CHAPTER ELEVEN

CASH CROPS AND MARKETS

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INTRODUCTION

In the opening minutes of *Black Harvest*, Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's 1992 film about coffee in the Papua New Guinea highlands, Joe Leahy and Popina Mai learn that the international price of coffee has collapsed and with it Popina Mai's dream of becoming rich from their joint venture coffee plantation, Kaugum. Later, sitting in Joe Leahy's house with other members of the Ganiga tribe, Popina Mai says, 'It's not our fault the price has collapsed. I feel like selling my big pig and travelling to where they make these decisions. This affects all of us. We'll never be millionaires now. When I think of the work I've done, I can't help weeping.' The poignancy of Popina Mai's situation, his desire to participate successfully in the global economy, and his profound misunderstanding of his position in that economy, are a microcosm of what cash crops and markets mean to many people in contemporary Melanesia.

While Melanesian producers of export commodity crops are, in many ways, on the periphery of the world economy, affected by events far away, involving people they do not know, Melanesian people's participation in markets is also the story of local choices, agency and innovation, and the remaking of export and domestic markets in ways that are distinctively Melanesian. Cash crops and markets have brought significant change, but, like other exogenous introductions – general purpose money, business, banking systems, cricket, courts and the state – they have been remade and reinterpreted in response to diverse, locally grounded ideas and practices (Akin and Robbins 1999; Brookfield 1969; Cox, this volume; Curry 2003; Demian 2003; Finney 1973; Kildea and Leach 1974; Maclean 1989; Sexton 1982; Sharp 2013).

Melanesia has, for the most part, been of relatively limited importance to Western colonial and capitalist interests. The exceptions to this are the long history of nickel mining in New Caledonia, and the more recent mining, oil and gas projects in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and West Papua. Colonialism came late (particularly in the PNG highlands), and this meant that Melanesians, with the exception of West Papuans and the Kanak of New Caledonia, were largely spared the most violent, exploitative and coercive forms of colonial capitalism experienced in many other parts of the colonial world (Knauft 1999; LiPuma 2000; Quanchi, this volume).[1] Melanesians continue to have unequal relations with outsiders, as Popina Mai was well aware. Despite this, Melanesians have, for the most part, been keen to explore opportunities presented by changing economic relationships. Export cash crops and fresh food for domestic markets were two of the earliest connections between Melanesians and outsiders. Alongside, and entangled with, influences of Christianity and the state, participation in these international and domestic markets has transformed, and continues to transform, landscapes, economic systems, forms of sociality, and how Melanesians imagine themselves in relation to their immediate neighbours and the wider world.[2]

Agricultural production and exports dominated Melanesian national economies into the 1970s (Brookfield and Hart 1971). Beginning in the 1970s, however, the relative contribution of agriculture to national accounts declined with the rise of extractive industries in PNG (mining, oil and gas, logging and fisheries) and the Solomon Islands (logging, fisheries, mining), and tourism and fisheries (and previously logging) in Vanuatu (Connell 1997; Bennett 1987; M. Allen 2013: 34–35). Similarly, in West Papua between 1993 and 1996, agricultural production grew by 26% while mining production increased by almost 70% (Elmslie 2002: 104, 114–115). The story is a little different in New Caledonia, where nickel mining was established in the 1870s and the significance of commercial agriculture to the national economy declined after the Second World War (Connell 1987). While there has been a significant reorientation in terms of national revenue, resource extraction and tourism have not benefitted most Melanesians. For the rural majority, in one of the least urbanised regions on earth, agricultural production for own consumption (see Bourke, this volume), as well as for international and domestic markets, remains central to household livelihoods.[3]

Today most rural households earn at least some money by growing and selling crops, either into international commodity markets or at local marketplaces, and an increasing number of urban households earn money from marketplace reselling. There is, however, significant variation in levels of participation and incomes earned. Climatic and geological variation across the region has created considerable diversity in the suitability of different environments for agriculture, and for the cultivation of particular crops. Seasonal inundation, too much or too little rainfall, poor soils, steep slopes, cloud cover, and cold temperatures due to altitude, all limit what can be grown, and where (B. Allen, Bourke and Gibson 2005; Brookfield and Hart 1971). Furthermore, the region's rugged mountains, large rivers and fragmented island chains, which result in uneven, disconnected and frequently unreliable transport networks, have created significant differences in people's access to places where they can sell their crops.

The impact of geography on the differing fortunes of people throughout the region, has largely been reinforced by colonial and post-independence development (B. Allen *et al.* 2005). Some areas are intimately entangled in international commodity circuits. These include, in PNG, the Gazelle Peninsula, the north-east coast of West New Britain Province, Goroka and the Wahgi Valley in the highlands, and the Guadalcanal Plain in the Solomon Islands. Elsewhere, in places remote from roads and urban centres, and which face significant environmental constraints to agricultural production – such as the fringes of PNG's highlands, much of PNG's Western Province, Guadalcanal's Weather Coast, and small distant islands throughout the region – cash incomes can be very low, and nearly non-existent in the most remote areas. There, labour migration and remittances may be the only sources of cash.[4] Environmental constraints, and proximity to markets and other income opportunities, also shape income-earning activities in New Caledonia and the Torres Strait Islands. Migration and remittances are also important in those two places, but their encompassment within large prosperous states means their economic situations are very different to elsewhere in Melanesia.

In this chapter, we discuss export cash crops and domestic markets separately. While this is an important distinction, the separation is nevertheless artificial. Export and domestic markets are closely connected. Most rural households participate in both international and domestic agricultural markets, or may shift back and forth from one to the other over time, including in response to the prices of export commodities and seasonal availability of labour. Those places where export cash cropping is strongest are, in general, the areas where domestic markets are most developed. This is because both are focused on the best agricultural environments, and because colonial development was concentrated in these same locations (B. Allen *et al.* 2005). Wealth from cash cropping also generates demand for domestic markets. Many highlanders, for instance, consume more betel nut during the coffee season when money is more readily available (cf. M. Allen, Bourke and McGregor 2009: 313; Bourke 1986: 68). At the same time, low and unreliable export prices have encouraged rural Melanesians to explore different domestic commodities as alternative income sources (Connell 1997: 311).

Participation in domestic and international agricultural markets also occurs within diverse livelihoods. Rural households grow most of the food they consume. The importance of this is difficult to overstate (see Bourke, this volume). Non-market exchange is also vital to people's livelihoods and well-being. Many households also earn money from a range of other sources including retail and transport enterprises, remittances, wage labour and resource rents.[5] In coastal and riverine areas, fish and other marine resources are also often major sources of income.

Although Melanesians have been incorporated into international commodity chains in uneven ways, incorporation has had important benefits. For many Melanesians market participation has contributed to improved nutrition and associated health benefits by enabling them to purchase and consume energy-dense imported foods (B. Allen *et al.* 2005; Heywood and Hide 1992). Money also makes food systems more resilient to shocks. This was demonstrated following widespread failure of food crops in the 1997–98 and 2015–16 droughts and frosts in PNG. People with access to cash were able to purchase rice and other store goods to get through the ensuing food shortages (Bourke 1999; see also M. Allen 2015).

In this chapter, we examine the production and sale of international and domestic cash crops in turn before discussing the effects of these markets on social relations and how Melanesians imagine themselves in relation to other people and other parts of the world. The chapter concentrates on the three independent Melanesian countries of PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which have strong similarities in their engagement with export cash crops and local agricultural markets. Our discussion of West Papua and New Caledonia is less detailed. In the Torres Strait Islands there is virtually no commercial agriculture for either international or domestic markets.

EXPORT CASH CROPS AND MARKETS

Export cash crops were introduced by colonial governments as ways for colonists to enrich themselves, for colonies to pay their own way, and as a means for indigenous people to improve their own welfare. They are the principal way

Melanesians became entangled in cash economies. In coastal areas, this began with European coconut plantations in the late nineteenth century (Dennis 1981). Coconuts remained the main cash crop throughout Melanesia until the 1950s when coffee production expanded in the PNG highlands. In the 1960s, cocoa became an important export crop in coastal PNG and the Solomon Islands (Bennett 1987: 316), although it was already a significant export crop in Vanuatu in the 1920s (Weightman 1989: 198–204). More recently oil palm plantations and smallholdings were established in lowland PNG beginning in the late 1960s, in the Solomon Islands in the early 1970s, and in West Papua in the late 1980s (M. Allen 2012; Curry 2003; Casson 1999).

Coconuts, coffee, cocoa and oil palm are the most important cash crops in the region, and in this section we focus on their geographical distribution, their production by plantations and smallholders, and their sale into international markets.[6]

Geographical distribution

The geographical distribution of these main four cash crops is shaped by ecological requirements (see Trangmar *et al.* 1995 and M. Allen *et al.* 2009 for details), as well as by access to transportation, investment in processing plants, and historical contingency.

Arabica coffee (*Coffea arabica*) is grown throughout the PNG highlands, while Robusta coffee (*Coffea canephora*) has much more limited distribution in the lowlands. Both species are grown in small quantities in the other Melanesian countries, including West Papua (Boissiere and Purwanto 2006) and primarily *robusta* in New Caledonia (Connell 1987). Most coffee is produced in places accessible by road, although in some places coffee is carried long distances to a road or an airstrip where it can be flown to a town for processing.

Coconuts (*Cocos nucifera*) are grown in coastal and lowland areas throughout the region. Commercial production of copra, dried coconut meat from which coconut oil is extracted, is most significant in PNG in the Islands Region and the coastal areas of Madang Province, as well as in Vanuatu and western areas of the Solomon Islands, although the production of copra has been abandoned in some areas such as Milne Bay Province, PNG (Hide *et al.* 1994; cf. Rollason 2014). Very small volumes of copra are produced in New Caledonia, primarily in the Loyalty Islands (Connell 1987; Guyard *et al.* 2014).

Cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) is grown widely throughout lowland and coastal PNG, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and West Papua, but not New Caledonia. It is often intercropped with coconuts. In PNG, cocoa's contribution to people's livelihoods has declined dramatically over the past decade with the appearance of cocoa pod borer, a pest which devastated yields and smallholder incomes. In East New Britain Province (PNG), where cocoa was a major contributor to the local economy, production in 2012 had declined by 80% from pre-borer levels (Curry *et al.* 2015: 3).

In contrast to the widespread distribution of coconut and cocoa, the production of oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) in the lowlands is spatially concentrated. This is a result of investment more than geographical conditions. Oil palm production is organised in nucleus estates comprising a plantation and large industrial processing mill, surrounded by smallholder growers who sell to the central mill. In Melanesia, oil palm is produced in several provinces of PNG (see Nelson *et al.* 2014) and in West Papua, but only on the Guadalcanal Plain in the Solomon Islands.[7]

Plantations and smallholders

A major feature of cash crop production in Melanesia has been the declining importance of plantations and increasing importance of smallholder production (MacWilliam 2013; M. Allen *et al.* 2009; Connell 1987). Today, plantations, which were prominent during the first half of the twentieth century, have been almost entirely replaced by smallholder production, except in the case of oil palm and sugar cane (which in PNG is produced for the domestic market).

An example of the historical relationship between plantations and smallholder production can be seen in the history of coffee production in PNG. Land for the first coffee plantation was alienated in 1949 near the town of Goroka, and by 1955 there were 76 plantations. In 1977, shortly after Independence there were 107 plantations, but by 2007 there were only 33 (M. Allen *et al.* 2009: 307–309; Stewart 1992: 23–24).

During the same period, and in contrast, coffee growing by indigenous smallholders (with plots less than 5 hectares) expanded rapidly. The first indigenous planting of coffee was in the 1940s (Radford 1987: 171), but by the early 1960s over 60% of coffee acreage and 43% of coffee production by volume was by indigenous smallholders, and smallholder coffee production has continued to expand since then. At Independence in 1975 more than 50% of PNG's coffee was produced by an estimated 200,000 smallholders, and by 2005 the proportion produced by smallholders had increased to 85%. Today around 524,000 households grow coffee (PNG National Statistics Office 2011).

The decline of coffee plantations can be attributed to a variety of factors, including changes to government policies on land alienation, extreme fluctuations in the international price of coffee, currency fluctuations, the high costs of starting and running plantations, difficulties in recruiting labour, and disputes over land (Howlett 1962: 220–221; Bourke and Harwood 2009: 296; Fingleton 1981: 212–237). The expansion of smallholder production, on the other hand, resulted both from the efforts of agricultural extension officers and from highlanders' enthusiasm to have their own businesses, including smallholder coffee, in preference to plantation work (MacWilliam 2013; Shand and Straatmans 1974; M. Strathern 1972).

Other export cash crops had similar trajectories of declining plantation production and increasing smallholder production. Cocoa production in PNG, for example, increased by 45% between 1985 and 2005, with smallholder production as a percentage of total production rising from 69% to 90%. Similarly, smallholders' share of copra production in PNG increased from 35% to 82% between 1971 and 1998. In the Solomon Islands, smallholders contributed 35% of cocoa production in 1984. Since the political turmoil between 1998 and 2003 (see M. Allen, this volume), which created unstable operating conditions for plantations, production is now almost exclusively by smallholders. Coconut production has also shifted from a strong colonial plantation sector to production entirely by smallholders (M. Allen *et al.* 2009; Brown and Liloqula 1992: 199; Rollason 2014; Solomon Islands Commodity Export Marketing Authority, cited in Hivu 2013).

In Vanuatu, smallholders are also the primary producers of export cash crops. At Independence in 1980, smallholders produced more than 75% of the country's copra and cocoa. This was the result of a long decline in cocoa and *robusta* coffee plantations, and led to increased dependence on copra and its pronounced cyclical prices (Weightman 1989: 13). This dominance of smallholder production in Vanuatu came about despite inadequate and unreliable support and infrastructure, as well as French colonial officials' overt opposition to smallholder agriculture because they believed it contributed to shortages of indigenous plantation labourers. In New Caledonia, coffee and copra plantations declined in the 1960–70s, unable to compete for labour with the mining and service sectors. Coffee and copra production is today almost exclusively by smallholders, although its contribution to household incomes is generally minor in comparison to wages outside of agriculture and welfare payments (Connell 1987; Gaillard and Manner 2010; Guyard *et al.* 2014).

In contrast to the decline of plantations for other major export crops, plantation production of oil palm has increased. In PNG, overall production increased by 226% between 1985 and 2005, and the growth of plantations over this period outpaced smallholder growth such that the relative contribution of smallholders declined from 50% to 33% of total volume (Bourke and Harwood 2009: 554, 564; Koczberski, Curry and Bue 2012). Oil palm production in the Solomon Islands is even more dominated by plantations, with smallholders contributing only 9% of total production in 2014 (Public Summary Report GPPOL; M. Allen 2012).[8]

In West Papua, export crop cultivation has historically been less extensive than in neighbouring PNG. In the late 1990s the area of export crops cultivated by smallholders was around twice that of the plantation (government and private) sector (Anggraeni 2006). For most of the export crops, smallholders dominate the cultivated area. Among these smallholders, transmigrants from elsewhere in Indonesia, who now comprise over half of the population of West Papua, have benefitted more from export cash cropping than have indigenous West Papuans, most of whom have focused on food crop production (McGibbon 2004: 43–44; Boissiere and Purwanto 2006). Oil palm is, as elsewhere, predominantly cultivated on plantations, which employ a significant number of people in West Papua (Anggraeni 2006). This has expanded in recent years, and looks poised to grow massively in the near future. As of 2011, ten permits covering a total of 377,000 hectares had been issued to nine agricultural corporations for oil palm plantations in the Merauke Regency in the Southern Lowlands. Permits for an additional 760,000 hectares in the Merauke Regency have been issued for sugar cane production and a further 60,000 hectares for food crop production. In total, this is about 25% of the total land area in the Merauke Regency (Ito, Rachman and Savitri 2014: 36).

The growing prominence of smallholder production (except in West Papua), especially since the 1970s means that most rural households in Melanesia earn money from the production of one or more export cash crops. This is shown in Table 11.1. As noted, there is significant geographical variation in levels of participation and incomes earned.

International markets

Melanesia's agricultural products are generally exported as minimally processed commodities. Melanesian countries export green bean coffee and raw cocoa beans,

Table 11.1 Percentage of rural households by country earning income from the production of cash crops in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu[9]

	Papua New Guinea	*Solomon Islands*	*Vanuatu*
Coconuts	36%	35%	64%
Cocoa	24%	29%	24%
Coffee	43%	—	4%
Oil palm	3%	<0.5%	—
Fresh food	66%	76%	56%
Betel nut	45%	48%	—
Kava	—	—	63%

for example, and import instant coffee and chocolate. While smallholders can do some of the pre-export processing of coconuts, cocoa and coffee, all pre-export oil palm processing is done by estate mills which also provide transport and support (M. Allen *et al.* 2009; Curry 2003).

In the case of coffee, rural smallholders can sell to itinerant buyers who travel the roads buying coffee, which they resell to factories in towns. Alternatively, producers can take their coffee to town themselves to sell directly to coffee factories or to buyers on the street. Street buyers – equipped with tripod, hanging spring scale, and a small board announcing the price per kilo they are paying – are found in towns near the main marketplaces or where rural trucks and buses discharge their passengers. Smallholders mostly sell their coffee either as parchment, which has been pulped, fermented, washed and dried, or as unprocessed cherry, which the buyers and factories then process. Factory coffee buyers pay a premium for cherry because the factory can then control the processing to produce a higher grade of green bean coffee which is exported (M. Allen *et al.* 2009; West 2012).

Similarly, smallholders sell cocoa as either dry bean, which has been fermented and dried, or unprocessed wet bean, which is processed by an intermediary buyer or the exporter. Smallholders earn more money from dry bean, but it requires more work and access to a fermentary and drier (Curry *et al.* 2007; M. Allen *et al.* 2009: 319).

The point here is that in contrast to the centralised market control of oil palm, coffee and cocoa buying is far more decentralised. Smallholders have more options about who they sell to. At the same time, however, all buyers are constrained by the requirements (e.g. in terms of quality and price) of the international markets into which they sell.

Melanesians, like primary producers throughout the world, receive a small fraction of the end value of the products produced from their commodities, and Melanesian smallholders frequently complain about the prices they are paid. But it is foreign businesses rather than local buyers and factories that make most of the money from export cash crops. In PNG, producers receive between 68% and 83% of the *export price* for their coffee (Batt *et al.* 2009: 53), and about 70% in the case of cocoa and 67% in the case of copra (ARDSF 2010: viii). Oil palm smallholders receive a smaller portion – around 51% after company deductions for outreach, research and transport (M. Allen *et al.* 2009: 335). Most of the value of a bag of roasted coffee or a bar of chocolate, which is sold to consumers, is added after the commodity has left Melanesia (see West 2012: 16–17). Indigenous West Papuans face more difficult markets with control frequently in the hands of migrants from elsewhere in Indonesia (Boissiere and Purwanto 2006).

Another source of complaint for smallholder producers is fluctuating prices and buying power, the causes of which are usually not clear to producers. In 1999, for example, the sale of one kilogram of parchment coffee gave a PNG villager enough money to buy three kilograms of rice in Goroka. But by 2003, low global coffee prices combined with the declining value of the Kina, meant a villager could buy less than a third of that amount of rice (Bourke *et al.* 2009: 182). The opaqueness and volatility of prices for smallholders reflects Melanesia's extremely small share of world markets. While the great majority of rural Papua New Guineans earn money from export cash crops, PNG contributes less than 2% of the world's coffee, and similarly small percentages of palm oil, cocoa and copra (Bourke and Harwood 2009: 420). The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and West Papua produce even smaller percentages. Melanesian countries thus have little influence over the prices they receive. This stands in stark contrast to domestic markets to which we turn our attention in the next section.

DOMESTIC CASH CROPS AND MARKETS

In most parts of Melanesia, fresh food marketplaces emerged during the colonial era, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. They were intended to feed growing urban populations, and were a means to broader political and development ends (Brookfield 1969; T.S. Epstein 1982; Jackson 1976). Marketplaces have proliferated during the last 50 years and are now ubiquitous features of urban areas and rural roadsides.[10] Marketplaces are an integral part of urban landscapes, as Crocker (2011: 22) notes for Jayapura in West Papua. They are vibrant public spaces where people buy and sell food, betel nut and other goods; where they go to meet friends and hear the latest news and gossip; and where trade is shaped by both social and economic concerns.[11]

A market scene

The Goroka market, like many urban marketplaces in Melanesia, is a lively and vital part of the urban scene. Each day six or seven hundred people sell food, and thousands come to shop. The vendors are overwhelmingly women, but of different local origins, ages, education levels and socio-economic status. A huge variety of produce is for sale including indigenous foods such as sweet potato, yam and leafy green vegetables; as well as introduced crops such as cabbages, broccoli, pineapples, oranges, tomatoes and capsicums. Fresh food is sold as individual items and in heaps or bundles – for example, K5 for a pile of sweet potato, or 50t for a bundle of green vegetables – rather than by weight. Around the edge of the marketplace are trade stores and smaller specialist marketplaces devoted to betel nut, firewood, live chickens and small appliances. Near the main gate people catch small buses to other parts of town, or somewhat larger buses and trucks travelling west farther into the highlands or east to the lowland towns of Lae and Madang.

While the physical space is shambolic – a collection of run-down, open-sided sheds with concrete slabs surrounded by a chain-link fence with holes large enough to admit both people and pigs[12] – transactions occur in a quiet and orderly manner. Those vendors who cannot find space under cover display their food on rice bags, cloth or bits of cardboard on the uneven ground around the sheds where they contend with dust or mud, depending on the weather. Some sit under colourful umbrellas, but others sit for hours in the bright sun.

Marketplaces more generally

While this description of the Goroka marketplace highlights many features shared by marketplaces throughout the region, marketplaces differ significantly in size and infrastructure, and each marketplace has its own character (Busse and Sharp 2019). Two of PNG's largest marketplaces – in Mount Hagen and Kokopo – have much better infrastructure than Goroka and are much larger, with over 1,500 vendors on busy days (Mullen *et al.* 2015).[13] In 2009, Honiara (Solomon Islands) market had up to 800 vendors, and Port Vila's (Vanuatu) main market had about 250 vendors, each day (UN Women 2009a). The relationship between the size of marketplaces and numbers of vendors means market space is often contested (Busse 2019; Crocker 2011).

Marketplace size depends on several factors, including catchment population and the wealth of the people who buy there. Because export cash crops are a major source of money, areas most entangled in international commodity markets are also areas where domestic cash cropping is most common and local marketplaces most developed. Domestic marketplaces are an important way in which wealth from export cash crops is redistributed.

Smaller urban marketplaces are often located at the edges of towns, near neighbourhood trade stores, on street corners, or near bus stops. In PNG, these are generally known as '*kona maket*' ('corner markets') in Tok Pisin. Rural marketplaces are generally small and may consist of a few vendors sitting under brightly coloured umbrellas on patches of bare earth along the roadside, at a government or mission station, near a rural tradestore, near a mine or other extractive enclave, and elsewhere where people congregate. Such marketplaces may take place only a couple of days a week or only at particular times of day such as when people are returning from work in town.

Spatial distribution

While marketplaces are found throughout Melanesia, people's involvement with marketplaces is more intensive in areas close to urban centres. In PNG, for example, some people living in rural and peri-urban areas near Mount Hagen and Goroka have stopped producing coffee because they can earn more by growing food to sell. In the Solomon Islands, growing food for sale is most common in areas with best access to the main urban centre of Honiara, including the northern coast of Guadalcanal and nearby islands (McGregor 2006; Wilson 1991). Similarly, in Vanuatu, Port Vila's market is supplied primarily from Efate, particularly the area surrounding the urban centre and north Efate (Mael 2011: 19). Urban growth, including of informal settlements, has also encroached on land currently used for market gardening.[14] The situation is different in highly urbanised New Caledonia. There, people with better access to the capital, Noumea, have more non-agricultural wage opportunities. As a result, participation in agricultural markets is more common in remoter locations with fewer alternative income sources (Guyard *et al.* 2014: 7).

Fresh food production is dispersed, but there is increasing specialisation of production of particular crops, especially in areas that supply the largest urban centres. In the Asaro Valley near Goroka, for example, sweet potato cultivation expanded significantly in the late 1970s alongside the emergence of long-distance trading.[15] There is a similar concentration of cash cropping of Irish potato in the Tambul area of PNG's Western Highlands Province and of peanuts in the Markham Valley (Benediktsson 2002: 113–114). In the area north-east of Goroka, occupied by Bena people, where pineapples, oranges, cabbages and broccoli are important domestic cash crops, pineapples are grown on a large scale with two-thirds of households having over 1,000 plants (Inu 2015: 131). Some specialisation also occurs in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – for example, pineapples on Malaita (McGregor 1999; Bourke *et al.* 2006) – although this is less pronounced than in the PNG highlands where the greatest commercialisation of domestic cash crops has taken place. The Baliem Valley in the highlands of West Papua is a major source of European vegetables (Boissiere and Purwanto 2006).

Betel nut (*Areca catechu*),[16] a stimulant of great cultural significance in lowland PNG, West Papua and the Solomon Islands, is also widely grown as a cash crop and traded in marketplaces. In PNG, since the late 1970s, demand for betel nut has increased in urban centres and betel nut consumption has expanded in the highlands, where it is not produced. This has driven production in parts of the lowlands, where many households now have extensive betel nut groves, often grown as near monocultures (Sharp 2012: 95–96, 144; Koczberski and Curry 2005). A large-scale, long-distance and complex trade network supplies urban areas and the highlands (Sharp 2019). The main production areas for the highlands are East Sepik, Madang and Oro Provinces. The Port Moresby betel nut market is supplied from Central and Gulf Provinces (Sharp 2012, 2013). In Vanuatu, where betel nut is not traditionally produced or consumed, kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a cash crop of similar cultural significance. There, a majority of rural households, including those distant from urban centres, produce kava, both as a domestic and export cash crop. Marijuana and tobacco are also widely produced as cash crops throughout the region.

Specialisation of production

The domestic markets of Melanesian countries are characterised by low levels of specialisation in terms of both production and market structure (Bourke 1986; Brookfield 1969; T.S. Epstein 1982). This remains true of most of the region's producers and marketplaces, although, as with export crops, there is variation in levels of production and market involvement. The vast majority of producers are smallholders who grow and sell small quantities of a variety of different crops. Distinctions between production for own use and sale are often blurred and flexible. For many households, the foods they sell are either planned or opportunistic surpluses from gardens primarily intended for the household's own consumption.[17] Households may also plant gardens specifically for sale, or segment their gardens and earmark sections and crops for sale, sometimes for particular purposes such as paying school fees or contributing to a compensation payment. For example, among oil palm smallholders in West New Britain Province, Bue (in Curry *et al.* 2012: 174) reported 19% of gardens sampled were intended for both marketing and household consumption, while 29% of gardens were cultivated for marketing. Of course, the intention of growers and what they actually do can be quite different. Other than coconuts, which are used as food and to feed pigs, export commodities do not afford producers the same flexibility.

Subsistence gardens typically have multiple crops, in mixed cultivation, and with staggered planting times. Given limited capacity to store perishable crops, this ensures food is available throughout the year. By contrast, production intended for the market frequently involves large plantings of a single crop structured to achieve a single bulk harvest. This is particularly true when producers plan to sell in distant markets and need larger volumes to achieve economies of scale in transport and marketing. In New Caledonia there has been some commercialisation and mechanisation of yam production (Gaillard and Manner 2010).

People's market participation and the degree of specialisation are probably best conceptualised as a continuum of production strategies between subsistence and dedicated cash cropping. Along this continuum are people who plant without thinking about selling in the market but sell small amounts of food when they need cash; people who plant more than they need with the idea of selling the surplus; people who plant both for their own subsistence and for the market;[18] and people who grow food only for the market and live entirely from the cash they earn. People at the subsistence end of this continuum tend to multicrop and have gardens in several different places (as insurance against diseases and other calamities), while people at the cash cropping end of the continuum are more likely to try to consolidate their planting and to monocrop.

The positions people occupy along this continuum influence both where they sell and the extent to which they think of land and labour as commodities. People selling food to get a small amount of cash are more likely to sell at a roadside or in small neighbourhood markets as the transport costs and gate fees required to sell in large urban markets diminish their returns. More commercialised producers are generally more concerned about legal title to the land and more likely to employ people, in large part because of the scale of production. Koczberski *et al.* (2012: 294) also highlight 'a tendency for greater use of pesticides on crops intended for local sale', which they suggest is likely associated with observed intensification of production.

Most rural households maintain diverse livelihoods, and there is often little commitment to produce regularly for the market. This creates resilience, although inconsistent supply has frustrated wholesale firms and direct bulk buyers (Benediktsson 2002). There are, however, examples where producers have heavily invested themselves in the domestic market. In the Bereina area in PNG's Central Province, for instance, the betel nut trade has proved so lucrative that people have been uninterested in export crops. There, following a period of exceptionally high prices, 'many families abandoned their subsistence food gardens in favour of flour, rice and tinned food imported from town' – although this was short lived (Mosko 2005: 19, 1999).

Market intermediaries

A striking characteristic of Melanesian marketplaces, compared with marketplaces elsewhere, is the high level of producer involvement and, at least until relatively recently, the limited development of wholesaling and trade intermediaries (middlemen), beyond a limited set of goods (Bourke 1986; Brookfield 1969; Busse 2014; T.S. Epstein 1982). Although intermediaries have grown in prominence in recent years, producer-sellers continue to dominate vendor numbers in small rural and roadside marketplaces and in many urban marketplaces (Anderson 2008; Busse 2014; McGregor 1999; UN Women 2009b; Vinning, Galgal and Luma 2008). The enduring image of marketplaces is one of rural, female, non-specialist vendors, each selling small quantities of several different items, say, a few hands of bananas, some bundled greens and several small heaps of sweet potato, which they grew themselves. For many marketplaces in the region, this remains an accurate image. Producer-selling is even prevalent in long-distance trading (Benediktsson 2002). The pervasiveness of producer-selling is explained by rural people's desire to visit town, a general distrust of intermediaries (including kin), and producers' reluctance to see others profit from *their* produce. Many people also see reselling as immoral because they do not value the practices of resellers as productive work (Busse 2014, 2019).

In PNG and the Solomon Islands, since the 1970s, intermediaries have multiplied, and entangled with this change has been an increase in higher-volume and longer-distance trading, greater specialisation and the development of more competitive trading practices. These developments have been most prominent in the betel nut trade (Sharp 2012, 2013, 2019). From producer to consumer, betel nut changes hands as many as five times. Intermediaries buy, then resell at different locations, at different times and at different scales. They do so in their own right and, significantly, as agents, buying and selling on behalf of others. Middlemen have also emerged to a lesser degree in long-distance trade of other commodities – notably coconuts and peanuts traded into the PNG highlands, and vegetables traded from the highlands to lowland marketplaces.

Intermediaries are most evident in the largest urban centres, where they have proliferated over the past decade. In Port Moresby, intermediaries now exceed producer-sellers in terms of both numbers of sellers and volumes traded. In two recent marketplace surveys, just over half of surveyed vendors said they were intermediaries and, more significantly, more than half had obtained their produce from other intermediaries (FPDA 2009; Wang 2014). The growth of reselling is also evident in Mount Hagen's main marketplace where resellers increased from 40% of vendors in 2007 to 80% in 2012 (Mullen *et al.* 2015). Resellers are also prominent, although not dominant, in Lae (Vinning *et al.* 2008), Kokopo, Rabaul and Kimbe.

Intermediaries have also emerged in the Solomon Islands. Wilson (1991), for example, found that between 27% and 50% of villagers on Guadalcanal's northern coast who supplied produce to Honiara had sold to an intermediary on their last market trip. The authors of a more recent study of Honiara's Central Market estimated that 'one third of vendors buy their goods from primary producers' (UN Women 2009b: 8). As in PNG, Solomon Islands market authorities frequently have negative views of intermediaries (Wilson 1991; UN Women 2009b). Indeed, in 2015 Honiara Central Market management moved to ban resellers in the marketplace

(Newter 2015). Port Vila's markets are overwhelmingly producer-seller markets, with reselling present although a very minor activity (UN Women 2009a).

The rise of intermediaries has been driven, in part, by unemployment among rapidly growing urban populations, particularly in the largest centres. This has encouraged a search for alternative livelihoods.[19] Reselling is also important for those with limited access to land for production, including both urban and rural migrants. Growing urban demand has also lengthened trade routes and increased volumes traded, which has led to more reselling.

These shifts in marketing are more developed, and potentially more significant, than the specialisation in domestic cash crop production discussed earlier. Greater market complexity and structural distance between producers and consumers is a significant development. Marketplaces have historically provided an important link between rural and urban areas. They still do, but the increase in intermediaries has meant the role of rural producers is changing. While intermediaries improve market efficiency by relieving producer-sellers from spending long periods of time transporting and marketing small amounts of food, some rural producers are being squeezed into less advantageous roles (Mosko 1999; Mullen *et al.* 2015). There is a need to understand the potential impact of this on rural production and livelihoods. If producers receive lower prices from intermediaries than they would selling themselves in the marketplace, producers either have to accept a cut to already low incomes, or expand or intensify production. Environmental and social limits constrain this option for some people. The growth of intermediaries is also likely to change gender relations. Currently, the overwhelming majority of fresh food and betel nut sellers in Melanesian marketplaces are women, and marketplaces have been important income sources for women (M. Allen 2015; Busse 2014; Overfield 1998; Sexton 1986). Many men also find it embarrassing to sell in marketplaces, but growth of intermediary trade and increased returns associated with marketplace selling compared to returns from export crops upon which men have traditionally concentrated has meant it is increasingly common for men to do so (Busse 2014; Jackson 1976).

Significance

Marketplaces are critical to livelihoods in Melanesia. They are a vital source of 'everyday' income, especially for women, and they redistribute wealth. They provide resilience during periods of depressed export cash crop earnings whether from slumps in global markets or declines in production, such as that which occurred in the wake of cocoa pod borer in East New Britain Province (Curry *et al.* 2012, 2015).

By far the greatest volume of domestic fresh food is sold through the region's marketplaces. Growers with good access to urban centres may also sell to wholesale depots, supermarkets, hotels, restaurants and snackbars, extractive resource camps, and directly to government institutions such as gaols, hospitals and schools, although doing so can be difficult and uncertain (Benediktsson 2002; FPDA 2009; Mael 2011). Marketplaces are also places where growers can sell fresh food not wanted by businesses and institutions, and they provide a buffer for people involved in contractual domestic cash cropping. A grower contracted to supply a particular amount of a crop can buy from the local marketplace to supplement shortfalls in their own production. Alternatively, the grower can sell produce that is surplus to their contract in the local market. Similarly, bulk buyers, such as stores and restaurants, can supplement their other purchases. While there have been efforts to create formal wholesale chains, particularly in the PNG highlands, wholesale buyers and growers have frequently had difficult relationships (Benediktsson 2002: 118–152).

While rural Melanesians collectively earn more money from export cash crops, more rural people earn cash from the sale of fresh food than from any other source. Participation is lowest among people in remote areas where access is poor, and in New Caledonia and the Torres Strait Islands where there are more lucrative income opportunities than agricultural production. By contrast, some urban residents resell fresh food or betel nut in a marketplace six or seven days a week as their primary source of income.

While the importance of domestic cash crops and marketplaces is evident by their omnipresence and the numbers of people involved, no systematic data is collected on the volumes or value of informally traded domestic commodities. These commodities are, for example, not included in reporting by the central banks of either PNG or the Solomon Islands. This contrasts with the extensive data on export crops. Marketplace surveys, however, indicate the economic significance of domestic markets. Kaiwei marketplace in Mount Hagen, for example, which is PNG's largest betel nut market (despite the fact that betel nut does not grow anywhere near Mount Hagen), had an estimated wholesale turnover of K35 million in betel nut and betel pepper in 2007 (Sharp 2012). Busse (2014) estimates that the Goroka fresh food market is worth an absolute minimum of K5 million annually, with the actual value probably three to four times that amount (see also Bourke 1986). Local markets are also critical to urban food security. In PNG and its capital, Port Moresby, imports are only a very small proportion of fresh food supply (Bourke *et al.* 2009: 130–137; FPDA 2009). The Solomon Islands, West Papua and Vanuatu are broadly similar. 'Imports' are more significant in New Caledonia and Torres Strait Islands.

In the following section, we examine how export cash cropping and domestic marketing have contributed to changes in social relations in Melanesia.

CHANGING SOCIAL RELATIONS

Cash crops and markets have had profound effects on social and economic relations in Melanesia. They have affected social relations of production and forms of exchange, and contributed to growing inequality. New economic forms have brought significant change, but they have been remade and reinterpreted in distinctively Melanesian ways that fit with Melanesian understandings and sociality. Existing resources (including social relationships and customary land) have been used in new ways and to new ends, just as new resources have been used to achieve old ends. Existing relations of power and authority have been destabilised, as new structures of inequality have been forged (Koczberski and Curry 2016; A. Strathern 1979).

It is important to remember that almost all rural Melanesians grow crops both for their own consumption and for sale. The extent of involvement in the cash economy differs between locations and among households in the same community. Few Melanesians are only subsistence farmers or only cash croppers. Nor is this a matter of an inevitable transition from subsistence agriculture to cash cropping. Instead, subsistence agriculture and growing crops for sale are strategies that are pursued simultaneously, or by the same household at different times, whether seasonally or over longer periods (Curry *et al.* 2012; Inu 2015: 132; Sharp 2012: 70–72).

At the same time that Melanesians have increased their participation in markets, they have also, for the most part, remained firmly entrenched in the 'gift economy' (Gregory 1982). They are engaged both in ongoing non-cash exchanges of food, betel nut and other gifts with members of their extended families and wider social relations, as well as in exchanges in which prices denominated in cash are critical. The two have also become particularly entangled as money has become an essential component of customary exchanges.

Social relations of production

While plantations and colonial expansion alienated land – particularly extreme in the case of New Caledonia (Connell 1987), and present plantation expansion in West Papua (Ito *et al.* 2014) – and drew people into capitalist labour relations, the dominance of smallholder agriculture has meant that most production, for both export and domestic markets, like subsistence agriculture, occurs on customary land with the household remaining the principal unit of production.

At the same time, production for subsistence, export markets and domestic markets, all compete for the same land and labour (Coelli and Fleming 2004). Export tree crops, such as coffee and cocoa, take years to mature and occupy land for long periods. This has encouraged more permanent cultivation and residence. Decisions about land use also have important gender dimensions, with men often more focused on cash cropping and women more invested in food production. Export cash crops are frequently planted in close proximity to people's houses, which increases the distances women walk to food gardens (Grossman 1984). In contrast, most domestic cash crops, with the exception of betel nut, do not permanently occupy land and therefore allow more flexible land use. Nevertheless, both export cash cropping and more commercially oriented production for domestic markets have contributed to changes in the way land is distributed and inherited, individualisation of land ownership, and informal transactions of land (Church 2016; Inu 2015: 89–91; Koczberski *et al.* 2012; Maetala 2008; Martin 2013; Mitchell 1982; Weightman 1989).

Throughout Melanesia the division of labour, including in agriculture, is gendered. Subsistence production including planting, weeding and harvesting in general falls more heavily upon women, with men most involved in clearing and fencing. Men often concentrate their efforts on export cash cropping, and tend to occupy the most profitable economic positions, although women are also frequently involved, and in some cases contribute more labour than men. This has increased women's workloads. Despite this, men's greater involvement in processing (e.g. in fermenting and drying of cocoa), transport and sale has meant that they have greater control of the proceeds of commodity sales. Men's control over land and men's ownership of resettlement blocks in oil palm estates, have also contributed to them asserting control over cash crop money (Curry *et al.* 2007: 48–51; Overfield 1998; Sexton 1986; A. Strathern 1979; West 2012: 124–126).

In contrast, women's role as subsistence producers and, by extension, producers and sellers in local marketplaces has meant that women exercise greater control over market earnings (Overfield 1998; Sexton 1986: 65–66; A. Strathern 1984: 79). Male involvement in the domestic market has tended to be more commercially oriented and on a larger scale (Benediktsson 2002; Inu 2015; Sexton 1986: 43).

As noted, Melanesian livelihood strategies emphasise diversification and flexibility over specialisation, and risk minimisation over maximising economic returns (Curry 2003; Brookfield 1969: 154). People highly value participation in cultural and social activities – such as mortuary rituals, attending church, participating in a communal work group slashing grass on the edge of the road, or socialising in the marketplace, and often there are strong social pressures to participate. Melanesians, then, have taken a fairly uncommitted approach to market participation – much to the frustration of export crop factories looking for consistent production to meet contracts, as well as bulk buyers of fresh produce seeking consistent supply. Smallholder cocoa and coffee growers have, for instance, adopted a casual 'foraging' approach to production which minimises capital and labour input (Curry *et al.* 2012, 2015; Finney 1973: 148). This has been a successful approach for smallholders, in part because it did not radically transform social relations. But in the case of the recent threat from cocoa pod borer, producers have had to make greater capital and labour investments, and adopt a more dedicated approach. While some producers have made this transition, the transformation of social relations that this requires may make this 'a bridge too far' for others (Curry *et al.* 2015).

Changes in the relations of production are evident among oil palm smallholders in West New Britain Province who have migrated from elsewhere in PNG and reside on blocks of land that are part of settlement schemes. Population pressure on these blocks, and ensuing tensions and conflict, have led to a shift in labour strategy (see Curry and Koczberski 2012; Koczberski and Curry 2016). Previously – in a system which more closely reflected pre-existing production and exchange relations – members of several households co-resident on a block worked cooperatively under the organisation of the block owner (usually an older man), who also distributed the returns based on social relationships. Recently there has been a strong shift to a new strategy where labour is instead coordinated at the household level, and co-resident households take turns harvesting and receiving payment. Under this arrangement there is less labour contribution from members of other households, and where this occurs it is frequently paid labour. Koczberski and Curry (2016) also argue that this represents a considerable reconfiguring of power and authority between fathers and their adult sons. Although this represents a particularly acute case, in which access to land is limited and livelihoods are heavily dependent on cash, the truncation of social networks and greater commodification of labour are more widely evident.

The extent to which a person produces primarily for sale often influences her or his relationships to labour and land. Producers who grow small amounts for sale can usually rely on the unpaid labour of household members and extended kin. Producers who are more commercially oriented and grow large amounts, by contrast, often also pay for labour, including from their own kin (Curry *et al.* 2019).

Social exchange relations

The new economic landscape of export cash crops and domestic marketplaces has compelled Melanesians to consider how they should transact with both kin and strangers.

One response to export cash cropping and the marketing of fresh food (alongside the general use of money more broadly) was an efflorescence of customary reciprocal exchanges (A. Strathern 1979; Akin and Robbins 1999). These public exchanges are frequently planned to coincide with seasonal coffee harvesting, oil palm payment cycles and peak betel nut buying periods – all times when people have more money (Boyd 2013: 318–319; Curry 2003; Sexton 1982: 181; Sharp 2012; A. Strathern 1984: 88).

New economic practices were also reimagined in ways that reinforced existing social relations. Among the Maring of PNG's Jiwaka Province, for example, for whom consuming food produced within a clan territory contributes to shared substance which binds people together, broader distribution of food through marketplaces was perceived as an expression of solidarity within a cluster of clans who consume one another's food (Maclean 1989).

At the same time, export cash crops and food marketing have contributed to destabilising existing power structures. Whereas in the past prominent men exercised considerable control over the distribution of wealth (such as pigs and shells), the new economic arena places wealth (money) in the hands of ordinary people, including women. This has led to questioning of existing structures of authority, for instance, as sons became more independent and no longer beholden to the demands of senior men (Koczberski and Curry 2016). Although this was a democratisation of wealth, control over money has been re-concentrated into new hands. While money is now a central component of ceremonial and everyday forms of gift exchange, it has also been a means for individuals to accumulate wealth and, for some, to distance themselves from redistributive demands in ways that were not possible in the past.

In Melanesian anthropology, social relations of exchange, and changes to such relations, have often been framed as a contrast between *gift exchange* – focused on creating and maintaining social relationships – and *commodity exchange* – in which the focus is on the relative value (price) of objects being exchanged (Gregory 1982; Carrier 1991; Healey 1990; M. Strathern 1988). In Melanesia this has often been presented as the introduction of an exogenous commodity economy, including export cash cropping and marketplaces, into a pre-existing gift economy. This simple dichotomy between gift and commodity exchanges is not an accurate representation of Melanesian economic systems, however, as both gift and commodity exchanges have long existed. Nevertheless, the fact that particular indigenous crops, such as sweet potato and betel nut which previously were only gifted, have become cash crops and are now transacted as commodities for money, is at times a source of tension (Mosko 2013: 172–173; Robbins and Akin 1999).

What distinguishes something as a gift or a commodity, then, is not the object but rather how the object is transacted and the intentions of the transactors. In some instances people in Melanesia themselves distinguish between this sense of gift and commodity. In the Goroka market, for example, it is not uncommon for women selling produce to add an extra item to the amount sold. When a customer buys, for example, three onions for K1, the onion seller often adds an extra onion. When asked, the onion seller insists that she is not discounting the price – i.e. she is not selling the onions for 25t each rather than 33t each. Instead, she sells three onions for K1 and gives an extra onion to thank the person for buying from her and to encourage them to buy from her again. In this example, objects from the same category (onions) are simultaneously used as commodities (three onions for K1) and gifts (the extra onion that establishes or maintains the social relationship between buyer and seller) (Busse 2019; also see Sharp 2016: 84–85).

Inequality and power

Changes to social relations of production and exchange have also contributed to inequality and changes in power relations. Differing abilities to participate in domestic and international markets have created unequal power relationships between groups at the core and on the periphery of the new economy, including as a result of the inflation of bridewealth and other customary exchanges. This can be seen in PNG in unequal relationships between Tolai and Baining, Melpa and neighbouring groups in the Jimi Valley, and Mekeo and their more isolated Fuyuge neighbours (Healey 1990; Hirsch 1990, 1994; Rohatynskyj 2001). In some cases, this has reconfigured relations between groups, but more often it has reinforced pre-existing inequalities (B. Allen *et al.* 2005).

In West Papua, indigenous Melanesians have become increasingly marginalised economically amid a growing immigrant population. Of the few economic spaces available to indigenous people, the sale of fresh food in marketplaces has been a particularly important source of income for indigenous women. These women, who mainly sell surplus produce from gardens oriented toward household consumption, have however had to compete with more commercially oriented migrant vendors. The marketplaces, as symbols of growing indigenous marginality, have become flash points for ethnic tensions (Boissiere and Purwanto 2006; Crocker 2011; McGibbon 2004: 47). In New Caledonia indigenous people are similarly disadvantaged relative to the settler population. Indigenous people were dispossessed of much of the best agricultural land during the early colonial period, and have largely found themselves marginal in employment, and relegated to a poorly remunerative agricultural sector (Connell 1987). In general, while export cash crops and especially local markets have given women greater access to money and wealth (Koczberski 2002; A. Strathern 1979), market participation has added to their work since they continue to be the primary producers of food for their families.

Similarly, young men have gained access to money and wealth through markets, and are less dependent on their fathers and other prominent men (e.g. to provide their bridewealth). But export cash crops have created inter-generational inequality and conflict. In parts of the PNG highlands, much of the land available for coffee was acquired by prominent men in the early period of coffee expansion, which created animosity among younger aspiring men who did not have the same opportunities as their fathers to make their fortune in coffee (A. Strathern and Stewart 1999: 178; for New Caledonia see Connell 1987: 180).

The permanence of export tree crops has tended to ossify previously more flexible systems of land access and distribution, which over time created inequalities between different groups (see Mitchell 1982). Informal land purchases, which have become common in areas with more commercial agriculture, also contribute to inequitable distribution of land within groups. In locations experiencing strong population pressure on land resources, longstanding power structures are being challenged. This is evident among migrants resident on Land Settlement Scheme oil palm blocks in

West New Britain Province. There, limited land resources has meant that older male block owners have in many cases struggled to secure land for their sons and contribute to their bridewealth. Faltering on these obligations has led younger men to challenge the authority of their fathers (Koczberski and Curry 2016).

The unevenness of opportunities to participate in markets throughout the region has also led to internal migration to locations with better income-earning opportunities (the same places with best access to services, including for health and education) (B. Allen *et al.* 2005). Although moving away from the most disadvantaged areas is seen as beneficial by migrants, there are inequalities between migrants and customary landowners. Migrants frequently find it difficult to access sufficient land to grow cash crops and are therefore forced to sell their labour.[20] The livelihood strategies, and social and economic status of migrants and landowners in a community are often quite different, and this impacts their potential to respond to environmental and economic shocks.

CONCLUSION: CONNECTIONS AND IMAGININGS

The production and selling of export cash crops created some of the earliest and most enduring connections between Melanesians and outsiders, and they have been, and continue to be, central to how Melanesians understand and imagine their place in the world. In this final section, we explore the ways in which export cash crops and domestic marketplaces connect people to other people and places, and in doing so shape that understanding and imagination.

Some of the earliest sustained interactions between Melanesians and Europeans, and between Melanesians from different parts of the region, took place on plantations. Plantation labourers were usually recruited from outside a plantation's immediate area,[21] and on plantations they were exposed to new things and new ideas, and began to imagine the new kinds of relationships that might be possible (LiPuma 1995; Bennett 1987).

In Melanesia, exchange is central to identity and relationships with others. People are created and sustained through exchange, and they remain entangled within networks of obligation and reciprocity. While discussions of markets in the West frequently background the role of social relations, Melanesians are certain that relationships are central. Sweet potatoes move from the PNG highlands to lowland towns along webs of social relations, and betel nut traders are 'compulsive network expansionists who constantly kindle new relationships' (Sharp 2012: 200). Through growing cash crops and participating in markets, Melanesians seek both wealth and social relationships, relationships which they understand as key to benefiting from new economic opportunities (Finney 1973).

At the same time that many Melanesians embrace connections with the world beyond their villages, districts and countries, different understandings of these relationships have frequently left Melanesians disappointed and Europeans perplexed. While European planters often saw transactions with Melanesians as the straightforward purchase of land and labour as commodities, Melanesians frequently saw those same transactions as part of ongoing and reciprocal relationships (N. Thomas 1991; West 2012: 84). Writing about coffee in one part of the PNG highlands, Finney (1973: 53) stated, 'Gorokans were generally disappointed with the returns from selling their land, labour, and produce and disillusioned with what they thought would be personal and reciprocal relationships between themselves and the settlers'. Similarly, Schwimmer (1973: 72–73) noted that

> the Orokaiva, lacking a long tradition of wage labour, regards his work as a long series of gifts to his employer enabling him to claim return gifts. He does not think of his wages as being a total discharge of his employer's obligations.

In some instances, differences among plantation labourers led to resentment and antagonism, but they also led to an awareness of the economic possibilities of cash crops. Groups closest to centres of colonial and plantation development, where alternative economic opportunities existed, quickly grew disinterested in contract labouring on plantations (A.L. Epstein 1969: 20; M. Strathern 1972: 33–39; Ward 1990). This disenchantment with working for others, together with growing desires for consumer goods, are part of the impetus toward small-scale cash cropping and domestic marketplaces. For most rural Melanesians, other options are limited.

Smallholders frequently have high expectations for their involvement in international commodity markets. Like Popina Mai in *Black Harvest*, they hope to become wealthy and are disappointed when they do not. While Melanesians earn money from export cash crops, the markets into which they sell are, as we saw earlier, far from transparent. Events which influence notoriously fickle international export crop prices occur in far off places of which Melanesians have little knowledge, and no control. Frosts in Brazil (Benediktsson 2002: 108; Townsend 1977: 419), cyclones in Madagascar (McGregor 2004; M. Allen *et al.* 2009: 374–378), and civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire (M. Allen *et al.* 2009: 320), have all resulted in significant fluctuations in the global markets for coffee, vanilla and cocoa, respectively. Unable to observe these events or exert any influence, export markets have an incorporeal quality for Melanesian producers. One of the appeals of the domestic markets for fresh food and betel nut is that the events that impact the market (dry weather, transport problems, undersupply and oversupply) are far more apparent to Melanesian producers and traders.

As Melanesians have become aware of the limits to their relationships with outsiders and their marginal position in international commodity chains, and at those times when export cash crops fail to deliver on smallholders' expectations and aspirations for development, they sometimes imagine the causes to lie in their own inferiority (Robbins and Wardlow 2005; Sahlins 2005). Smith (1994: 160) noted how villagers on Kairiru Island (East Sepik Province), even when aware of the factors beyond their control which shape global commodity markets (in their case copra), continue to attribute their failure to master the cash economy to their own moral shortcomings, lack of local unity and cooperation, and failure to develop the right types of relationships. By contrast, Kairiru villagers see (with rose tinted glasses) the success of Europeans, evidenced by their material wealth, to stem from their harmonious social relations which are reflected in their organisation and coordination of work practices which they have observed, including as plantation labourers. Similarly, Rollason (2014) has described the uncertainty and angst among Panapompom people of Milne Bay Province following the decline of the once thriving copra economy in the region, and with it the social and material relationships and connections that had been central to constructions of identity and place and their hopes for the future.

Oil palm, coffee, cocoa, copra, fresh food, betel nut and kava connect rural Melanesians with distant others through production and trade. But they also entangle Melanesians with other people and places by enabling consumption of rice, instant noodles, cola, lamb flaps, beer, betel nut, cigarettes, mobile phones, Toyotas, and other commodities (Errington *et al.* 2012; Foster 2002, 2008; Gewertz and Errington 2010; Marshall 1982, 2013; Sharp 2012; see also Hobbis, Gibson, both this volume). This consumption is also an important part of how Melanesians imagine themselves and their relationships with others both far away and closer to home. By consuming imported products and engaging in new consumer practices, Melanesians are able to imagine themselves as participants in the modern world. Such things also contribute to the construction of the backwardness of neighbouring groups, and members of their own communities, who are less able to consume (Foster 2002). Consumption has also become an important marker of emerging class differences in Melanesia (Cox 2011; Gewertz and Errington 1999; Martin 2013; see Gibson, this volume). In the context of desire for goods and declines in the real incomes of Melanesians caused by, until recently, an extended period of low commodity prices and rising costs of imported goods, it is increasingly apparent that consumption by rural Melanesian smallholders is very different from consumption practices of the emerging urban middle class and elites, European settler populations in New Caledonia or the Torres Strait Islands (Australia), or transmigrants in West Papua. For many rural Melanesians there is a growing divergence between their aspirations and their lived reality. What they can and cannot consume is a potent reminder of their place in domestic and global social hierarchies.

NOTES

1 The most obvious exceptions are the 'blackbirding' of island Melanesians to work on sugar plantations in Queensland in the late 1800s, the New Caledonian Kanak people's dispossession of land under early French colonialism, and state-based violence in West Papua (Connell 1987; Corris 1968; McGibbon 2004).

2 As with other aspects of Melanesia, it is difficult to generalise about political and other relationships between Melanesians and the wider world (see Hirsch and Rollason, this volume). For example, while PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu all became politically independent states between 1975 and 1980, West Papuans have been involved in a long-term and often bitter struggle for independence from Indonesia and have in this century been granted some very limited autonomy; the people of New Caledonia, which is currently a French overseas colony, have been preparing for self-government for almost 20 years (see Firth, this volume); and Torres Strait Islanders are Australian citizens.

3 In New Caledonia, among the Kanak population, production for own consumption remains significant, but commercial agriculture has declined in importance as it has failed to compete with alternative income sources, notably wage employment and welfare. (Connell 1987; Guyard *et al.* 2014). The economy of the Torres Strait (part of Australia) is dominated by private and public sector employment, government welfare, commercial fisheries, and subsistence fishing, hunting and gardening. There is no commercial agriculture of note and no significant local marketing. Some Papua New Guineans cross the border to nearby Boigu Island to sell produce (Arthur 1992; Busilacchi *et al.* 2013). Incomes for Melanesians in both New Caledonia and the Torres Strait are much higher than those of other Melanesians, but these groups remain significantly disadvantaged compared to the non-indigenous populations of New Caledonia and Australia.

4 Such stark differences between different parts of Melanesia sometimes have political consequences. M. Allen (2013 and this volume), for example, has argued that uneven development between northern Guadalcanal, and the Weather Coast and Malaita, was a major contributing factor to civil conflict in the Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003.

5 Rural livelihoods in Melanesia remain overwhelmingly agrarian. This is significantly different from other parts of the world including southern Africa and Southeast Asia where rural livelihoods have become increasingly non-agrarian (see Ferguson 2013; Rigg 2005).

6 Other export cash crops include rubber, tea, vanilla, balsa, pyrethrum and various spices. These are only significant in particular locations. Cotton, tobacco and kapok were introduced in the colonial period but failed to take off.

7 In recent years large areas of PNG have come under Special Agricultural and Business Leases, including for oil palm development. However, Nelson *et al*. (2014: 193) argue that 'most of the current oil palm proposals are unlikely to result in commercial plantations within the foreseeable future, but appear to be a means of circumventing restrictions on logging'. Recent expansion of oil palm in West Papua also appears to be associated with logging interests (Casson 1999).

8 In the Solomon Islands oil palm production under Solomon Islands Plantation Limited was solely estate production until it was closed due to political tensions in 1999. Smallholder production only began in 2007 following the recommencement of oil palm production and export in 2006, now under Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited (M. Allen 2012).

9 PNG data are from the 2011 census (Papua New Guinea National Statistics Office 2011); cf. M. Allen *et al*. 2009: 286). Solomon Islands data are from the 2009 census (Solomon Islands Government 2009), except oil palm which is based on number of smallholder blocks rather than households (A. Thomas 2014). The rural population figure used in calculations for the Solomon Islands included minor urban centres. Vanuatu data are from the 2009 census (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009), except fresh food which is from the 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2006: 133). Coffee figures combine *arabica* and *robusta* coffee.

10 Marketplace-like arrangements only occurred in a limited number of locations prior to the colonial period. For most of the region the character of contemporary fresh food markets is very different to the forms of exchange that prevailed in the pre-colonial era (see Keil 1977; Brookfield 1969).

11 For descriptions and discussions of the various types of marketplaces in PNG and the variety of social relations within them, see Busse and Sharp 2019, as well as the other articles in *Oceania 89(2)*.

12 Crocker (2011: 29) reports similar shambolic conditions in the marketplaces in which indigenous West Papuans sell food in Jayapura, West Papua.

13 Data for Kokopo (2014–15) were provided by the East New Britain Provincial Market Authority.

14 People in peri-urban areas are increasingly making decisions not only between export cash crops and domestic cash crops, but between market gardening and building houses for rent (or selling land to outsiders) (see Church 2016). As housing at the edges of urban areas becomes more valuable, people increasingly opt for real estate development. As a result, land is lost to agriculture, and production for urban markets is pushed farther and farther from the town or city (cf. Goddard, this volume).

15 This has, among other things, led to a limited number of cultivars – those that are higher yielding and favoured by consumers – dominating but not entirely displacing other cultivars (Benediktsson 2002: 250–251). See Gaillard and Manner (2010) on yams in New Caledonia.

16 Betel nut is chewed with betel pepper (*Piper betle*) and powdered lime (calcium hydroxide). The production and trade of these has grown alongside betel nut.

17 Based on fieldwork in Eastern Highlands Province of PNG, Overfield (1998: 60) observed that most food marketed was intentionally produced for the market. But he also points out that men and women in the same household sometimes viewed marketed items differently. While men were more likely to see marketed food as an accidental surplus, women were more likely to attribute it to planning. Overfield interprets this as negotiation, between men and women, over the use of a household's land and labour.

18 In New Caledonia, higher potential incomes from non-agricultural income sources means gardening is often focused on home consumption (Connell 1987; Gaillard and Manner 2010; Guyard *et al*. 2014).

19 Market surveys at Kimbe market in 2000 and 2008 show that urban residents have increased as a proportion of vendors (Koczberski *et al*. 2012: 291).

20 Even when land is accessed through informal arrangements with landowners, migrants often find it difficult to cultivate export tree crops because tree crops contribute to more individualised and permanent occupation of land. For these people, growing food to sell in local marketplaces is a particularly significant economic activity. This was evident for Malaitan migrants living on Guadalcanal (Lasaqa 1969) and for households on Land Settlement Scheme oil palm blocks at Hoskins in PNG (Koczberski and Curry 2005).

21 See Panoff (1979) for a discussion of labour relations on early European plantations until 1914. Under the Highlands Labour Scheme (1950–74), some 100,000 Highland men were temporarily recruited to work in lowland locations, mostly on plantations. This was the first time that large numbers of highlanders had sustained contact with people from elsewhere in PNG (Ward 1990: 291–292).

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