

*Repackaging Tradition in Tahiti?  
Mono'i and Labels of Origin  
in French Polynesia*

*Kate Stevens*

On 1 April 1992, the French government granted Monoï de Tahiti (coconut oil scented with tiare [*Gardenia taitensis*] flowers) an appellation d'origine (AO), or label of origin (JORF 1992). Though this French scheme of protected geographical indications (GIS) originated in the early twentieth century, monoï was the first product from a French overseas territory to receive such a designation. This milestone formally recognized and protected the unique environmental and cultural heritage said to be embodied by the oil, together with its claims to ancestral virtues. Yet the production standards enshrined by AO law emphasize industrial-manufacturing processes developed since World War II. The reality of contemporary production sits in tension with the imagined heritage that is marketed to tourists and foreign consumers, as well as the history and continued uses of mono'i within Polynesian communities.

Monoï is unique in the French AO system in multiple regards: it remains the only product granted an AO outside metropolitan France, as well as the only cosmetic product on a list dominated by wines and cheese. This positions it as a striking lens through which to examine the ways that perceptions of history and the environment—encapsulated in the concept of *terroir* (explored in the next section)—shape the commercialization and marketing of an indigenous product. Though appellations are advocated as a means to protect and valorize traditional landscapes and traditional knowledge in developing nations, the vast majority of protected GIS and most of the related scholarly literature still come from Europe. A close study of an early, non-European appellation thus contributes a historical perspective to the conversation on the potential and limits of such systems. In the context of growing awareness and debate over Intellectual Property

(IP) issues in Oceania,<sup>1</sup> this example also adds a francophone perspective that is often absent in the existing literature (Forsyth 2003; Forsyth and Farran 2015). This is particularly important given the European Union's interest in promoting GIS as a means for Pacific Islands development through trade negotiations and technical assistance (Blakeney 2012, 166, 186–187).

This article examines the benefits and contradictions in the emergence of *monoï* as a commercial product since World War II, focusing particularly on the adoption of AO legislation and its impact since 1992. While largely successful in navigating between tradition and modernity in production and usage, the commercial promotion of *monoï* as a contemporary commodity raises questions of authenticity and invented tradition, as well as questions of who benefits from this repackaging of cultural tradition in French Polynesia (compare Mawyer 2016a). The commercialization of *monoï* is underpinned by French Polynesia's continued colonial relationship with France, which provides the legal context for establishing an AO. While the AO is situated as a means to aid economic development and prevent urban migration, it also reinscribes the centrality of Tahiti in the public imagination and in economic production. Thus, as Valérie Boisvert outlined, “In most cases, production processes are the results of compromises between tradition and modernity, health norms and authenticity, and among local variants. The diversity of ingredients and techniques and their variability in time and space is necessarily reduced” (2006, 14).

I begin with an outline of historical conceptualization of appellations *d'origine* and their contemporary uses, followed by the history of commercialization and protection of *monoï* specifically. I conclude by considering the ways in which legal enshrinement has redefined the nature of this product and its implications for the use of GIS or labels of origins in the Pacific more widely. This article is empirical in focus: it points to the practical dimensions of larger theoretical questions regarding the suitability and application of Western IP laws for Pacific regional products.

My research was conducted as part of a broader project on the history of coconut commodities in the Pacific and their global networks from the early nineteenth century onward. Research in French Polynesia took place in September–October 2015. While the larger project is primarily archival in focus, the case study on *monoï* was shaped by visits—including conversations and interviews—to the Papeete market; the Huilerie de Tahiti and the Institut du *Monoï* in Papeete; the Atitia Ethnobotanical Center and CRIOBE (Centre de Recherches Insulaires et Observatoire de

l'Environnement) on Moorea; and the government coconut-breeding station on Raiatea. While in French Polynesia, I was unable to interview directors or employees at *monoï* companies; this would be a valuable avenue for further research.

This article uses different spellings of *mono'i*, reflecting its various incarnations. *Mono'i* is the Tahitian spelling and here refers to the scented oil produced by individuals, families, and communities according to long-standing practices (though it may be also sold). *Monoï* is the spelling adopted in appellation law and by certified producers and is used when discussing these commercial producers and their products. However, as commercialization and related laws were being developed, the variation *monoi* was also used, and this alternative remains common in English. This spelling is used in the article in some historical contexts.

### TERROIR, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND APPELLATIONS

Across the Pacific region and in French Polynesia specifically, geography has largely been characterized as an economic limitation. Since the 1980s, scholars following Geoff Bertram and Ray Watter's MIRAB (migration, remittances, aid, and bureaucracy) model of small island economies have lamented the small size, tyranny of distance, and oceanic nature of Pacific states as challenges to economic development (Bertram and Watters 1986). Though numerous scholars have strongly contested this narrative (notably after Hau'ofa 1993), it has remained influential, especially in the context of falling prices for the mainstays of the export economy, such as copra (the dried meat of the coconut). Stephen Henningham, writing in 1989, described French Polynesia as "a chronically dependent economy, [with] meager economic potential, and severe social problems" (1989, 107). In this context, the success of *monoï* as a value-added product stands out as a success story for culturally sensitive commercialization of Pacific resources (Guezennec, Moretti, and Simon 2006, 184). Moreover, the AO model repositions geography and environment as a unique advantage. Given that "indigenous innovation is place-based innovation" (Drahos and Frankel 2012, 13), AOs also have potential value in protecting indigenous practice and knowledge from inappropriate exploitation. Consequently, such legislation and branding are cautiously touted as a potential model for Pacific economies and for those of indigenous peoples more generally (Blakeney 2012; Gervais 2012).

Recent scholarship in the Pacific points to the potential legislative

convergence between indigenous knowledge and IP, necessitated partly by World Trade Organization requirements or free trade agreements.<sup>2</sup> Miranda Forsyth highlighted the ways in which traditional knowledge is increasingly viewed “as a potential new source of economic value in the Pacific Islands region, whether through bioprospecting that leads to new medical and scientific breakthroughs or through the development of cultural industries and tourism based on cultural practices” (2013, 1). Given the real risks of genetic, environmental, and cultural resources being appropriated, the development of suitable IP laws has been imperative but difficult. New initiatives to protect traditional knowledge and IP have featured prominently in regional and national discussion and law over the last two decades, such as the 2002 Model Law for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture (SPC 2002). But national governments have yet to enact this law. More generally, there have been limited copyright and patent cases in states where such legislation exists, and debate continues on how best to adapt international norms to local concepts of ownership (Blakeney 2012; Forsyth 2003, 2012, 2013).

Within the Pacific, these conversations have largely taken place within the anglophone sphere. Moreover, as Forsyth noted, “claims about the potential advantages of intellectual property regimes are necessarily being made at a highly abstract and theoretical level” in the absence of sufficient Pacific-focused studies (2012, 1). Her empirical work on copyright and patents in Vanuatu, Fiji, and Sāmoa indicates the complexity and potential risks of the wholesale adoption of Anglo-American IP laws by independent Pacific states (see, eg, Forsyth 2012; Forsyth and Haggart 2014; Forsyth and Farran 2015, 205–235). In contrast, the legal traditions and opportunities in French Polynesia (as well as in New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna) as an overseas collectivity of France have followed a different pathway, as a result of their alignment with the metropole. The development of the *Monoï de Tahiti* AO beginning in the late 1980s occurred considerably earlier than the IP laws (especially copyright and patent) recently enacted elsewhere. Yet discussion of this case study is notably missing from scholarship of GIs and their IP potential in the Pacific (Farran 2011; Gervais 2012; Geismar 2013; Plant 2013).

As one of the oldest and best-recognized forms of GI, the French appellation d’origine scheme is a broad category of intellectual property rights that “recognizes that a specific good has a quality, reputation, or characteristic that is attributable to its geographical origin” (Aylwin and Coombe 2014, 753; see also Moran 1993; WIPO 2004). Though originating in late

nineteenth and early twentieth century France, this model of geographic protection has proliferated in recent decades as the European Union (EU) and others have adopted and adapted the French system (Barham 2003; Boisvert 2006). In the context of globalization, AOs have been touted as a means to counter the damaging impacts of neoliberal trade and to protect rural spaces and small producers from the homogenizing impact of industrial agriculture. By tying IP to a specific location (rather than to an individual or company), AOs contrast with the more neoliberal US logic of trademarks and branding and may provide a means for Davids to take on the Goliaths of twenty-first-century multinational food corporations. As geographical indications, they also respond to consumer desires to reconnect to place. More broadly, they form part of the trend toward what Jacques Revel has termed *patrimonialization*: the preservation of cultural heritage both small and large as part of widespread collective memorialization in France since the 1980s (Revel 2000). Thus, the recent expansion of GI sits at cross-purposes with globalization: AOs “have themselves become part of the globalization process but their influence has often been contradictory to its established processes and effects” (Moran 1993, 264; see also Besnier 2011).

The original appellation legislation emerged from the central idea of *terroir*.<sup>3</sup> This French concept does not lend itself to an easy translation but encompasses the specific qualities of a particular, contiguous, and generally small landscape; the local *savoir faire* (know-how) associated with production; and the history of production in this space. Together, these factors give the product a “typicity”—based on distinctive qualities that are supposedly unable to be reproduced elsewhere. Thus, an appellation transforms “colloquial, environmental space (*terroir*)” into “jurisdictional space (*territoire*)” (Gade 2004, 849). Applying for, granting, and maintaining an AO requires “a chain of agents, from producers to marketers to consumers, as well as political and legal institutions . . . in the construction of a marketable product, which also entails the construction of meanings of place of origin of that product” (Gade 2004, 849). As Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay have argued (1995), the creation of historical legitimacy, along with the related construction and deployment of stories, myths, and legends in this process, must be researched. This is evident in the politicized and constructed origins of the AO system itself, as the French wine industry sought to link quality to place as a means to counter market competition from colonial Algerian wines in the early twentieth century. Since the first AO in 1935, the system was successful in valorizing

French wine, and the Algerian wine industry slowly declined (Meloni and Swinnen 2014).

The ideals of rural and indigenous development associated with the spread of GI in recent decades contrast markedly with their origins in the late nineteenth century wine lobby. In this respect, and given the legislation's roots in protecting French products from colonial imports, *monoï* has somewhat paradoxically benefitted from the continued association of French Polynesia with France, through having a clear avenue and model for requesting and maintaining an AO. This history points to the contradictions inherent in the emergence and expansion of GI. Indeed, the marshalling of historical evidence in support of commercialization and branding is a defining feature of AO protection, and one that calls for careful interrogation: "Authenticity, tradition, and roots are vigorously manipulated during a time when communication reigns supreme" (Bérard and Marchenay 1995). As outlined below, the acquisition of an appellation has had profound and transformative effects on the product as both a local tradition (*mono'i*) and an international export (*monoï*).

In practice, the assessment of the local and historic qualities of an AO product and its uniqueness can be a fraught and contested process. This includes delineating the boundaries of the territory and documenting the production methods, the varieties cultivated, and the historical evidence for this information. AO laws rest on precise definition (Drahos and Frankel 2012, 9). The need for definition can be a source of conflict between producers, as the history and realities of production are inevitably more complex than the resultant AO laws can encapsulate. The required legal precision is often at odds with the fluid nature of knowledge and practices in both European and indigenous cultures, as this article shows regarding the constructed definition and meanings around *monoï* and its terroir in Pacific Island landscapes and in the development of this coconut oil as a GI product.

Scholarship by Boisvert, Bérard and Marchenay, and others has nevertheless focused on the positive impacts of AO on sustaining rural communities (in the face of continued urbanization) and artisanal producers, as well as protecting biodiversity and associated environmental and cultural knowledge. The increased economic value of products protected and promoted by a GI, alongside related tourism and handicraft industries, can help transform declining agricultural environments into viable and profitable regions (Boisvert 2006, 12–23; Bérard and Marchenay 2006; Gade 2004, 860; Downes and Laird 1999). Given that plant selection and the

development of specific breeds over many generations cannot be patented as invention under Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), GIS and AOs also offer a means of legal protection for traditional agricultural knowledge (Dagne 2010; Boisvert 2006, 6–7). In the absence of adequate, direct, international protection for traditional knowledge, GIS may be the best available substitute (Gervais 2012).

However, there is also a more critical vein running through the scholarship on AOs, concerned with the ways in which the tendency toward nostalgia and patrimonialization of rural areas leads to “Disneyfication” of the landscape and the people in it. Elizabeth Barham has argued that, by following this tendency, the AO and related marketing and tourism reinforce a false dichotomy between tradition and modernity (2003). These critiques parallel long-standing debates over the invention of tradition, as “the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made in the present” (Linnekin 1983, 241). AOs appeal to a desire to seek and recover the “authentic” without acknowledging the constructed and potentially contested nature of a product’s history of use or production (Barham 2003, 132). In addition, Boisvert highlighted that AOs do not protect farmers’ rights or biodiversity directly: “They protect differentiated commodities; they are neither defending cultural values nor conserving genetic diversity *per se*” (2006, 26). Significantly, the AO process places local knowledge about production in the public domain, where others can adopt and adapt it for their own use or commercialization (Boisvert 2006, 14–15). On a practical level, creating and enforcing an appellation is costly and bureaucratic and requires a high level of voluntary industry monitoring, while proscriptive production requirements serve as a possible brake on innovation (Barham 2003, 133; Dagne 2010, 454–455).

Finally, the legal mechanisms for the enforcement of GI protection are complex: “Rules and agreements exist at four scales to protect place-names and appellations—internationally as multilateral agreements, regionally as multilateral agreements, bilaterally as special agreements between two nations or between a single nation and groups of countries such as the European Community and, finally, the laws of individual countries” (Moran 1993, 267).

An important aspect of the use of GI for export products is therefore the ability of different nations to monitor and enforce the use of GI domestically and internationally. While the relevant legislative and organizational structures are well established and well recognized in Europe, they are still developing elsewhere, and the United States largely rejects GI in



favor of company-owned trademarks. The divergence in preferences for trademarks versus GIS has been an ongoing point of contention in high-level trade negotiations. Thus, these global IP debates create additional challenges for Pacific government and industries looking to establish and expand GI as an economic development strategy (Dagne 2010, 443–445).

## MONO‘I: A SYMBOL OF ISLAND CULTURE

*Mono‘i* is the Tahitian term for sacred oil or scented oil. It is the most commonly used name for the oil in French Polynesia, but there are different words in Reo Tuamotu (*monogi*) and in Marquesan language, ‘Eo Enana (*pani*). The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Tahitienne* online defines *mono‘i* as follows:

Perfumed coconut oil obtained by a special preparation. One uses the kernel of germinated nuts (*uto*), dried, grated, fermented by the addition of crushed fat of hermit or other crabs. In exposing the mixture to the sun, one obtains through exudation an oil that one perfumes with flowers (*tiare tahiti*, *moto‘oi* [*Cananga odorata*] . . .) or with sandalwood. The oil is named by the perfume employed, for example *mono‘i pītate*: jasmine *mono‘i*. Currently, one finds for sale “*mono‘i*” prepared with copra oil mixed with [floral] essences. (Fare Vāna‘a Academie Tahitienne 2016)

This definition highlights the use of germinated nuts to produce the oil rather than refined copra. It also suggests the variety of recipes for preparing and adding fragrance to *mono‘i*, which might include *tiare*, sandalwood, or other flowers and herbs. Indeed, on Captain James Cook’s second voyage to the Pacific, naturalist Georg Forster noted at least thirteen plants used in perfuming the oil (Oliver 1974, 155). The scents added to the oil depended on the locally and seasonally available resources in different islands that make up French Polynesia, spread across more than two thousand kilometers and five archipelagos, ranging from the atolls of Tuamotu-Gambiers to the volcanic and relatively biodiverse Marquesas and Society Islands. Similar oils are found across much of Polynesia, such as *lolo* in Sāmoa (Krämer 1995, 318; Alefosia and Henderson 2017).

A common refrain in narrating the history of *mono‘i* is that it is a product made since time immemorial—a heritage of a thousand years or more. Certainly, both *mono‘i* and *tiare* are celebrated in popular Tahitian songs such as “*Mono‘i, te hinu no‘ano‘a Tahiti*” and “*Hei no te tiare*” (Cowell and DeNino 2013, 127). Early visitors to Tahiti frequently commented



on the manufacture of coconut oil and its varied uses. Writing in 1792, James Morrison, second mate on the *Bounty*, provided a full description of mono'i production:

Their method of making Oil is this—The Cocoa Nuts being full grown, are Gatherd in and freed from the Husk. They are then Broke in halves and the Milk which is then sour is thrown away and the Inside of the Nut grated into a Trough made for the Purpose—a piece of Coral tyed on a kind of Horse on which they sit to steady it serves for a Grater. The Nuts being all grated, the trough is hung up, or fixd on a stand and the stuff left to dissolve, and in a few days the Oil begins to run, then [they] Grate into it Sandal wood and mix into it the Dust from the palm blossoms and other sweet flowers herbs &c—and when all is disolvd they strain it off, and put into Bamboos for Use, the Oil retaining the Scent while it is kept Close stoppd—this Process of making it takes up near three Weeks, during which time they mostly turn it over and Mix it evry day—Another Method is by placing the Nuts in the sun to melt, which is done in a few days, but the Oil thus made is always rank—The Cocoa Nut is the only oil they make and the Chief use of it is for Dressing their Hair or Anointing their Bodys where they Chance to be sunburnt—it is Calld Monnoe. (Morrison 2004, 33)

While bamboo sections have been replaced with recycled bottles, this method of manufacture has continued throughout the Society Islands and French Polynesia into the present. This historical evidence is also deployed in justifying the special status of mono'i as a product deserving of legal protection.

Mono'i has varied uses in spiritual and daily life. It could be a moisturizer for skin and a pomade for hair. It might protect and soothe skin exposed to the tropical sun or protect fisherman and divers from the chill of the Pacific waters. The oil helped relax muscles for exercise, oiled the skin of dancers, highlighted the rich color of tattoos, healed skin stretched from childbirth, and nourished and styled the hair. Moreover, the natural, human, and spiritual have long been interconnected in Polynesian societies, and both coconut oil generally and mono'i specifically also provided a noteworthy component of many religious, magical, and medicinal practices. In Society Islands traditions, mono'i was used to anoint the dead, helping preserve the body. On ceremonial occasions, the oil was applied to the bones of the ancestors and altars of the marae (open-air places of worship) (Oliver 1974, 155, 498–499, 935; Albonico and Milledrogues 2009, 15–19; also compare Alefosio and Henderson 2017). Coconut oil also played an important role in Tahitian pharmacopeia. In particular,

massage—*taurumi* or *rumirumi*—using scented coconut oil was conducive to maintaining or restoring good health in Polynesian societies and was regularly practiced within the family (Oliver 1974, 427, 480, 603; Petard 1972, 45).

As with the oil's production, historical continuity in the high standards of hygiene and beauty attributed to Polynesian women underpins the promotion of *mono'i*. Georg Forster in 1777 noted “how remarkably fond these people are of fine smells,” contributing to the development of the long-standing view of scent, the sensory, and the sensual as entwined characteristics of Tahitian society (Oliver 1974, 155). Today, both homemade (or “artisanal”) *mono'i* and industrial *mono'i* are available at the Papeete market (figure 1), while commercially produced brands of *mono'i* can be found in local supermarkets, tourist stores, and resorts. Whether making or purchasing it, the oil continues to feature in daily life for many, notably as a moisturizer for hair and body and for use in massage.<sup>4</sup> Some long-standing uses of the oil such as massage have also been expanded



FIGURE 1 *Mono'i* and *Mono'i* at the Papeete market, October 2015. Photo by author.

and transformed with the establishment of the spa industry for the tourist market.

### COMMERCIALIZING “THE SCENT OF HOLIDAYS”

Though coconut oil and then copra were quickly among the most commonly exchanged and sold products of the Islands and the use of the scented oil was widely observed, the first reference to commercial production comes in 1932. “Monoi” was cited among the perfumes and products made and sold by Samuel Russell and W B Jones of Tiki Products Company (*Pacific Islands Monthly* 1932). It is unclear whether this company continued through the 1930s and 1940s, as commercial monoi’s origins have generally been dated to 1942. On the outskirts of Papeete, Gustave Langy founded the Parfumerie Tiki, which remains one of the most widely available and recognizable brands. Referencing the recycled bottling of homemade mono’i (as well as being named for a ubiquitous Polynesian motif), the Tiki brand has used a distinctive medicinal bottle packaging since its founding. A second company, Parfumerie Sachet, was founded in 1946 by two brothers from France. The emergence of postwar tourism, development of air links, and influx of workers in the epoch of nuclear testing all increased awareness of the oil, and air hostesses in particular brought the product to France, creating an international reputation. Starting in the 1970s, monoi was exported to France and is increasingly reexported from the metropole (Lancelot 2007, 95). Monoi was also sold on the beaches in French Polynesia, becoming “the scent of holidays” for many visitors (Vaxelaire 2015).

The expansion of commercial monoi production was aided by the founding of the oil mill Huilerie de Tahiti in 1968, along with ongoing subsidies for copra, both of which supported continuity in coconut cultivation and the production of coconut oil in Papeete. As a means to halt and reverse urban migration from the outer islands and create a viable economy through copra production, the Huilerie de Tahiti was obliged by law to buy all the copra of the territory at a set price (Robineau 1984). The oil mill formed an important part of the subsidized economy in the wake of nuclear testing in French Polynesia and declining copra prices worldwide. Today, around 120 million CFP per year are paid to the oil mill in subsidies (*Tahiti Infos* 2013; 100 CFP = about US\$.97). The subsidy per kilo in 2017 reached 140 CFP for first-grade copra (*Tahiti Infos* 2017). The establishment of the mill ensured a regular supply of refined copra

oil for the new *monoï* factories, which were centered around Papeete. The *monoï* producers pay commercial rather than subsidized prices for the refined oil—a point the director of Institut du *Monoï* was quick to emphasize in an interview—but the lack of reliance on government support is also a significant element to the *monoï*'s claims to economic success (Vaxelaire 2015).

The image of Tahiti provided a seductive marketing device that was quickly appropriated. By the “bikini years” of the 1970s and 1980s, with tanning in fashion in France, counterfeit *monoï* dominated the French market. Imitations were often made elsewhere, using lower quality oil, synthetic perfumes, or both. Indeed, up to 80 or 90 percent of *monoï* sold in France during this period was not from French Polynesia (Lancelot 2007, 97; Vaxelaire 2015; *Monoï Addict* website 2016).

#### FABRIQUÉ À TAHITI: LOBBYING FOR A LABEL

Faced with this competition, the four existing commercial *monoï* companies created the Syndicat des fabricants de *monoï* de Tahiti in 1988 in order to develop a collective brand and protection of the reputation and quality of their product. They were initially supported by grants from the French Polynesian territorial government and local legislation that sought to protect *monoï* from fraud and false declarations of origins (JOPF 1982, 1988, 1990).<sup>5</sup> The 1988 legislation was the first formal articulation of a distinction between “traditional” *monoï* and industrial or commercially produced *monoï*. “*Monoï* traditionnel” was defined as scented oil made through maceration and decantation under the sun of fresh or germinated grated coconut and one or more Polynesian plants. Apart from filtration for visible impurities, no other physical or chemical treatments were allowed. Traditional producers retained the exclusive right to use such terms as “traditionnel, vrai, véritable, artisanal, authentique, ancestral” to identify their product (JOPF 1988).

By contrast, “*monoï*” (note the lack of qualifier and accents) was to be made from at least 90 percent refined copra oil, produced within the territory from French Polynesia coconuts and plants. Perfumes, coloring agents, preservatives, antioxidants, and ultraviolet filters were, however, permitted as necessary to ensure a good product. The law defined the quality expected of this copra-based *monoï* (such as “characteristic” color, odor, and taste; maximum acidity; and peroxide value), as well as export and labeling requirements, from which artisanal producers were

largely exempt. All monoï exports—whether bottled or in plastic barrels and whether produced on Tahiti or other islands of the territory—were to be clearly identified as “Fabriqué à Tahiti” or “Made in Tahiti” (JOPF 1988). Though the commercialization of monoï had begun forty years prior, this legislation recognized and enshrined the different production processes as well as the different anticipated markets for “monoï traditionnel” and commercially produced “monoï.” The law thus marked a moment of increasing divergence in the definition and ownership over the future development of the monoï industry.

Following a larger campaign by the interprofessional lobby and submission to the Institut National des Appellations d’Origines, monoï was awarded an appellation d’origine by the French Republic in 1992 (figure 2). Through this process, the precise definition of monoï and its production was further refined, as necessitated by the AO process noted above. In early 1991, the Journal Officiel de la Polynésie Française outlined the proposed form of an appellation d’origine for Monoï de Polynésie Française (JOPF 1991). These conditions, discussed in detail below, were largely adopted in the finalized legislation, though it is notable that the geographic designation shifted from Polynésie Française to Tahiti specifically, despite the fact that the refined copra comes exclusively from the outer islands.<sup>6</sup>



FIGURE 2 The Appellation d’Origine Monoï de Tahiti logo. Most (though not all) certified producers display the symbol on their product. Credit: Institut du Monoï; reproduced with permission.



The 1992 appellation legislation and certification is more proscriptive than the 1988 labeling law, narrowing the focus to industrial, commercial *monoï*. It does not mention “*monoï traditionnel*,” though it emphasizes the preparation of AO *monoï* as conforming to “local, loyal and constant” usage—a phrase that recurs in similar AO laws to make heritage claims. The appellation legislation specifies that coconuts (*Cocos nucifera*) must be collected from French Polynesia’s coral soils (ie, from the atolls, especially the Tuamotu-Gambiers, which have 86 percent of the territory’s coconut plantations [IEOM 2015]), in a mature state, split, and with the kernel extracted after forty-eight hours. The flesh should then be dried by the sun for at least a week to ensure moisture content of equal to or less than 10 percent before being bagged. The dried kernel must then be crushed into pieces of around two millimeters and the oil extracted through hot press. The oil is then refined through filtration and treatment. The resultant refined oil must have “characteristic” smell, color, and taste, as well as chemical composition. The production and physico-chemical properties of the oil are recorded by the Huilerie de Tahiti—the mill that processes all copra in the territory—to ensure their conformity with the legislation (JORF 1992; JOPF 1992b). Other copra is mainly exported for use by the margarine, table oils, or soap industries, while the by-products are sold locally as animal feed (Huilerie de Tahiti [2015]).

Commercial *monoï* is made from the refined oil combined with tiare flowers. The legislation also precisely outlines this flower’s collection and use in manufacture. Tiare must be harvested in bud form and picked less than twenty-four hours before infusion. At least ten flowers per liter of oil are macerated for a minimum of ten days. This combination of refined copra oil and tiare is the essential basis of *monoï* under law, though other plants collected within the zone of appellation are also permitted as perfuming agents in addition to tiare if in accordance with traditional usage (JORF 1992; JOPF 1992b). Subsequent additions to the appellation criteria further specified maceration in steel tanks, as well as storage and transport methods to preserve the character of the oil. *Monoï* producers were required to undertake analysis of the physical and chemical properties of each batch (JOPF 1993, 2008). Control over the process of manufacture sought to maintain a consistent quality, aiming to ensure *monoï*’s reputation through a high degree of uniformity in the oil’s texture, odor, and cosmetic benefits. However, compared to the historic description of oil manufacture from Morrison, the AO conditions situate *monoï* as an indus-

trial product of the oil mill and the factory. Individuals, families, or communities making mono'i in the manner of earlier generations thus cannot achieve an AO, nor do they necessarily have the resources to pursue and maintain certification.

The 1992 appellation and subsequent laws created a range of mechanisms to ensure the adoption of production and label standards and to promote mono'i in a unified manner. Notably, the Groupement Interprofessionnel du Mono'i de Tahiti (GIMT), and later the Institut du Mono'i (founded by GIMT members), play key roles in the monitoring of authenticity and quality standards as defined by AO laws, in research and development, and in the promotion of the mono'i brand collectively on an international level (JOPF 1992a). In addition to the geographical indication, the GIMT filed for a trademark in the United States in 1994, where company-owned brands are preferred to collective appellations. The trademark "Mono'i de Tahiti Appellation d'Origine" (serial number 74553739) was registered in 1997 (USPTO 2016). This and other activities of the institute are funded through a parafiscal export tax on mono'i bearing the AO designation, ensuring that the maintenance and promotion of the product is self-sustaining (JOPF 1992c).<sup>7</sup> These efforts appear to have been successful in protecting the reputation of Mono'i de Tahiti, most notably in France where there is very high brand recognition. As the metropole remains the main export destination, 90 percent of those surveyed in France by the Institut du Mono'i knew the product, though its wider international profile is still developing (Vaxelaire 2015; Lancelot 2007, 99).

Currently there is a sophisticated, unified marketing scheme under the auspices of the Institut du Mono'i, highlighting the benefits of commercial cooperation through the AO certification. These benefits include books on mono'i; a number of polished websites and social media engagement; a tourist route around Tahiti based on sites of mono'i production (figure 3); and a biennial festival celebrating the oil called Mono'i Here (Dubois 2014; Mono'i Addict website 2016; Searching for New Beauty website 2017; Vaxelaire 2015). Short documentaries on French television and online videos have also introduced the product to wider audiences (*Capital* 2015; *Des Racines et Des Ailes* 2014; *Reportages* 2013; *Silence, ça pousse!* 2011). These clips emphasize the long heritage of mono'i in indigenous communities, frequently depicting the manufacture of the oil on sandy beaches according to traditional practices and centering on the



use of monoï for Tahitian massage. These marketing tools, along with the branding of the bottles themselves, play into long-standing imaginings of indigenous peoples as living unchanged lives in harmony with nature generally, and of Tahiti as a tropical paradise specifically (see Kahn 2011, especially chapter 3 [96–126]). In particular, sensual and beautiful women—often of ambiguous ethnicity—feature prominently across these websites, brochures, and videos (see figure 4; also compare Teaiwa 1994). Though uncritically adopting and reinforcing problematic elements of European images of the Pacific and its peoples, these techniques undoubtedly contribute to the valorization of monoï as a portable slice of paradise among tourists and consumers abroad.

Since 1995, the Institut du Monoï has added another focus to its activities: the expansion of export markets for monoï in bulk as a raw material for the cosmetics industry (Vaxelaire 2015). Monoï can be found—in varying qualities conforming to the appellation legislation—in a large and diverse range of moisturizers and serums, shampoos and hair care products, bronzers, antiaging and after-sun creams, and mosquito repellants from well-known brands including L’Oreal, Nars, Sephora, Schwarzkopf, and The Body Shop.<sup>8</sup> From 2005 to 2015, the total number of brands using monoï almost doubled, from around 200–250 to 400–450. In recent years, over 90 percent of monoï was exported in bulk for use in the cosmetic industry (IEOM 2015). While the value of this sector is proportionally less than that for bottled or prepared monoï, it has proved an important element of the product’s economic growth.

Underpinning this effort, scientific research coordinated by commercial interests has sought to demonstrate the benefits of monoï for skin and hair. The GIMT established a technical committee in 2006 to aid in these endeavors (DGAE 2016). Published experiments include evidence that monoï is safe, hypoallergenic, and effective in hydrating the skin and in repairing, protecting, and adding shine to hair (Institut du Monoï [2010]). Various French pharmacy theses have also examined the oil (Touboul and Touboul 2002; Lancelot 2007; Gonte 2008; Boubia 2010). The findings of these experiments have been promoted through the Institut du Monoï’s brochures (available in up to nine languages) and through the attendance of Institut de Monoï representatives at major international cosmetic fairs.

This approach has increasingly added a sense of scientific legitimacy to the romantic image of the oil and serves as a means to ensure continued

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Official website : [www.monoïaddict.com](http://www.monoïaddict.com)



### Moorea

**Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa - Massage and bodycare treatments using Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Moorea Maharepa - PK 5.5 sea side - Tel : 40 55 17 12  
 Hours & Admission : Tuesday to Sunday 9 AM to 7 PM.  
 By appointment - There is a charge for massage.

**Atitia Center - Ethnobotanical garden, homemade monoï and traditional massage**  
 Moorea Paopao - PK 11 mountain side - Tel : 40 56 45 35  
 Hours & Admission : Monday to Saturday,  
 demonstration upon request - Free admission.

**Agricultural secondary school of Opunohu (Lycée Agricole) - Footpath on the Monoï Route® / Sentier sur La Route du Monoï®**  
 Moorea Opunohu - PK 18 mountain side  
 Route du Belvédère - Tel : 40 56 11 34  
 Hours & Admission : Monday to Saturday 8:45 AM to 4 PM - Bank holidays 8:45 AM to 12:15 PM - (closed Sunday, Christmas, January 1st, May 1st).  
 Free admission, guided tour upon request.

**Tahiti Arômes - Producer of Monoï de Tahiti® and Tiaré Tahiti plantation**  
 Moorea Haapiti - PK 26 sea side - Tel : 40 56 14 51  
 Hours & Admission : Monday to Friday 9 AM to 4 PM.  
 Free admission.

Fondé en 1992 par les principaux producteurs fédérés au sein du Groupement Interprofessionnel du Monoï de Tahiti, l'Institut du Monoï® a pour mission de développer les connaissances sur le Monoï, faire la promotion et protéger le Monoï de Tahiti® Appellation d'Origine.

Founded in 1992 by the members of the "Groupement Interprofessionnel du Monoï de Tahiti" (Monoï de Tahiti Interprofessional Group), the Monoï Institute® has for mission to develop the knowledge of Monoï, the promotion and protection of the Monoï de Tahiti® Appellation of Origin.

タヒチのモノイの主産生産者グループにより、モノイオイルをさらに一般に周知するとともに、プロモーションを行い、またその名前を保護するために商標申請制度(MAC)を制定するという目的で1992年にモノイ研究所が設立されました。

由大溪地農産物旅行業協会の成員于1992年创建的莫尼依学院，旨在开发椰子花油相关知识，以及推动和保护大溪地莫尼依精油原产地认证的权利。

La Route du Monoï® est une initiative de l'INSTITUT DU MONOÏ

# La Route Monoï

### Tahiti

**Papeete handcraft Market - Homemade monoï and certified Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Papeete - PK 0 - Hours & Admission : open every day until 4 PM - Free admission.

**Huilerie de Tahiti - Production of coconut oil raw material for the certified Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Papeete - Motu Uta - Tel : 40 50 74 00 - Hours & Admission : Tour on request - Free admission.

**Parfumerie Sachet - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Papeete - PK 1.8 mountain side - Tipaerui Valley - Tel : 40 42 72 78 - Hours & Admission : Tour on request - Free admission.

**Laboratoire Cosmétique de Tahiti - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Papeete - PK 1.8 mountain side - Tipaerui Valley - Tel : 40 54 99 40 - Hours & Admission : Tour on request - Free admission.

**Parfumerie Tiki - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Auae Faa'a - PK 2.6 mountain side  
 Tel : 40 82 63 40 - Hours & Admission : Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays) 8 AM-11 AM - Free admission and Tour on request.

**Deep Nature Spa Tahiti - InterContinental Tahiti Resort & Spa - Massage and bodycare treatments using Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 10.5 sea side - Tel : 40 47 31 00  
 Hours & Admission : By appointment - There is a charge for massage.

**Manca Spa at the Manava Suite Resort Tahiti - Massage and bodycare treatments using Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 10.5 sea side - Tel : 40 47 31 00  
 Hours & Admission : By appointment - There is a charge for massage.

**Tevi Tahiti - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 12.2 mountain side  
 Tel : 89 36 70 80 - Hours & Admission : Monday to Friday - Tour by appointment - Free admission

**Rau Horu Tahiti - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti® and traditional massage**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 12.6 sea side - Tel : 87 72 85 89  
 Hours & Admission : every day - Tour by appointment  
 Free admission - There is a charge for massage.



**Tahiti and the Islands Museum - Ethno-botanical Garden**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 15 sea side - Tel : 40 54 84 35  
 Hours & Admission : every day except Monday 9:00 AM-5:00 PM. Garden free admission, 600CFP (\$6) for the museum.

**L'Atelier Botanique at l'hôtel Le Méridien Botanical Garden**  
 Tahiti Punaauia - PK 15 sea side - Tel : 40 47 07 09  
 Hours & Admission : Tour on demand - Free admission.

**Jean Le Maguer - Homemade monoï**  
 Tahiti Paea - PK 19.8 sea side - Tel : 87 70 87 51  
 Tour by appointment - Free admission.

**La Savonnerie de Tahiti - Certified producer of Monoï de Tahiti®**  
 Tahiti Paea - PK 20 mountain side - Tel : 40 42 31 31  
 Open : Monday to Thursday - Hours & Admission : 8 AM-11 AM and 1:30 PM-3 PM. Friday 8 AM-11:30 AM.  
 Tour on demand - Free admission.

**Robert Peretia - Homemade monoï**  
 Tahiti Papara Tahar'u - PK 38 mountain side.  
 Tel : 87 78 08 47 - Hours & Admission : Demonstration on request - Free admission.

**Taharu'u Fleurs - Tiaré Tahiti plantation**  
 Tahiti Papara - PK 39 mountain side - Tel : 87 74 57 08  
 Hours & Admission : Tour on demand - Free admission.

FIGURE 3 Route du Monoï map, showing stops at coconut and tiaré plantations, monoï producers, and spa and massage locations. Credit: Institut du Monoï; reproduced with permission.



# du Monoi® oi Route® Te ara o te Monoi'i



Coconut plantation and copra dryer - Point of view  
Tahiti Papara - PK 39.3 mountain side.

Laboratoire de Cosmétique du Pacifique Sud  
Certified producer of Monoi de Tahiti®  
Tahiti Papara - PK 39.5 mountain side - Tel : 40 54 78 54  
Hours & Admission : Monday to Friday - 10 AM-11:30  
and 1 PM-3 PM - Tour on demand - Free admission.

Tiare Tahiti Plantations - Point of view - Tiare Tahiti  
plantation  
Tahiti Mataiea - PK 48 sea side.

Botanical Garden Harrison W Smith of the Motu  
Ovini - Conservatory of medicinal plants  
Tahiti Papari "Motu Ovini" - PK 51.2 sea side.  
Tel : 40 57 10 58 - Hours & Admission : every day  
9 AM-5 PM - There is a charge for admission - 500 CFP  
(\$5).

Coconut plantation - Point of view  
Tahiti Hitia'a - PK 34.6 mountain side.

Tiare Tahiti plantation - Point of view  
Tahiti Papenoo - PK 14.2 mountain side.

The Spa at the Tahiti Pearl Resort - Massage  
and bodycare treatments using Monoi de Tahiti®  
Tahiti Arue - Plage Lafayette - PK 7 sea side.  
Tel : 40 48 88 21 - Hours & Admission : Monday  
to Thursday - 9:30 AM-7 PM by appointment.  
There is a charge for massage.

Pirae handcraft Market  
Homemade monoi and massage  
Tahiti Pirae - Aorai Tini Hau - PK 4 sea side.  
Hours & Admission : every day - Free admission.  
There is a charge for massage.





FIGURE 4 monoiaddict.com homepage. Credit: Institut du Monoï; reproduced with permission.

potential growth beyond the limited market for bottled, pure monoï. The interplay of the chemical and the cultural is evident in the description of tiare in one of the institute's recent technical brochures:

An endemic flower from Tahiti and Her Islands, Tiare Tahiti is much more than a mythical flower with a suave fragrance. It is a precious source of active compounds and one of the most important plants in the traditional Polynesian pharmacopoeia—the Ra'au Tahiti. Maohi [the indigenous people] used it in preparations to treat migraine or earache, heal wounds or insect bites, and even cure certain types of eczemas. But above all, the Tiare flower is the heart and soul of Monoï. Its composition rich in terpenic alcohol and esters—which includes methyl salicylate—gives the beauty oil its purifying and soothing properties. (Institut du Monoï [2008, 2])

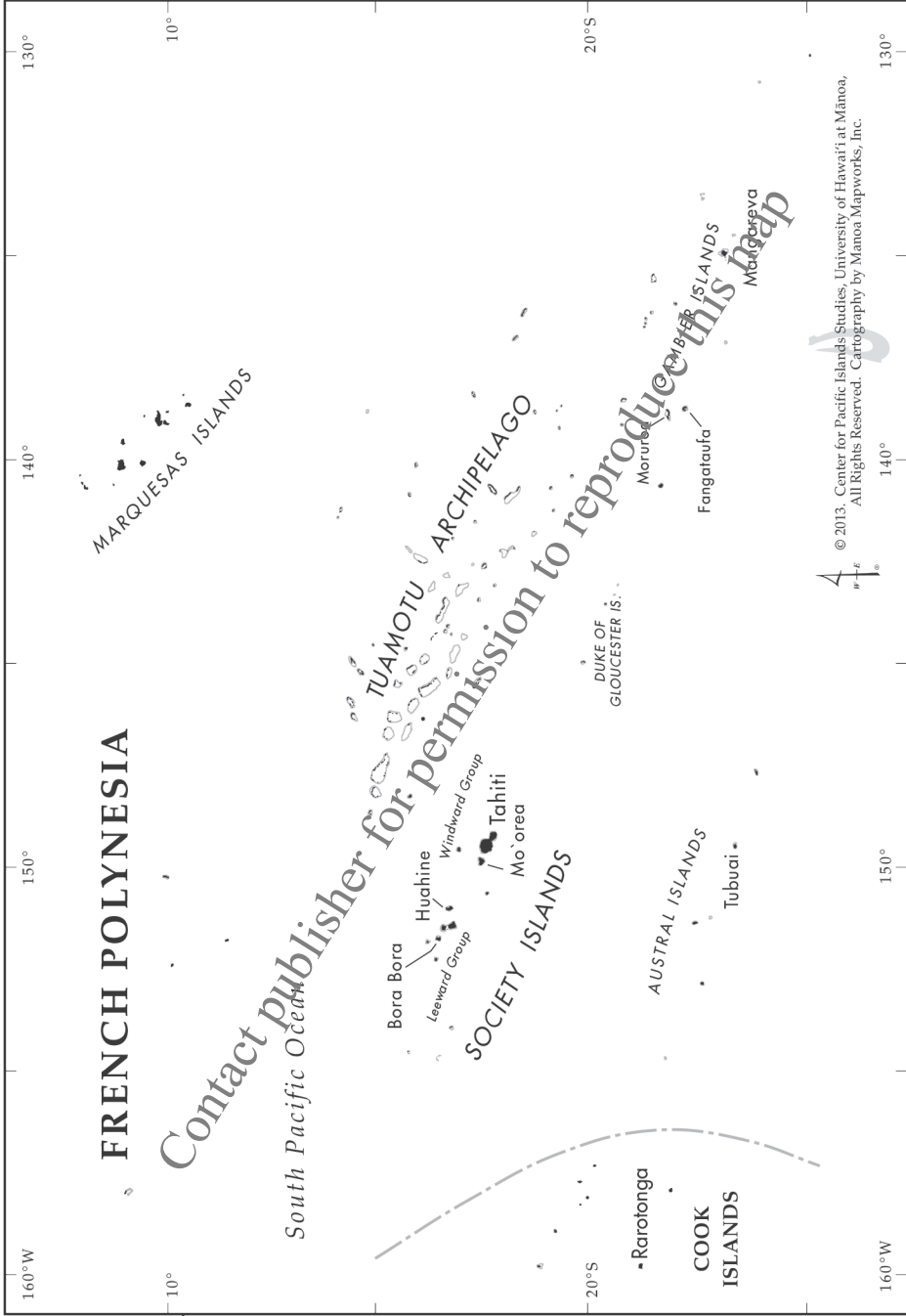
The marshalling of scientific data contributes to the reputation of monoï as simultaneously exotic and timeless, sanitized and modern, and in doing so has proved a valuable strategy in expanding the oil's market.

Monoï—with around 95 percent of production exported each year (Guezenec, Moretti, and Simon 2006, 194)—can thus be seen as a commercial success story built on local heritage, supporting local agriculture, and with high added value within the territory. Though monoï remains a small economic sector (seventh in exports, or 2 percent) in French Poly-

nesia, its exports have grown rapidly in recent years, with the recognition and popularity of the product increasing through the institute's marketing efforts. The value of exports increased 42 percent from 2004 to 2014, to reach a value of 550 million CFP and a total production of 305 tonnes (IEOM 2015). Significantly, *monoï*'s story provides a contrast to the recent history of another important French Polynesian agricultural export, copra. The exportation of copra oil has been a mainstay of the territory's agriculture and export economy for decades. As it is a raw material that is easily substitutable with other tropical oils in a volatile global market, the administration has subsidized and stabilized copra prices since 1968 to ensure a viable livelihood for cultivators spread across the islands. The copra is purchased at a set price by the Huilerie de Tahiti, where it is processed into oil for export. As a comparison, in 2005 exports of *monoï* reached 238 tonnes and a value of 164 million CFP, while over 5,000 tonnes of copra oil were exported for 292 million CFP (Institut Statistique de la Polynésie Française 2006). Thus, *monoï* accounts for 56 percent of the value of coconut oil exports, though it represents less than 5 percent of the volume. *Monoï* highlights the potential for Pacific innovation, value addition, and economic success beyond the subsidy system, though the potential to greatly expand beyond its current niche remains to be seen.

### TRANSFORMING MONO'I TO MONOÏ

The impact of the appellation has been more contradictory than the export figures alone suggest. While the label of origin has been invaluable commercially, the legal definition of the product has substantially transformed it. The alteration of the oil's spelling is emblematic: from *mono'i* with a glottal stop in the Tahitian language to the anglicized *monoi* used in the 1988 law, the commercialized product has distinguished itself from the artisanal since the 1992 appellation through its claim to the French-inflected spelling *monoï*.<sup>9</sup> This change perhaps reflects the increasing involvement of non-Polynesians in creating the legislative and organizational structures around commercial production and promotion. Similarly, AO *monoï* sits at odds with the historic (and contemporary) production of *mono'i*, despite the fact that both the AO legislation and marketing rely on this heritage. The basis of *monoï*'s protected status is as a traditional product rooted in ancestral knowledge and practices, and the ter-



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MAP I French Polynesia



roir of the oil is reinforced through its depiction as part of the “living history” of Tahitian culture. Yet such representations largely obscure the realities of contemporary production.

Thus, appellation is, in the words of anthropologist Gisela Welz, “the Europeanized mode of transforming local food products into ‘commodity-heritage’”: “When food is discursively marked and politically regulated in order to become commodity-heritage, it is taken to represent a group’s history, and the distribution of that artifact is mapped onto the group’s territory” (Welz 2013, 275). Discussing Cyprus’s *loukoumi* (a candy also known as Turkish delight) and *halloumi* (a type of brined cheese) under EU-protected origin certifications, Welz highlighted the ways in which these markers of geographic status and production method tend to flatten and homogenize regional variation, while also denying the often wider, interconnected heritage of such products. In a commercial context, industrial lobbyists’ voices often prevail in defining the key ingredients and production modes.

Clear parallels can be seen with *monoï*, as the regional diversity of scented coconut oil is reduced to a very specific recipe, and the similarity of Tahitian *monoï* to oils not only across the archipelagos of French Polynesia but also other Pacific Island groups is downplayed. Indeed, the compression or erasure of regional diversity is particularly marked in French Polynesia when compared to the much smaller appellation boundaries demarcated in France and Europe. It is also worth noting that the final AO legislation shifts the label name from *Monoï de Polynésie Française*—as publicized in the application—to *Monoï de Tahiti* (JOPF 1991). This may be a smart marketing decision given the cachet of “brand Tahiti” over that of the other islands in French Polynesia. However, it also reinforces the slippage between Tahiti and the much larger entity of French Polynesia, homogenizing the heritage of indigenous communities spread over five historically and culturally distinct archipelagos (see map 1).

As a traditional product, *monoï*, *monogi*, or *pani* is diverse in origin, ingredients, and manufacture. The appellation flattens this: it requires *monoï* to be made with refined copra oil from the Huilerie in Papeete and emphasizes tiare flowers as the essential scent. Other means of making oil (for instance, involving the sun) are not included. This has important intellectual and practical implications. For consumers, the appellation has significant symbolic power in defining *monoï* as an equation of coconut and tiare, thereby overshadowing other recipes. The legislation



also limits appellation to industrial-style production, rather than familial and small-scale producers using sun-based production, their own coconut oil, and alternative perfuming plants. Nevertheless, the enterprises that produce AO monoï are, on the whole, small businesses with fewer than fifty employees across the eight current producers and an additional two hundred indirectly employed by the sector (IEOM 2015). A number of these businesses are family run, such as the Parfumerie Tiki, which has passed from father to son. Daniel Langy, that company's current director, remembers making mono'i at home since childhood, as "the use of monoï is rooted in everyone's daily life" (ICA-Web 2009). There are also benefits along the chain, as the producers purchase local raw materials: oil from the Huilerie and flowers from tiare plantations.

Notably, however, some companies were established by nonlocals, including the most successful current exporter, Laboratoire de cosmétologie du Pacifique Sud, founded by the Touboul brothers of Aubagne in the 1990s (Moly 2013). One interviewee involved in traditional mono'i manufacture felt that the benefits of the commercialization of a traditional product had not reached the local community. This person argued that "instead of helping the community promote the mono'i, they come and confiscate their income": the interviewee felt that knowledge of making mono'i had been appropriated for the profit of the business and that some local manufacturers were even concerned they could no longer make mono'i without an appellation. In this interviewee's opinion, while there was a place for both artisanal and industrial mono'i/monoï, the benefits were not currently being shared locally.

Though the AO label may be amended with the addition of the Marquesas, Tuamotu, Gambier, or Austral Islands, in practice commercial production is centered in the Society Islands. All eight current companies with the appellation are based on Tahiti and neighboring Moorea. Though the copra comes from the atolls, it must be transported to Papeete for processing at the oil mill, and it benefits the companies to be closer both to the mill and to the port for export. In addition, the tiare flowers must be fresh, and thus the planting of this flower for monoï, which consumes 10 percent of the total production, occurs only in the Society Islands (IEOM 2015). It is simply too expensive to ship by air, and boat transport is too irregular or slow to move tiare from outer-island plantation to factory within the requisite twenty-four-hour period (Vaxelaire 2015). In this respect, monoï works counter to the aims of preventing the outer island-to-urban drift that has been emphasized by the policy of copra subsidies since the late

1960s.<sup>10</sup> While the Caisse de soutien des prix de coprah (CSPC) still operates to ensure stable copra prices for the outer islands, the employment and profits from the more profitable manufacture of monoï are situated predominantly around Papeete and exclusively in Tahiti and Moorea.

So, who benefits from the appellation? Certainly the recent emergence of AO monoï is a story of innovation built on tradition, an example of commercially successful branding of the Pacific, and a demonstration of the value of drawing on local agriculture, cultural heritage, and knowledge through the concept of *terroir*. The economic value of the product is also significant, given the volatile and often low prices for copra. However, as demonstrated, the appellation and collective marketing obscure the true conditions of commercial manufacture. Imagery depicting monoï made in sculpted bowls on the beach and Tahitian “mamas” massaging cute infants with the scented oil hide the fact that the monoï exported and purchased by most visitors is factory-made. Tradition has been carefully repackaged.

The GIMT represents larger commercial interests rather than small-scale home manufacturers, who have not benefitted directly from the AO and may have faced increased competition. Tahiti, and especially Papeete, is re-centered economically. Finally, the AO was only possible because of the continued colonial connection between French Polynesia and metropolitan France, in terms of both the protective AO legislation and the subsidies for copra and oil crushing provided in the wake of nuclear testing (Robineau 1984). Thus, besides being an industrial product, AO monoï is also a colonial one. Monoï in the twenty-first century is therefore a product of contradictions: It seeks to protect cultural heritage while enshrining industrial manufacture, and it is a growing economic sector strongly rooted in local and regional culture and landscape but made possible through colonial heritage.

#### APPELLATIONS AND GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS AS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PACIFIC

So, does the example of AO monoï provide a model for other Pacific nations to both commercialize and protect their products? Can GIS offer a strategy suitable for rural development, indigenous IP, and protection of biodiversity in the Pacific? Certainly, the possibility of obtaining an AO for French Polynesian vanilla and pearls is being investigated, while elsewhere GIS have been suggested for a wide range of agricultural and

cultural products. These include noni (*Morinda citrifolia*) (Sāmoa); fine mat weaving (Tonga, Cook Islands, and Tokelau); decorative weaving (Fiji); kava (Vanuatu, Fiji, and Pacific); floor mats and string bags (Papua New Guinea); baskets (Solomon Islands), and carvings (Cook Islands and Papua New Guinea) (Guezennec, Moretti, and Simon 2006; Blakeney 2012, 186–187; Plant 2013; Downes and Laird 1999; Forsyth and Farran 2015, 230).

The example of AO monoï provides some basis for optimism. Over the past twenty-five years, the export of this oil has rapidly expanded while, more generally, monoï production requires significant amounts of refined copra oil and tiare and makes an important contribution to the Tahiti brand and to the tourism sector. Though the industry associations were initially aided by government grants, monoï has become a profitable and self-sufficient industry rather than a subsidized one (as buyers pay the full price for the processed oil rather than benefiting from the copra subsidies). Nevertheless, there are numerous remaining and future challenges, including fickle and ever-changing fashions that may impact the international desirability of the oil, as well as the continued reliance on the French market for the majority of exports. Locally, declining production of copra and tiare, especially in the Society Islands, may limit the supply of raw materials. More significantly, the small businesses producing monoï lack market power against big cosmetic companies who are now major buyers and therefore derive less income from this sector than the volume of trade suggests: “Faced with these buyers, their bargaining power in terms of price is equally limited, particularly as they are situated as a niche market in competition with other low-volume, original and so-called precious oils (argan oil, grapeseed oil)” (IEOM 2015).

The Tahitian example also has some notable differences that should be taken into account when assessing the potential of this model in other Pacific states. Tahiti benefits from wider name recognition than many other islands in the Pacific, while the use of broader geographical terms like South Pacific or Oceania may be too generic to attract global attention. Though there are greater challenges in establishing consumer recognition for lesser-known islands, the development of GI and associated branding may have wider, less tangible benefits such as tourism. There is, however, a potential to overcrowd the market with competing GI for similar products. The resources and institutional capacity to create and maintain the necessary legislation, organization, and enforcement mecha-

nisms may also be significant barriers in some states (Forsyth 2012, 9). French Polynesia benefited in this respect from a well-established path to registration in France, though EU technical assistance may aid in future Pacific endeavors toward GI legislation.

## CONCLUSION

The commercialization of *Monoï de Tahiti* highlights the complexities of implementing culturally appropriate IP legislation in the Pacific. Commercialization and associated legal protections necessitate transformations of the product itself. Both the basic ingredients and the manufacturing process have changed significantly in the last fifty years, and it is these newer methods that are legally recognized. Moreover, the success of *monoï*'s AO registration relies on continued colonial connections to France and a carefully curated version of the Tahitian past. These compromises are evident in the transformation of *mono'i* to *monoï*.

Yet these downsides may be offset by both direct and indirect benefits, as the *monoï* industry has experienced strong growth and indirectly supports local agriculture (copra and tiare). An AO shows the potential for the diffusion of profits from commercialization more widely than a company-held trademark, such as the foreign-owned Fiji Water (Kaplan 2007). But, significantly, spreading benefits for the local population both widely and appropriately remains an ongoing challenge. The limited distribution of economic benefits and employment opportunities across the whole territory reflects the narrowing definition and repackaging of a widespread cultural tradition.

Thus, while GIs are not a magic bullet to simultaneously solve economic, environmental, and IP challenges facing the region, their emphasis on collective, place-based ownership of products and brands may align with Pacific values more closely than alternative, existing Anglo-American IP regimes. In this article, I have examined the ways that European legislation has transformed an indigenous practice, but future research could further illuminate the ways in which Islanders themselves have contested, appropriated, transformed, and "provincialized" the intellectual property rights surrounding the oil (see Geismar 2013). *Mono'i* sits alongside *monoï* on market shelves; innovation has not displaced tradition. As the possibilities of GIs and related intellectual property rights in the Pacific are debated, *mono'i/monoï* provides an example of these issues in action.

## EPILOGUE

Between the time this article was first submitted for review and when it was published, the GIMT and the parafiscal tax on monoï exports were dissolved (JOPF 2016; Farhi 2017). Replacing the GIMT from 2017, commercial monoï manufacturers are divided between the new Groupement d'intérêt économique (GIE) and Cluster Tahiti Cosmetic (David 2017a, 2017b). The impact on the AO Monoï de Tahiti remains to be seen, although this situation is indicative of the contested, ongoing nature and negotiations over the branding of this cultural tradition.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

1 The WIPO Intellectual Property Handbook defines intellectual property in the broadest sense as “the legal rights which result from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary and artistic fields.” IP laws serve to protect the “moral and economic rights of creators” as well as a means for governments to encourage “economic and social development” (WIPO 2004, 3). IP exists in a variety of forms, including patents, trademarks, copyright, and geographical indications such as appellations d’origine.

2 The 2002 Model Law defines traditional knowledge as covering any knowledge which “(a) is or has been created, acquired or inspired for traditional economic, spiritual, ritual, narrative, decorative or recreational purposes; and (b) is or has been transmitted from generation to generation; and (c) is regarded as pertaining to a particular traditional group, clan or community of people . . . and (d) is collectively originated and held” (SPC 2002, 4).

3 See Bérard and Marchenay 1995 for a genealogy of the term *terroir*.

4 The transformations and continuations in the local use and significance of *mono'i* and *monoï* constitute another area worthy of further, more ethnographic, research.

5 Arrêté no. 283 SCG du 8 mars 1982 (JOPF 1982) provided a subsidy of 818,000 CFP for the association of *monoï* producers and distributors, and Arrêté no. 932 CM du 27 août 1990 (JOPF 1990) granted the Syndicat des fabricants de *monoï* de Tahiti 6,000,000 CFP for their promotion campaign outside the territory.

6 The same is true for another major French Polynesian export, so-called Tahitian pearls. The development of this industry has had similarly complex socioeconomic impacts for the outer islands. See, eg, Tisdall and Poirine 2011; Rapaport 1995; Mawyer 2016b.

7 The 1992 legislation set this export tax at 50 CFP per kilo of AO *monoï* and 200 CFP per kilo of refined oil or *monoï* exported in bulk (JOPF 1992c). In 2012, this was changed to 150 CFP per kilo exported (JOPF 2012).

8 *Monoï Addict* 2016b has twenty-five pages of photographs showing the various cosmetic products containing *Monoï* de Tahiti.

9 The changing use and orthography of Pacific languages in the context of an increasing globalized world is discussed more fully by Rehg 1998 for Pohnpei and Tualalelei, Mayer, and Hunkin 2015 for Sāmoa.

10 In 1951, 50 percent of the territory's population lived on Tahiti. By the 1980s, this had increased to over 70 percent (Henningham 1989, 108). The trend of outer island-to-Tahiti migration did slow during the 1980s, but the majority of the population remains centered on Tahiti and Moorea, with 75 percent living on these islands (Merceron 2013, 1).

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### *Abstract*

In 1992, Monoï de Tahiti (coconut oil scented with tiare flowers) was granted an appellation d'origine by the French government. It was (and remains) the only cosmetic product to receive such certification, as well as the only appellation in French Polynesia. This article examines monoï as cultural heritage and as an industrial product in the territory, and the transformations wrought through gaining the appellation. The appella-



tion d'origine formally recognized and protected the unique environmental and cultural heritage embodied by the oil, which has long been made with Polynesian communities and which has been commercialized since World War II. The production methods enshrined in the appellation laws, however, emphasize industrial manufacturing processes, in tension with both the imagined Pacific heritage marketed to tourists and foreign consumers and the place of *mono'i* within Polynesian communities. In navigating between tradition and modernity, this contemporary commodity raises questions of authenticity and invented tradition, as well as questions of who benefits from the repackaging of cultural tradition in French Polynesia. Given that appellations d'origine and geographical indications have recently been touted as tools for indigenous intellectual property, this case study demonstrates both the potential and limits of such legislation for the Pacific more broadly.

**KEYWORDS:** Tahiti, French Polynesia, appellation d'origine, geographical indication, intellectual property, coconut oil, tiare