The Transnationalism of Shell Money

New Regional Trades of the Langalanga, Solomon Islands

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Many Pacific Islanders have experienced the impacts of globalization on their culture and economy. The degree of devaluation of state currencies in the past few decades is among one which strongly influences everyday life in Melanesia. Feeling that global economic and financial market is far beyond their control, some islanders look for alternative ways to sustain the value of currency in their hands.
This paper examines how the Langalanga attempt to maintain their economic and cultural agency through transnational trades of shell money in Melanesia. The Langalanga people of Malaita Island, Solomon Islands, have been making shell money for generations, which is circulated the region in the Solomons. In recent years, some Langalanga traders expand their trading networks and travel to neighboring countries, including Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji.
Abstract

The cultural significance of shell and shell money in traditional sphere of exchange, which is shared by many Melanesians, paved the way for the transnational trade of Langalanga shell money. While neo-liberalist economy moved the world toward the transnationalism of currency, the transnational movements of local and traditional currencies in Melanesia provide an alternative way of thinking in the balance of culture and economy.
Langalanga shell money in Solomon Islands

Shell money on the move: the Bougainville connection

Transnational trades of shell money in Melanesia in the 21st century

The transnationalism of local money
Research Methods


Solomon Islands

Geographical location and settlement pattern

Langalanga subsistence on shell money economy

Cultural meanings of shell money

Shell money vs. state money
Solomon Islands

Geographical location and settlement pattern

Langalanga subsistence on shell money economy

Cultural meanings of shell money

Shell money vs. state money
tafuliae

Feather Money (Santa Cruz)
Langalanga shell money in Solomon Islands
Solomon Islands

Cultural meanings of shell money

• Bridewealth exchange

• Fertility and social reproduction

• Blood, peace-making

• Cultural identity, national heritage

• Expansion of shell money circulation
Bridewealth exchange (Honiara, 2009)
Reconciliation and compensation
(painting in front of SI National Museum, 2007)
Body decoration
(performance for tourists, Raolo, Langalanga, 2002)
new designs of ornaments (2007, 2009)
shell money vs state money

- 1978 Solomon Dollar (SBD)
- Shell money has higher moral value
- Shell money devalues less than SBD
1997-8  AUD$1=SBD$2.7

$tafuliae$= SBD$500-600

2003  AUD$1=SBD$4.3-6

$tafuliae$= SBD$650

2007  AUD$1=SBD$6-7

$tafuliae$= SBD$650-700

2009  AUD$1=SBD$4.8-5.4

$tafuliae$= SBD$650-700
Shell money on the move

Bougainville connection in 1960-70s

- **safi** (Langalanga), **mimis** (Bougainville)

Price in later 1970s:

- **Mimis**: K$25
- **Safi** in Solomon Islands SBD$10

Trading partners
Safi, mimis
Shell Money in Melanesia

Bougainville re-connected

Afi: SBD$40

Limis: K$60 (SBD$144)

- Black necklaces

Solomon SBD$7-15

Bougainville K$15-20 (SBD$36-48)
necklaces for the market of Bougainville (2006)
(Langalanga, 2007)
Shell Money in Melanesia

Exploration of new networks

- Vanuatau, Rabaul, Fiji, etc.

‘Feraligeli’: women traders

- *Fera*: men’s house
- *Geli*: women
Grassroot Women’s Group (Honiara, 2007)
Sale of necklaces in Port Vila (Vanuatu, 2007)
Transnationalism of Local Currency

Expansion of shell money circulation, from Malaita Island to Solomon Islands, Melanesia (and beyond?)

Shell/ shell money tradition shared in Pan-Melanesia area

New trading networks, and trading partners

Small scale, individual initiatives
Transnationalism of Local Currency

More than economic concerns

Self-empowerment (economic, political, cultural) in a neo-liberal world

Tolai’s *tabu*: (New Britain, PNG)

Kwaio’s *kofu* (Malaita, Solomon)

LETS (Local Exchange Trading System)
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