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LABOUR MOBILITY AND
ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN
SOLOMON ISLANDS:
LUSIM CHOISEUL, BAE KAM BAEK MOA?

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship of labour mobility and socio-economic transformation in the Solomon Islands, and proposes that one cannot be understood in isolation from the other. Explanation is pursued both at the levels of structure and of agency, and integration of these levels is attempted in some places. This is discussed in the first part of the thesis, within a general discussion of issues of theory and method.

The second part of the thesis deals with the structural parameters of labour mobility. Through the twentieth century, the institutions of government, mission and capitalist enterprise have been central in shaping the Solomon Islands social formation. The roles of these formal institutions with implications for labour mobility have ranged from purveyors of ideology to employers of labour. Another major element in the social formation is an original Melanesian mode of production which influences labour mobility through village-level institutions such as the land tenure system, kinship, and household operation. Labour circulation is a major factor in linking village and non-village institutions, and more abstractly in articulating two different modes of production.

The third part of the thesis considers the ways in which individual agency operates within structure. The data base are life histories and related information from the Mbambatana language group on the island of Choiseul. This is integrated with national, regional and village-level structural information. Education is important in the way it 'selects' individuals for certain kinds of employment. This selection process

occurs within the wage economy generally, but is further refined within institutions of employment. This results in labour mobility 'streams' which have identifiable characteristics related to gender, education, and employment type. Movements within each 'stream' have typical temporal and spatial characteristics. Patterns of labour mobility, especially sequence, are affected by gender and life cycle factors. For men and women the most critical changes take place in the 20s age span, but individual behaviour varies according to marriage and childrearing patterns.

From a village perspective, labour circulation is a logical response to the necessity of operating within two different economic systems typified by different modes of production. This process of articulation is manifest in other ways as well, and households or families may adopt different strategies in operating within two different systems. The particular strategy adopted depends on the labour power available, degree of access to land, and employment possibilities of individual members.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgments | xiii |
| Conventions and abbreviations | xvii |
| Part 1: Theory, setting and method | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1 MELANESIAN LABOUR MOBILITY: THE ISSUES | 2 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| Initial definitions | 4 |
| Incidence and nature of Melanesian labour mobility | 6 |
| Rates and selectivity | 7 |
| Circulation and the village as base | 10 |
| Explanations: individuals and social groups | 12 |
| Motivation | 13 |
| Life cycle | 15 |
| Family, household and kinship | 18 |
| Explanations: structural approaches | 22 |
| Social formation and modes of production | 25 |
| Articulation and labour mobility | 29 |
| Scales of analysis and levels of abstraction | 31 |
| The role of institutions | 35 |
| Capitalist enterprises and labour | 37 |
| Influence of government on labour mobility | 38 |
| Missions and their relationship to labour mobility | 40 |
| Education | 41 |
| Objectives and chapter outline | 43 |
| CHAPTER 2 PEOPLE, SAMPLE AND METHOD. | 48 |
| Census measures and the use of a selective sample | 48 |
| The island of Choiseul | 50 |
| The Mbambatana of Choiseul | 53 |
| Selection of samples | 55 |
| Village-level data collection | 60 |
| Life history data collection | 61 |
| Residence and life history analysis | 67 |
| Conclusion | 70 |
| Part 2: Structural context of labour mobility | 72 |
| CHAPTER 3 CAPITALISM, COLONIALISM AND CONVERSION: EVOLUTION OF A SOCIAL FORMATION. | 73 |
| Before the twentieth century: early Melanesian-European contact | 74 |
| Early capitalist institutions in the western Solomon Islands | 78 |
| The labour force before the Pacific War | 82 |
| Establishment of government in the western Solomons | 88 |
| Government as mediator and administrator | 89 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Government as employer | 93 |
| Missions in the western Solomons and the conversion of Choiseul | 94 |
| Establishment and consolidation | 94 |
| Education and industrial mission | 97 |
| Mission networks | 100 |
| Missions as employers | 101 |
| Disruption of the Pacific War | 102 |
| Sectoral evolution of the postwar economy | 104 |
| Destinations and origins of postwar labour force | 112 |
| Government employment | 117 |
| Capitalist enterprises and other employers | 125 |
| Role of government in regulation and planning | 128 |
| The education system | 135 |
| Conclusion | 140 |
| CHAPTER 4 INDEPENDENT SOLOMON ISLANDS: THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF LABOUR MOBILITY | 145 |
| Development directions and political objectives | 146 |
| The significance of 'the two economies' | 151 |
| The contemporary non-wage village economy | 153 |
| The contemporary wage labour force | 161 |
| Conclusion | 163 |
| CHAPTER 5 VILLAGE STRUCTURE AND LABOUR | 168 |
| Land: traditional and contemporary access | 170 |
| Leadership changes | 183 |
| The sexual division of labour: enduring and evolving roles | 186 |
| The original mode | 186 |
| Contemporary division of labour | 188 |
| Time allocation and division of labour | 191 |
| Household composition and labour requirements | 202 |
| Conclusion | 210 |
| Part 3: Mbambatana labour mobility: individuals, groups and structures | 213 |
| CHAPTER 6 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MBAMBATANA LABOUR MOBILITY. | 214 |
| Labour mobility within general movement streams | 215 |
| Summarising lifetime residence and employment experiences | 226 |
| How critical is a move? | 235 |
| Statistical significance of sample variation | 238 |
| Conclusion | 239 |
| CHAPTER 7 STRUCTURE, INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS | 243 |
| Early evolution of Mbambatana labour mobility | 243 |
| Postwar evolution of Mbambatana labour mobility | 254 |
| Education as a mechanism of selection | 259 |
| Education and cohorts with extensive work experience | 261 |
| Recent trends in education: women and younger men | 271 |
| Streaming of individuals through institutions | 273 |
| The mission streams | 279 |
| The government streams | 284 |
| Capitalist enterprise streams | 290 |
| Conclusion | 293 |

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 8 | GENDER, LIFE CYCLE AND FAMILY. | 297 |
| | Primary importance of gender and age | 298 |
| | Conjugal family: marriage and childrearing | 310 |
| | Age at Marriage | 310 |
| | Family size and spacing | 315 |
| | Movement of families | 320 |
| | Extended family: the role of kinship | 323 |
| | Conclusion | 325 |
| CHAPTER 9 | LABOUR MOBILITY FROM A VILLAGE PERSPECTIVE | 329 |
| | Family and Household strategies | 329 |
| | Household differentiation: possessions, incomes, expenditure | 337 |
| | Household possessions | 337 |
| | Range and sources of income | 339 |
| | Types of expenditure | 344 |
| | The sources of differentiation | 347 |
| | Remittances and other tangible effects of labour migration . | 349 |
| | Village capitalism: Choiseul-based companies | 355 |
| | Village/non-village linkages: less tangible aspects of labour mobility | 364 |
| | Conclusion | 370 |
| Part 4: | Conclusion | 373 |
| CHAPTER 10 | CONCLUSION. | 374 |
| Appendix A: | SOLOMON ISLANDS MOBILITY DATA | 387 |
| Appendix B: | INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONNAIRES | 395 |
| Appendix C: | LIFE HISTORY DATA PROCESSING | 403 |
| Appendix D: | SEASONALITY OF COPRA PRODUCTION | 405 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | | 407 |

TABLES

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 1.1 | Levels of abstraction and terms used in this study | 34 |
| 3.1 | Number of indentures by island of origin, 1915-1940 | 87 |
| 3.2 | Wage occupations of Solomon Islanders 1931 | 88 |
| 3.3 | Average quinquennial copra prices 1952-1981 | 106 |
| 3.4 | Sectoral distribution of wage employment 1951-1971 | 110 |
| 3.5 | Distribution of wage employment by major sectors and institutions 1971-1981 | 111 |
| 3.6 | Wage and salary employment by District/Province 1961-1981 . | 114 |
| 3.7 | Wage labour force participation rates by area, 1961-1981 . . | 116 |
| 3.8 | Wage/salary participation rates 1976, by island and Council Area | 118 |
| 3.9 | Location of government establishment employees 1957, 1966, 1976 | 119 |
| 3.10 | Origins and stations of government establishment workers, 1966 and 1976 | 120 |
| 3.11 | Regional representation in government establishment jobs relative to population | 121 |
| 3.12 | Establishment positions occupied 1957, 1966, 1976 by department | 123 |
| 3.13 | Government establishment: mean duration of continuous service by cohort | 124 |
| 3.14 | Proportions of the population reaching particular educational levels, 1976 | 140 |
| 4.1 | Solomon Islands population, proportions urban and rural, 1970-1981 | 152 |
| 4.2 | Sources of gross domestic product 1970-1983 | 154 |
| 4.3 | Per capita copra production of Solomon Islanders, 1970-1984 | 158 |
| 4.4 | Changes in copra price compared to price index 1970-1984 . . | 159 |
| 4.5 | Estimated copra income on Choiseul 1970-1984 | 160 |
| 4.6 | Participation rate and composition of labour force 1970-1985 | 162 |
| 4.7 | Wage levels and wage gaps 1970-1982 | 164 |
| 5.1 | Sepa households: strength and origin of land use rights . . | 179 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 5.2 | Steps in Mbambatana gardening cycle | 190 |
| 5.3 | Time allocation in Sepa: average number of hours spent in each activity | 193 |
| 5.4 | Cash activities of single and married men, Solomon Islands microstudies | 197 |
| 5.5 | Labour units for age-sex groups according to broad activity categories, Sepa village | 199 |
| 6.1 | Choiseul residence: sample and census compared | 218 |
| 6.2 | Lifetime residence of Mbambatana sample | 220 |
| 6.3 | Primary and secondary stated reasons for movement | 222 |
| 6.4 | Mbambatana sample: Number and types of moves | 223 |
| 6.5 | Mean number of moves by sex and large cohorts | 224 |
| 6.6 | Cumulative residence of sample by place type | 229 |
| 6.7 | Number in sample who ever had a full-time job and mean time in employment | 233 |
| 6.8 | Determining how critical a move or change is | 236 |
| 6.9 | Examples of changes or moves and associated critical scores | 237 |
| 6.10 | Analysis of variance of indicators by personal variables: males born 1936-66 | 240 |
| 6.11 | Analysis of variance of indicators by employment-related variables: males born 1936-66 | 241 |
| 7.1 | Critical scores by gender and large cohorts | 255 |
| 7.2 | Postwar sectoral and institutional involvement of sample . . | 259 |
| 7.3 | Level of education compared to work and move indicators . . | 260 |
| 7.4 | Labour mobility indicators by education | 269 |
| 7.5 | Characteristics of first jobs according to institution 1951-1981 | 276 |
| 7.6 | Sample groupings derived from educational levels and institutions of employment | 278 |
| 7.7 | Streams identified from Mbambatana work histories | 280 |
| 8.1 | Mean age at marriage, Choiseul Methodists and sample | 314 |
| 8.2 | Change of occupation at family life cycle stages for men . . | 319 |
| 8.3 | Job duration at family life stages for men | 319 |
| 9.1 | Sepa households: Ownership of indicator items | 339 |

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 9.2 | Sepa households: Summary income statistics | 340 |
| 9.3 | Sepa households: Sources of Income | 341 |
| 9.4 | Sepa households: Summary expenditure statistics | 345 |
| 9.5 | Sepa Households: Types of expenditure | 345 |
| 9.6 | Sepa households ranked by income: comparison with individual sources | 350 |
| 9.7 | Village-resident sample according to time since last visit to Gizo and/or Honiara (if ever) | 366 |
| 9.8 | Reasons for most recent visit to Gizo and/or Honiara by village residents | 367 |
| 9.9 | Opinions on town versus village living | 368 |

FIGURES

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 2.1 | Choiseul villages according to size | 52 |
| 2.2 | Choiseul languages, administrative wards and distribution of Mbambatana speakers, 1976 | 56 |
| 2.3 | Mbambatana villages and communities | 58 |
| 2.4 | Age-sex structure of household sample 1981 compared to that of Ward 18, 1976 | 62 |
| 2.5 | Age-sex structure of individual sample 1981, compared to that of all Mbambatana speakers 1976 | 64 |
| 3.1 | Annual labour recruitment and number of indentures employed, Solomon Islands 1912-1940 | 84 |
| 3.2 | Growth of missions on Choiseul 1905-1952 | 96 |
| 3.3 | Plantation and smallholder copra production, Solomon Islands 1946-1984 | 107 |
| 3.4 | Relative changes in copra price and labouring wage 1952-1981 | 108 |
| 3.5 | Solomon Islands major exports 1960-1985, by value and proportion of total | 133 |
| 3.6 | Regional divergences from national average levels of education 1976 | 141 |
| 5.1 | Areas in coconuts and gardens near Sepa, 1979 | 172 |
| 5.2 | Time spent in cash-related activities, from Solomon Islands microstudies | 196 |
| 5.3 | Sepa households: relationships of subsistence gardening effort and number of labour units | 207 |
| 6.1 | Proportions of Solomon Islands language groups absent from home islands 1976 | 217 |
| 6.2 | Mbambatana sample: proportion of lifetimes spent in different residence types by employment status | 231 |
| 6.3 | Sample: involvement in wage employment by gender and cohort | 234 |
| 7.1 | Destination of work moves of sample before July 1951 | 245 |
| 7.2 | Mixed institutional work paths started before Pacific War | 248 |
| 7.3 | Early work paths of government workers | 249 |
| 7.4 | Work paths of mission village stream | 251 |
| 7.5 | Work paths during Pacific War | 252 |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 7.6 | Destination of sample work moves 1951-1966 | 256 |
| 7.7 | Destination of sample work moves 1966-1981 | 257 |
| 7.8 | Residence and employment of men born 1936-1941, by education | 263 |
| 7.9 | Residence and employment of men born 1941-1946, with different levels of education | 265 |
| 7.10 | Residence and employment of men born 1946-1951 with different levels of education | 266 |
| 7.11 | Residence and employment of men with secondary education, born 1936-1951 | 267 |
| 7.12 | Residence and employment of women with intermediate education, born 1936-1951 | 272 |
| 7.13 | Residence and employment of men born 1951-1956 | 274 |
| 7.14 | Typical work paths in mission mover stream | 281 |
| 7.15 | Typical work paths in government labour and lower establishment | 286 |
| 7.16 | Typical work paths in specialised government establishment stream | 289 |
| 7.17 | Typical work paths in private company streams | 292 |
| 8.1 | Residence type of sample males by age | 300 |
| 8.2 | Activity and employment institution of sample males by age . | 301 |
| 8.3 | Criticality of employment change by age of sample males . . | 303 |
| 8.4 | Residence type of sample females by age | 304 |
| 8.5 | Activity and employment institution of sample females by age | 305 |
| 8.6 | Criticality of employment change by age of sample females . | 307 |
| 8.7 | Timing of first job and marriage for sample females | 312 |
| 8.8 | Timing of first job and marriage for sample males | 313 |
| 8.9 | Birth spacing of women in Mbambatana sample | 317 |
| 8.10 | Example of male residence and employment patterns according to family size | 321 |
| 9.1 | Example of relay migration of siblings | 332 |
| 9.2 | Example of relay migration | 333 |
| 9.3 | Example of siblings early in relay cycle | 335 |
| 9.4 | Lorenz curve comparison of village and town income | |

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| | distribution | 342 |
| 9.5 | Gizo enterprises by ownership, 1981 | 356 |
| 10.1 | Structures and processes related to labour mobility | 377 |

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CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The orthography used in this thesis is one standardised for all Solomon Islands languages as suggested by Hackman (1968) and used in most government publications. The most conspicuous example of this is the word 'Mbambatana' which is spelled 'Babatana' by the people who belong to that group. The exceptions to this convention are the names of people which have been left in their original form, and in the discussion of land and agriculture, words are written as they were provided by informants. Unfortunately, even in these cases modern technology has not allowed a proper representation of some of the letters used by Mbambatana writers. For example, o is shown here as o and n as n. Mbambatana terms used in this study came either from informants, or from the unpublished dictionary compiled by Sister Lucy Money.

The term 'Solomon Islands' is used to describe the area now part of the country by that name (thus excluding Bougainville and Buka), for all historical periods. However, 'British Solomon Islands Protectorate' (BSIP) is used in some contexts, especially when the reference is to government administration. The 'western Solomons' is the area which was once the 'Western District', then 'Western Council Area' and now the 'Western Province'.

Abbreviations are usually explained in the text. Common ones are:

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| BSIP | British Solomon Islands Protectorate |
| WPHC | Western Pacific High Commission |
| SDA | Seventh Day Adventist |
| LPT | Lever's Pacific Timbers |
| BP | Burns Philp |
| SILC | Solomon Islands Labour Corps. |