NZ Geographer 24, 1 (1968) 50-60

Indigenous Trading in Fiji and Tonga: A Study of Changing Patterns

A. D. COUPER

THE EUROPEAN INVASION of the Pacific which took place more than 150 years ago brought with it new techniques, diseases, and new religious concepts.[1] These caused widespread changes in island society and, for a time, threatened the very existence of some island peoples. But the islanders and many of their institutions and traditions proved to be remarkably resilient. Some traditions which have survived from pre-European times now operate to the detriment of economic progress, others have been adapted to the new economic environment. Examples of the former may be found in Fijian *kerekere*, a system of exchange based on soliciting gifts from relatives which 'puts a premium on laziness and is often a serious or even disasterous drain on those Fijians who are endeavouring to accumulate and invest.'[2] There are many traditional exchanges in the Pacific Islands which fall into this category; on the other hand the types of trading systems which are discussed in this paper appear to have more positive roles in the present stages of economic development in Fiji and Tonga.

It is proposed to trace historically, and very briefly, some of the changes which have come about in the trading system known as *solevu* in Fiji, and to make references to its Tongan counterpart the *katoanga*. Also discussed are examples of these as they now operate both within the archipelagos, and between Fiji and Tonga in particular. Finally, on the basis of somewhat scanty data, an attempt is made to support the hypothesis that these particular modes of exchange have undergone certain fundamental changes in such a way as to make them useful appendages to commercial trade.

* Dr Couper is Lecturer in Geography at the University of Durham.

1 The examples of modern non-commercial trade detailed in this paper were recorded during a study of commercial trade in the Pacific Islands. Some of the examples were followed up by interviewing participants from both sides of the exchanges, but as their statements as to the precise quantities of goods exchanged seldom tallied, the figures given in this paper should be treated as rough estimates. In one other case where it was possible to consult the official papers of the court of enquiry into the loss of a vessel engaged on a *solevu*, as well as to interview people connected with it, the quantities cited are fairly accurate.

2 O. H. K. Spate: *The Fijian People: Economic Problems and Prospects*, Legislative Council of Fiji. Council Paper 13/1959, paragraphs 142–145.

EARLY PATTERNS OF INDIGENOUS TRADE

The Europeans who first came to the Central Pacific found established patterns of trade linking the archipelagos of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. Within each of these island groups were complex local trading chains which operated through intermediate villages and even through professional middlemen. Commander Wilkes in 1841, for example, describes communities of trading specialists in Fiji who had no fixed place of residence.[3] The missionary Thomas Williams also remarked on these seafaring 'Levukians', and he noted the important role of women as traders and as ordinary seamen.[4] There were in addition recognised native market places in Fiji at which inland and coastal peoples could meet for the exchange of fish, salt and vegetables.[5]

European travellers also described Tongan traders who voyaged between Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The Tongans came to Fiji to obtain canoes, spars, sailmats, pottery, mosquito curtains and scarlet bird feathers. They traded the latter in Samoa for the fine Samoan mats which were important in Tongan ceremonies.[6] Erskine noted in 1830 that there were in Tonga several natives from Eromanga in the New Hebrides, whom, he said, had been brought to Tonga by Tongan trading canoes.[7]

Many of these early patterns of trade were geographically soundly based. In Fiji, on places such as Kabara Island rich in hardwood (*Intsia bijuga*), were to be found carvers of wooden *kava* bowls and canoe builders, while on some of the low dry islands with poor soils the heavy *nokonoko* wood (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) grew and was utilised for the making of war clubs.[8] The best matting sails and other products of pandanus came also from the drier islands. Pottery was made from high island clays and salt was obtained from the tidal mangrove flats along the coastlines of some of the main islands. A few of the volcanic islands were also known as great yam and taro producers. Barkcloth appears to have been made in many parts of Fiji and Tonga, but in this activity there were regional specialists in colour and design, and mats also had certain regional characteristics of size, thickness, and function. Some of the most important links appear to have been between the rich food-growing islands and the less fertile areas where people specialised in the production of craft goods; between regions which were inadequately endowed with timber for canoes and those which had both the timber and craftsmen, and between the sea and land peoples.

3 C. Wilkes: *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, 1852, p. 362.
4 T. Williams: *Fiji and the Fijians*, London, 1870, p. 40.
5 *Report of the Commission into the Decrease of the Native Population*, Government Printer, Suva, 1896, paragraph 172.
6 Williams: *Fiji and the Fijians*, p. 42.
7 J. E. Erskine: *Journal of a Cruise Among the Islands of the Western Pacific*, London, 1853, p. 143.
8 B. Seeman: *An Account of a Government Mission to the Vitian or Fijian Islands 1860–61*, London, 1862, p. 362.

Local specialisations for indigenous trade were not, however, simply direct responses to the distribution of resources. Highly localised village products and crafts appear, in fact, to have been deliberately preserved, thereby giving any one community opportunities to enter into trade relations with many places throughout the immediate archipelagos and beyond. Exchanges were motivated by a complexity of utilitarianism, kinship ties and ceremony. It was the obligations of kinship which guided many of the channels of trade, and it was the ceremonial presentation and redistribution of goods which acted as the main distributories amongst the people.

There are a few notable studies of these relationships. Buell Quain describes how the village of Nakoroko in Vanua Levu specialised in mat-making at the expense of all else, and would depend on trade to maintain a balanced supply of goods.[9] Hocart, on the other hand, has traced the complicated flow of goods through the northern areas of Fiji. The people of Vuna, for example, concentrated on the production of lamp-black. They would trade this for nets made in parts of Taveuni and exchange nets for barkcloth from Lau.[10] Thomson also cites the special trading relationships of the people of Fulaga and Ogea in Southern Lau (who were dependent on the North for food) through the island of Moce which acted as an entrepôt at the junction of sea routes.[11] Finally, in a more recent study of Moala, Sahlins makes a brilliant analysis of the interaction of ecology, kinship, and the ethics of inter-island trade.[12] The latter were such that a community which was called upon to trade with another could not readily refuse, so that at times of natural catastrophe, such as hurricanes or droughts, islanders were able to trade in distant regions, exchanging their craft products for foodstuffs. Such mutual insurances were obviously factors in the maintenance of peace between related communities in pre-European times.

It was the *solevu* in Fiji which appears to have been one of the most important media of indigenous trade. The main characteristics of a *solevu* are the prior arrangement by one related group to visit another, the preparation of the goods to be exchanged over a period of months or even years, the visit, the ceremonial exchange of gifts (status being accorded to the most generous) and the accompanying feast and dances. Jackson describes a typical *solevu* at Nateva in the 1850s:

> The orator, having solicited silence, then said he was extremely happy to see them once more collected in such an amicable party, and hoped that that day's meeting would be the means of cementing them together in eternal friendship. If it did not prove as he wished, it was not the fault of Nateva, because, he remarked, there could be no deception on their side, or they never would have taken the trouble to work day and night, as it were, to make cloth to oblige their neighbours, and they had even gone so far as to strip themselves naked for the sake of exemplifying their good will and desire of peace . . .
>
> Various speeches of this kind were made, and whales' teeth again and again presented backwards and forwards to each other . . .
>
> They then retired from the square to a long receiving house built for the purpose of accommodating visitors, where the inhabitants supplied them with provisions of the best quality the country afforded, and in great quantity. They accepted the supplies very thankfully, and, in proof of their gratitude, they all went out in front of the heaps of provisions and danced a very merry war-dance, making the air fairly ring again with the clapping of hands, clashing of arms, beating of bamboo, etc.[13]

[9] B. Quain: *Fijian Village*, Chicago, 1948, p. 173.
[10] A. M. Hocart: *Lau Islands, Fiji*, Bernice Bishop Museum Bulletin 62/1929, p. 290.
[11] L. Thomson: *Southern Lau: An Ethnography*, Bernice Bishop Museum Bulletin 162/1949, p. 211.
[12] M. D. Sahlins: *Moala: Culture and Environment on a Fijian Island*, Ann Arbor, 1962, p. 30.

THE EUROPEAN IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS TRADE

The establishment of European political and economic hegemony over the islands did not stifle indigenous trade, at least not in Fiji. Sir Arthur Gordon, the first governor of that colony, favoured its continuation on the grounds that:

> it would form a substitute for commerce until the natives should become better accustomed to money as a medium of exchange, and it was inseparable from the quasi-commercial institutions in which the race had been reared. It was felt that without the *solevu*, the manufacture of native commodities such as mats, pottery, salt, native cloth, sinnet, wooden bowls, etc. would fall into disuse . . .[14]

What appears to have taken place by the last quarter of the nineteenth century is, in fact, an increase in the number and frequency of these exchanges. The observation by Basil Thomson that the *solevu* was in decay may have been a little premature, although his prediction of a change in its structure was accurate enough. Thomson wrote:

> With the arrival of the trader who, all unconsciously, was set to teach the natives an entirely new system of trade based on currency, all need for the *solevu* vanished, and each native product immediately acquired a recognised place in the scale of values, either in money or calico.[15]

One of the factors which could have facilitated an actual increase in *solevu* during the nineteenth century was the acquisition of European-type boats which people wanted to display in the archipelago. The Commissioners of 1896 were quite certain that there was at that time more travelling about in boats to *solevu*, and that the *solevus* were conducted 'on a far larger scale and with greater frequency, than in the period before Cession.'[16]

[13] Erskine: *Journal of a Cruise Among the Islands of the Western Pacific*, p. 269.
[14] *Report of the Commission into the Decrease of the Native Population*, paragraph 59.
[15] B. Thomson: *A Study of the Decay of Custom*, London, 1908, p. 286.
[16] *Report of the Commission into the Decrease of the Native Population*, paragraphs 48 and 59.

By the 1890s *solevus* had become highly ostentatious and appear to have lost some of their useful functions. It was, for example, usual for quite enormous *solevus* to take place at the annual meetings of the Provincial Councils where the chiefs 'obtained the principal share of the property without being required to furnish an equivalent.'[17] These exchanges were abolished by the end of the century. It also seems to have become the practice for all *solevus* to be restricted by Government whenever possible. The Western Provincial Council records of 1899, for example, state that 100 people were leaving for the Yasawa Islands on a *solevu* but they were restricted to a stay of four days only, otherwise they would have left a famine behind them.[18]

With the decline in the numbers of Fijian owned vessels from about 1912 onwards it also became more difficult (but not impossible) for some island communities to *solevu*. The exchanges could now be arranged by letter without a preliminary visit, although this was not precluded, and as the appointed date approached people could travel on commercial trading ships or, alternatively, a small cutter would be chartered for the voyage. It seems that by the early twentieth century the *solevu* was showing many new features. The depression years of the 1930s, however, brought about a revival of canoe building, local specialisations, and traditional trading relationships, especially in Southern Lau where the cash sector of the economy had virtually disappeared.[19] This was a brief revival, and up to the beginning of the Second World War it continued to be the practice to charter small commercial cutters in order to *solevu*, or to board an itinerant trading schooner which made the rounds of the islands. All of these vessels were plentiful and relatively cheap in this period.

After the Second World War it became more difficult to charter vessels for indigenous trading, and Fijian-owned island schooners had disappeared, or had deteriorated to a dangerous degree. Commercial shipping costs had also risen and trading vessels tended to operate between the port of Suva and limited island hinterlands. As a result, widely dispersed islands lost direct contact with each other, and people who wished to move from one part of the group to another found they had frequently to come first to Suva and wait until a suitable passage could be obtained.[20] Suva by then contained a relatively high proportion of wage-earning Fijians drawn from every part of Fiji,[21] and both within the town and in suburban settlements, Fijian household groupings had emerged according to the places of origin of the people.[22] Kinship links between Fijians of island origin could thus often be more easily maintained in urban communities than they could in the outer islands.

Corresponding to the changes in inter-island communication facilities, and in the distribution of population, came distinctive changes in the channels of non-commercial trade. The most frequent *solevus* in recent years appear to have been between people living in Suva and those in the islands. This new relationship between urban residents and related hinterland communities is also true of non-commercial trading patterns in Western Fiji and in Tonga. Many of the articles of trade

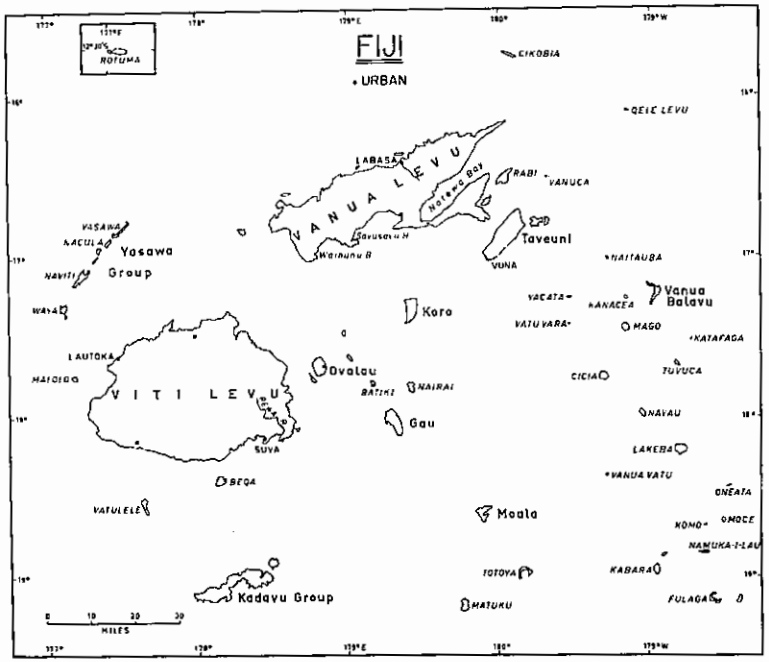

Fig. 1. The Fiji Islands

have also changed, for nowadays it is common for one party in the exchange to present European goods and cash, receiving island foodstuffs and handicrafts in return. Nevertheless the original non-monetary morality and ceremonial expressions of goodwill are still dominant in these exchanges.

EXAMPLES OF THE MODERN SOLEVU

The first *solevu* recorded during visits to Fiji in 1963 and 1964, took place on 10 March 1963. On the latter date 24 people from Lautoka

[17] *ibid*, paragraph 59.

[18] *Western Provincial Council Report*, Suva, 1899, p.71.

[19] Thomson: *Southern Lau: An Ethnography*, pp. 93-94.

[20] A. D. Couper: *The Island Trade: An Analysis of the Environment and Operation of Seaborne Trade Among Three Island Groups in the Pacific*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1967, pp. 93-94 and pp. 126-130.

[21] J. S. Whitelaw: *People, Land and Government in Suva, Fiji*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1966, pp. 59-60.

[22] R. R. Nayacakalou: *Urban Fijians in Suva*, in *Pacific Port Towns and Cities*, (A. Spochr, ed.), p. 36.

left the port for an exchange with the people of Yaqeta Island in the Yasawas. With them they took 24 four-gallon drums of kerosene and 18 baskets of salt, the latter having been evaporated from sea water on the tidal mangrove flats to the north of Lautoka.[23] The people said they were to exchange these things for mats and foodstuffs at Yaqeta, but the return of the party was not recorded.

A second example is afforded by a *solevu* between Fijians from Suva and the suburbs of Nabua, Kaunikuila, Rawai, Lami and Vatuwaqa (including at least one person from the goldmines at Vatukoula) on the one hand, and the people of Waitoga village on the island of Nairai on the other. The exchange was made during Easter weekend 1964. The *solevu* was organised by Tamalesi Kovea of Vatuwaqa who was related to the people of Waitoga. When she received the request Tamalesi contacted other women in Suva, and from December 1963 the women met once each month to discuss arrangements. One of the main purposes behind the request from Waitoga villagers was the need for money in order to repair their church.

It was decided that a party of about 28 Suva people should go to Nairai Island, and, according to a Nabua woman, each person would contribute £F21 ($A27.30), a drum of kerosene, a bolt of material and two whales' teeth, but the contributions seem to have varied between individuals even within the same group. The owner of the cutter *Yacomai* was approached with a view to chartering the vessel. According to the owner he declined as about 40 people were by then involved and this was more than he could take. The cutter *Kadavulevu* was obtained, and on the night of 26 March the *solevu* party with their articles of trade began to arrive by taxis at Suva wharf. There were over 90 people on board by the time the vessel sailed, but some, it appears, had not paid fares or made *solevu* contributions. The cargo included drums of kerosene, bales of cloth, furniture, single and double beds, and mats. In addition, about $A800 in cash was taken for the church at Waitoga village.

The *Kadavulevu* anchored off Waitoga on the morning of 27 March. The people and crew disembarked and were shown into houses specially reserved for them. They were served a meal and then the visitors presented their *solevu* and the money for the church. A *magiti* was held followed by a *meke* and dances. The following day the Waitoga people arranged their *solevu* in several piles about five feet high. These comprised 250 mats, two to three tons of yams, three to four tons of taro, 800 husked and unhusked coconuts, three sacks of tapioca, eight bunches of bananas, six bundles of *voivoi*, or *Pandanus canicosus*, which is used in mat making, 150 bottles of coconut oil, live pigs and live chickens. The *solevu* was presented and loaded on board the *Kadavulevu*. Another feast was held followed by a *meke* and dances, then throughout the rest of the night until Sunday morning the men drank *yaqona* (Piper methysticum).

The *Kadavulevu* sailed from Nairai at 2 p.m. on Sunday, 29th March with the *solevu* cargo in the hold, stocks of cooked foods for consumption during the voyage, and about 100 people. The vessel was grossly overloaded and capsized and sank in the Koro Seas about 11 p.m. that night; only two women and one young boy survived. It is not certain how many of the people on the *solevu* were actually related but one woman could name 40 others whom she knew well.

There was another *solevu* recorded in March of that year. On this occasion it was between the people of Naidi village, near the small urban centre of Savasuva on Vanua Levu, and the people of Nabuna village on Koro Island. It had been arranged by letter through a woman of Nabuna who was married at Naidi. A cutter was chartered and the party from Naidi took dinner services and large plates to Koro in exchange for *voivoi*.

On 15 August 1964 a Women's Association (*Sogosogo Vakamarama*) of Lautoka came to Koro Island to take part in a *solevu* for which they had been preparing for about ten months. They are reported as having brought 40 tins of biscuits, 16 bags of flour, 16 bags of sugar, 40 five gallon drums of kerosene and 20 yards of material. On the return trip they had 120 mats, 120 wooden basins for yaqona, cloth made from paper mulberry bark, and many whales' teeth.

A *solevu* was also made to Nacamaki village on Koro Island on 8 September 1964 by ten women who were wives of policemen in Suva. They brought dressing tables, chairs, crockery and rice. The women spent two weeks at Nacamaki and returned to Suva with mats, *voivoi*, coconut oil, taro and pigs.

Finally it was recorded at Suva that the schooner *Yatu Lau* sailed for Lakeba Island on 15 October 1964 with 48 people on board. They were returning to their home island after visiting relatives at the Vatukoula gold mines in northern Viti Levu. There they presented mats, paper mulberry bark cloth, taro, yams and coconut oil, for which they received money in exchange. This they used to purchase in Suva furniture, (beds, meat safes, chairs, dressing tables), kerosene, and cloth.

No information was recorded of *solevu* directly between any of the outer islands during 1963–64, but villagers said this still very occasionally took place. In particular, people on Koro Island reported that a Fijian owned boat sometimes came from Nairai Island to exchange for *voivoi*. One exchange between people on the same island was observed, however, in November 1964, of a group of women who had travelled

[23] Salt is a traditional item of ceremonial exchange in Fiji. W. L. Parham: 'Salt Making by Fijians', *Fiji Agricultural Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1942, describes the tracks through the interior of Viti Levu from the 'dry' to the 'wet' sides which have been kept open especially by the transport of salt from the Sigatoka and Nadi coasts to the Wainimala and Waidina Rivers.

to Namuca from Nacamaki village and had brought with them soap and cloth in order to get *voivoi*.

It is impossible to state whether the examples of the modern *solevu* recorded here represent the whole or merely a part of the non-commercial trading system which operated in Fiji during 1963-64. However, it appears significant that, despite the questioning of people on several of the outer islands, there was no indication of recent *solevu* between islands which followed the old traditional patterns. It is suggested at this point that non-commercial channels of trade have been radically altered. Kinship may continue to guide these channels but it seems to be the inter-related communities in the port towns which act as the foci of indigenous trade, but before further conclusions are suggested the situation in Tonga will be outlined.

THE TONGAN KATOANGA

As in Fiji, regional specialisations in Tonga form a traditional and ecological basis for exchange, but European goods may not enter so markedly into Tongan exchange as they do in Fiji. The large island of Tongatapu offers favourable growing conditions for the paper mulberry from which *tapa* or Tongan bark cloth is made. The small low coral islands of Ha'apai are ideal for growing pandanus used in the making of mats, and in the tropical zone of Vava'u thrives the *vavai* tree from which kapok is made. Wooden articles such as *tanoas* are generally manufactured on the forested island of 'Eua, or are made from wood obtained there. Nowadays many of the *katoanga* (exchanges) are arranged by women's committees. The *Kautaha Lalanga* or association of mat makers, and the *Kautaha Koka'anga* or association of *tapa* makers produce the articles and conduct the trade in their respective areas. They normally make the arrangements for the *katoanga* by letter and each party, as in Fiji, knows roughly what is expected of them. Also, as in Fiji, the exchanges are accompanied by speeches, feasts and dancing. One significant feature of the modern *katoanga* appears to be that people invariably travel to Nuku'alofa, the port town, so that it is highly probable that the exchanges are linked with visits to the urban area for many purposes.

Other organised groups as well as individuals trade in this way. In February 1965, for example, arrangements were being made at Ha'apai for an exchange with the village of Kolovai on Tongatapu in connection with the visit of a Ha'apai basketball team on the island. It had been agreed that each of the Ha'apai people would make three mats and the Kolovai participants one length of *tapa* about 70 feet long.

During September and November 1964 small shipments of yams from the coral islands of Ha'apai to Nuku'alofa were also noted. These were probably exchanges with relatives, and the *polopolo*

presentations (or first-fruits) of the Ha'apai people to chiefs residing in Nuku'alofa. Like so much of this type of cargo flow the date of presentation is not purely arbitrary. In this sample, which reverses the normal flow of foodstuffs between richer and poorer areas, it was clearly geared to the earlier ripening of yams in the Ha'apai group compared with those on cooler Tongatapu Island.

EXCHANGES BETWEEN FIJI AND TONGA

There appears to be a small revival of non-commercial trade between Tonga and Fiji. The supposition that it is a revival is based merely on the statement of people that they can not recall any organised occasion previous to those recorded here, although they all said that the carriage of goods by individuals between the two island groups had always taken place.

During May 1964 a Suva *Sogosogo Vakamarama* arranged an exchange with a *Kautaha* at Ma'ofanga village on Tongatapu. This was initiated by letter from a woman of Ma'ofanga who had a sister living in Suva. On 30 November the Fijian party of 11 arrived at Nuku'alofa and were met by people from Ma'ofanga and transported to that village. The Fijian party remained there for two weeks and returned to Fiji on a Tongan vessel. The exchange by the Fijian members of the *Sogosogo* who had gone to Tonga had also been made on behalf of 11 other women who had remained in Fiji. The details of the exchanges, recorded from the Fijian party, are as follows:

> From Fiji everyone of them took one dressing table, 12 yards of material, a companion set of ladies' perfumes and one bedspread. From Tonga everyone of them received a *tapa* (100 feet by 20 feet), five large Tongan mats, and 30 bottles of Tongan oil.[24]

This was fairly well substantiated during a visit to Tonga in February 1965, and it was also learned then that a return exchange was being arranged for November 1965 when the Tongan women would visit Suva.

In addition to European goods, other articles which move from Fiji to Tonga through non-commercial channels include wooden headrests for presentations at weddings, *tano'as* and some mats worn by Tongans. The Fijians in turn like to obtain Tongan oil, kapok matresses, and *tapa*. The latter fetches an excellent price in Suva where it is cut up and made into articles such as handbags for the tourist trade, so that nowadays in this particular exchange there are strong economic overtones.

In passing, it is worth mentioning that some non-commercial trade is still conducted between Samoa and Tonga. In particular seamen on

[24] This information was recorded by John Taoka who assisted me in both Fiji and Tonga.

Tongan vessels are sometimes asked to find someone in Samoa who is willing to trade the precious *kie* mats for *tapa* and coconut oil. These finely-woven Samoan mats are now very scarce and are prized in Tonga where families usually keep them in chests under mothballs.

CONCLUSION

The form of present-day indigenous trading appears to have many similarities with that which prevailed in pre-European times. The functions of the trading systems are also similar to those of the old society, in as much as they are attempts to ensure a redistribution of goods when and where scarcities arise. Nowadays, however, the most frequent and urgent requirements of island communities are for money and consumer goods. These needs, the new inter-island transport arrangements, and the existence of related wage-earning groups in the port towns, have contributed to a basic adjustment in the patterns of indigenous trade.

It is difficult to assess the economic value of the *solevu* and *katoanga* in the absence of complete details of their extent and frequency. Tentatively, however, one can suggest that they have useful socio-economic roles. Apart from the insurances which they provide in cases of need following destructive hurricanes or droughts, their main virtue, vis a vis other kinship obligations, is that the traffic cannot simply be one-way. For the participants, the *solevu* and the *katoanga* imply immediate reciprocity with goods of like value. These exchanges help meet the cash requirements of people in the poorer agricultural districts, and at the same time they satisfy the needs of many urban wage-earning labourers for 'things of the land' and for traditional articles which are still used on ceremonial occasions. In some ways the adjustments of the indigenous trading patterns, may, in fact, be a partial solution to the problems of the growing disparity in terms of trade between richer and poorer areas. These are universal problems which 'commercial' economics have so far been unable to solve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is part of a study of Pacific Island trade which was made possible by an Australian National University Research Scholarship. I am grateful to the Australian National University for the award. I would also like to thank Dr H. C. Brookfield, Dr Peter France and Dr Sione Latukefu who read and commented on an earlier draft of the paper but they would not necessarily share all the comments and conclusions relating to the modern *solevu*.

NEW ZEALAND IN MAPS . . .

6. Retail Activity in New Zealand Towns 1958-1963

JAMES FORREST

THE PATTERN of change in the volume of retail activities tends to reflect the growth or decline of urban centres. Thus several articles, brought into focus by a study of retail, wholesale, and service sales growth for the five years up to 1958,[1] have attempted to concentrate attention on this pattern as it affects New Zealand towns. Central to King's argument is the thesis of association between town and hinterland; more particularly between the national or regional function of a centre, and the nature and prosperity of its tributary region.

This study seeks to extend this earlier work by examining the changing pattern of retail activity from 1958 to 1963, drawing on the quinquennial surveys of selected retail activities published by the Department of Statistics.[2] Information is available for 1958 on the then 15 urban areas and the 21 boroughs with minimum individual populations of 4000 persons. A more detailed coverage was published for 1963, including not only the now 18 urban areas but all towns of 1000 population or more: 96 centres (Fig. 1) compared with the 36 of 1958 and 31 of 1953. It may be noted, however, that in 1958 and 1963, the 36 centres for which information was recorded at the earlier date accounted for 80 and 81 percent respectively of all retail sales, the other 60 centres taking up a further 11 percent in 1963.

Following King, the level of retail activity within each city is expressed in terms of sales volume or turnover *per capita*. This provides an indication of the comparative importance of retail activity in each town independent of the size of the community.

URBAN RETAIL ACTIVITY IN 1958: 36 TOWNS

Three regional groupings of towns emerge with a consistently high level of retail sales per capita (Fig. 2A). In south-central Taranaki (Stratford and Hawera) and in the South Auckland area (Pukekohe,

* MR FORREST is Lecturer in Geography at the University of Otago. Grateful acknowledgement is made to G. F. Spears, Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Otago Medical School, for the use of his FORTRAN IV multiple regression program for this study.

[1] L. J. King: 'The Growth of Commercial Activities in New Zealand Cities 1953-1958,' *N.Z. Geographer*, Vol. 18, 1962, pp. 50-71.

[2] *Census of Distribution, 1958* and *1963*, Wellington, 1959 and 1964.