

# Oksapmin Trade Stores

## Introduction

Trade stores specializing in the retail sale of introduced items of food and clothing are an ever-present sight throughout Papua New Guinea. In the larger towns they offer for sale a wide variety of Western goods as well as the ubiquitous tinned mackerel and rice. As one leaves the urban centers, however, trade stores carry a smaller range of goods. These rural trade stores, along with trucking businesses, small restaurants, and coffee gardens, have been described as part of the new integration of village people into the national economy.

I would like to present here a report on the early stages of trade store operation in the Oksapmin district in the West Sepik Province. This report is based on observations made during 1978 and 1979 and although many changes have occurred since that time I hope that this report can be of use in clarifying questions relating to the introduction of a cash economy into a rural society.

## ***Oksapmin Trade Stores***

Within the Oksapmin district over 100 licenses for trade stores had been granted as of 1977. The district had a population of about 7,400. It was a cash-poor district, with an estimated per capita income of K12 (K1=US\$1.50) per year. (Friend 1980:29) A portion of this limited cash was saved or circulated as part of traditional payments. With the limitation on the amount of cash available to be spent on goods from trade stores, there would appear to have been little economic advantage to trade store ownership. However, there were trade stores throughout the thirty parishes of the district with some parishes having as many as 10 stores. There was, in all parishes, an expressed interest in establishing new stores.

## ***Entrepreneurs***

Several reports have been made within the last 15 years describing traditional Papua New Guinea societies in which there was an entrepreneurial response to new economic opportunities. (Brown 1973; Epstein 1968; Finney 1968, 1973; Harris 1975; Meggitt 1971; Strathern 1972).

In order to determine whether or not the Oksapmin trade stores constitute a similar response to a new economic system, this paper will examine the notion of the entrepreneur, and will discuss the Oksapmin trade store in terms of both pre- and post-contact economic organization. It will be shown that in egalitarian societies that lack traditional mechanisms for the success of one man to stand for the success of the group, the development of true entrepreneurs will be limited, and that reactions to economic change will not emphasize monetary profit.

Finney (1973:83) uses Schumpeter's definition of the entrepreneur as an economic innovator who by exploiting new markets, goods, sources of supply or production methods, provokes economic growth. Finney notes that in discussing economic development in Papua New Guinea, the innovations may be imitative rather than truly new, in that European models are available. However, if the perspective of traditional economic organization is taken then the

man who plants coffee or purchases a truck to use in a transport business is truly an innovator. A more serious problem with this sort of definition is the determination of whether or not a given individual's effort will provoke the required economic growth, since growth depends, in part at least, on the success or failure of his operations. This makes Schumpeter's definition less useful in situations where new sorts of economic activity are just beginning.

In a discussion of capital formation, Firth (1963:28) mentions the ability of individuals to use the combined savings of kinsmen as a key factor in the development of a new class of entrepreneurs. When the stock of excess goods and services controlled by each individual is small, pooling resources can make possible profitable investments which can increase future consumption. Where kinsmen or clan groups are involved, even though the largest share may be kept by the organizer, some distribution of the profit among the contributors is already implied by traditional obligations.

Barth (1963:7-8) defines the entrepreneur as one who 1) has a single-minded concentration on the maximization of profit (but not necessarily economic profit), 2) acts on the basis of deductive prognosis of results rather than on expectations based on accumulated institutionalized experience, and 3) has a willingness to take risks by committing his assets, trusting in his deductive reasoning and acting against the odds. This definition, focusing as it does on the characteristic behavior of the individual, rather than the economic results of his behavior, seems more suitable for evaluating the types of response to economic change that are seen in Papua New Guinea. What is striking about this definition is that since it allows for maximization of other than strictly monetary profit, it seems capable of including traditional political leaders, as well as those who have recently expanded their efforts into the cash economy.

Traditional leaders, through their manipulation of wealth, seek to maximize political profit, or power, thus fulfilling Barth's first criteria. The extent to which they can fill the second two criteria which involve taking risks and evaluating those risks in terms of observed outcomes may differ, but surely the leaders described by Langness (1973) and elsewhere were capable at times of making such judgements and taking such risks. The elaborate arrangements required for success in large scale exchanges such as the Moka and Te of the Papua New Guinea Highlands appear to have been vastly more complex than what would be required of the entrepreneurial Norwegian storekeepers described by Barth. The major difference between traditional "big men" and the Western entrepreneurs is in the nature of the profit which they accumulate. In traditional societies where the material requirements for comfortable life are at a minimum and storage is undependable, there is little advantage to having more pork than one can eat or more decorative objects than one can wear. But there can be a substantial advantage to having the social obligations that one will be owed if one gives these things away. IN contrast to Western societies, in which stores of excess goods and cash can provide security for the future, for some traditional societies, only social obligations can be stored up against the future. It was to maximizing social or political profit that traditional leaders put their "single-minded concentration". It can be claimed that the presence of entrepreneurs in many Papua New Guinea societies predated exposure to Western economic opportunities and that the new man of business has merely altered his concept of what valuable to seek, not his method for obtaining it.

## Oksapmin – Pre Contact

### ***Leadership***

In Oksapmin, powerful traditional political leaders were absent. There were no large-scale prestations or festivals as in Chimbu or Kapauku, and there was no participation in a regional exchange system such as the Moka or the Te. This is true for much of the highlands west of the Strickland Gorge, including the Bimin, Faiwol, Telefol, and Mianmin people.

Traditional leaders were those with religious authority, and, to a lesser extent, those with a knowledge for curing or an aptitude for leading warfare. Leadership was fragmented, with no single man having the power to influence others on issues outside his own area of expertise. These leaders were limited to parish- or clan-wide influence.

### ***Compensation***

Traditional payments of wealth such as death payments to maternal kinsman of the deceased and bride price payments were characterized by individual transactions rather than group prestations. Single individuals in the donor group gave goods (or, more recently, small amounts of money, i.e. K2- K20) to other individuals in the recipient group. Certain individuals might have had joint membership in both the donor and recipient groups, in which case they might have been giving that which they had received only a moment before. Members of the recipient group merely demonstrate their desire for compensation for themselves, and members of the donor group compensate specific individuals in the recipient group with whom they already have close ties. While the majority of these individual payments are made at a meeting of those individuals party to the transaction, payments could be made at other times as well. The individual and fluctuating nature of these transactions made them more accurately described as "compensation payments" rather than as "group prestations".

### ***Gardening***

Traditionally and currently, both men and women harvest vegetable products from their gardens. While gardens are often made through the joint efforts of a husband and wife pair, it is not uncommon for a woman to have an extra garden or two which she has established with a male relative. Both men and women can, as individuals, purchase or be given harvesting rights in plots which have been cultivated by others. The vegetable products which a woman harvests will often be shared with her husband, traditionally in an uncooked state only, men being prohibited from eating food cooked in women's fires.

However, a woman's husband was not the only person to whom a woman would give vegetable produce, nor was a wife the only source of vegetable produce for a man. Husbands and wives did not form an economic unit in the sense that they worked together for the prosperity of the family. Rather, each benefited by the prosperity of the other in a way only slightly different in degree from the way in which neighbors benefited from the generosity of those with a surplus.

Thus both men and women retained first rights to the fruits of their labors for themselves and their dependent children. Sharing became obligatory only when there was a visible

surplus. If produce was brought back to the village and was seen by others (rather than being consumed in the garden) it was then encumbered by the obligation to share.

### ***Trade***

Although there had been no Oksapmin involvement in large-scale regional exchange, some men had always been active in trade. Oksapmin trade is best characterized as "personalized." Although impersonal, impromptu trade of the sort described for the Mae Enga (Meggitt 1971: 195) and for the Kapauku (Pospisil 1963) does occur, it was seen as risky and may have been a post-contact phenomenon. Impersonal trade was less common than the sort of personalized, repeated exchanges which could take place between established trading partners who called each other brother or cross-cousin.

Traditional trade involved salt from the east, stone adze heads from the north, barks and grasses for skirts, net bags, and black palm bows from the south and pigs, dogs and the residua of previous trades from the Oksapmin area. Although the Oksapmin area as a whole could be seen as gaining in such trades because of favorable ideal exchange ratios, not all traders made the most profitable sorts of exchanges. Many were content to keep back only a small portion of the goods traded for their own use in bride price or death payments, which were small and infrequent. Although some prestige as a rich man could be gained by contributing generously to these payments, the only sanction against those unable to pay was the fear of sorcery from disgruntled recipients, and this would generally be directed at those who could have paid, but did not. An adequate participation in Oksapmin social life could be had without participating in trade. However, traditional trade was valued for other reasons than the excess goods which could thereby be obtained. In times of war or famine a man and his family might seek refuge among the group to which a trading partner belonged. A man might be able to observe public aspects of cult activities of other groups or attend the more secret rituals as a senior observer, he might even arrange for the young men of his own group to undergo certain initiations with the young men of his trading partner's group, thus providing his own group with additional ritual knowledge. (see Barth, 1975:119 for mention of similar strategies). Additionally, informants' descriptions of trading expeditions often stressed the enjoyment of the physical challenge of the travel itself, and the satisfactions inherent in being the recipients of hospitality.

### ***Markets***

Traditional markets in the sense of established places or times for the exchange of goods were unknown. Concerns about sorcery and hostility between groups made impersonal exchange difficult.

## **Oksapmin – Post-Contact**

The post-contact period involved opportunities for cash for Oksapmins who were interacting with outsiders. The earliest employment of Oksapmin people was in 1939 when three men were used as guides for the Black and Taylor Patrol and received axes and bush knives in payment for their services. When the Oksapmin Patrol Post and the Australian Baptist Mission at Tekin opened in 1961 and 1962, there was further work for guides and there was the opportunity to sell food, wood, and artifacts to the Government and Mission. In addition, many of the police assigned to the area employed teenaged boys as personal servants, paying them with food and shelter.

In the late 1960's, labor recruiters came to Telefomin, and Oksapmin men who heard of this through contacts with the police or trading partners traveled there to sign on for contract labor on copra plantations on Buka Island and on New Britain near Rabaul.

During the period of development of the Government Patrol Post and the Mission there was a great amount of employment of casual labor for airstrip and road building. During this time crews from each parish would be brought in for two weeks work in rotation. Although some maintenance work continued to go on in the late 1970's, the availability of such work had decreased at that time.

In the early 1970's, Oksapmins began to work at Aviamp, a tea plantation near Mt. Hagen. Work on the tea plantations was preferred to work with copra since it was closer to home, because the climate was more congenial, and because the contract period was shorter. In November, 1979, 21.8% of the adult men between 18 and 45 in the entire Oksapmin District were at Aviamp. (Cape, 1980:160)

In the mid 1970's, a vegetable market was set up by the mission. Seeds for European vegetables were distributed to parishes near Tekin, and people were encouraged to bring in produce for sale twice a week. In the late 1970's the mission market purchased 600-650 kg of vegetables per week at 20t per kg. (10t - US\$.15).

In the late 1970's, the Government set up a similar market for the parishes near Oksapmin, and this market later became a cooperative with shares in the business purchased by Oksapmins from all parishes. In the late 1970's, the cooperative market purchased approximately one tonne of vegetables per week at the same 20t per kg. rate as the mission.

These cash employment opportunities were limited, but reliable. Small amounts of cash were obtainable through sale of items locally, and larger amounts could be earned through contract labor out of the district.

### ***Plantation Labor***

At the time of the investigation, most Oksapmin men preferred brief, sporadic employment. Their involvement with their own garden work was not continuous. Cutting trees and fencing required short periods of intensive labor at the beginning of the gardening cycle and it was these jobs which required male labor and could not be done by most women. A two-week period of roadwork would have meant that the money a man earned was clear profit for himself. He would not need reimburse any other person for fulfilling any duties he was unable to attend to because there would seldom have been anything requiring his immediate attention during so brief a time.

Plantation labor was another matter. The contract period preferred by the plantation management was at least two years. If a man signed on when the labor recruiter came with a plane to the government station, and if he stayed the full two-year contract, he would have had his transportation paid for entirely by the plantation. A man who was fortunate enough to have known ahead of time that the labor recruiter would be coming could repair his house and clear and fence a new garden area from which his wife could expect to harvest in

diminishing amounts for up to one year (Cape 1980). However, even with the utmost preparation, a man's wife and children would require the labor of some other male during this time, and, because of the difficulty of obtaining this labor, would often be short of food and lacking in adequate shelter. Thus during his employment, the man would generally take care to send gifts of cloth, clothing, pots, knives, or money to his wife and his and her relatives so that any bad feeling towards him might be assuaged. Those at home were quick to make use of their own or their friends' new-found literacy in Pidgin to write letters of complaint expressing hardships undergone as a result of the lack of the services of the absent man. Not only would the man's wife and other dependents complain in this manner, but his brothers and uncles would also go to great lengths to describe their efforts to do his work.

Additional problems beset the man who was unable to take advantage of the free transportation to the plantation. The labor recruiter came only irregularly, and in outlying villages such as Kweptanap, the knowledge of his arrival at the Government station often came too late even to arrive in time to get the plane, much less to prepare gardens and houses for the prolonged absence. Additionally, the desire to leave for plantation labor was often tied to recent quarrels with a wife or others, or because of recent marriage. In these situations, a man would have to provide the K52 for his airfare to Mt. Hagen by borrowing the amount from relatives. If he then remained at the plantation for at least 3-6 months, the money would be reimbursed to him by the plantation management, but usually reimbursement would be made in small amounts added to his fortnightly pay over a long period, making it difficult for him to save this additional amount for repayment to his creditors at home. The fortnightly wage was determined by adding bonus money for extra baskets of tea picked to a basic daily rate, so that it was difficult for the worker to distinguish additional money gained for bonuses from additional money meant to reimburse travel expenses. A small amount was withheld from the laborer's fortnightly pay in an enforced savings plan such that at the end of two years he would have approximately K200. This practice originated with the notion of giving a bonus for completion of the contract, but at the time under discussion here, the savings legally belonged to the worker and were to be given to him whenever he terminated. The plantation manager however often balked at providing transportation for short terms - i.e., 6 months or less, and often retained the amount withheld in order to reimburse the company for plane fare in these cases. Some district officers had been active in trying to get this money for early-returning workers with some success.

The fortnightly pay was generally spent entirely on the purchase of additional food, and gifts for home which were sent back with returning laborers. Food was provided by the plantation and included rice and tinned fish or meat. but extra food was desired and available at a small trade store on the plantation for those with the money to buy it. If, at the end of his contract, a man managed to pass through Mt. Hagen (a place he rarely went during his term of labor because of the perceived dangers of the road and for fear of assault from highlands groups, all of whom he considered fearsome) with no delay in which to be caught up in a game of chance, he would usually return home with about K125 and an array of personal goods for himself and others. After reimbursing his creditors, including those from whom he had borrowed plane fare, those to whom he was indebted for service in his gardens, and those who were merely unhappy at his absence, he might have had as much as K50 with which to enter into bride-price payments for himself or others or to buy supplies

to set up a trade store. The choice of most men was the latter.

The advantages of plantation labor over sporadic employment were its constant availability (the plantation manager was in constant need of laborers and preferred to hire Oksapmins over any other group because of what he saw as their hard-working, and pacific natures), its abundant food, its lack of women, and its isolation from the social obligations of village life. The last three factors had their greatest appeal to younger men. Young men were less likely to have substantial gardens of their own, either because of lack of interest on their part, or because of the lack of a wife who would assist and encourage them. Young men would have traditionally spent a great deal of time hunting and thus would have made up in protein goods what they lacked in sweet potato and taro, but game had become scarce in nearby areas (perhaps because of the introduction of shotguns into the area in the mid 1960's) and hunting was only good in areas accessible by passage only through territories of other groups with whom the younger men would not yet have established friendly relations. Oksapmin men were not as fearful of contact with women as some highland groups have been said to be. However, shyness and fear of the responsibilities entailed in the establishment of a household were commonly expressed by younger men, and it was seen by older Oksapmins as quite sensible, both for economic and personal reasons, for a young man to leave for plantation labor soon after he had begun to cohabit with his new bride. He was expected thus to be able to provide a portion of his bride price and also to be able to avoid conflict with his new wife until she was obviously pregnant, at which time he would have been encouraged to leave the plantation.

Of 58 men from Kweptanap parish surveyed in 1979, only half had never worked as contract laborers on plantations. Of these, 15 were elderly men who would have been old for plantation labor even in 1968, when the first labor recruitment began. An additional two of this 29 were young men who intended to go to plantation work soon. The remaining men included mature men who were, like the elderly men had been, active in traditional pursuits, such as trade, extensive gardening, and pig husbandry. Of the half who had worked as contract laborers, the majority worked at Aviamp Tea Estate near Mt. Hagen. Nine of the men surveyed had worked on copra plantations in the late 1960's. Of these nine, seven went on to work at the tea plantation, as did 20 others, for terms ranging from six months to six years. Fourteen men worked at plantation labor for more than a single two-year term. Periodic work at plantation labor was a regular expectation of most Oksapmin men.

### **Markets**

At the time of this investigation, some individual marketing was done by Oksapmin men and women. In contrast to the situation described for the Mae Enga, in which marketing European goods and butchered pig meat predated the operation of trade stores, Oksapmin trade store operation began concurrently with the small amount of casual individual marketing. Items for marketing included bark for making string bags, feathers, and butchered pig meat from both wild and domestic pigs. The development of group markets had been quite recent, and centered on areas, which had a sizeable population of civil servants. Thus one weekly market was established by teachers in 1980 near Divanap Community School which had at that time 6 teachers and their families living there. Another somewhat less regular market had been established by government employees at the

Oksapmin Station several years earlier. Both these markets offered vegetable products, and occasionally butchered pig meat for sale.

### **Cash Cropping**

Cash cropping in the area is limited. Coffee was first planted in 1976, and some trees were at the bearing stage. In 1979, 74kg. of parchment coffee was purchased by the mission and the Government at K1.30 and 60t per kg respectively. Bird's-eye chilies had also been planted in some areas, and in 1979, 15 kg. were purchased at 40t per kg. (Friend 1980:26-27) The major cash crops in the area were European vegetables including lettuce, cabbage, cucumber, tomato, and Irish potatoes, all of which grew well in the Oksapmin area. Vegetable production in Oksapmin seemed likely to avoid the problems of retrogression in traditional horticultural methods suggested by Lea (1972) as a consequence of cash cropping because of the limited scale of production and because the crops were planted before and after sweet potatoes and utilized otherwise unproductive garden space. The major markets for these vegetables were the mission and the Government. Both purchased vegetables at 20t per kilo and together purchased approximately 1600 kg of vegetables per week. These vegetables were delivered to the coast, taking advantage of inexpensive transport in planes which had made deliveries to the area.

Airfreight costs presented a major obstacle to full participation in the national economy by Oksapmins. Although there was a proposed road which would have connected the area to Lake Kapiago (and thereby would have connected it to the Highlands road system) this road was unlikely to be built because of the difficult terrain (the road would have required a bridge across the Strickland River) and because of lack of funds available for this remote corner of the West Sepik Province. At the time of the investigation, the only way for goods to come in or out of Oksapmin was by air, and the cargo rate was 52t per kilo.

This increased the cost of imported goods dramatically. A can of tinned mackerel that cost 35t on the coast would cost 65t at the mission trade store, and might have cost 70-80t at a local village trade store. The freight surcharge on lighter weight imported items, such as clothing, was less, but the most favored imported items, tinned fish, rice, batteries, shotgun cartridges and axes were all heavy items in relation to their prices.

Additionally, the airfreight costs affected the ability to effectively market vegetable produce. The current practice of "back-loading" vegetables on planes which were returning empty after making deliveries of trade store goods means that the amount of vegetables which can be sent is tied to the amount of trade store goods ordered. This relationship between trade goods ordered and vegetables sold masks the true costs involved in both the trade store and the vegetable market. Both the mission and the government claim that it would be impossible to market the vegetables without backloading because they would then be required to charge at least 80t per kg (which would include 20t for the grower and 52t for air freight) to their customers. However, vegetable-purchase plans announced in the early 80's by both Frieda and Ok Tedi Copper mines, might change this agreement since they would send their own planes for pickup.

The small amounts of cash received by men and women who sell vegetable produce at the mission and station markets is usually converted into luxury food items immediately to



prevent claims on the money by relatives or friends. Tinned fish, rice and sweet biscuits can be purchased not far from the vegetable purchasing area at the well-stocked mission store. These foods when prepared at home may also be shared, but food is less desirable than cash, and is also more divisible, and there will be fewer claimants for it. Recipients of cash payments from schoolteachers or other government employees on patrol through villages have less opportunity for immediate conversion when village trade stores may be out of stock. This money then becomes fair game for anyone who can claim to want it. Inter-generational requests for money are common, and same generation requests are rare, although some begging from older siblings also occurs. What does not occur, however, is a husband claiming money based on his rights to disposition of his wife's labor. Rarely do husbands and wives combine resources to establish businesses, and there is little pooling of money among clan or lineage groups, such as has been reported elsewhere in Melanesia. Business, like traditional trade, and like traditional gardening is an individual undertaking.

The independence of the adult members of households extends to recently introduced transactions involving the exchange of labor for cash. However, while cash need not be obligatorily shared with one's spouse, cash is seen as surplus by its very nature, since it cannot be consumed. Few Oksapmins accept the notion that cash could substitute for garden labor: i.e., that one could purchase subsistence. (For example, during a court case, most rejected the notion that a garden destroyed by pigs should be compensated by enough cash to buy fish and rice every day of the amount of time that the garden would have produced.) The only ways that cash can be removed from the obligation to share are concealment or conversion into something else. One way that cash can be both converted and concealed is using it to purchase supplies for a trade store.

### **Trade Stores**

The first trade store in the Oksapmin area was set up by the Australian Baptist Mission as a business investment for the local church association. This store, located on the mission station, sold a wide range of items to individuals and, additionally, made case lot sales of fish and rice at a discount. As cash entered the area through the efforts of casual and contract labor, the wholesale price was taken advantage of, not for personal use, but to set up small stores in the parishes.

Physically, trade stores in Oksapmin differ from both traditional structures and from structures built at the urging of the Government or Mission, although they share features of both.

Traditional structures include houses and various special purpose structures such as cult houses, menstrual houses, and temporary or long-term garden or hunting shelters. All are generally small, with the largest being about 3 x 5 meters. (A temporary structure built for periodic initiations was, however, quite large, approximately 4 by 8 meters or more.) A single-family house is usually 3 meters square. These structures are made of a framework of poles faced with rough cut timber, a roof of pandanus leaves and a bark floor, and contain one or two earthen hearths. Traditional structures are generally nestled in among trees and other plant growth and although they may be situated on the tops of small ridges, access to them is generally limited to one or two narrow tracks. Where two or more houses within a

hamlet are situated very close to each other the entryways generally face in opposite directions. Traditional structures emphasize privacy, individuality, and defense.

Non-traditional public structures such as churches, classrooms, aid posts, and government rest houses are much larger (ranging from 4 square meters to 5 x 10 meters) than the traditional buildings. They often use non-local indigenous methods of construction, such as woven pitpit walls, earthen floors, and thatch roofs. These public buildings are situated on the tops of the larger ridges in well cleared areas with access from several directions. Where several public buildings are in the same area, their main entrances generally face onto a central plaza. Non-traditional structures emphasize public access, community, and lack of concern with safety.

Trade stores are generally located either at the side of the Government road or in the clearings surrounding a church, school or aid post. They are extremely small, most no more than 2 meters square, and are built with woven pitpit walls, thatch roofs, and bark floors. The use of nails and hinges in the construction is common. Like the traditional structures, they can be built by one or two men, and become the property of the builders. In contrast to the public buildings, trade stores are usually well maintained. Many have well cleared drainage ditches around them, a feature absent from most traditional structures and poorly made in many public buildings. In common with public structures, access to trade store buildings is open and entryways face public areas. The trade store structures while encouraging access by the entire community share with the traditional structures a sense of individual ownership and maintenance.

At the time of the investigation there were over 100 trade stores in the Oksapmin District. These stores were run by young and middle-aged men, most of whom had gotten the money to stock the store from plantation labor. While the small size of the stores would allow them to be built by one man alone, it is more common that a group of friends (rarely kinsmen as is common elsewhere) will work together on the construction, owning the building jointly.

At some point, either before, during or after construction one or more members of the group manage to accumulate excess cash, usually from plantation labor, with which to purchase stock for the store. Although the trade store building can be jointly owned, the stocks of fish and rice in the store are individually owned by the person whose money purchased them. A man would not sell fish belonging to a man with whom he shared a store without that man's permission; and each man's business operation is separately capitalized.

One might think that the great number of parish trade stores would allow for competition among them, thus providing on the local level at least, a check against high prices or bad service. However, it is rare that more than one trade store in a parish is stocked with goods for sale at a given time. (During 1978-80 this occurred only twice in Kweptanap Village, for periods of 3 weeks and 2 months.) Decisions to patronize one trade store rather than another, if two are stocked at the same time, may be based on kin or friendship ties, but are usually based on the availability of the particular item the buyer wishes to purchase, or on the availability of coins to offer in change. The amount of profit allowable by the Government on each tin of fish or bag of rice is approximately 5t, but this is not closely monitored. Instead, there is an appropriate price range for the item that local people are accustomed to pay, and trade store owners are accustomed to charge. This would allow for

an acceptable profit for the storeowner, except when wholesale costs rise, or when bad debts or personal consumption intervene. Most trade store owners suffer from all these problems. The typical trade store building is shared by a group of men one of whom earns money to buy stock, runs the store with diminishing profit for a period of 6 months to 1 year, and is replaced by another of the group who has earned enough to buy stock. With a large group of men, continuous operation of the store could be assured; however, groups of two or three men are most common, and men have personal obligations that prevent them from returning to plantation labor as often as would be necessary to prevent the store from being left without stock. For the individual trade store owner, it is repeated bouts of plantation labor that support his store operations. He invests his excess cash in stock for this store, sells the stock, and uses the cash he receives from sales to buy new stock and items for personal use. When he has less cash than the cost of new stock, he must temporarily suspend operations until he has again accumulated excess cash.

This lack of a long-term increase in the amount of cash is not seen by trade store owners as evidence of failure of the store, but rather as a method of operation. If there were any large-scale profit making by an Oksapmin, it would be difficult for him to gain anything by it. To keep excess for himself would arouse the jealousies of others, and there is no indigenous mechanism whereby he could gain political power by giving it away; nor is there any system of leadership whereby his wealth could be seen as representative of the importance of his group.

Trade stores are thus limited both by operational flaws and social factors in their profit making ability. Despite this, trade store stock money is the most frequently given reason for working at the plantation. M. Strathern describes as disapproving the attitude of Hageners toward young men who leave for wage labor in towns, and discusses their concern that the men return home to establish a name for themselves in business. For Oksapmin there is no disapproval of wage labor, which is seen as a way to a comfortable life, nor is there any special status to be gained from being a trade store owner.

Trade store owners as a group are not active in the new introduced forms of politics. It is the local pastors of the Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist churches who are the most involved in running for elective office and in promoting local government councils.

## Conclusions

Why then are there so many of these trade stores which are generally unprofitable and do not bring any special prestige to their owners? It appears that there are advantages to being a trade store owner which do not involve political, social or monetary profit.

First, there is the advantage of additional associations with mission and government personnel made on trips to restock at the mission-run trade store. Information regarding the arrival of labor recruiters, the distribution of free seeds; gossip regarding the school teachers; or news of the government's desire to buy a certain type of artifact all can be gathered from an afternoon's conversation.

Second, there is the enjoyment of participating in business. Harris (1975) suggests that for Huli non-big men, whose businesses are as unlikely to turn a profit as are Oksapmin's

businesses, there is a desire to model oneself after the more successful big men. This cannot be the case for Oksapmin, where there is a lack of successful local models, but it may be that there is some satisfaction in simply participating in the new economic system.

Third, the trade store can be used to safely store personal goods such as feathers, shotguns, letters of importance and other valuables belonging to the owner or his friends.

Fourth, money owed for goods purchased in a trade store is considered a true debt, one which may not be collectable, but which is understood by both parties as owed.

The fifth and major advantage of trade store ownership is that it allows a man to remove surplus wealth from traditional spheres of sharing and exchange, and allows for storage over time. If a man has surplus money, there may be requests for contributions to bride price or death payments, which are difficult to refuse since failure to satisfy these obligations may bring sorcery attacks by the unhappy recipients. If a man converts his excess wealth into stores of Western food for personal use, he will not be required to donate them to group payments since such goods are not appropriate for payments of this sort; however, it will be difficult for him to eat this food without sharing it, and thus using it all up in a week or two of feeding large numbers of relatives and friends. Material goods, such as lanterns, clothing, axes, and spades are also liable to be requested by associates. Any item not actually in use by the owner can be requested by others, either in loan or as an outright gift. Failure to agree to such loans or gifts is rare because of the fear of retributive sorcery or suicide by the person so rebuffed. Occasionally goods are simply taken with no discussion with the owner. Individuals often complain to others about this sort of behavior, calling it stealing when their goods are taken, but describing it as a loan or a gift which should have been given in cases where they have taken the goods of others. But food stuffs and material goods locked in a trade store are considered outside the arena of social relations where such loans and gifts/thefts occur. During 1978 and 1979 not a single accusation of "stealing" from a trade store was made.

There are indications that locking one's home is not acceptable. Few do so, and those who do run the risk of upsetting relatives or friends who had planned to come to collect some goods stored in the house. But trade stores are always locked unless the owner is open for business, and there were no comments from others that indicated that it was inappropriate or inconvenient to do so. The key to the lock to the trade store is generally worn on a rope around the trade store owner's neck in a manner similar to that of the Government-appointed headman's medal. Many men who were described as trade store owners had neither stock nor a separate trade store building, but had only an additional room in the house that had a door with a lock. This room was then referred to as the trade store. In this way goods can be kept in a place which is both physically and psychologically separate from the social life of the parish.

By converting his excess cash to fish and rice held under lock and key in his place of business, the trade store owner is able to lengthen the time in which he has control of his surplus. Since he can quickly convert the cash he receives from sales into more goods, he is able to resist pressures to contribute to the few traditional events which require payments, and he and his family have access to supplementary goods should they need them.

Given the fact that ownership of a trade store allows a man to remove his surplus money from traditional spheres of exchange, why do members of the community tolerate the existence of so many trade stores? For many village residents, the trade store is a service; one which they would like to see expanded to offer even more goods for sale. Most villagers are not adept at the mathematical operations required to calculate the purchase price of several items bought at once, or to calculate the correct change that is due them. (Saxe, in press). As a result, dealings with the storekeeper in the mission store at Tekin who is a member of a parish other than that of most of his customers, is an event surrounded by suspicion and apprehension. Complaints about the mission storekeeper include the claims that he charges too much, that he gives incorrect change, and that he holds back the better merchandise for his friends. The parish trade store owner takes on these difficult transactions with the outsider storekeeper at the mission and then returns to the parish to sell the goods to his relatives and parish co-residents. There are occasional complaints about parish trade store owners, mainly that they charge too much or that they are too often out of stock. However, residents claim that since the parish trade store owner is a member of the group he is less likely to take advantage of his customers in the parish. In fact, this appears to be the case. In one instance where a parish trade store owner had purchased from the mission trade store a case of fish which, it was claimed, had gone bad and caused vomiting, he was careful to set that case aside for sale only to the school teacher and aid post orderly, sparing his parish co-residents.

Thus the trade store owner, although he appears to be involved in an unprofitable business, is satisfying his associates with available goods and credit, and is providing himself with a means for delaying the consumption of his surplus. His goals and methods do not appear to be those of the entrepreneur. Although he is exploiting new markets to provide new services, he does not have a "single minded concentration on maximization of profit". Economic profit would provoke envy, and the kind of political profit which allows a man to call on others who have received from him is absent. In Oksapmin, giving is done to prevent anger and sorcery, and does not have long term implication.

The trade store owner is not a representative of a group of kinsmen who have pooled their money for his business, but neither is he a man acting entirely on his own, outside and against his community's wishes. He provides the goods desired by other members of his community, bears the risks of travel and dealings with outsiders, tolerates indebtedness, and provides for himself a degree of security difficult to obtain by other means.

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