particular importance because of their trade with the indigenous Papuan communities of New Guinea, and for the tribute relationship imposed on parts of the islands and mainland of New Guinea by the Sultanate of Tidore. It was principally through these connections that *Melanesia* was linked into the greater premodern Asian trading system for which Bantam was an *entrepôt*. That nutmeg and cloves also grew wild on New Guinea⁹ was an element (though only one among many) in the attraction the Papuan lands held for Moluccan and other traders, especially once the Dutch monopoly on the traditional sources of spices had been enforced.

6. New Guinea in the archipelagic trade system

The political division of New Guinea by Dutch and English-speaking colonialists, as well as the brief German occupation of northeast New Guinea, has imposed an artificial division on academic studies of the island and its cultures. As the archeologist Matthew Spriggs remarked,

'Anglophone researchers are cut off from seeing the full diversity of Melanesia, the diversity that comes from consideration of its always-open border to the west, its border with the rest of the world. Scholars working on the ethnography and archeology of Papua New Guinea rarely consider a history for the region which encompasses occasional rice agriculture, contact with Chinese and other Asian and Southeast Asian cultures, the use of iron and gold, and trade involvement over at least 2000 years with an ever-expanding world economy' (Spriggs 1998, 931).

⁹ 'Wild clove trees are common in the lower montane forests of ... New Guinea ... [and] have larger and less aromatic flower buds and leaves. Their essential oil content is also less and it has a different composition.' Wild nutmeg was collected from MacCluer Gulf, south of the Bird's Head, in New Guinea (Swadling 1996, 26)

The need for a cross-boundary approach is implicit in the comparison of *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia* attempted here. One such attempt is by Pamela Swadling, who dealt with early trade routes to the island of New Guinea, with a particular interest in Bird of Paradise plumes. Swadling contended that trade volumes some 2000 years ago were sufficient to support the activities of 'long-distance specialist traders from Asia'¹⁰. They operated in the islands off western New Guinea and on the coast of the Bird's Head Peninsula in what is now the Indonesian province of West Papua, although the trade may also have extended east, along the north coast, as far as present-day Jayapura. She asserted that plumes were central to this trade 'and as a result were the first product from New Guinea to go through a trade cycle of boom and bust'. The boom ended about 250 AD, when 'spices and aromatic barks and woods displaced plumes as prime luxuries in Asia' (Swadling 1996, 15-16).

The evidence for a trade in New Guinea plumes (which cannot be supported by archeological findings) rests on knowledge of the movement of other, more durable, commodities to and from Melanesia. Swadling cites the known popularity of bird plumes as luxury commodities in contemporary Asian kingdoms, the frequency of plume motifs decorating the bronze artifacts of the *Dong Son* culture of North Vietnam, and the discovery (among other artifacts of Asian origin) of Dong Son bronze drums in parts of modern Indonesia and on the island of New Guinea itself. Such bronze artifacts, none of which can be dated from after about 250 AD, have been found in the interior of the Bird's Head and as far west as Lake Sentani (near modern Jayapura). This led Swadling to claim that '[t]he trail of these large bronze artifacts to New Guinea' is 'archeological verification' of the interest of traders in New Guinea plumes (Ibid., 52-7, 273)¹¹. The Bird's Head and the hinterland of present-day Jayapura (administrative centre of the Province of Papua) were to become major sources of plume exports in Dutch colonial times.

In Swadling's account, the plume trade was eclipsed after 300 AD by the demand from India and the Middle East for cloves, nutmegs, sandalwood and other aromatic forest products. As a result, 'the Spice islands' – the Moluccas – and the Onin area of the New Guinea mainland¹² became the new centres supplying these markets, as they were respectively the sources of cloves and nutmegs and massoy bark' (Ibid., 59). Trade in Bird of Paradise plumes did not cease, and they were esteemed in the Indonesian kingdoms of Srivijaya (7th to 11th centuries) and Majapahit (13th to 16th centuries).

¹⁰ A discovery of cloves, thought to be of a species unique to Maluku, at a site in the Euphrates Valley in modern-day Syria, was said to date from about 1750-1600 BC (Swadling 1996, 22). This would advance the commencement of long-distance trade from the region considerably. However Spriggs et al (2007, 16) cite evidence casting doubt on the provenance of the excavated cloves and hence the plausibility of the theory. Nonetheless, they support her emphasis on the importance of the Bird of Paradise trade (see below, footnote 11).

¹¹ Spriggs et al (2007, 16) are broadly supportive of this conjecture, noting that 'Swadling's claims for an important role for bird of paradise feathers in the later exchange systems associated with the spread of early metal in the region are far more persuasive [than the Euphrates valley hypothesis]. Such birds occur in Maluku only in the Aru Islands, but the long-standing connections between northern Maluku and New Guinea provide the conduit through which such feathers probably first entered the world market'.

¹² Onin: historic name for the Bomberai Peninsula, south of the Bird's Head on the mainland of New Guinea

The ideology of a *Greater Majapahit (from Sabang to Merauke)* would later provide a rhetoric for Sukarno's drive to re-unite Dutch New Guinea with the other elements of the former Dutch East Indies in an independent Indonesia. As Mielink-Roeslofsz (1962, 23) recorded, 'Majapahit is reputed to have extended its authority as far as the Moluccas, no doubt with the object of making certain of the supply of spices from Banda and the Moluccas'. It has been suggested that Majapahit may only have traded indirectly with *Wwanin* [Onin], and that it is possible that any putative Majapahit sovereignty over Onin was actually vested in Ceram [*Seram*, in Maluku] (O'Hare 1986). This supposition is based on the latter's documented influence over Onin. If so, that arrangement provided a precedent for the subsequent management, using native rulers as proxies, of relations between Dutch authorities and the easternmost fringe of the Malay world. By the early fourteenth century, Majapahit influence appears to have stimulated the emergence of faux-Javanese kingdoms, or 'sultanates', in the Moluccas (among which Tidore and Ternate have been mentioned above). This was a common pattern of cultural acquisition across the Archipelago, inspired by 'the need of ambitious local rulers to acquire the cultural trappings conducive to royal state-building' (Findlay 2012, 7). In later centuries the Dutch would attempt to use these Sultanates as instruments of indirect rule over the Papuan islands and portions of the mainland of New Guinea.

On the eve of European intrusion into this system, a long-established trade route led from outer eastern Southeast Asia, through the Middle East and Venice, into Europe itself. This trade route also provided an eastward pathway for the entry of Islam to the Malay Archipelago, and in time the new religion would reach its eastern frontier, the island of New Guinea. In Europe, cloves had been adopted for elite cuisine from the early middle ages while nutmeg had been consumed since the 12th century. Riches promised by access to the sources of the spice trade, and the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 (compromising the entry of spices to Europe via the Adriatic) stimulated early Portuguese and Spanish expeditions to the region, on the sea-route around the Cape of Good Hope. As we have seen from Van Leur's discussion of Bantam, Dutch voyaging in the region commenced late in the sixteenth century. The Dutch East India Company (the VOC) was established in 1602 to exploit the spice wealth of the archipelago and with the immediate priority of displacing the Portuguese from the Moluccas. It did so, and its subsequent monopolization of the production and distribution of clove and nutmeg, together with its destruction of the Bandanese trading community, diverted the energies of independent traders further east to the wild (albeit lower-value) resources of clove and nutmeg in the Bird's Head region of west New Guinea. There trading networks with the Moluccas were well-established, and aromatics such as massoy (*massoi*) bark and dammar resin could also be found, along with slaves, ambergris, trepang, turtle shell, pearls, parrots and bird of paradise plumes. These were all products 'hunted and gathered' ('captured', in the case of slaves), from forest or sea and traded-on with little or no processing. This pattern of resource extraction, with negligible 'value adding' (to use a modern term) has typified the region into modern times.

The mention of trepang (*tripang*, or *bêche-de-mer*), a marine delicacy highly valued by the Chinese, introduces a new phase of trade with New Guinea (and the Archipelago more generally). It focused (in addition to trepang) on mother-of-pearl, and birds' nests and other forest products. This new trade cycle commenced after internal stability was restored in China under the Qing dynasty in 1684 (although

Swadling speculates that isolated Chinese traders had reached Onin as early as the fifteenth century). Much of the Chinese impact was indirect, however, for their demand 'encouraged a great diaspora of Makassarese and Bugis¹³ throughout the archipelago' from the late seventeenth century. It should be added that defeat at the hands of the Dutch in the 1660s gave many Bugis good reason to disperse from their homelands. These sea-faring inhabitants of the south Celebes (*Sulawesi Selatan*) 'founded new settlements and trading centres throughout the archipelago at the same time as the Chinese expanded their trade there' (Swadling 1996, 277)¹⁴. While this included footholds on the mainland of west New Guinea, on the Bird's Head and the Onin Peninsula, Malays and Chinese often established entrepôts in more secure niches close to the coast of the big island, several of which Alfred Russel Wallace would later visit in the mid-nineteenth century.

The resources required for the Dutch to secure and develop their interests in the Moluccas left them with limited capacity to deal with New Guinea. By Jan Pouwer's account (1999, 159-60),

'The purpose of the Dutch voyages of the 17th and 18th centuries was to explore the coast [of New Guinea] to find a safe haven for VOC ships sailing for Batavia that were blown off course. The authorities were also expected to assume nominal possession of the country by setting up boundary posts. Of course, the opportunities for trade and replenishment of supplies were to be investigated as well. All the same, the VOC was never directly interested in New Guinea; it was only concerned to prevent its use as a base by British or Spanish rivals. The commercial prospects proved to be discouraging'.

This would not be the only case where a colonial power, with European cost structures and profit goals, relinquished frontier trade opportunities to 'Asiatics' operating on a different plane of expectation¹⁵. After initial, abortive, attempts to conduct direct trade with New Guinea in the sixteenth century, the Dutch were content to see this trade conducted under the authority of Moluccan Sultans, as their vassal rulers. The trade with Papuans was thus conducted – as it had been for millennia – by Asians, but now in the interstices of an overstretched and relatively non-interventionist European colonial empire. A useful introduction to this subject will require discussion of the pre-colonial trade networks involving Moluccans and Papuans, of how these linked in with the wider archipelagic trade system, and of the cultural milieu of the border regions between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*. Given the relevance to this study of J C van Leur's emphasis on petty traders, his insights into the Moluccan trade with New Guinea provide a good starting point.

¹³ Bugis: an ethnic group originating in south Sulawesi, much-dispersed throughout the Malay Archipelago. Also used in historical sources as a catch-all for other groups from south Sulawesi, including the Makassarese

¹⁴ Around this time similar vessels from Sulawesi found their way to the *bêche-de-mer* grounds on the coast of north Australia, a trade only halted by Federation of the Australian colonies in the early 20th century.

¹⁵ Other examples include the trade conducted in British colonial West Africa by 'Levantine' merchants, and the activities of Chinese traders in German New Guinea, outside the few small centres of administration.

7. Trade between Moluccans and Papuans

North Moluccan lords claimed suzerainty over the Papuan islands west of the Bird's Head, in places on the Bird's Head itself, on the Onin Peninsula and to a limited extent along the north and south coasts of west New Guinea. In these footholds, the sultans appointed local leaders as *Raja*, *Kapitan* and other Malay or Dutch ranks, giving them responsibility for oversight of local trade and requiring the periodic payment of tribute. Aside from the sultanates of the north, other Moluccan communities played trading roles. Collectively, the Moluccas comprised a scattered and sparsely populated set of small island groups, principally Ambon, Seram and the north Moluccas, and the Bandas¹⁶. When the Dutch reached Bantam in 1596, and before they had moved to seize a monopoly over the spice trade with dramatic consequences for the Moluccas, there was a variety of political formations in the region. The northern sultanates, including Tidore and Ternate, were characterized by relatively centralized monarchies. Ternate, for example, was 'an aristocratic state with its ruler as chief among peers'; it required of its subjects 'participation in military expeditions, sago voyages, galley duties, and forced relocation of people'. It stationed governors on outlying islands to levy tolls, deliver products to the centre, and control the ports of trade. By such means the sultanates effectively channeled the riches of the clove trade to a noble class (Van Leur 1955, 143).

By contrast, the political structure of both Ambon and Banda 'was "patrician republican", with a staunchly unitary society under a rigidly exclusive aristocratic regime' (Van Leur 1955, 142). In some respects these arrangements proved less burdensome for the populace, since the patrician classes appear to have been more focused on trade and less concerned than the sultans to project political power. Patricians in both Ambon and Banda arrogated to themselves most of the proceeds of the spice trade. These included, aside from monopoly profits on the trade itself, 'anchorage money, tolls, and trading permit rights'. In consequence, 'the free population was poor and subservient to the nobility; slaves were held chiefly by the nobles' (ibid., 142). Nonetheless, individuals appear to have had greater agency, with Banda in particular having an aggressively entrepreneurial culture. Such an entrepreneurial culture was also found in Seram, most particularly in its southeastern archipelago, known as Seram Laut, or the Seram Laut Archipelago¹⁷. Seram lacked centralized authority, with tribal groupings forming the focus of local identities. It was a zone of rivalry between the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, although the isolated islets of Seram Laut were relatively undisturbed by either¹⁸.

Another account of the political organization of Seram Laut refers to the later, colonial, period. These islands possessed 'a flexible, trade-oriented socio-political system' consisting of 'small principalities managed by a loose confederation of merchant kings'. Eight such 'rulers' functioned in the southeast Seram archipelago and each had 'a large number of subordinate officials, common people, and a retinue

¹⁶ For an overview, see the map at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/malukuc15-17.html?zoomview=1>

¹⁷ The map at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/malukulang.html?zoomview=1> in Cribb's *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History* shows the string of islands southeast of Seram (bottom centre)

¹⁸ As suggested by a map showing the spheres of influence of Ternate and Tidore, early C16. in Cribb's *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History*; see <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/malukuc15-17.html?zoomview=1>

of resident slaves'. These *orang kaya* (Malay, 'rich men') were validated in their roles by virtue of holding titles (such as *raja*, *kapitan* and *major*) awarded by Ternate or Tidore. Indeed, 'So prolific were these titles that European visitors could never be certain about the source of legitimate authority' in any community. Titles, and their accompanying letters of authority, 'cemented the leaders' status in local politics', while acting to prevent autocratic rule by a single ruler (Goodman 1998, 432-33). In describing a set of more decentralized and fluid, albeit miniature, polities, Goodman's account supports van Leur's distinction between centralized north Moluccan states and more fluid entities, such as Banda, in the south. It is likely that Banda contributed to Seramese entrepreneurialism, since the destruction of its society by the Dutch after 1621 had created a diaspora of Bandanese, many of them living in archipelagic southeast Seram (Ellen 1993, 19).

Two major trade systems, the *sosolot* and the *kain timur* 'complex'¹⁹, accounted for most of the traffic between Moluccans and the Papuan inhabitants of mainland New Guinea. A third significant trade corridor, extending to the north of the Bird's Head Peninsula and into Geelvink (*Cenderawasih*) Bay, was both of less importance and less germane to the present discussion. The *sosolot* occurred in the region of the Onin (*Bomberai*) peninsula and further to the southeast in the district of Kowiai, and was controlled largely by traders from Seram Laut. The *kain timur* trade took place in the south coast and interior regions of the Bird's Head Peninsula. It was largely the province of traders from the Raja Ampat islands, located in contemporary West Papua, although with Seramese also involved. The influence of the Sultanate of Tidore was more marked in the case of the *kain timur* complex, with frequent contact between the Raja Ampat sultans and the Gamrange islands (a Halmaheran group located further west, and subordinate to Tidore). This trade was seen as an extension of Tidorean power and influence to the New Guinean mainland, to parts of which Tidore laid claim. It is possible to exaggerate the separateness of these *sosolot* and *kain timur* trade systems, for just as Seram Laut traders were involved on the Bird's Head, so also were Raja Ampat traders active on the Onin peninsula²⁰. However, while both systems involved the export of slaves and forest products, *kain timur* imports were restricted to the southern Bird's Head region. The *sosolot* and *kain timur* systems will be discussed in turn, below.

8. Trading and raiding: *Sosolot*, *Kain Timur*, and slavery

Van Leur asserted that premodern Asian trade represented a stage of mercantile capitalism comparable with that of contemporary Europe. But whereas modern industrial capitalism requires the efficient organization of free labour, mercantile capitalism in the Malay Archipelago relied heavily on the labour power of slaves. This was true, whether in Dutch settlements or the Asian maritime and agrarian polities. The taking of slaves as booty, and their gift as tribute, was integral to the system, while commercial slave raiding was a highly organized trade²¹. The enslavement of Papuans, whether by other

¹⁹ *Kain timur* is Malay for 'eastern cloth' (as seen from the perspective of Java); this is *ikat*, a woven cloth from Sumbawa, Timor and other parts of the eastern Malay archipelago

²⁰ See Timmer (2011) for an account of the trade which conflates these two systems

²¹ For a map of principal slave trade routes across the archipelago in the period C16-18, see Robert Cribb, *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History*, at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/slaving.html>

Papuans or by 'Malays', was only one element in a wider system of tribute, plunder and commercialized slavery. Van Leur does not appear to have discussed slavery as institution, *per se*, though its pervasiveness is evident from many incidental references in *Indonesian Trade and Society*. His attitude was non-judgmental; he was critical of the tendency to dismiss the small political entities of the Malacca Straits as 'corrupt despotisms, pirate states, and slave states', because 'despotism, piracy and slavery are historical terms, and history is not written with value judgments'. He pointed wryly to the prosperity of towns in his Dutch home province, gained by engagement in the eighteenth century Atlantic slave trade, which 'must have supplied the funds of building many of the fine mansions of Zeeland's capital' (Van Leur 1955, 276).

Anthony Reid (1983, 31) characterized the historic patterns of Archipelagic slavery in a manner particularly apt for west New Guinea. There was 'an overall consistency of the slave trade, which tended to take people from east to west, from small divided states (especially those prey to internal warfare) to larger, wealthier ones, and from non-Muslim to Muslim societies'. Heather Sutherland described 'a large scale indigenous commerce in human beings, fed by many small networks funnelling their goods through a hierarchy of local, regional and major entrepots'. After their arrival the Dutch also engaged in extensive slaving on their own account, but there is little doubt that, 'with their endless need for labour, the Company [the VOC] drew on indigenous slave-trading networks, and probably stimulated their expansion and intensification' (Sutherland 1983, 267).

The archipelagic slave trade grew rapidly in the seventeenth century as labour supplies from the Indian subcontinent declined, causing the VOC to look to the east for slaves to operate the pepper plantations of west and central Indonesia, in Borneo, Java and Sumatra. But slavery was also an urban phenomenon, for slaves became part of the European colonial economy. As Reid notes, slaves were 'a majority of the population of Dutch Makassar in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', while in Batavia, 'slaves were always a majority of the population inside the city walls, where free Indonesians were very scarce'. In that city, the total slave population, both inside and without the walls, 'was relatively stable between twenty-four and thirty thousand from the late seventeenth century to the 1770s, reaching a peak of thirty-eight thousand in that decade (Reid 1983, 29). In seventeenth century Batavia, European-owned slaves frequently absconded. In consequence, Europeans were known to 'seek slaves from as far away as possible - India, Arakan, Madagascar or New Guinea - so as to minimize the likelihood of slaves fleeing from anything they found unacceptable' (Reid 1983, 15). The majority of Java's slaves came from Sulawesi and Bali, 'but each year for several centuries hundreds of New Guinea slaves ... were transported east into the Malay archipelago, usually never to return' (Moore 2003, 68).

The enslavement of Papuans was ancient in origin and Papuan slaves were known throughout the Archipelago. Van Leur cited evidence that 'hunting of Papuas [sic] for slaves as early as the tenth century appears from the fact that Papua [sic] slaves were found on Java then (from the records of the foundation of a Buddhist sanctuary' (Van Leur 1955, 355 n.64). Reid described how states 'rose and flourished primarily on the traffic in slaves ... Onin (New Guinea) had this reputation in the sixteenth century' while Sulu and Tidore had it in the seventeenth and Sulu in the eighteenth. By the mid-seventeenth century, 'Tidore was taking slaves from the Raja Empat Islands and the New Guinea coast ...

frequently in the name of tribute' (Reid 1983, 31). Papuans were found in the Jolo slave market, in the Sulu Archipelago (southwest Philippines) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where 'Papuan and Flores islanders always found a ready sale', and 'women from the Aru islands and Papua were ... considered attractive and sold without difficulty at higher than average prices' (Warren 1981, 2010).

Alfred Russel Wallace (whose account of *The Malay Archipelago* in the mid-nineteenth century is quoted at length below) appears to have formed a higher opinion of the Papuan than the Malay. This judgment applied also to slaves: 'The Papuan has much more vital energy ... [and] Papuan slaves show no inferiority of intellect compared with Malays ... and in the Moluccas they are often promoted to places of considerable trust' (Wallace 1962, 450). Perhaps this was an additional reason why 'the larger and stronger Papuan slaves commanded significantly higher prices than slaves from Bali, Lombok, or Sumbawa and other traditional Indonesian labour sources' (Goodman 1998, 438). Papua appears to have been among the last areas in the Archipelago from which slaves were taken. Sutherland recorded that 'the total abolition of slavery (in theory effective since 1860) was more real after 1878, despite regular mentions of incidental trade throughout the area [of Sulawesi] and possible large scale activity in the Irian [Papua] region and parts of Kalimantan' (Sutherland 1983, 279).

The first European account of what is now known as the *Sosolot* trade system was given by the Portuguese mariner de Brito in 1581 (Sollewijn Gelpke 1994). He described the capture of Papuan slaves for sale to Seram Laut, where many slaves were held, and how they were used there to produce sago for export to Banda, seat of nutmeg and trade, which lacked a staple food. People in Onin wore gold jewellery, though the place of its origin was wrapped in mystery. They gathered massoi bark for exchange with the Seramese, who in turn transshipped it to Java. Goodman (1998, 436) claims that 'the region visited by the Seramese dwarfed other New Guinea trade and exchange systems dominated by centrally-located trade societies'. Nine 'Islamic kingdoms' (*kerajaan*) in the Onin region, located either on the mainland or on inshore islands between MacCluer Gulf and Kowiai, were the 'main Papuan power centres' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Agents of one of them, Rumbati on the Onin Peninsula, were stationed by its raja at 'headwater communities and inland settlements' to access hinterland resources of massoy bark (Ibid., 437). These small polities 'grew wealthy from the *sosolot* monopolies' on riverine and coastal traffic. Such monopolies were often established by the first Seram Laut trader to make contact with a Papuan group; how they were sustained subsequently is suggested by Andaya (1991, 85):

'One of the slave routes operated between Onin on the west coast of New Guinea and the island of Goram [in Seram Laut]. Onin boats came regularly bringing slaves to Goram and selling them for 25-30 reals in cloth, and for knives and swords ... Although the Dutch wished to tap this supply of slaves, they were unable to get there without guides, interpreters, and the blessing of Goram leaders ... The slaves were sold by warring non-Muslim coastal tribes to the chiefs and other important individuals along the Onin coast, who were Muslims mainly of Seram Laut or Tidore Laut origin. It was these Muslim lords who conducted the trade with foreign merchants. Those from the Seram Laut islands had entered into trade agreements with the Papuan tribes through the exchange of weapons, thus creating *sosolot*, or areas of special trade arrangements'.

Intermarriage between 'Malays' and Papuan women created what Andaya called a 'mixed intermediary group'. Such groups often established small fortified settlements on the coast, known as *kota*, for which there is archeological evidence (Goodman 2002, 5). In the journal of a nineteenth century Dutch naval officer who had been sent in 1826 to show the flag in the Moluccas and west New Guinea, the term *kota* was used frequently to denote a fort or blockhouse (Kolff 1840). In modern Indonesian *kota* means 'town', or 'urban centre', suggesting the emergence of a proto-urban culture distinct from that of traditional coastal and hinterland Papuan settlements. Goodman described how, in the *kota*, Seramese 'intermarried with Papuan mainland groups and learned a special trade lingua franca called *Bahasa Onin*, a mixture of Malay and local languages spoken along the coasts of the Bomberai Peninsula [on which the modern Indonesian town of Fak Fak is located]. Family ties and linguistic expertise gave the Seramese *sosolot* communities a decisive advantage over European and indigenous competitors in the lucrative trade in West Papua' (Goodman 2002, 1). We might choose to regard the *kota* of the western fringe of New Guinea as places where our stylized *Melanesia* gave way to the physical presence and economic influence of *Monsoon Asia*.

The *kain timur* trade was conducted, as mentioned, on the southern coast of the Bird's Head Peninsula, and involved *ikat* cloth (*kain*). This was exchanged by foreign traders and their local intermediaries for 'kidnapped people and birds of paradise' (Miedema 1998, 194n). Over centuries this trade effected considerable social change among the Papuans of the interior, as *kain timur* acquired prestige value, with the most coveted varieties being regarded as *kain pusaka* (Malay, 'heritage cloth'). The anecdote recorded by the Portuguese traveller Pires, concerning the 'veneration' or 'adoration' inspired among Moluccans for captains bearing special cloths, together with Moluccan cultural influence on the Papuan coast, gives some clue to how *kain timur* might have become institutionalized as an exchange valuable in certain Papuan societies. The use of the term 'veneration' by Mielink-Roelofs has spiritual connotations (though it was said to have been extended to the captain, rather than the cloth itself).

As noted above (section 5), Javanese merchants obtained Indian cloth in Malacca and left the finest grades in Java before proceeding to Bima, where they obtained cheaper *ikat* cloths for the Moluccan trade. In the Moluccas, the Bandanese also required 'coarser sorts [of cloth] ... needed to meet the requirements of the traders bringing sago from the islands further east, from Halmahera to New Guinea' (Mielink-Roelofs 1962, 84). This suggests the demand for cloth became progressively less discriminating from west to east, a tendency still evident in contemporary West Papua. There 'research suggests that the most classic *kain timur* in the Bird's Head originate from the Lesser Sunda islands of Flores, Sumba, Timor, Lembata, and Alor'. These are 'essentially *ikat* cloths', although 'not all *kain timur* are *ikat*. Indian cotton prints, European imitations of Indian trade cloths and woven textiles from South Sulawesi have also found their way into the Bird's Head and can be categorised as *kain timur*. Among the lowest ranking *kain timur* are chequered Dutch tablecloths from the 1940s and 1950s' (Timmer 2011, 387-88). In Timmer's account, 'in the past, *kain timur* arrived [in Papua] with connotations of power and wealth located in foreign lands to the west, where powers were assumed to be greater and the people wealthier. After arrival, they became exchange objects, gaining meaning as items for bride wealth and compensation payments, and offerings to ancestors and other spirits' (Timmer 2011, 384). Timmer

appears to explain Papuan attitudes as resulting from a long-term perception of power imbalance, a kind of *cultural cringe*, rather than any spiritual connection based on 'veneration'.

Christopher Healey (1998, 346) suggested that in the Melanesian societies of the Bird's Head, *kain pusaka* came to acquire the status of 'inalienable things'. Such inalienability is the hallmark of Maussian gift exchange (Mauss 1974), in which gifts represent 'relations between non-aliens by means of inalienable things' (Gregory 1997, 52). For Chris Gregory, following Mauss (in *Gifts and Commodities*, 1982) such inalienable 'things' are not 'commodities' amenable to orthodox economic analysis. Both gifts and commodities occur in Gregory's analysis of Melanesian indigenous economy because it is 'an "ambiguous" economy where things are now gifts, now commodities, depending on the social context' (1982, 117). Gregory is credited with having shown how these opposed concepts, often taken as representing, respectively, 'the capitalist world' (commodities) and 'the rest of the world' (gifts) may coexist and interact within a single society, as in Melanesia (Hann and Hart 2011, 87)²².

In Miedema's account, *kain timur* entered into marriage exchange on the Bird's Head through the activities of an emergent class of Papuan 'warrior-capitalists'. Whereas such exchanges had been based previously on reciprocity, with groups exchanging women to establish and maintain alliances, the principle of 'woman for woman' was increasingly superseded by that of '*kain* for woman'. Involving changes in marriage rules, this phenomenon was taken by Miedema as evidence of the emergence of bride-price, and as being associated with 'the rise of a ceremonial exchange system' (Ibid., 227n). Such a view is consistent with Healey's description of *kain pusaka* as 'inalienable', in the manner of the Maussian 'gift'. However over time warrior-capitalists extended the principle of '*kain* for woman' to that of 'woman for *kain*', implying an acceptance on the part of some Papuans of the 'alienability' of women and the commoditization of human life (Ibid., 227). A cultural discontinuity emerged, corresponding to Gregory's 'ambiguous economy', in which on or near the coast women were purchased for *kain* as commodity-slaves, while in the interior women (as wives) were exchanged ceremonially for *kain* (ibid.,346).

Perhaps this interior/coast discontinuity is further evidence of a transitional zone, to which the Bird's Head, where Maussian 'gift exchange' gave way to 'commodity exchange' conducted by Malay traders and their coastal trade partners, was central. Such a proposition does not require a hard and fast geographical divide. At least some elements of *The Gift* are discernable in all cultures. Nonetheless we may posit a transition, occurring on or about the western margin of the island of New Guinea, from societies in which gift and reciprocity principles were dominant and explicit, to others in which commodity exchange and commerciality were more general ruling principles.

Over centuries, in Miedema's view, emerging Papuan warrior-capitalists manipulated exchange relationships to extend their internal trading networks, gaining power over others in the process. Further, as *kain timur* 'bankers' the warrior-capitalists arranged marriages in order to dominate the exchange of cloths (Miedema 2004, 176). Such trade involved also warfare and capture, and required

²² See Conroy (2012b) for a discussion of Gregory's critique of neo-classical economic theory, inspired by *The Gift*.

the assistance of coastal intermediaries with connections to the Raja Ampat kingdoms and Seram. As with the *sosolot* trade, 'mixed intermediary communities' operated from their *kota*, facilitating the *kain timur* trade by reaching across the divide to the warrior-capitalists, who operated in recognizably Melanesian 'big man' fashion.

Slavery thus underpinned both the *sosolot* and *kain timur* trade systems. In cooperation with Moluccan trade partners, Papuan crews captured and sold slaves, ranging over territories from the south Celebes (*Sulawesi Selatan*) to Biak Island, northeast of the Bird's Head. In 1581 a Portuguese mariner witnessed a remarkable mobilization of maritime power. When voyaging south of Onin in MacCluer Gulf with a Raja Ampat lord, the 'King of Waigeo', the adventurer de Brito encountered a Papuan fleet containing 160 *kora-kora* raiding vessels and some 7000 men, said to be from the Geelvink Bay region of northwest New Guinea (Sollewijn Gelpke 1994). This may have been the annual 'Onin flotilla', which (as recounted by Goodman) 'terrorized eastern Indonesia, raiding maritime areas of central and southern Maluku and eastern Sulawesi, and contracting coastal populations to maraud villages in island interiors ... This bustling regional slave trade supplied Papuan labour to the western slave markets' (Goodman 1998, 438).

Alfred Russel Wallace (whose account of *The Malay Archipelago* is quoted at length below) appears to have formed a higher opinion of the Papuan than the Malay, and this judgment applied also to slaves: 'The Papuan has much more vital energy ... [and] Papuan slaves show no inferiority of intellect compared with Malays ... and in the Moluccas they are often promoted to places of considerable trust' (Wallace 1962, 450). Perhaps this was an additional reason why 'the larger and stronger Papuan slaves commanded significantly higher prices than slaves from Bali, Lombok, or Sumbawa and other traditional Indonesian labour sources' (Goodman 1998, 438).

In Clive Moore's view, slavery was not 'an alien imposition' in New Guinea; ceremonial elements were present in *sosolot* slave exchange. Indeed, 'for a variety of reasons it could be expeditious for a community to place one or several of their number into slavery, for middlemen to arrange the exchanges, or for an individual to "enlist" as a slave' (Moore 2003, 69-70). This is a relatively benign interpretation of Papuan slavery. It may well have been 'expeditious' for a community, facing one of the infamous *hong* tribute raids by emissaries of the Sultan of Tidore, to surrender slaves in the hope of avoiding death and destruction. The *sosolot* might have resembled 'ceremonial' exchange, though (as with the *kain timur* exchanges discussed above) it is possible that a cultural discontinuity, occurring at the point where Asian trade met Melanesian exchange, would result in differences of perception on each side of the bargain. This is a question of alternative cosmologies, a subject taken up in the next section. Finally, Moore follows Rowley (in the latter's account of indentured labour in eastern New Guinea) in pointing to the influence of oppressive ('claustrophobic') social conditions in some Melanesian societies, which might incline a young person to accept bondage (though it seems a hard bargain) (Rowley 1966).

9. Commerce and cosmology in the zone of transition

Introducing the idea of west New Guinea as a zone of transition between *Melanesia* and *Monsoon Asia*, the writer has asserted as a stylized fact that this zone was characterized by an encounter between ceremonial exchange, practiced by Melanesians, and a system of tribute imposed by Moluccan sultanates. Ceremonial exchange, marked by reciprocity, confronted tributary relationships imposed by force of the more centralized political structures of *Monsoon Asia*. One might say that Melanesian 'trading' encountered Moluccan 'raiding', although the contrast is summed up rather more subtly by Christopher Healey (1998, 341), for whom it involved

'the exchange of goods on the one hand by trade, in which Melanesians operated on a more or less equitable footing with other transactors, and on the other hand by tribute, in which one party was politically (and economically) dominant and extractive. These exchange relations focused on the passage of specialized, usually "luxury" goods. Premier among the commodities offered by Melanesians were sundry forest products, and people'.

On the other hand, Clive Moore's view that the relationship reflected elements of ceremonial exchange finds support in the work of Leonard Andaya, (1991, 1993). Analyzing Moluccan trade with New Guinea between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Andaya (1991, 71) hypothesized that Moluccans adhered to 'common origin myths which established familial links' between them and their trading partners, links which were supposed to have extended 'as far east as the Papuan islands' (the Raja Ampat group). In his account, the Seram Laut archipelago was a nodal point in Moluccan trade flows with New Guinea. Andaya constructed a Moluccan mythology in which the sultanates of Tidore and Ternate were regarded as the 'exemplary center' of a Moluccan cultural universe²³, with Seram Laut and other 'nodes' occupying intermediate positions. The Raja Ampat islands of New Guinea constituted the eastern periphery of that universe. The people of the 'sacred' center saw their relationships with other communities in this cosmic system as based on common membership of 'a mythically defined family of communities' (ibid. 1991, 96). Members of the intermediate and peripheral communities were supposed to have accepted this view of their places in a cosmological system rather convenient to Moluccan interests.

So far as the Papuan periphery was concerned, Andaya proposed a plausible basis for such belief. This lay in the history of westward migration of Papuan peoples into the Moluccas over many millennia, the widespread distribution there of Papuan languages, and the later migration of Austronesian-speaking Biak peoples into the region, about 2500 BC²⁴. He claimed that Moluccan mythology was complemented by twentieth century Papuan traditions which suggest cultural continuity. Such traditions

'contributed to the establishment and maintenance of links with Tidore. According to Biak stories, the west, the land of the souls, was regarded as the origin of power and wealth. The Papuan islanders [of the Raja Ampat group] therefore found little difficulty in accepting as appropriate that their overlord should come from a western area known as Tidore. As with the

²³ See Cribb, *Digital Atlas* at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/malukuc15-17.html?zoomview=1>

²⁴ See Cribb, *op. Cit.*, <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/malukulang.html?zoomview=1> for a language map, incidentally showing the Seram Laut archipelago and places on the New Guinea mainland mentioned in the text.

societies in north Maluku the Papuans sought explanation of present realities within an established cultural framework' (Andaya 1993, 17).

In their turn, the rulers of Raja Ampat could conceive of the adjacent coastal areas of New Guinea as constituting a farther periphery, to be drawn into a greater Tidorean cultural sphere. This was so because myths of mainland Papuans in the Bird's Head region often identified 'the west' as the source of *kain pusaka*, as well as the last refuge or resting place of culture heroes (Miedema 1998). Andaya suggested that Tidore, both through the agency of Seram Laut and by more direct contact, had established a powerful connection with Papuan groups, whose leaders accepted models of 'exemplary activity' (in addition to the well-documented Tidorean titles, dress and Islamic religion). Moreover, 'Tidore was the chief supplier of foreign goods. Because the Papuans associated these objects with the ruler of Tidore, they believed that possession of such spiritually imbued items would guarantee material wealth, health, and happiness' (Andaya 1993, 16). For this reason, 'Tidore's location in the west and its possession of ceremonial objects were comprehensible within Papuan culture as signs revealing a center of wealth and power' (Ibid. 1993, 18).

In response to Andaya, however, Roy Ellen (1993) argued that, in the case of archipelagic southeast Seram, 'there is little evidence to suggest that the meaning of life was somehow enhanced by participation in the sacred reality of the center, or that Tidore systematically exercised power or maintained an effective administrative network' in Seram. He arrived at the 'tentatively negative' conclusion that 'southeast Seram has probably never been more than precariously, temporarily, within the effective orbit of Tidore'. In fact, Banda probably exercised greater influence than Tidore in the Seramese imagination (and, Ellen claimed, it still did in the twentieth century) due to the Bandanese diaspora of the early seventeenth century. During this upheaval 'many Bandanese fled to archipelagic southeast Seram, and trading and community contact with Banda since then has been strong' (Ellen 1993, 19).

With these assertions Ellen cast doubt on the integrity of Andaya's mythological consensus, assumed as powering the trade between a peripheral Papua and a central Tidore. So far as the mainland of New Guinea was concerned, Seram Laut was the most important intermediary and Ellen's challenge to the supposedly shared 'sacred history' raises issues touching on its role. These include the degree to which Bandanese commercial energy and knowhow, rather than any sense of common origin with Tidore, may have driven Seramese trade with New Guinea, and the extent to which Seram's Papuan trade partners were acculturated to Andaya's Moluccan 'mythology'. In considering such issues, scholarly interpretation comes up against ambiguities in the historical record. Any reader of the tales of European travelers and mariners in the region – Forrest in the 1770s, Wallace in the 1850s, for example – will appreciate that the term 'Papuan' is a source of confusion in deciding what degree of agency autochthonous Papuans actually possessed in many transactions and interactions. Andaya's concept of 'the mixed intermediary group' is relevant here. Thus:

'Intermarriages created a mixed intermediary group which became prominent in the interisland trade. Early Dutch traders discovered trade agents of mixed blood being referred to as "Papuan" who received payment of knives, cloth, palm sugar and rice to obtain massoi, nutmegs, and slaves from interior tribes. The "Papuan" had high standing in the community because of their access to desired foreign objects, particularly cloth, iron implements, and later foreign titles which were awarded by the Sultan [of] Tidore on the presentation of tributary goods' (Andaya 1991, 94).

Clive Moore also pointed to this difficulty. He wrote of Onin traders, some professing Islam, and who were competing successfully with Seramese rivals, that 'it is not possible to know if these were recently arrived Malay traders who married into local communities, or indigenous New Guineans' (Moore 2003, 72). How 'Papuan', for example, was the leadership and financing of such elaborate and expensive exercises as the Onin Flotilla, even though it is reasonable to suppose that most of the raw physical energy was supplied by indigenous Papuans, for whom the activities of the Flotilla would have been a wholesale version of traditional raiding and headhunting practices? It seems there were both 'Papuans' and Papuans engaged in the *sosolot* and the *kain timur* trade complexes, and it is worth speculating about the extent to which these separate groups shared the understanding of such notions as 'common origin', 'sacred center', and trade in 'spiritually imbued' goods. Is it possible that one side of the bargain was conducted in a more worldly and utilitarian spirit than the other?

Transactions between representatives of communities which hold different perceptions of reality may appear satisfactory to each side, but third parties may be excused for judging that someone is being ~~screwed~~ disadvantaged. Miedema's account of *kain timur* traffic (1998) showed how goods or commodities, moving along a chain of exchanges, may pass between parties with radically different understandings. Commencing from a situation of ceremonial exchange between people sharing a set of cultural assumptions, including expectations of reciprocity, items of value may subsequently have been surrendered to satisfy obligations under a tributary relationship between superior and inferior parties. Miedema suggested such a scenario to explain the chains of movement of women and *kain timur* between the interior of the Bird's Head and the south coast, leading ultimately to the extraction of commodities and slaves. Of course such tributary relationships do not exclude the parallel conduct of utilitarian trade in commodities, and may indeed establish a working basis for the conduct of such trade. To that extent, the 'stylized fact' of an unmitigated extractive relationship must yield to a more complex reality. Overall, however, a relationship of this type, supported by force and involving some degree of exaction, must be accounted one of unequal exchange, unlikely to nurture creative and mutually advantageous economic relationships.

It is difficult, for example, to imagine that the 'trade-savvy Bandanese exiles' (Goodman 1998, 438) credited with energizing Seramese maritime commerce would have accepted the ideology of the *sosolot* trade as readily as those Papuan villagers who looked west to the 'land of the souls'. Such beliefs might have encouraged some Papuans, under the spell of 'trade-biased political myths' (ibid., 435), to seek privileged admission to a mythical community through trade. Papuans play roles in these myths, though their inferior status is demonstrated by them (ibid., 436). When Goodman refers to the myths as demonstrating 'shades of hierarchy between the eastern Seramese [Seram Laut] and their Papuan

contacts' (ibid., 446) he is putting it delicately indeed. The possibility of a situation of unequal exchange between the Seramese and their 'Papuan' intermediaries, on the one hand, and the non-Muslim Papuans of coast and interior, on the other, is suggested by two anecdotes. In the first Goodman cites the eighteenth century German observer Rumphius, concerning how a Seramese trader 'employed his knowledge of local religious practice to haggle for an extraordinarily low price'. In another, his contemporary, the English mariner Forrest (1780), described the persuasive effect on Papuans of the gift of iron. Goodman comments that 'Seramese traders understood the value of iron to western Papuan peoples, who viewed the metal as imbued with dangerous spiritual power' (Goodman Ibid., 443).

Travellers' tales are more often a source of anecdote than hard evidence, but on the frontier between *Monsoon Asia and Melanesia*, where documentary materials are limited, we must make of them what we can. It is a bonus to find that, in his account of *The Malay Archipelago* (1862), the distinguished natural scientist Alfred Russel Wallace was also a conscientious recorder of social and economic life. The following section draws heavily on Wallace's observations of mid-nineteenth century trade and exchange on the western fringe of New Guinea, as well as on the writings of some contemporary travellers, to examine the workings of trade involving Papuans.

10. Some Historical Accounts of Trade in the Archipelago

Wallace's description of several important *entrepôts*, together with his thumbnail sketches of numerous isolated trading posts, gives us an impression of the character and energy of the mercantile system of the Malay Archipelago, where he travelled widely over the period 1854 to 1862. His work had important scientific outcomes but his *obiter dicta* – incidental accounts of trade and traders reflecting both acute observation and the prejudices of a Victorian gentleman amateur – are of greater interest to us here. His writings have particular resonance for being almost exactly contemporaneous with those of the English journalist Henry Mayhew, whose pioneering account of street trading, *London Labour and the London Poor*, forms the centerpiece of the writer's account of the origins of the idea of the 'informal economy' (Conroy 2012a). Wallace's account may also be read as a harbinger of the classic analysis of Javanese petty trading, *Peddlers and Princes* (Geertz 1963) which influenced Keith Hart in his formulation of the concept of the informal economy (see Conroy 2012a). Van Leur (1955) emphasized the long-running and durable character of the ancient world trading system, and it is appropriate that Wallace's observations, though made some hundreds of years after the period studied by Van Leur, bring to life the latter's account of the role of the peddler in the Indonesian maritime economy.

Wallace commenced his journey in Singapore where, in intervals between his expeditions to 'the interior' of the island, he observed the Chinese majority population and their 'incessant activity'. Singapore was already the greatest *entrepôt* in southeast Asia; the harbour was 'crowded with men-of-war and trading vessels ... and hundreds of Malay praus and Chinese junks, from vessels of several hundred tons burthen down to little fishing boats and passenger sampans'. The Chinese included 'some of the wealthiest merchants, the agriculturalists of the interior, and most of the mechanics and labourers'. But aside from the well-to-do Chinese, he observed in the 'Chinese bazaar'

'hundreds of small shops in which a miscellaneous collection of hardware and dry goods are to be found, and where many things are sold wonderfully cheap ... The tailors ... and the shoemakers work well and cheaply. The barbers have plenty to do, shaving heads and cleaning ears ... In the outskirts of the town are scores of carpenters and blacksmiths ... All about the streets are sellers of water, vegetables, fruit, soup and agar-agar (a jelly made of seaweed) ... who have many cries as unintelligible as those of London. Others carry a portable cooking apparatus on a pole balanced by a table at the other end, and serve up a meal of shell-fish, rice and vegetables for two or three halfpence; while coolies and boatmen waiting to be hired are everywhere to be met with' (Wallace 1969, 16-17).

As suggested by this description (remarkably similar to the atmospherics of Mayhew's description of London street life) trade in British Singapore was very largely monetized by the mid-nineteenth century. Wealthy Chinese merchants had commercial networks spread far throughout the region. In a manner reminiscent of Van Leur's sixteenth century Bantam Chinese, their capital also financed trading by members of other ethnic groups. For, while 'European trade at the port was serviced by a number of leading merchant houses ... locked into it was a complex web of traditional Asian trade'. Much of this was *commenda* trade, 'plied by junks from China ... based on the traditional Asian mode of investment partnerships, with a stipulated portion of the cargo-space shared by the crew, in accordance with rank ... At Singapore, as at other emerging modern Southeast Asian commercial capitals, Van Leur's ubiquitous Asian peddler found his place, side by side, with the modern merchant bourgeois - Asian as well as European ... within a new framework of liberal commerce' (Kirithamby-Wells 1998, 76) .

The further east such trade extended, the more likely exchange would be conducted by barter (with the physical proceeds monetized in one or other of the major *entrepôts* of the region). Though much inferior to Singapore, one such *entrepôt* was Macassar (modern *Makassar*) in the south Celebes (*Sulawesi Selatan*). Like Seram Laut, it had been energized in the seventeenth century by the migration of entrepreneurs expelled from Banda by the Dutch. Wallace described it (1962, 309) as 'one of the great emporiums of the native trade of the Archipelago'²⁵. 'In the roadstead of Macassar there was a fine 42 gun frigate ... [and] a small war steamer and three or four little cutters used for cruising after the pirates which infest these seas. There were also a few square-rigged trading vessels, and twenty or thirty native praus of various sizes'. For a mile or more along the front, there was a 'long narrow street ... devoted to business, and principally occupied by the Dutch and Chinese merchants' offices and warehouses, and the native shops or bazaars'[*ibid.*, 162-3]. Makassar was a point of transshipment for cargoes aggregated in numerous minor *entrepôts*, including some further east which gathered the products and human cargo of Maluku and west New Guinea. The extent of its reach may be grasped from Wallace's account (*ibid.*, 309) of 'Rattans from Borneo, sandalwood and bees'-wax from Flores and Timor, tripang from the Gulf of Carpentaria, cajaputi-oil from Bouru, wild nutmegs and mussoi-bark from New Guinea, [which] are all to be found in the stores of the Chinese and Bugis merchants of Macassar, along with the rice and coffee which are the principal products of the surrounding country'.

²⁵ Meilink-Roelofs (1962, 329 n.35) described how 'veritable emporia sprang up at the junctions' of the archipelagic trade, tending to integrate the separate markets created by maritime commerce

We also have Wallace's account of two of the subsidiary *entrepôts* for the trade with west New Guinea – Kilwaru in the Seram Laut archipelago, and Dobo, in the Aru Islands. The little island of Kilwaru appeared 'to rise out of the sea like a rustic Venice' and 'to float upon the water' so tight-packed were the houses upon it. It had good all-weather anchorages, together with a 'situation in the middle of the Papuan trading districts' (Wallace 1962, 288). This was another 'emporium', 'the metropolis of the Bugis traders' with many resident Seramese as well. Kilwaru was the locus of small local trading networks: 'Here the Goram [Seram Laut] men bring the produce of their little trading voyages, which they exchange for cloth, sago cakes and opium'. The sago (an essential staple for certain agriculturally-deficient islands whose men were frequently absent on trading voyages) had been brought to Kilwaru by villagers from the main island of Seram, close nearby. But Kilwaru was also a centre for a wider-ranging trade – a 'rendezvous of the praus trading to various parts of New Guinea, which here assort and dry their cargoes, and refit for the voyage home'. Rice from Bali and Makassar was available, having been back-loaded on schooners arriving to procure slaves²⁶, while 'Goram men come here for their supplies of opium, both for their own consumption and for barter in Mysol and Waigiou (*Waigeo*) [islands of the Raja Ampat group] where they have introduced it, and where the chiefs and wealthy men are passionately fond of it' (Wallace 1962, 288).

To Kilwaru, the 'sea-wandering Bugis' came from Singapore, 'bringing thence the produce of the Chinamen's workshops and Kling's [Indian] bazaar, as well as of the looms of Manchester and Massachusetts' (Wallace, loc cit). The availability of western consumer goods in this remote outpost signified what Van Leur considered 'important and drastic' changes in the nineteenth century. 'Industrialization of western Europe under modern capitalism set a mass traffic of goods in motion; the lands of an ancient Asian culture were mobilized as consumers' markets for the large industries of the West and (under colonial capitalism) fitted into the trade system as areas for supplying the raw materials and plantation products of modern colonial mining and agriculture' (cited by Wertheim 1954, 171)²⁷.

In 1857 Wallace was taken by a Dutch trader to 'Dobbo' (*Dobo*) in the Aru group²⁸ in present-day Maluku, south of the Bird's Head. He obtained food from 'back of the country' Papuans – fish, shellfish, turtle and vegetables – by offering the items they sought: tobacco, knives, sago-cakes, and 'Dutch copper doits'. The latter were small coins (c/f *duit*, 'money' in modern Indonesian) indicating some small degree of monetization of trade among even these rural people. They supplied the seasonal occupants of Dobo – professional traders, Chinese, Bugis and Seramese – who came in relatively large vessels. Dobo was located on a sand-spit, with vessels arriving with the northwest monsoon and returning on the southeast trade winds. In Dobo

²⁶ The Dutch mariner Kolff (1840, 297) who visited Kilwaru in 1826 noted that the Rajah of Kilwari (sic) was 'deeply engaged' in this bulk rice trade with Bali, and had a residence there.

²⁷ See Wyatt (1998, 45ff) for an account of the expansion of regional trade in the century to 1820, in the context of Van Leur's work.

²⁸ For a map see Cribb, *op. cit.*, at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/map/maluku2007.html>

'Every house is a store, where the natives barter their produce for what they are most in need of. Knives, choppers, swords, guns, tobacco, gambier, plates, basins, handkerchiefs, sarongs, calicoes, and arrack, are the principal articles wanted by the natives; but some of the stores contain also tea, coffee, sugar, wine, biscuits, etc., for the supply of the traders; and others are full of fancy goods, china ornaments, looking glasses, razors, umbrellas, pipes and purses, which take the fancy of the wealthier natives' (Wallace 1969, 335).

As to the scale of the trade, it was 'considerable' and his estimates suggest why Chinese traders were present: 'This year there were fifteen large praus from Macassar, and perhaps a hundred small boats ... The Macassar cargoes are worth about £1,000 each, and the other boats take away perhaps about £3,000 worth, so that the whole exports may be estimated at £18,000 per annum. The largest and most bulky items are pearl-shell tripang ... with smaller quantities of tortoise-shell, edible bird's nests, pearls, ornamental woods, timber and Birds of Paradise'. Goods offered in exchange included arrack (some 45,000 half-gallon bottles annually, by his count), native cloth from Sulawesi [probably *kain timur*], white English calico and unbleached cottons from America, 'common crockery, coarse cutlery, muskets, gunpowder, gongs, small brass cannon and elephants' tusks'. The last three items are described as 'the wealth of the Aru people, with which they pay for their wives, or which they hoard up as "real property"' (Wallace 1969, 368). Some of these items suggest that individuals from Aru were able to offer substantial amounts of the natural products sought by the traders, as does the reference above to 'the wealthier natives'. However a great deal of the petty trade with 'back country' Papuans was concluded simply by the exchange of tobacco.

Dobo inspired in Wallace an encomium, such as might emerge from a modern libertarian think-tank, for *The genius of Commerce at the work of Civilization*:

'I dare say there are now near five hundred people in Dobbo of various races, all met in this remote corner of the East ... to get money any way they can. They are mostly people who have the very worst reputation ... Chinese, Bugis, Ceramese, and half-caste Javanese, (336) with a sprinkling of half-wild Papuans ... yet all goes on as yet very quietly. This motley, ignorant, thievish population live here without the shadow of a government, with no police, no courts, and no lawyers; yet they do not cut each other's throats; do not plunder each other day and night; do not fall into the anarchy such a state of things might be supposed to lead to. It is very extraordinary! It puts strange thoughts into one's head about the mountain-load of government under which people exist in Europe, and suggests the idea that we may be overgoverned ... and one would be led to infer that if Dobbo has too little law England has too much'.

Wallace concluded this paean with the judgment that 'trade is the magic that keeps all at peace, and unites these discordant elements into a well-behaved community. All are traders, and all know that peace and order are essential to successful trade, and thus a public opinion is created which puts down all lawlessness' (ibid., 335-36). He wrote this conscious of the prevalence of piracy in the waters between Aru and the Bird's Head; traders sailing to Dobo had to be prepared to defend themselves. But in Dobo itself, it seemed, the peace of the market prevailed.

This account of an apparently self-regulating market may have been based on inadequate observation, however. D H Kolff, who visited Dobo in 1826, reported that the market site was controlled then by a local *orang kaya*, who levied anchorage dues and ground rent from the traders, maintained the area in good condition between seasons and mediated disputes between them and the natives (who made small boats available to the traders for the conduct of trade around the nearby islands). Dobo was not at that earlier time a place completely without government (Kolff 1840, 197)²⁹.

Wallace also visited the present-day province of West Papua, where his disappointment in the quest for Birds of Paradise may have contributed to a somewhat dyspeptic view of matters Papuan. His impressions of the Raja Ampat island Waigeo convey a sense of the local-level trading networks feeding into *entrepôts* such as Dobo and Kilwaru, of the chains of credit sustaining the trade, and the pervasive presence of slavery. He found the people of Muka village living

‘in that abject state of poverty that is almost always found where the sago-tree is abundant ... [and] selling a little tripang or tortoiseshell ... Almost all of them, however, possess one or more Papuan slaves, on whose labour they live in almost total idleness, just going out on little fishing or trading expeditions ... They are under the rule of the Sultan of Tidore, and every year have to pay a small tribute of Paradise birds, tortoiseshell or sago. To obtain these they go in the fine season on a trading voyage to the mainland of New Guinea, and getting a few goods on credit from some Ceram or Bugis trader, make hard bargains with the natives, and gain enough to pay their tribute, and leave a little profit for themselves’ (Wallace 1962, 404-5).

Previous discussion of the ‘cosmology’ of trade suggested that ambiguity in use of the term ‘Papuan’ has contributed to difficulties in interpreting historical accounts by Europeans. Wallace’s observations of people whom he described as ‘Papuan’ were drawn, as we have seen, from visits to mainland New Guinea and the Raja Ampat islands, but also to Aru and its *entrepôt*, Dobo. Wallace said Dobo was located ‘in the middle of the Papuan trading districts’. This is true enough if he meant that it was close to Onin and roughly equidistant from the south coast of the Bird’s head and the Kowiai coast, but not, perhaps, if he meant that Dobo itself was a ‘Papuan’ trading centre. While at Dobo, Wallace bartered for food with some ‘back of the country (Malay, *blakang tana*) Papuans’. These were Aruans who had travelled some distance to Dobo by boat. He distinguished between these and certain ‘wealthier natives’, who were given to hoarding ‘gongs, small brass cannon and elephants’ tusks’, gained through trade. It is not clear whether Wallace considered these ‘wealthier natives’ also to be Papuans. They might have had more in common with Seramese, such as the trade-wealthy people of the Matabello islands of Seram Laut, where ‘almost all the women wear massive gold earrings and in every village there are dozens of small bronze cannon lying about on the ground, although they have cost on the average perhaps £10 apiece’ (ibid., 282).

²⁹ While the scale and degree of sophistication were very different, this situation is reminiscent of the role played by good governance in the trading success of another ‘emporium’ of maritime trade, fifteenth century Malacca. Thus ‘Malacca’s prosperity was based entirely on trade. For its convenience there was a regular governing body and a good judicial system which managed to guarantee a fairly large degree of judicial security. The requirements of the foreign merchants were met by looking after the port and by building warehouses ... Fixed customs duties, fixed weights and measures, and coinage, all served the same purpose - the furtherance of the economic activity of the port’ (Meilink-Roelofs 1962, 40).

Wallace did appear to regard the 'back country' folk as Papuans, and in this connection it is useful to recall a comment of Charles Rowley, in *The New Guinea Villager*. He remarked that 'in Asia, those who established the rice villages pushed people who live like New Guineans into the forests and mountains, where they still remain' (Rowley 1966, 15). It is clear Wallace regarded the professional traders who gathered at Dobo as Malays, 'or a mixture of which Malay is the chief ingredient, with the exception of a few Chinese'. Some were 'Macassar men or Bugis, but more from the small island of Goram' [in the Seram Laut archipelago], whereas 'the natives of Aru, on the other hand, are Papuans ... and a few of them may be seen all day wandering about ... offering their little bit of merchandise for sale' (ibid., 329). His account of the rather ineffectual trading efforts of these Aruan 'Papuans' is juxtaposed against the businesslike behavior of the visiting Malay and Chinese traders. The inland Aruans are a people of whom Matthew Spriggs said that they 'may well have retained a primarily pre-Austronesian hunter-horticultural lifestyle until it was somewhat transformed by world-system demands for forest products within the last 2000 and particularly the last 200 years' (Spriggs et al. 2007, 15). But something similar might be said also of many New Guinea mainland groups.

In the village of Muka, on Waigeo Island in the Raja Ampat group (in present-day West Papua) Wallace saw villagers who had 'Papuan slaves', while they were themselves were 'not truly indigenes of the island, which possesses no ... aboriginal inhabitants'. They seem to have corresponded with Andaya's description of the 'mixed intermediary group', and Wallace thought them a mixture of Halmaheran (north Mollucan) and New Guinean descent. They spoke a Papuan language (probably derived from Biak, in Geelvink [*Cenderawasih*] Bay) and they almost certainly included Muslims, though Wallace did not comment on this. Waigeo paid tribute to Tidore; the people were financed by Seramese or Bugis traders (one of whom was resident in Muka) for trading voyages. They bartered on the New Guinea coast for forest products, and probably also for slaves. In this case, as in other places visited by Wallace, it is difficult to draw conclusions about any degree of independent agency exercised in trade by indigenous Papuans. His eye was inevitably drawn to the activities of non-indigenous traders.

Among these, Wallace singled out the men of the Seram Laut island of Goram ('the petty traders of the far East') among whom he spent a month in 1860. Goram traders appear to fit, very well, the category of Van Leur's foot-soldiers of trade. Andaya (1991, 85) had described them as monopolizing access to Onin, and reported that the Dutch required their blessing and safe conduct to tap in to the reserves of slaves there. Wallace remarked on their introduction of opium to the Raja Ampat islands and on their own fondness for the opiate ('a lazy race, much given to opium smoking'). His account of their trading activities belies the charge of sloth, however, for every year, they visited

'Tanimbar, Kei and Aru Islands, the whole northwest coast of New Guinea from Oetanata [Utanata in Mimika district, on the southwest coast] to Salwatty [Salawati], and the islands of Waigiou/Waigeo and Mysol. They also extend their voyages to Tidore and Ternate, as well as to Banda and Amboyna ... They trade chiefly in tripang, the medicinal mussoi bark, wild nutmegs and tortoise-shell, which they sell to the traders at Ceram Laut [Kilwaru] or Aru [Dobo]' (ibid., 284-5).

Such access to mainland trade incurred costs. While in Goram Wallace had 'a striking proof of the dangers of New Guinea trading'. Six men from the island returned in a small boat, 'almost starved,

having escaped [in] one of two praus, the remainder of whose crews (fourteen in number) had been murdered by the natives of New Guinea'. This occurred near Lakahia on the Kowiai coast in Etna Bay where they were buying trepang, a district 'where scarcely a year now passes but some lives are lost'. For 'on the southwest coast ... the natives are in a very barbarous condition, and take every opportunity of robbery and murder', desiring the goods carried in the boats and their 'appurtenances'. In this fashion, Wallace reported, some fifty Goram men had been murdered in the same place four years earlier (ibid., 286-7). Seramese mariners profited by taking the risks and showing maritime and political skills. But from time to time they paid dearly in blood, in a prevailing environment of 'war, booty and political tribute'.

Such episodes were not uncommon and attacks on mariners were often reprisals for earlier outrages. Jan Pouver noted that 'voyages of trade and plunder were undertaken by the people of eastern Indonesia, Ceram, Goram, Ternate and Tidore from as early as the 17th century, later to be joined by Makassars, Buginese, Arabs and Chinese. Their local agents made use of rifles as they engaged in trade and plundering expeditions as far east along the southern coast as central Mimika. It is difficult to overestimate the direct and indirect effect of these contacts. They led to wars, depopulation, migration, and the exchange of great numbers of prisoners of war and slaves by eastern Indonesian and local traders and dignitaries' (Pouver 1999, 160-61). Such endemic violence has been suggested as preventing the operation of indigenous trading networks in southwest New Guinea comparable with those in eastern waters, such as the Motu/Mailu trading complex and the *kula* cycle (Hughes 1977, 32; Goodman 1998, 425). We might also see it as a factor inhibiting the capacity of indigenous Papuans to respond to commercial opportunities. Goodman suggested that it was 'specialized maritime traders from archipelagic southeast Seram who profited most from the discord and distrust along the southwestern New Guinea coastlines'³⁰.

Dorei (also *Dorey*, *Doreh*), located at the head of Geelvink (*Cenderawasih*) Bay, was the prime destination in a third trade stream (after the commerce with Onin/Kowiai and the Bird's Head) by which the Raja Ampat group was linked with the western coasts of New Guinea. For a number of reasons it might be considered an outpost of *Monsoon Asia* on the shores of *Melanesia*. At Dorei, site of modern Manokwari, the naturalist Wallace had slim pickings and found the coastal people not very helpful, for 'none of the natives anywhere near the coast shoot or prepare Birds of Paradise'. These came from the inland, 'over two or three ranges of mountains, passing by barter from village to village till they reach the sea' before being traded-on to the Bugis or Moluccans. He visited German missionaries on a nearby island, referring to them rather patronizingly as 'working men ... sent out as being more useful among savages than persons of a higher class' and disapproving of their trading with the natives. This involved buying a large portion of the Papuans' 'small rice crops' at harvest, then selling it back to them during the wet season and turning a profit in the process. The reference to the cultivation of rice, the quintessential food crop of *Monsoon Asia*, is intriguing. It is not clear whether the crop was wet (*sawah*) or dry (rain-fed) rice, and whether it was planted with missionary encouragement or had a longer

³⁰ For a discussion of the activities of tribute fleets (*hongji*) despatched by the Sultan of Tidore, and their eventual suppression by the Dutch in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Huizinga (1998)

history in the district. That rice-growing occurred in Dorei is supported by Swadling, who recorded that local traders were known to voyage to the Raja Ampat island of Salawati, to exchange rice for sago – presumably a profitable trade since rice was a prestige crop for Papuans and sago a commonplace (Swadling 1996, 125).

Aside from mentioning rice cultivation, and perhaps because of his ‘privations and annoyances’ (he was unwell for extended periods), Wallace gave little hint of Dorei’s significance as an outpost of *Monsoon Asia*. Other visitors, before and after his time, had noted evidence of Asian cultural and technological influences, and its selection as the site of the first Christian mission in west New Guinea suggests its importance. In an account of the visit to Dorei of the Dutch man-o’-war *Circe* in 1850, accompanying the tribute fleet of the Sultan of Tidore, De Bruijn Kops (as reported by Rowley [1966, 56]) had observed that ‘leading men at Dorey used Malay titles ... and dressed in the Malay fashion. Calico was worn by women of ordinary rank. Artisans worked in silver and copper; iron was worked in the Asian manner with bellows of bamboo. Chinese traders from Ternate brought weapons and implements of iron, brassware, china ware; and took away shell, trepang, massoy, and especially slaves worth “25 to 30 guilders apiece” on the coast’. Again, in 1883 the French natural scientist Guillemard saw Doreians working in iron, a craft thought to have been carried from Gebi [possibly *Gebe*, in the North Moluccas]. However the skill was not widely shared; ‘the knowledge remains confined to one or two families only’. Guillemard described the mechanism of the forge, ‘which was, of course, of Malayan, not Papuan, origin’ and ‘almost identical with that I have seen employed in the interior of Africa’. For the Papuans, this craft – as with their agriculture and every other significant undertaking – was steeped in magic and taboo. ‘These smiths do not eat pigs’ flesh; not that they are Mohammedans, but purely from the superstitious belief that the transgression of this rule would affect the goodness of this work’ (Guillemard 1886, cited in Whittaker et al 1975, 239). If these smiths were not themselves Muslims it seems likely they learned the craft from them.

In fact, as Moore (2003, 49) noted, the working of iron and fabrication of metal tools, implements and ornaments, and certainly the use of them, has a longer history in ‘stone-age’ New Guinea than is commonly realized. He provided a number of instances: the Portuguese mariner de Prado, who found evidence of iron-working at Triton Bay, southeast of the Bird’s Head, in 1606; the account of Dumont d’Urville, at Dorei in 1827, where ‘primitive forges’ were producing ‘rings, bracelets and ear ornaments from copper and silver obtained through trading’; Bruijn Kops, already mentioned above, at Dorei 1850. But the later accounts also mention the importation of finer metal tools and implements, for while Bruijn Kops conceded that Doreian metalwares, ‘however rude, appear to be well fitted for use’, he noted nonetheless that the Papuans ‘give the preference to articles manufactured elsewhere and brought by vessels’ (Moore 2003, 49-50). By the time of Wallace the cheap manufactured tools and other artifacts of Western industrialization, the products of ‘Manchester and Massachusetts’, were becoming increasingly available, carried in trade from *entrepôts* such as Dobo and Kilwaru to New Guinea. It would not be surprising if their availability and cheapness suppressed the ‘rude’ manufactures of the indigenous smiths and potters of the coasts.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century one of New Guinea's oldest international commodities experienced a new surge of demand. A trade boom in plumes of the bird of paradise, and to a lesser extent the Goura pigeon, commenced on the Bird's Head from the 1870s, lasting until the mid-1920s. With the suppression of coastal raiding and violence by the Dutch, this trade spread along the north coast to the border of German New Guinea, and beyond to the Sepik River valley where Malay and Chinese hunters encouraged local people to engage in the trade. Pamela Swadling reported the sale of about 155,000 birds of paradise at London auctions between 1904 and 1908, the year in which commercial killing was outlawed in Australian Papua. British legislation, the *Plumage (Prohibition) Act*, prohibited the import of plumes in 1921 and the Dutch prohibited the export of plumes in 1924, after which the trade fell away (Swadling 1996). Miss Lillian Gibb, a botanist who collected in the Arfak Mountains of the Bird's Head in 1913, gave her impression of the boom in northwest New Guinea. In the region of Manokwari (near Dorei):

'In recent years, thanks to the dictates of fashion ... the volume of the trade in Birds-of-Paradise has again enormously increased ... All intercourse in NW New Guinea during the open season is dependent on the trade. Thanks to the enterprise of Tidorese, Malay, Arab, and Chinese traders ... the coast Papuans have been brought more or less into contact with the outside world ... In the season the chief trading-stations swarm with the miscellaneous agents engaged in this lucrative business, whilst the Papuans are engaged in hunting in the interior on their own account, or for various Ternate traders or agents, so that it is next to impossible to obtain quarters or procure native hunters or carriers' (Gibb 1917, 2).

Miss Gibb might be excused for having failed to understand early twentieth century trade on the Bird's Head as simply the most recent manifestation of a long-term process, by which the Malay world impressed itself upon the western fringe of Melanesia. According to Jaap Timmer (2011, 385), 'the influence of *raja* on the northern and western shores of the Onin Peninsula lasted till the 1920s, when missionaries, Dutch military personnel and administrators, and traders became more dominant and marginalised the position of the *raja*'. Nonetheless, and perhaps benefiting from more recent political change, there are today living reminders of the early Malay presence. As Tom Goodman (2002, 1) found: 'In Onin, Kowiai, and the Raja Ampat Islands, three districts in the extreme west and southwest of Papua, live a number of traditional Islamic local leaders (*raja*) with historical and kinship links to *rajas* in East Seram. These *rajas* are the last remnants of an old trade network at the crossroads of Southeast Asia and Melanesia'.

This account of the impact of *Monsoon Asia* on west New Guinea will pass over the efforts of administrators and soldiers to extend Dutch control over the Papuan population of the hinterland, during the inter-war period. Nor will it deal with the Pacific war and Japanese occupation. Instead the narrative resumes from the point at which 'Malay' influence was reasserted, with the restoration to the Indonesian Republic of all territories of the former Dutch East Indies.

11. **Orde Baru³¹: the Indonesian ascendancy**

At the time of the departure of the Dutch from west New Guinea in 1962 there was an identifiable, albeit small, population of indigenous Muslims, living in places on the Bird's Head which had long been associated with the Moluccan trade. No doubt many of these were descendants of Andaya's 'mixed intermediary group' and some among them may have maintained contact with, and sympathy for, the newly established Indonesian state during the interregnum of 1949-63. It is difficult to know how numerically significant were these late-colonial pockets of indigenous Islam on the Bird's Head. No data for religious affiliation are available from the end of the Dutch period, since when substantial in-migration of Indonesians, most of them Muslims, has occurred. These population flows have greatly altered the religious balance in Indonesian New Guinea, as well as transforming the ethnic composition of Indonesia's newest province .

The official requirement for all Indonesian citizens to declare affiliation with one or other of the State-recognized faiths seems (as was later the case in East Timor) to have boosted the enumerated proportion of professed indigenous Christians. Similarly, some Papuans may have chosen to *masuk Islam* (convert to Islam) in the intervening period, though little is known of the extent of this. Differences in coverage between successive censuses have complicated the analysis, with indigenous/non-indigenous comparisons (which would help to unscramble the effects of in-migration of Indonesian Muslims) not available before the 2000 population census. In that year, only 3.5 per cent of indigenous Papuans self-identified as Muslim (compared with 24.2 per cent of total population, a proportion which had doubled since 1980, due to in-migration). Of those indigenous Muslims, nearly one-third were found in the regency (*kabupaten*) of Fak Fak, together with substantial numbers in Sorong and Manokwari³². Only 1.3 per cent of Papuans in the rest of the province were recorded as Muslim (Upton 2009, 258-9), while the proportions of indigenous Muslims were almost 40 per cent in Fak Fak, 10 per cent in Sorong (*kota*, or municipality), around 8 per cent in Sorong (regency) and about 5 per cent in Manokwari (Ibid., chart 7.15). It seems reasonable to follow Goodman in attributing this concentration of Papuan Muslims on the Bird's Head to historic connections with the trade streams of the past, the *sosolot*, the *kain timur* and the Tidorean relationship with Dorei and Cenderawasih Bay.

After the transfer to Indonesian sovereignty of the bulk of the Dutch East Indies in 1949, the Netherlands implemented separate arrangements for the control of West New Guinea under a Dutch Governor. Indonesian nationalists had always claimed the right to all Dutch territories, 'from Sabang to Merauke'. What followed in the time remaining to the Dutch has been described as 'a "New Deal" period ... aimed at accelerated economic, sanitary, educational, social and political development and the 'Papuanisation' of the administrative machinery' (Pouwer 1999, 167). With a vigour not previously seen, the Dutch attempted to bring development to the some 467,000 Papuans living in 'controlled'

³¹ *Orde Baru*, the 'new order' (self-description of the regime established in Indonesia under Suharto from 1966). The reference here, however, is to the replacement of Dutch rule by that of Indonesia

³²See Robert Cribb's *Digital Atlas of Indonesian History*, map titled 'Muslim population of Papua, by district, according to the 2000 census', available at <http://www.indonesianhistory.info/>

territory. When they left in 1962, a successful diplomatic campaign by Indonesia having forced them to relinquish the province, there were nonetheless only 19,000 Papuans in formal wage employment.

The transfer of administration from an interim UN authority to the Republic occurred in 1963. This was followed by a period of normalization of Indonesian rule, pending the completion of an 'Act of Self-Determination' by the Papuan people, as required by the agreement with the Dutch. This process, known as the *Act of Free Choice*, was completed to the satisfaction of Indonesian authorities in 1969, whereupon the former Dutch New Guinea, renamed *Irian Barat* (West Irian)³³, came fully under Indonesian authority, to be administered as a single province of the unitary State. The former colonial capital, Hollandia, was renamed Jayapura. Aside from achieving an organic incorporation of Irian into the Indonesian polity, the most pressing task of authorities was the absorption of the grossly underdeveloped province into the national economy, itself desperately poor. The writer is indebted to a contemporary study by Garnaut and Manning (1974) for a discussion of the latter task. Quite incidentally, their work greatly clarified certain structural issues touching on formality and informality and provided a most revealing contrast with the contemporary situation on the other side of the border in the (then) Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

The economic absorption of Irian required a traumatic convergence, caused by the freeing of capital, labour and commodity movements between Irian and the Republic. The banks and major trading companies of the colonial era had withdrawn, leaving only 'the missionaries and medium-sized Chinese businesses'. Indonesian government posted a cadre of administrators to the province and boosted expenditure on services and equipment, while FUNDWI (the Fund of the United Nations for the Development of West Irian) commenced a program of infrastructure development and rehabilitation. Migration of Indonesian citizens commenced, with official 'transmigration' schemes of sponsored government agricultural development, together with an increasing stream of *migrasi spontan* (private Indonesian individuals migrating spontaneously). These developments supported rising levels of demand in a formal economy lacking banking facilities and suffering shortages of basic commodities due to irregular shipping services and the loss of local production capacity. Shipping difficulties affected both coastal and inter-island trade, while international trade was further dislocated by Sukarno's *konfrontasi* of Singapore from 1963. Given these limitations on private sector capacity to meet aggregate demand, and despite direct government action to increase market supplies of consumer commodities and inputs such as building materials, substantial commercial opportunities opened up for the nimble.

The response of small Indonesian entrepreneurs was worthy of the pen of J C van Leur, so closely did it mimic his account of pre-modern Indonesian trade, containing elements of the travelling peddler, of junks crammed with petty traders, 'each with his own pack', and of *commenda* finance. Garnaut and Manning observed that, while Chinese firms and others established by employees of the departing colonial-era companies used their established trading links to expand, and while some Indonesian

³³ Irian Barat became 'Irian Jaya' (Victorious Irian) in 1973, then 'Papua' from 2000 until 2003, when the province was divided into two administrative entities, 'Papua' and 'West Papua'. The latter occupies the 'Bird's Head' region.

national trading firms also set up shop, 'equally significant' was the arrival of 'many small-scale "round-trip traders"'. These 'accompany their cargoes from Surabaya or Ujung Pandang and so reduce pilferage. They remain as long as required to sell their wares'. Supplier finance was an important element in making such journeys possible and in supporting trading conducted by immigrants. Thus 'many small-scale entrepreneurs migrating from other provinces have been financed by their suppliers in Surabaya, Ujung Pandang and Jakarta, or have financed themselves through sale of commodities carried with them on the journey' (ibid., 42, 35).

These spontaneous responses by informal traders had significant effects on the character of retail trade and personal consumption in the province, as did the entry of failed transmigrants to the towns, where they entered petty trade and services and competed with Papuans for unskilled jobs. Garnaut and Manning noted that the shopping baskets of incomers from western Indonesia were 'very different from import oriented consumption patterns of the Dutch and Eurasians that they replaced in Irian Jaya's towns'. International trade was disrupted and in any case cheap Indonesian consumer goods were a better match for the budgets and tastes of immigrants (and of Papuans, for that matter). This applied also to services, including transport, where suppliers in Surabaya and other ports financed the purchase by migrants of *bemo* (the cheap, ubiquitous and chaotic mini-buses of Indonesia). These soon came to play an indispensable role in the towns where, along with street stalls, peddlers and pavement-artisans they gave urban life a distinctly Indonesian flavour.

Just ten years after Indonesia gained control of West Irian, Garnaut and Manning (ibid., 20) could say of its capital that, 'Jayapura today is a vivid contrast to the relatively high-wage, white-administered, import -dependent, ordered town that was Hollandia'. With the movement of people, capital and goods between Irian and the rest of Indonesia, the province's market economy had been rapidly incorporated into Indonesia's broader economic and governmental systems. Its towns, particularly those of the northern coast, had been 'transformed', with employment growing vigorously in 'the small-scale service and manufacturing industries that are characteristic of Malay-Indonesian towns'. These labour-intensive activities were dominated by newcomers from other parts of the Republic.

The former West New Guinea had found itself, quite suddenly, with a thriving urban informal sector, giving a new dimension to the concept of *Orde baru*. This had sprung up in towns which Garnaut and Manning, experienced observers of both New Guinea and Indonesia, described as having been in 1962 essentially similar in economic structure to those of its eastern colonial neighbour, the [then] Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea. This similarity was qualified to the degree that PNG towns were somewhat larger and built around more complex technology and more formal business organization. They were, nonetheless, also 'relatively high-wage, white-administered, import -dependent [and] ordered', while in them urban informal economic activity, involving the indigenous population, was essentially nugatory³⁴.

³⁴ Garnaut and Manning thought PNG would benefit substantially from the emergence of 'a flourishing bazaar economy' in urban areas, such as had erupted in Irian Barat. Why such activity continued to languish in PNG is an issue to be canvassed in the writer's future research.

The emergence of an informal economy in West Irian was primarily due to the influence of 'free' (*spontan*) immigrants, most of them from Sulawesi and Maluku. By 1972 they comprised 'an overwhelming proportion of the new arrivals', and

'In the towns of the north and west the 'newcomers' (*pendatang*) controlled the greatest part of small-scale trade and urban transport. They held most of the places in the urban markets. Newcomers also held the majority of labouring and artisan jobs in road construction and building. The migrants have been responsible for development of many new labour-intensive economic activities: pit-sawn production of timber, tailoring, cigarette sales from small stalls and other new urban services. Similarly, the night markets in Jayapura, Biak and Sorong and the stalls have reduced the turnover of several established import-oriented stores run by Chinese' (Garnaut and Manning 1974, 65).

Hand-sawn timber provided strong competition for the formal 'machine' sawmills and soon accounted for the greater part of urban timber supplies. In southern towns, where demand for labour was less and unskilled wages lower, fewer immigrants accepted wage employment. 'Instead they were concentrated in employment with an entrepreneurial content; small-scale trading, commercial fishing and pit-sawn production of timber' (*ibid.*, 65). There was more scope for Papuans to find wage employment in this situation, unlike the northern towns where they were squeezed out of even unskilled jobs by the competition of incomers.

Informal economic activity by immigrants dynamized the system of fresh food supply and marketing, one of the few areas of the monetary economy in which Papuans had participated, as 'producer-sellers'³⁵. In terms of supply, transmigration projects near Jayapura and Nabire had become successfully incorporated into fresh food supply chains. There and in Merauke (where a Javanese population had been established in the colonial era) immigrants provided the bulk of fresh food. In urban markets some degree of culture clash occurred as Papuan producer-sellers encountered 'Malay' market behaviour born of hard experience in the *pasar* (bazaars) of Makassar. Such behaviour included the unfamiliar activities of intermediaries and emergent wholesalers and the phenomenon of price flexibility (as contrasted with relatively inflexible fixing of 'customary' prices in the monetized food markets of colonial Melanesia³⁶). This introduction to the realities of market competition led to claims of unfair behavior. Monopolistic practices emerged, such as the alleged exclusion of Papuan vendors from the Jayapura fish market. In waters close to the capital immigrants introduced new and higher-yielding fishing methods, not always making arrangements with traditional right-holders for access, while the latter continued to fish in traditional fashion. Papuans showed some flexibility in the adoption of new, exotic, and improved vegetable varieties, though they were slow to incorporate these into their own diets. Garnaut and Manning commented that incomers appeared 'more responsive to market opportunities and quicker to participate in government extension programs than local villagers', while also being more responsive to cooperative organization.

³⁵ Producers of food selling directly to end-users in markets, with limited or no role for intermediaries; the dominant mode of informal marketing in colonial Melanesia (as in PNG in the 1960s); see Epstein (1982) .

³⁶ See Epstein 1982

From a Papuan perspective, the availability of 'unlimited supplies of labour'³⁷ from poverty-stricken areas of Indonesia promised to keep unskilled wages so low as to make permanent jobs unattractive to the indigenous people. This, Garnaut and Manning thought, would condemn Papuans to participate in the modern economy merely as short-term, unskilled, circular migrants. It would impede them from acquiring 'commercially-valuable skills', so that, in an intensification of the dualistic structure of the colonial economy, 'the modern economy can be expected to become increasingly alien to the Irian Jaya villager'. Failing access to education, 'the Irianese will remain a village people for many years' (ibid., 106).

Finally, and without attempting to review the further development of the informal economy in the period since the early 1970s, it may be useful to consider briefly the census data for 2000. This was the first occasion on which employment at the provincial level was classified according to ethnic origin. Census results for 2000 may suggest whether non-indigenous dominance of urban formal employment (and coincidentally, urban informal activity) had continued. The census may also have cast some light on the extent to which indigenous Papuans had gained any significant urban foothold, or whether they remained (as Garnaut and Manning had suggested they would) 'a village people'.

Year 2000 census data represent an improvement on earlier enumerations, in that an attempt was made to distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens in terms of variables such as employment, residence (urban/rural) and education, *inter alia*. At the aggregate level, it established that whereas non-indigenous citizens comprise only a third of the provincial workforce, they number almost three-quarters of urban workers (Upton 2009). Published data for the various categories of employment are marred, however, by the level of aggregation involved. Most obviously, formal and informal occupations are lumped together (civil servants with street barbers, for example) in the 'services' category, thus masking the realities in an important area of informal employment.

In two instances, however, there are telling hints of a genuine and continuing asymmetry in the distribution of informal occupations between the ethnic groups. It seems reasonable to expect both the 'trade' and 'agriculture' categories of employment to be dominated by self-employed, low-paid, informal workers. A continuation of the pattern described for urban areas in the early 1970s by Garnaut and Manning would show a much greater representation in 2000 of non-indigenous workers in the urban sector 'trade' category. This was indeed the case. Non-indigenous workers in 'trade' made up 18.7 per cent of the urban non-indigenous workforce, while the comparable figure for the indigenous was only 4.9 percent. By contrast, non-indigenous workers in urban 'agriculture' were 10.9 per cent of their cohort, while the indigenous were 24 per cent of theirs. Put simply, non-indigenous urbanites were still almost four times as likely to work in highly informalized 'trade' occupations than indigenous Papuans, while the latter were more than twice as likely to work in urban agriculture. This latter category, while also highly informalized, is largely an extension of traditional subsistence agriculture into the city, rather

³⁷ This is a reference is to the classic paper by W A Lewis, *Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour*.

than a new, learned, form of behaviour³⁸. There is no suggestion from the 2000 census that the immigrant stranglehold on key urban informal economic activities was being challenged by indigenous Papuans.

The same comparisons may be drawn in rural areas. There is no surprise in observing that the indigenous outnumbered immigrants (and their locally-born children) in agriculture (92.4 per cent of the Papuan cohort as against 64.1 per cent of the other). Clearly the overwhelming predominance of Papuans in agriculture does nothing to shake the Garnaut/Manning hypothesis that 'they will remain a village people for many years'. In the rural 'trade' category, Papuan under-representation was extreme (0.5 per cent as against 7.9 per cent), while it was also manifest in the other, non-agricultural, rural employment categories (Upton 2009, chart 7.24, 290)³⁹. After more than thirty years few Papuan workers were anything other than farmers. They remained under-represented in urban occupations and were grossly under-represented in the occupations of interest to this study.

12. Conclusion

What criteria could be applied to judging how well contact between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia* over several millenia had equipped Melanesians to engage successfully in a 'world system' of trade and exchange? Perhaps evidence of significant and sustained technology acquisition from Asia, leading to the more productive use by Melanesians of their own natural resources, facilitating greater occupational specialization and mutually advantageous exchange, would serve as proof of beneficial contact? Perhaps one would need to show evidence of beneficial political consolidation, achieved under pressure from Asia, among the small, decentralized, and relatively acephalous polities of Melanesia. The distinction here is between Charles Rowley's 'stateless societies' and his 'Asian rice villages', with the latter integrated into 'a wider economic, social and political order'. What if political consolidation had enabled Melanesians to achieve more cohesive social action and to treat with outsiders from a position of greater strength?

This study asserts that complex and hierarchical social structures, associated with substantially greater occupational differentiation and task specialization, have distinguished *Monsoon Asia* from *Melanesia*. For this reason *Melanesia* has been slow to lay foundations for informal economic activity (considered as an essential component of, and a building block for, a 'missing middle' of micro-, small- and medium-enterprises). Such an informal economy might have permitted greater and more productive

³⁸ In the cities of developing countries, particularly those in which population is not dense, there is often land available for food production. This is usually done for home consumption, but where a surplus is produced it may enter into market exchange and be counted as informal sector monetary income. Such activity conducted by Papuans is an extension of rural subsistence agriculture into the urban 'space', quite different in character from the 'new' urban informal activities introduced by Indonesian immigrants.

³⁹ Further enquiry might commence by examining the occupational and self-employment activities of Papuan 'elites' in the Bird's Head region, including descendants of the 'mixed intermediary group', to see how these differ from those of the bulk of Papuan 'villagers' and of non-indigenous residents. For this purpose Miedema and Reesink (2004) could be a starting point.

engagement of Melanesians in the monetary economy introduced by colonialism and expanded under Indonesian rule. It might have built greater capacity in Melanesians, enabling them to progress to higher levels of economic and industrial organization. It might yet do so, should circumstances and policy permit the more active engagement of Melanesians in monetized informal economic activity in future.

Central to the argument has been the situation of west New Guinea, by reason of its location and history, as a zone of transition between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*. Across this zone, archetypal Melanesian ceremonial exchange relationships were confronted by tributary relations imposed by force of the more centralized political structures of Asia. Following Van Leur, the travelling peddler has been represented here as foot-soldier for the eastward advance of the trading and tribute-seeking marine power of *Monsoon Asia*. We might choose to regard *entrepôts* such as Kilwaru and Dobo as *caravanserais* along the sea-road. We could see fortified *kota* on the western fringe of New Guinea, with their mixed populations of trading intermediaries, as points at which *Melanesia* yielded ground to *Monsoon Asia*. The *kota*, aside from being trading posts, also served to project Asian power, although this was done more widely and destructively by raiding expeditions sanctioned by Moluccan sultanates. These in turn unleashed forces of disorder within Papuan society.

A situation of cultural discontinuity, the 'ambiguous economy' of the Bird's Head of New Guinea, should be considered evidence of the transitional nature of this territory. There Melanesian gift exchange gave way to human 'commodity' exchange conducted by Malay traders and their coastal partners. Ambiguities in the historical record, concerning the role and nature of the 'intermediary group', create difficulties for understanding how much agency was exercised by indigenous Papuans. It appears, however, that the 'stylized fact' that the relationship was one of unmitigated exploitation and extraction must yield to a more complex reality. There were winners and losers; exotic manufactures circulated through Papuan trade channels altering local balances of power and wealth as some groups found themselves in advantageous positions in relation to non-Melanesian trading partners. New trading relationships were beneficial for some coastal and inland Papuan groups although others must have been relegated to the status of slave reserves. Overall, however, the historical record suggests a relationship of unequal exchange between *Monsoon Asia* and *Melanesia*.

In an attempt at an accounting, Pamela Swadling listed a number of 'introductions' to New Guinea from the Spice Islands. These are familiar, and included (besides metal-working)

'socio-political practices such as bestowing titles and paying tribute; a new religion, as some New Guineans were converted to Islam; a new language, as some New Guineans learnt trade Malay; new crops such as rice, sweet potatoes and tobacco [*the latter two soon after their arrival in the Moluccas, courtesy of the Portuguese*]; and new products such as metal tools, cloth, fine porcelain and metal gongs' [*displacing traditional valuables in ceremonial exchange*] (Swadling 1996, 281).

Some of these 'introductions' were instances of failed technology transfer. Rice cultivation was no more than a curiosity, while metal-working fell victim to superior tools imported from industrial countries. It proved no basis for the emergence of an artisan class⁴⁰. Some other innovations were profound, but how far they are germane to the concerns of this essay is less clear. The impact of metal tools on agricultural labour and gender relations is documented from eastern New Guinea, as are the effects of sweet potato on population carrying capacity. There is no suggestion that such innovations resulted in a positive-sum game, in the sense that they supported a more elaborate specialization of labour and mutual gains from trade.

It must be granted that the 'raja polities' of the coastal Bird's Head amounted to the introduction of elements of 'the State' into West Papua, by contrast with the acephalous societies normally associated with *Melanesia*.⁴¹ This was most evident in the *kota* of the Raja Ampat group and the coastal fringe of the Bird's head, where the 'mixed intermediary group' of Moluccans and Papuans flourished. It is intriguing that Anthony Reid felt able to include sixteenth century Onin (along with Sulu and Tidore) as among the 'states' which 'rose and flourished primarily on the traffic in slaves' (Reid 1983, 31). Stories of the Onin Flotilla and de Brito's account of a war fleet in 1581 suggest a certain level of political organization on the western margins of Papua. But while the physical energy of such fleets was no doubt supplied largely by Papuans, the source of their leadership is a more open question, as is the nature of the alliance which assembled such forces. If Onin was ever a 'state', it is certainly much less well-documented than either Tidore or Sulu. Thus, for example, Reid said of Onin simply that it 'had this *reputation* in the sixteenth century' (emphasis added).

Learning a *lingua franca* and travelling to the Moluccas must certainly have given some Papuans an introduction to a wider world and perhaps the experience reinforced their commitment to models of 'exemplary activity' emanating from Tidore and Ternate. The tribute system and Islam imposed new forms of political leadership in certain places, especially on the Bird's Head. But this connection of some Papuans to a centralized power structure appears to have yielded limited benefit, in terms of constructive partnership or learning. More likely, it simply gave individuals access to the zero-sum game of extraction and exaction played by Moluccan traders and their intermediaries. The embryonic political institutions represented by the *kota* declined throughout the period of closer Dutch control in the nineteenth century, and even more so in the twentieth, when the lack of any effective political consolidation among the Papuan people became painfully evident. In total, Swadling's list of innovations flowing from New Guinea's trade connection with eastern Indonesia is slight, and her account of them is necessarily lame.

⁴⁰ In relation to the failure of Papuan metal-working to endure into the modern era, one should consider cautionary remarks by Ian Hughes (pers. comm., 8 August 2012): 'When attempting to explain patterns of diffusion of products or techniques, remember to allow for sheer cultural preference, the power of the long-established total cultural matrix'. If so, it appears that the combination of cheap imported tools and a robust 'cultural matrix' may have accounted for the failure of this innovation.

⁴¹ I am indebted to Prof. Chris Healey, Visiting Fellow of the ANU's Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program, for this suggestion

The argument has so far made only limited reference to the second group, other than the travelling peddlers, whose members Van Leur had described as responsible for much of the conduct of ancient trade. This was the class of 'wealthy money holders', for whom 'trade was a matter of occasional investment of capital' rather than an occupation. Indeed, (to repeat Van Leur's judgment of this group) 'trade was not generally the primary concern of "money-holders", for the classical *polis* of the Mediterranean was not dominated by "bourgeois" economic life, but [by] war, booty, and political tribute'. He saw the conduct of Javanese princes and Moluccan sultans in New Guinea as answering this description. Can he possibly have foreseen the circumstances of modern Indonesia's Papuan provinces, rich in tropical timber, fisheries and mineral resources, and governed since 1963 by an administration top-heavy with senior military figures who commit the public resources of the Indonesian state to the cause of private enrichment?

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