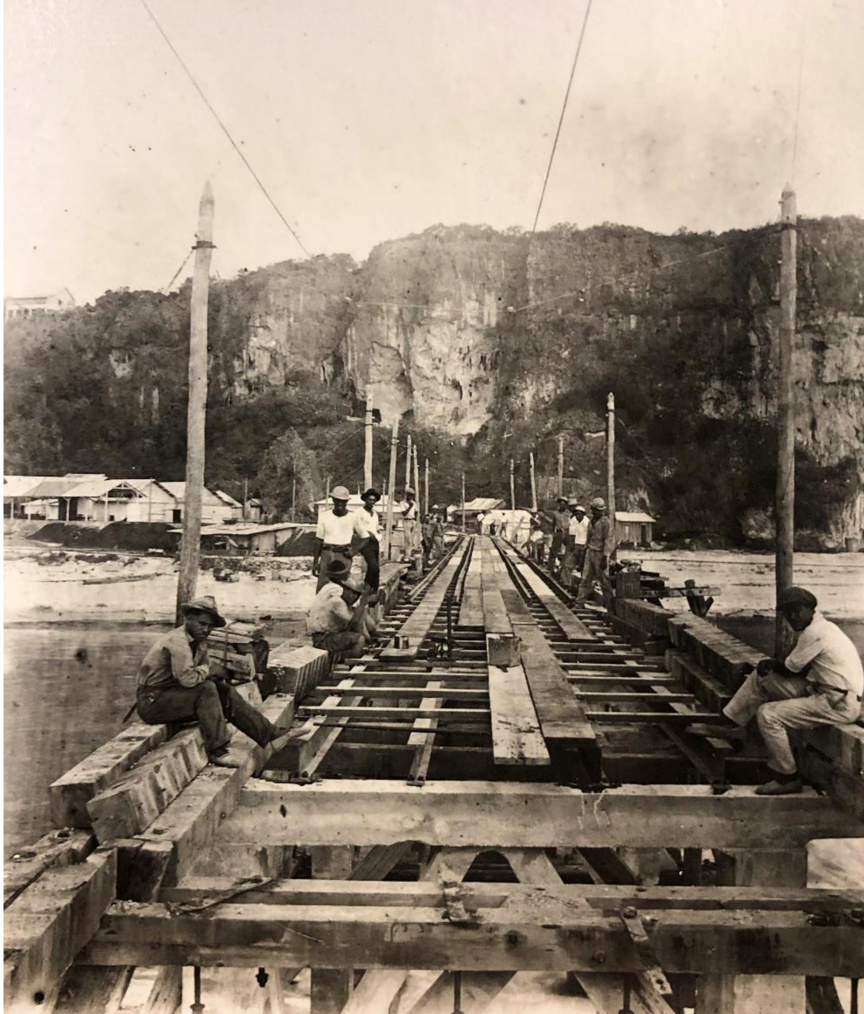
Re-Mining Makatea:

People, Politics, and Phosphate Rock



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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
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Declaration

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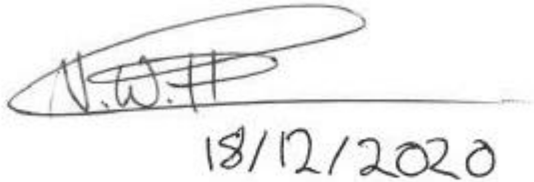

Nicholas William Hoare

18 December 2020

Cover Image: Transforming old wooden jetty into a concrete and iron one (Jan. 1927).

Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-o-322

Acknowledgements

I have probably read far more acknowledgement sections than I care to admit in the prepation of this thesis. As my friend and mentor Roti Make likes to say about her weekend ice-cream sundaes from McDonald's Taravao, reading them has been my *petit péché* (or sin). However, I have since learned that producing one's own acknowledgement section is far less pleasurable than the consumption of others', such is my fear that a debt has been forgotten among the long list accrued over the years.

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While it may have been the calibre of the ANU's past and present historians that initially drew me to Canberra, it was only once I arrived that I realized the value of the PhD community. My time would have not been the same if it were not for my colleagues in the Coombs building, people like my original PhD cohort: Daniel May, Alice Rumble and Catherine Fisher; and others including but not limited to: Ben Huf, Scott Dempsey, Colin Milner, Wilbert Wong Wei Wen, Murray Chisolm, Maria Haenga-Collins, Shannyn Palmer, Will Scates Frances, Eamonn McNamara, Ingrid Ahlgren, Nic Halter, Myjolynne Kim, David Oakshott, Mitiana Arbon, Talei Luscia Mangioni and visiting student, Sean Phillips.

ANU innovations such as the departmental thesis writing group, shut-up-and-write sessions, and the thesis boot camp were also invaluable as motivational tools.

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[1] Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 125.

Thanks are due to the team with whom I originally travelled to Makatea (Paul and Rose Judd, Claude Johnstone, Marama Lorenzo, and Patita Savea especially), and to those on Makatea like Jacky Ioane, *mamie* Louela, Ruben and Mata, Reretini Viritua, Vinona Tetoofa, the Poroi family, Ah-Scha Gontran, Tevahinemoumu Vaitahe, Mehotea and Gilles, Sato, Raoul, Dimitri and the rest of the gang at the Protestant Church, and of course the *tāvana* Julien Mai and his family. *Mauruuru roa à toutes et à tous, comme je l'ai toujours dit, cette thèse n'est que le début.*

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the processes involved in the making, unmaking and potential remaking of a Pacific phosphate island. It is a history of Makatea, an uplifted coral atoll in the Tuamotu Archipelago (French Polynesia), mined by a French private company from 1908 to 1966 and presently coveted by an Australian-financed re-mining project called Avenir Makatea.

Using predominantly French, and English-language archival sources, I excavate aspects of the island's past, re-visiting important moments in time before, during and after the mine to demonstrate how phosphate islands are not just born but consciously, and often painstakingly, made. In presenting this history, I am concerned with exploring the relationship between human agency and broader environmental, economic or political circumstances; emphasizing through the extended case study of Makatea that phosphate islands exist only insofar as they belong to a complex set of local and global interrelationships involving landowners, labourers, companies, markets, governments, and environmental conditions, with each of these contingencies being open to contestation and negotiation.

Like recent historical studies on guano and phosphate islands, this thesis reinforces the link between extractive colonialism in the Pacific and input-intensive agricultural production in the neo-European nations of the Pacific Rim. However, unlike the examples of Nauru and Banaba, the particular historical circumstances of Makatea – belonging to a French colony, for one; mined by a private company, for another – meant that the island was subjected to both a shorter and less extensive period of mining, providing space for a different, more hopeful kind of historical narrative where the phosphate imperialism of the 20th century does not necessarily define the island's past or future.

As the first extended study of an island relegated by some Anglophone commentators to the status of the 'third phosphate island', this thesis adds to a growing historiography on the Pacific phosphate industry. It adds nuance to a French historiographical tradition that overlooks the British influence on the making of the industry and downplays the significance of the Makatea experience for the later nuclear era in French Polynesia. Over six chapters, this thesis traces Makatea's development from a lush Polynesian island, to a quintessential mined land and back again. It seeks to provide much needed context for present debates within French Polynesia about Makatea's future identity and whether it will revert once more to a phosphate island or continue to develop in a sustainable and self-defined direction with less reliance on the natural resource that nonetheless put the island onto the world map. Ultimately, this study is a reminder that in an era that has witnessed a movement towards global history, stories of small places, and islands in particular, still matter.

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Glossary

Ari'i	Chief, chiefly class.
'āti	Tribe or clan, known as gāti in Pa'umotu.
Avenir Makatea	Makatea's future.
Ayant droit	Legal inheritor of or heir to property.
Le Cercle	Colloquial term denoting the CFPO management.
Clef de voûte	Key or loadstone.
Commission paritaire	Select Committee.
Demi	Literally, half. Popularly used to denote people of mixed race within French Polynesia, regularly carrying a class or social connotation, particularly in contrast to the 'non-assimilated' Polynesian population.
DOM-TOM	French overseas departments and territories.
Enfer	Hell/inferno.
L'époque minière	Popular term for the mining years at Makatea, 1908–66.
Fa'a'apu	Family, community or market garden.
Fa'atara	Narrative form used in Polynesian oratory to praise or incite a challenge (not to be confused with *fa'ateniteni* which provide only praise).
Fa'ateniteni	Traditional narrative form used to praise the beauty of a place or person.
Fa'atere	Master mariner.
Farāni	France/French.
Fatu Fenua	Indigenous landowners.
Femmes en carte	Sex workers (colloquial).
Fenua	Land; used also to denote French Polynesia as a whole (homeland).
Feo	Coral limestone that occupies much of the interior of Makatea.
Fēti'i	Family or relatives.
Filles publiques	Sex workers (colloquial).
Gao Gam San	Cantonese for Old Gold Mountain or San Francisco (Gam San came to refer to gold-rush sites in general).
Hakka	Literally, 'guest people' or 'strangers' (*Kejia* in Mandarin). The Hakka are a sub group of Hakka-speaking Han Chinese.
Huagong	Chinese 'coolie' labourer.
Huaqiao	Overseas Chinese migrant.
Indigénat	French legal code designed in Algeria principally for governing colonied subjects in French settler colonies.
Ivi Tupuna	Ancestral remains.

Kaveu (or *'aveu*)	Coconut crab (*Birgus latro*).
Lieux de mémoire	Sites of memory, popularized as a concept by Pierre Nora.
Magasins	Retail shops or stores.
Main-d'œuvre	Work or labour force.
Makatea	Geological term used to describe islands surrounded by coral limestone with an exposed volcanic core.
Māmāiā	19th-century Tahitian millenarian movement.
Mana	Strength, authority or respect.
Manahune	Guest peoples or plebeian classes.
Manœuvre	Unskilled labourer.
Marae	Polynesian ceremonial or socio-cultural site.
Mère nourrissante	Nourishing mother.
Métèque	Xenophobic French term for immigrant (metic).
Métis/métissage	Mixed-race or miscegenation.
Metua	Father or elder, popular name of endearment for Pouvana'a a O'opa.
Mihiroa	The name of both the cultural and linguistic region and the people from the western Tuamotu atolls Makatea, Rangiroa, Tikehau, Mataiva, Arutua, Apataki, Kaukura and Niau.
Mono'i	Scented coconut oil and emblematic Tahitian beauty product.
Mūto'i	Indigenous Polynesian police officer.
'Ohipa fa'a'apu	Agricultural or horticultural work.
'Ohipa moni	Wage work.
L'oubli	The forgotten.
Ouvrier	Skilled labourer.
Pahī	Tuamotuan double-hulled canoe.
Parata	Man-eating shark(s).
Pelle	Shovel. People are quick to refer to the mining work on Makatea as being done wholly by *la pelle et la brouette* (shovel and wheelbarrow).
Pension	Family-run, bed & breakfast-style accommodation.
Phosphatier	Colloquial label for phosphate ships.
Pirimato	The men on Makatea who looked after and laid to rest the deceased.
Pito	Umbilical cord.
Popa'ā	European.
Presqu'île	Peninsula. Iin the case of Tahiti, it is the area known as Ta'iarapū.
Pūfenua	Placenta.

Punti	Hakka term used to describe Cantonese in French Polynesia (*bendi* or 'natives' in Mandarin).
Pupu autahu'araa	Early 20th century prophetic movement originating in Ana'a.
Purūmu	Voyaging route.
Puta tupuna	Geneological manuscripts/written records of oral tradition.
Le Ralliement	Decision by the French colonies to support De Gaulle and the Free French after the outbreak of the Second World War.
Rupe	Polynesian imperial pigeon endemic to Makatea (*Ducula aurorae*).
Tahu'a	Religious or expert knowledge holder.
Tāmanu	Large, evergreen tree (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) formerly planted next to *marae* and used for medicinal purposes.
Tāumi	Ornamental or warrior breastplates.
Tāvana	Mayor or chief of district (also used to refer to the Governor).
Terre des hommes	Most often used to refer to the Marquesas though also used by the Mihiroa to refer to Vavau or Bora Bora, their ancestral home.
Tiare	Emblematic Tahitian flower (*Gardenia Tahitensis*)
Tīfaifai	Patchwork bed covers or quilts.
Les travaux	Mine fields, known as the diggings in English.
'Ura (or *kura*)	Red feathers.
'Uru	Breadfruit.
Va'a	Polynesian canoe, usually single-hulled.
Zaibatsu	Japanese business conglomerate.

List of Abbreviations

AN	Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine
ANOM	Archives Nationales d’Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence
ANU	The Australian National University, Canberra
ANZ	Archives New Zealand, Wellington
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
BDIC	Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine
BPC	British Phosphate Commissioners
BSEO	*Bulletin de la Société des Études Océaniennes*
CFPO	Compagnie française des Phosphates de l'Océanie
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
EFO	Les Établissements Français d’Océanie
ICJ	International Court of Justice
JO	*Journal Officiel des Établissements Français de l’Océanie*
JPH	*The Journal of Pacific History*
JPS	*The Journal of the Polynesian Society*
JSO	*Journal de la Société des Océanistes*
KMT	Kuo Min Tang (or Guomindang in Mandarin)
LMS	London Missionary Society
NAA	National Archives of Australia, Canberra
NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra
OMRI	Organic Materials Review Institute
ORSTOM	Office de la recherche scientifique et technique outre-mer
PIM	*Pacific Islands Monthly*
PMB	Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
PPC	Pacific Phosphate Company
RDPT	Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes
SPAA	Service du Patrimoine Archivistique et Audiovisuel - Te Piha Faufa'a Tupuna
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UA	Unilever Archives, Port Sunlight
UAC	United Africa Company
UDSR	Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance.
UST	Union des Syndicats Tahitiens
WCCA	Wellington City Council Archives

A Note on Terminology and Orthography

The standardization or codification of *te reo Tahiti* (the Tahitian language), originally an oral language, has evolved markedly since Europeans first encouraged the Mā'ohi to commit their language to writing. Nevertheless, despite the creation of a Polynesian equivalent to the famous *Académie française,* the *Académie tahitienne - Fare Vāna'a* in the 1970s, there is still widespread orthographic variation in popular and official usages, especially as concerns the names of people and places. Unlike *te reo Māori* in Aotearoa New Zealand or *'Ōlelo Hawai'i* in Hawai'i (and rather more like *Gagana Samoa*), the use of diacritical marks (*tārava*) and glottal stops (*'eta*) have not been accepted by all and there is still much local variation, especially between speakers of the multiple dialects or languages that make up *te reo Mā'ohi* (the language of the Mā'ohi people).

As I point out later in this thesis, Makatea played a part in the popularization of *te reo Tahiti* as the *lingua franca* of the Mā'ohi, but historically the inhabitants of Makatea (or Ma'atea as it would have been known) spoke the language of the Mihiroa people, a dialect of the Tuamotuan or Pa'umotu language that nonetheless resembled Tahitian more than Tuamotuan (which uses a glottal stop in place of the consonant *k*).[1]

Given such a context, it is unsurprising to find that Anglophone and Francophone scholars have left a potpourri of spelling forms for Mā'ohi-language terms and names across the historical record. In this thesis I have therefore tended to keep the author's original spelling while quoting and have only added the modern form in parantheses where the meaning would otherwise be unclear. Elsewhere in my own writing, I defer to the forms as stipulated by the *Académie tahitienne - Fare Vāna'a* (most personal names excepted).

Even though it is anachronistic to use the term French Polynesia to describe the region prior to 1957, in this thesis I have often used it interchangeably to avoid excessive repetition of the colony's official name, *Les Établissements français de l'Océanie* (or the EFO). Whereas it was once common practice for authors to refer to the entire region as Tahiti or classify the Mā'ohi people as 'Tahitians', I have tried my best to avoid such terminology for the way it flattens the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. That said, for simplicity I prefer to use the term 'territory' to describe the region that has been administered under various umbrella terms such as protectorate, colony, overseas territory, overseas country or collectivity.

Finally, all translations from French into English, unless otherwise stipulated, are my own.

---

[1] The authoritative source is still J.F. Stimson and Donald S. Marshall, *A Dictionary of Some Tuamotuan Dialects of the Polynesian Language* (Salem, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1964), revised by Karl Rensch in 2013.

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Relics of the Mining Age looking back towards the cliffs of Temao.

Source: Nicholas Hoare, 2018.

To the man in the street ‘phosphate rock’ means nothing; he knows not; he has in all probability never heard the term used. Yet the farmer and the fertilizer man know that it is one of the most important of the world's raw materials, and one in which the world should have a vital interest, seeing that future food production must depend to a great extent upon adequate supplies of phosphate rock. The prospect of the exhaustion of the virgin lands, which are now the main source of the supply of wheat, is coming nearer with each year that passes, and consequently fertilizers will probably play an even more important part in the future than they do at the present time.

Walter H. Voskuil, ‘The Utilization of our Phosphate Resources’, *Economic Geography* 1:3 (1925): 387.

As its time is nearing to an end, it seems to me the appropriate moment to celebrate the work of the CFPO. The work of a French company which has contributed significantly to the development of French Polynesia and the wellbeing of its people for more than half a century.

Robert Langlois, *Journal Officiel de la Polynésie française*, 10 May 1966, 235.

That’s what they did to the Mihiroa. They came, they took their lands, they took them off their lands, they brought people from Tahiti, from the Cook Islands, from wherever, they put them on the land to make money, and the real landowners, the Mihiroa, they were just put on the side, and given what? 2 francs, 3 francs … they couldn’t stop it, they didn’t have a word in this … it was a rape.

Sabrina Birk, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018.

Introduction: The Anatomy of a Phosphate Island

Figure 0.1: Sketch of Makatea (or Maatea) taken by French officers on the *Zélée*, 1908.
Source: SPAA, 48W/2024, Poste administratif de Makatea.

This thesis is a history of an island. It is one of the 25,000 islands scattered across the vastness of the Pacific Ocean and one of the 118 islands that comprise French Polynesia (or Mā'ohi Nui), an overseas collectivity of the French Republic, that stretches over an oceanic expanse equal to a great swathe of Europe, from Calais to Odesa (figure 0.2). For the Indigenous inhabitants of these islands, the Mā'ohi people, islands are their *fenua* (land), their *mère nourrissante* (nourishing mother), where the *pūfenua* or placenta and umbilical cord (*pito*) of their children are buried symbolically after birth.[1] Far from being the blank tableau of the European imaginary, the islands of French Polynesia are each marked by complex ecosystems and storied landscapes. Once organized around ancient *marae* (ceremonial sites), the social life of an island is now more likely to congregate around a local church, *fa'a'apu* (community garden), or *'centre commercial'*. This island, Makatea, with its ancient *marae*, its two churches, and multiple *fa'a'apu,* is no different.[2]

Despite similarities to neighbouring islands, the island of Makatea has a very singular history. Not only is it the most elevated atoll in the Tuamotu archipelago; at 113m, it is one of the highest in the world.[3] Other physical attributes also set it apart. Once, it contained a massive phosphate deposit that has shaped its historical course over more than one hundred years.

This is the first dedicated history of Makatea, a Polynesian island mined by the Compagnie française des Phosphates de l'Océanie (CFPO) from 1908 to 1966 and possibly soon to be re-mined by an Australian-backed company, Avenir Makatea (Makatea's future). It is a history weighted towards the 60-year period known as *l'époque minière,* when 11.3 million tons of Indigenous land were removed and sent to nourish the nutrient-poor fields of the Pacific Rim as superphosphate fertilizer. This is not the only period of change in Makatea's 120,000-year-old history, yet it represents the most accelerated period of change since the island's original geologic uplift.[4] The discovery of phosphate rock not only put the island on the maps of European and Japanese shipping companies, it brought about a level of

[1] Miriam Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 65; Bruno Saura, 'Continuité des rites: le nombril des églises et le placenta des hommes en Polynésie orientale', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* (hereinafter *JSO*) 116 (2003): 49–50.
[2] For archaeological data on Makatea's *marae,* see Pierre Vérin, 'Ra'iupu Marae of Makatea, Tuamotu Islands, Oceania', *Asian Perspectives* 8:1 (1964): 212–4; Paul Niva, 'Inventaire historique et archéologique de Makatea en 2005', *Bulletin de la Société des Études Océaniennes* (hereinafter *BSEO*) 314 (2008): 54–61.
[3] Walter M. Goldberg, 'Atolls of the World: Revisiting the Original Checklist', *Atoll Research Bulletin* 260 (2016): 10; Jean-François Butaud and Frédéric Jacq, *Atolls soulevés des Tuamotu: guide floristique* (Papeete: DIREN, 2014), 5.
[4] L.F. Montaggioni et al., 'Geology and Marine Biology of Makatea, an Uplifted Atoll, Tuamotu Archipelago, Central Pacific Ocean', *Journal of Coastal Research* 1:2 (1985): 168.

industrialization until then unheard of in the region. As Julien Mai, the current *tāvana* or mayor of the island, likes to say, it was like 'Papeete was still cooking with a Tahitian oven when Makatea had microwaves'.[5] Or, in the words of one the island's promising young leaders, Reretini Viritua, Makatea 'was like New York, it was like Broadway'.[6]

Figure 0.2: Map of modern French Polynesia with island groups shown with their English nomenclature.
Source: CartoGIS 00-074.

At the height of production in the early 1960s, Makatea was home to just over 3,000 people and boasted French Polynesia's only train, its first cinema, floodlit basketball courts, and

[5] Julien Mai in Jacques Navarro-Rovira, *Makatea l'Oubli* (Paris: Bonne Compagnie, 2010). Known by all as the *tāvana,* Mai is technically only the *maire délégué* (deputy-mayor). Since 1972 Makatea has belonged to the commune of Rangiroa, where the mayoralty is based. The population of Makatea consists of roughly only two per cent of the commune's total population.

[6] Reretini Viritua, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 22 Sep. 2018. Writing in March 1966, journalist Michel Anglade said the island's train running through the village gave it 'an aspect of Disneyland', Michel Anglade, 'Makatea: l'île des phosphates à la veille de la fin', *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 4 Mar. 1966, 7.

even ice cream.[7] The popular narrative has it that this epoch came to a sudden end in October 1966 when the CFPO decided to close shop, and the company schooner, *l'Oiseau des Îles II,* deposited the last of the company's workers on Tahiti where a new historical period of nuclear-fuelled industrialization was just beginning. Makatea, the island which had given so much to the local and global economy, was abandoned, left to rust away and become the forgotten island of French Polynesia;[8] its population of almost 100 people are today connected to Tahiti by no more than an infrequent, regional commercial shipping route, and the occasional catamaran bringing handfuls of intrepid tourists paying top-dollar to visit what has become what William Cronon might label 'a symbol of romantic decay'.[9]

By treating the mining period as an aberration rather than the norm, this thesis seeks to challenge the forgotten island narrative. While I do not wish to minimize the effects of phosphate mining, which brought about a significant change in fortune for the island, I argue that this is better viewed as a change in the island's historical trajectory rather than a complete rupture, a timely deceleration after an anomalous period of great acceleration that all but ruined at least a third of the island. It is not an anti-development argument, but an appeal to history as providing a potential way out of the island's present resource curse. As Viritua told me upon a 2018 visit to the island, 'what is done is done, now we have to rebuild, but at our own rhythm, and at our own pace'.[10] Seen through the eyes of the local Mihiroa (the tribe or name of the people from the islands of the western Tuamotu), the cessation of mining has allowed the island and its human and non-human inhabitants the time and space to breathe. More importantly, it has allowed them to take stock of the unique riches that their island has to offer.

Positionality is important throughout Polynesian and other Indigenous societies in the Pacific. Thus, as much as I have tried to immerse myself in the cultures, archives and literatures of this part of the world, this thesis remains an outsider's perspective on Makatea's past, revealingly written on lands that may well have once received the island's rock in the form of superphosphate fertilizer.[11] As such, I do not pretend to possess any

[7] Louis Molet, 'Les groupements religieux de Makatea (Polynésie Française)', *Le Monde non Chretien* 66 (1963): 71; Louis Molet, *Le Travail Féminin à Makatea* (Papeete: ORSTOM, 1962), 8; Navarro-Rovira, *Makatea l'Oubli*.

[8] Navarro-Rovira, *Makatea l'Oubli*.

[9] William Cronon, 'Kennecott Journey: The Paths out of Town', in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past,* ed. William Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin (W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, 1992), 50.

[10] Reretini Viritua, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 22 Sep. 2018.

[11] In this I take heed of Robert Nicole's warning that 'to speak for Maohi is a perilous exercise that often erodes and undermines their power to define themselves and their position in history', see Robert Nicole, *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol: Literature and Power in Tahiti* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 167.

special qualification for writing this thesis other than an academic knowledge of the terrain, and perhaps a historian's knack for perseverance. The roots of this study lie in a much more ambitious project to reveal the many – and messy – historical interconnections between Pacific-rim nations such as Australia and New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific. Out of all these entanglements, those relating to phosphate mining must rate as being the messiest of them all.[12] From these beginnings, I have since become gripped by the colonial history of French Polynesia, and by Makatea's place within this history, as well as its place within a wider Pacific context. Although by no means an exhaustive treatment, I have had the good fortune of gaining access to a wide variety of archives in metropolitan and colonial centres which has allowed me to piece together this history from a greater range of perspectives than ever before. Perhaps my reading of these records will inspire others to bring new documents to light, of which the most important must surely be the inheritors of the CFPO's company records that are still unavailable to researchers.[13]

With or without the company records, it is my hope that a closer, more critical examination of *l'époque minière* as provided over the pages of this thesis will help temper some of the romanticism that exists among certain sectors of the French Polynesian public towards this period.[14] In fact, the unavailability of the company records has allowed me to place a greater emphasis on what others thought about the CFPO rather than what the company thought about themselves. The kinds of records that end up in the colonial archive are naturally less discriminating than a curated company record, and through an analysis of the industry from the outside looking in, so to speak, I have been encouraged to differentiate my study from the kind of business history that Maslyn Williams and Barrie Macdonald put together from privileged access to the voluminous archive of the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC).[15] By unearthing stories that live on in the colonial archive if not popular memory, this thesis aims to complicate rather than smooth out the

[12] Geoff Bertram, 'Trade and Exchange: Economic Links between the Pacific and New Zealand in the Twentieth Century', in *Tangata O Le Moana: New Zealand and People of the Pacific,* ed. Sean Mallon, Kolokesa Māhina-Tuai and Damon Salesa (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2012), 202–9.
[13] In the 1970s Colin Newbury wrote that the CFPO archives were not open to researchers and, to my knowledge, nothing has changed in the interim. See Colin Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', in *Man in the Pacific Islands: Essays on Geographical Change in the Pacific Islands,* ed. R. Gerard Ward (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 168.
[14] Fuelled no doubt by historical accounts such as Christian Beslu, 'Makatea, soixante années d'aventure humaine et industrielle', *BSEO* 314 (2008): 13–49.
[15] Rather fortunately perhaps, as H.E. Maude would comment that the book 'nearly killed poor Maslyn trying to work through the immense mass of source material. He is now nearly blind as a result…'. See H.E. Maude to John Arundel Aris, 3 Mar. 1988, 2, Arundel Family Papers, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (hereinafter PMB) 1227, microfilm, Reel 1.

historical narratives that have been built up around this consequential yet critically neglected time.

Throughout this thesis I am most interested in the processes involved in the making and unmaking of a phosphate island and, by treating Makatea as an extended case study, I seek to demonstrate that phosphate islands exist only insofar as they belong to a complex set of local and global interrelationships involving landowners, labourers, companies, markets and governments. It is by re-mining the archives of the island's historical past that we can more clearly see these relationships for what they were: a series of temporary and ad hoc responses to the challenge of phosphate mining and providing fertilizer for others. In exposing the fleeting nature of this period, the hope is that continuities between historical periods emerge and a stronger case can be made for a sustainable, phosphate-free future.

Writing a Pacific Phosphate Island

As Colin Newbury once remarked, 'one of the cruder ways of changing the landscape of a South Sea island is to dig it up'.[16] Nowhere is this line more appropriate than in describing what occurred throughout the 20th century on the Pacific's 'three great phosphate rock islands': Nauru, Banaba (Ocean Island) and Makatea where industry dramatically altered these environments.[17] For example, visiting Makatea in 1933 on a 'tour of the islands', leading Australian artist Margaret Preston commented:

> It is an ugly place and rises almost sheer out of the sea… The island has an ugly little shelf to land upon, and then up you go to the top on a cable platform. Once there you can walk across the island for some ten miles, but there's nothing to see, as the growth of trees is as high as big shrubs only, and it's chock-a-block with lumps of grey masses, which are phosphate.[18]

The way these comments contrast so sharply with those of another visiting artist, Titian Ramsay Peale, who found his short trip along the plateau in 1839, one hundred years prior, to be 'more picturesque than any similar spot I have visited', suggests that phosphate mining was far from benign.[19] Descriptions such as Preston's establish a way of thinking

[16] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 167.
[17] James R. Hein, 'Phosphate Islands', in *Encyclopedia of Islands,* ed. Rosemary G. Gillespie and David A. Clague (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 739. The Micronesian phosphate island of Angaur, situated in today's republic of Palau, is arguably the Pacific's fourth great phosphate island.
[18] Margaret Preston, 'Just a Tour of the Islands', *The Home: An Australian Quarterly* 14:11 (1933): 43.
[19] Jessie Poesch, ed., *Titian Ramsay Peale (1799-1885) and his Journals of the Wilkes Expedition* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1961), 156.

about ‘phosphate islands’ that is wholly negative, as if they were an affront to the romantic or paradisiacal image of the Pacific island.[20]

Figure 0.3: View from the *Mareva Nui* approaching Port Temao, Makatea.
Source: N. Hoare, 2018.

Yet while the landscape of Makatea, like Nauru, Banaba and phosphate islands even further afield (figure 0.4), was certainly changed through mining, it was not ‘ruined’ in the sense that the island became inhospitable (figure 0.6). In fact, approaching the 24km^2 island from sea for the first time today, over half-a-century since mining ended, cannot be all that different from the way visitors would have seen it in the centuries prior to mining: steep, fortress-like cliffs making way to a flat-top surface carpeted by a dense grove of trees and plants of all varieties (figure 0.3).[21] It is only once the ship creeps closer that the yellowing remnants of the mining years come into view, and one gets the sense that the island is nonetheless ‘ruined’: in that the landscape is still littered with the debris of the island’s industrial past.[22]

[20] ‘No tropical paradise’. Jimmy Skaggs described Clipperton Island as ‘one of the most obscure, isolated, and unpleasant places on earth’. See Jimmy M. Skaggs, *Clipperton: A History of the Island the World Forgot* (New York: Walker and Company, 1989), 1.
[21] Paul-Émile Lafontaine, *Campagne des Mers du Sud faite par le Seignelay de 1875 à 1879,* ed. Dominique Delord (Paris: Mercure de France, 2006), 266.
[22] See Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination’, *Cultural Anthropology* 23:2 (2008): 191–219.

These ruins are of course both artefacts and symbols of a colonial age and, taken alongside the pock-marked surface of the mined-out plateau, serve as vivid reminders of the damaging capacity of colonialism. As Julien Mai told me, Makatea might look idyllic today, but one must only pull back the branches to see the true state of the island.[23] For Damon Salesa, the 'most damaging colonialisms, if one dared to so rank them, were probably those connected with land appropriation and/or large populations of settlers, or with nuclear testing, militarisation or mining'.[24] Yet phosphate mining, for good or for ill, has also given the island its modern identity; it is what put Makatea on academic and commercial maps, and even today it provides the island with a point of difference. For Viritua, notable for being one of the only islanders still living in one of the original CFPO houses, these remnants are not what Ann Laura Stoler has labelled 'reminders 'of irretrievability or of futures lost' but rather are part and parcel of Makatea life, even a source of pride.[25] Today, skilled hunters, of which Viritua is one, traverse the dangerous plateau at night in search of the island's famous delicacy, the coconut crab (called *kaveu* in Pa'umotu or *'aveu* in Tahitian) for local consumption and export.[26] The island's endemic pigeon, the *Rupe* (*Ducula aurorae*), long driven out of Tahiti, is now no longer hunted and is free to ply the skies above the revegetated mining zones, a vivid illustration of how the ancient characteristics of the island have not been stamped out but abide. These two examples, of which there are many more, might make historians and other writers think twice about how they begin to characterize phosphate islands. Instead of focusing on the effects of mining and ruin, might we not consider the how and why they came into being and what sustained them?

In the entry on Phosphate Islands in the 2009 *Encyclopedia of Islands,* Makatea is included alongside Nauru and Banaba as one of 'the three great phosphate rock islands'.[27] Seen from the perspective of the geologist, these places are prosaically defined as islands that contain deposits of phosphate rock 'of sufficient quantity and quality to be economically mined'.[28] Yet, while the existence of phosphate is certainly a necessary precondition for the transformation of a Pacific island into a phosphate island, this thesis is concerned with describing the historical processes that lie behind such a profound identity change.

[23] Julien Mai, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 13 Aug. 2018.
[24] Damon Salesa, 'The Pacific in Indigenous Time', in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37.
[25] Stoler, 'Imperial Debris', 202.
[26] See Elodie Lagouy, *État zéro de la population de crabe de cocotier (Birgus latro) sur l'ile de Makatea en 2007* (Papeete: Direction de l'Environnement, 2007).
[27] Hein, 'Phosphate Islands', 739.
[28] Ibid., 738.

Starting from the premise that Pacific phosphate islands are not born but rather consciously made, I contend that the category of a phosphate island is far from immutable and, for an island like Makatea in particular, the label might only be suitable to describe the six decades of its history as a mine (1908–66). By using the history of Makatea as an extended case study, this thesis aims to complicate the way Pacific phosphate islands are represented in historical writing. While Makatea had much in common with Nauru and Banaba, over the pages of this thesis I argue that Makatea's history is distinctive in particular ways. In analysing the processes that lay behind the island's 20th-century transformation from Ma'atea, the Polynesian island, into Makatea, the phosphate island (and potentially back again in the post-mining era), my thesis provides new perspectives on both the reach of European colonialism in the 20th-century Pacific and the way that Islanders and non-Islanders alike came to navigate it.

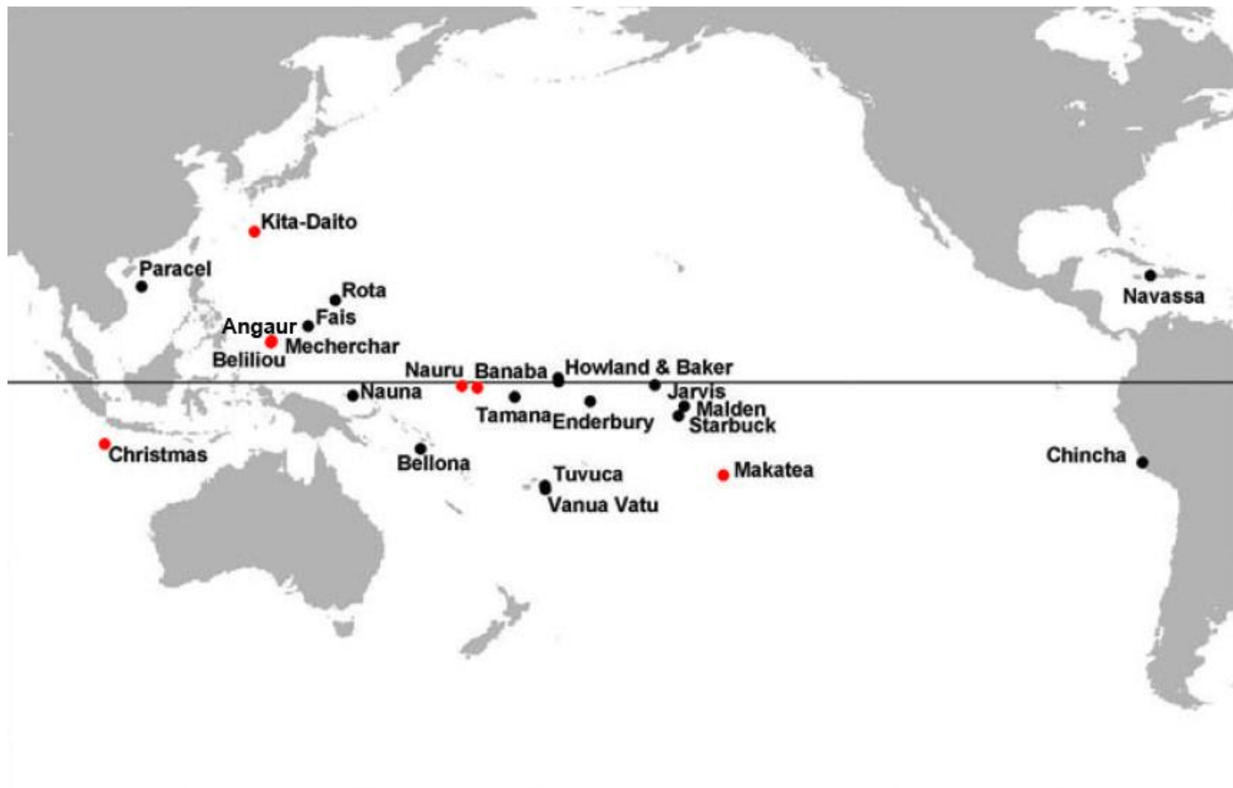

Figure 0.4: Map of 'High and Low Phosphate Islands' as defined by Hein across the Pacific and beyond (red dots signify the phosphate islands mentioned in this thesis).
Source: Adapted from Hein, 'Phosphate Islands', 738.

In writing Pacific phosphate history, much can be gained from the model provided by Katerina Teaiwa in her 2015 monograph, *Consuming Ocean Island,* and related works.[29]

[29] Katerina Martina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). For the rest of Teaiwa's work on Banaba, see Katerina Martina Teaiwa, 'Tirawata Irouia: Re-Presenting Banaban Histories', MA thesis, University of Hawai'i, 1999; 'Visualizing te Kainga, Dancing te Kainga: History and Culture between Rabi, Banaba and Beyond', PhD thesis, Australian

For the equatorial island of Banaba, which belongs to modern-day Kiribati, we see the transition from Pacific island into phosphate mine formalized in the shift in nomenclature from Banaba, meaning 'rock land', into its more popular 20th-century appellation, Ocean Island. Such discursive shifts occur repeatedly in the representation of phosphate islands over time. It did not take long for Nauru to lose its original European name of Pleasant Island and the island of Navassa near Haiti, the site of the 1889 guano workers' rebellion, was quickly dubbed 'Devil's Island' on account of its hellish conditions.[30] A quick literary tour of Makatea throws up names such as 'Freak Island', '*un enfer'* (hell), and 'nothing but a corpse on the sea'.[31] The English writer Sydney Powell, who passed by but never set foot on Makatea in 1912, said the sight of the island was an affront to 'common humanity'.[32]

Given the first shipment of Makatea rock left the island in 1910, we can see here how quickly this discursive transition could be. According to Teaiwa, this shift was more than discursive on Banaba:

> After eighty years of mining and the removal of 22 million tons of land, Banaba, 'the rock', became 'Ocean Island', a phosphate mine, and a place of European work and leisure, overwritten by industry and commerce; indigenous spatial and emplaced meanings and practice evacuated with each shipment of rocks.[33]

Though less was mined on Makatea than on both Nauru and Banaba, it is still the case that 11 million tons of Indigenous land were removed over the history of the mine, sent to nourish the nutrient-poor fields of the Pacific Rim in exchange for a 'derisory' one franc per

National University, 2002; 'Multi-sited Methodologies: "Homework" in Australia, Fiji and Kiribati', in *Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation,* ed. Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 216–34; 'Our Sea of Phosphate: The Diaspora of Ocean Island', in *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocations: Unsettling Western Fixations,* ed. Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson Jr. (Aldersgate: Ashgate Press, 2005), 169–92; 'Teaiwa's *Kainga*', in *One and a Half Pacific Islands: Stories the Banaban People Tell of Themselves,* ed. Jennifer Shennan and Makin Corrie Tekenimatang (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005), 120–3; 'Recovering Ocean Island', *Life Writing* 8:1 (2011): 87–100; 'Choreographing Difference: The (Body) Politics of Banaban Dance, *Contemporary Pacific* 24:1 (2012): 65–95; 'Ruining Pacific Islands: Australia's Phosphate Imperialism', *Australian Historical Studies* 46:3 (2015): 374–91; *Project Banaba,* exhibition commissioned by Carriage-works, Sydney, 17 Nov.–17 Dec. 2017; 'Moving People, Moving Islands in Oceania', *Paradigm_Shift: People Movement* 3 (2018): 62–9.

[30] Jennifer C. James, '"Buried in Guano": Race, Labor, and Sustainability', *American Literary History* 24:1 (2012): 117; Tao Leigh Goffe, '"Guano in their Destiny": Race, Geology, and a Philosophy of Indenture', *Amerasia Journal* 45:1 (2019): 35; Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 54.

[31] W.A.H., 'Freak Island: A Visit to Makatea', *Pacific Islands Monthly* (hereinafter *PIM*), Apr. 1954, 76; Annie van de Wiele, *Pénélope était du voyage* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), 165; S.W. Powell, *A South Sea Diary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1945), 78.

[32] Powell, *South Sea Diary,* 78.

[33] Teaiwa, 'Ruining Pacific Islands', 389.

ton royalty to the landowners.[34] Written over 100 years later at another crossroads in the island's history, this thesis has involved exploring the historical archive to re-examine epithets such as Powell's – proving that while they might have captured something of the reality of Makatea as a phosphate island from 1907 to 1966, they do not have much validity when describing the Makatea of before or after *l'époque minière*. A renewed focus on historical contingency when analysing the past can bring us closer to capturing the island's true character.

From Guano to Phosphate

The taint that attached to phosphate islands in the 20th century surely owes much to the sordid reputation of the 19th-century guano trade and the less-than-humane conditions found on the Pacific's guano islands. Daniel Immerwahr has recently suggested that guano mining 'was arguably the single worst job you could have in the nineteenth century'.[35] He argues:

> It offered all the backbreaking labor and lung damage of coal mining, but to do the job, you had to be marooned on a hot, dry, pestilential, and foul-smelling island for months. Respiratory diseases, causing workers to pass out or cough up blood, were common. So were gastrointestinal ailments – the unsurprising consequence of crowded conditions, rotten food, and a dearth of fresh water. Clouds of shrieking seabirds darkened the skies overhead, unleashing the occasional fecal rainstorm ("We were completely encased in a thick film of bird manure," one visitor remembered). On Howland Island, an out-of-control rat population scurried underfoot, adding yet another vile ingredient to the epidemiological stew.[36]

For Pacific historians, such is the impression of guano islands that they are still regularly associated with the seven-month Peruvian labour trade of 1862–3 which led to the direct and indirect deaths of 6,000 Islanders, a 'genocide of an order never seen before or since'

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[34] Visiting colonial inspector Robert Lassalle-Séré described the level of royalty as 'derisory' in both his 'Rapport sur le règlement du conflit du travail survenu à Makatea du 10 au 19 Juillet 1947', 27 Jul. 1947, 14 and 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre à Makatea', 4 Aug. 1947, 24, Archives nationales, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (hereinafter AN), IND 1954 Océanie 1928–1963, OCEA/114.

[35] Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire,* 53. See, also, Edward Dallam Melillo, 'Strangers on Familiar Soil: Chile and the Making of California, 1848–1930', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2006, 292. cf. Gregory Rosenthal, whose research into the experiences Hawaiian men on guano islands in the 19th century demonstrates a diverse set of responses. See Gregory Rosenthal, 'Life and Labor in a Seabird Colony: Hawaiian Guano Workers, 1857–70', *Environmental History* 17 (2012): 758–64.

[36] Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire,* 53.

in the history of Polynesia.[37] This is despite the fact that some time ago H.E. Maude demonstrated that the Islanders were not in fact taken to work the infamous Chincha Islands rather they were employed as domestic helpers or agricultural labourers on the Peruvian mainland.[38] Even so, many of the 92,000 Chinese 'coolie' labourers recruited from Macau for the Americas did end up on the Chincha Islands where many, after surviving the gruelling Trans-Pacific passage, often preferred suicide to continuing work on the dusty, ammonia laden islands.[39] Add to this the effects of the five-year 'War of the Pacific' between Chile and Bolivia over Peru's guano resources (1879–84), it is little wonder Gregory Cushman, in his expansive study of the Pacific guano trade, concludes that 'the guano age truly deserves its reputation as an "age of shit"'.[40]

Though guano and phosphate are regularly conflated together – both fed directly into the global fertilizer industry after all – in this thesis I argue that for reasons of scale, timing and level of colonial regulation, guano and phosphate islands are better analysed as distinct phenomena.[41] Whereas guano mining took place on low, generally uninhabited islands, which were scraped clean within decades, phosphate mines were established on high, often well-populated islands where 100-year contracts were signed with the Indigenous habitants and concessions negotiated with local colonial governments. The frontier-like conditions of the guano trade, so central to the opening up of the Pacific world to the capitalists of the phosphate and other trades in the 20th century, nonetheless gave way towards the end of the 19th century to a more regulated, fixed industry heralded by the turn-of-the-century discovery of deposits on the 'great phosphate islands' of Nauru and Banaba (c.1899–1900), and Makatea in 1907.[42] As we shall see, the quantity and quality of the deposits found on these islands meant that the likes of the Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC) and the French CFPO had an economic incentive to stay.

One of the most observable features of a phosphate island is therefore the relationship between company, colonial government and island population. Unlike the case of the 1856

[37] H.E. Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: The Peruvian Labour Trade in Polynesia, 1862–1864* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1981), 182.
[38] Ibid., 135–8.
[39] Melillo, 'Strangers on Familiar Soil', 292.
[40] Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 74.
[41] After pointing out the preponderance of 'journalists and travel writers [who] thrive on the vivid metaphors and images conjured up by humans' obsession with bird and bat shit', Teaiwa makes a convincing geological argument for the need to distinguish between phosphate rock, 'the result of millions of years of sedimentation', and guano, 'the excrement of seabirds, bats, and seals'. See Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 7.
[42] Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 117–120. Other deposits of note were found on Angaur in 1907, the islands of Kita Daitō and Oki Daitō (or Rasa Island) in 1908 and, prior to them all, on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean in 1876.

United States Guano Act by which President Franklin Pierce famously gave *carte blanche* to American citizens to claim any uninhabited, guano-bearing island for the nation (which by 1902 had netted a total of 66 islands in the Pacific and Caribbean),[43] phosphate companies were obliged to seek formal concessions, pay royalties and respect the rules of whatever imperial or global jurisdiction they happened to fall under.[44] In Makatea's case, the French administration did not formally grant a concession to the CFPO until 1917, some 10 years after their first contracts with landowners were signed.[45] Despite working with and adhering to the regulatory regimes of the colonial state in the main, we should not pretend that phosphate companies acted in the interests of the islanders whose lands they were exploiting. Yet, nor did they enjoy cosy relationships with the colonial governments they reported to. In the case of Makatea, a tacit relationship of export receipts in exchange for military protection was observed but both sides nonetheless clashed over how far each of these should extend. The CFPO was particularly exercised over matters relating to labour recruitment and export duties, with intermittent letters from the company pleading its case in one way or another scattered throughout the French colonial archive.

By the same token, as Michel Panoff reminds us, the CFPO was 'the most powerful firm in the colony', and as such, they could get away with an incredible amount without interference.[46] Perhaps Sujit Sivasundram's concept of 'islanding' – used to describe the colonial process of partitioning (a word he uses for its resonances in South Asian historiography) or separating an island from the mainland in order to regulate the land and its people through the creation of a manageable unit – might be a useful tool for us to describe how phosphate islands were able to proceed on their own timeline.[47] With phosphate islands like Makatea, the island was not only partitioned from its neighbours via the joint efforts of company and administration to ensure that the uneven effects and precedents of mining did not upset the rest of the colony, but it was also inserted into new global, imperial circuits based on shipping routes, export markets and pools of indentured labour (figure 0.5). Such processes were often fluid and partial, but the temptation for the company to rule their island as if it were a little fiefdom was nonetheless ever-present. One

[43] 94 in total were claimed by Americans under the Act whereas 66 became United States appurtenances. Importantly, as Jimmy Skaggs points out, fewer than two dozen were ever mined. See Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush: Entrepreneurs and American Overseas Expansion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 199. Also, see Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire,* 51–3.
[44] Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush*, 224–5.
[45] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 183–4.
[46] Michel Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse* (Paris: Denoël, 1989), 213.
[47] Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17.

of the goals of this thesis is therefore to describe how the CFPO's tight rein over island affairs loosened gradually as the mining period went on and Makatea became increasingly reintegrated into Polynesian post-war currents. For instance, in 1947 the CFPO's top brass, known colloquially as *le cercle*, spectacularly lost out to workers over an industrial dispute forcing two of its most senior managers into an embarrassing retreat to Tahiti.

Figure 0.5: CFPO map displaying principal maritime and aerial connections with Makatea, 1958.
Source: CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire et Extraordinaire du 29 Juillet 1958* (Paris: Grandchamp, 1958).

What makes Makatea an instructive counterpoint to the twin islands of Nauru and Banaba was that it fell under French administration and mining was carried out by a private limited company with its headquarters in Paris. By contrast with the BPC, who oversaw the industries on Nauru and Banaba on behalf of the governments of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the CFPO managed Makatea in the interests of their shareholders alone. And despite their Parisian headquarters, a significant amount of the CFPO's capital came from London, with an entity called the Anglo-French Phosphate Company holding a controlling stake in the business for much of its existence.[48] Most French historiography tends to overlook the contribution of the British-owned Pacific Phosphate Company and figures such as the 'world's greatest phosphate magnate' John

[48] Created after the Great War, the Anglo-French Phosphate Company was the PPC's former share in the CFPO.

T. Arundel and his wealthy business partner, Sunlight Soap's William Lever (Lord Leverhulme) to the formation of the industry in the years preceding the Great War. This thesis aims to bring English-language and Francophone sources together for the first time to emphasize the trans-imperial nature of the mining years, and more particularly to show how a handful of British 'gentleman capitalists'[49] and Franco-Tahitian elites – 'phosphateers' if you will – managed to mobilize their respective experiences from Nauru, Banaba and the Tahitian legal sphere to transform this Polynesian land into a quintessential 'mined land'.[50]

Phosphate Legacies

While Makatea might have been 'islanded' from the rest of French Polynesia until the end of the Second World War, mining brought the island into contact with the industrial world far earlier than the other islands of the territory. Colin Newbury has alluded to the global nature of the industry, stating that:

> The phosphates of Makatea were financed by British capital, mined by a French company, exported by British and German vessels, and marketed in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.[51]

Yet as Sujit Sivasundaram has stated elsewhere, we need to be alert not just to connection but to disconnection also.[52] This is particularly salient in Makatea's case where a large proportion of its history under the mine was seemingly about not being connected to the places that mattered.[53] For instance, Newbury is right to point out that a small proportion of Makatea phosphate went to North America and Europe but without imperial tariffs or subsidies, exporting to such destinations was never going to be economically viable in a

[49] The term belongs to Cain and Hopkins, for their analysis of the drivers of British 'new imperialism' in the period leading up to 1914, of which the men involved in the Pacific Phosphate Company were surely examples, see P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850–1945', *The Economic History Review* 40:1 (1987): 1–26.

[50] In an infamous letter to Teresia Teaiwa, Harry Maude wrote of his distaste for the word 'phosphateers': 'simply an ugly word invented by a BPC bureaucrat … who was asked to suggest a name for Maslyn's book. Let us pray that it will never get acceptance, even as a term of abuse', H.E. Maude to Teresia Teaiwa, 'Enclosure: Notes on your "Statement of Purpose"', 21 Feb. 1991, 2, H.E. Maude Digital Archive, University of Adelaide Library (hereinafter Maude Papers), part I, series J, section 27, 1991. Teresia Teaiwa would write a poem called 'Mine Land: An Anthem', a variation of Woody Guthrie's 1940s folk anthem 'This Land is Your Land', part of which appears in Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island,* 63.

[51] Colin Newbury, *Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia, 1767–1945* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980), 236.

[52] Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Towards a Critical History of Connection: The Port of Colombo, the Geographical "Circuit," and the Visual Politics of New Imperialism ca. 1880–1914', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59:2 (2017): 347.

[53] Today, many bemoan the fact that unlike most of the islands in the archipelago, Makatea is unable to be reached by plane.

market where competitiveness was often contingent on shipping costs. In a related vein, despite being Makatea's 'natural' markets on account of proximity, the CFPO famously struggled to sell its product on the Australian and New Zealand market due to competition from the larger, state-owned BPC. On the other hand, this thesis demonstrates that Japan – World War Two excluded – was Makatea's largest and most consistent market, despite being overlooked in Newbury's formulation. The business connections formed with the Japanese *zaibatsu* Mitsui by Arundel in the early 1900s secured not just a growing fertilizer market but a regular supply of workers as well.

By comparing Makatea to Nauru and Banaba, we can see that its place in the Pacific phosphate industry was often a marginal one. From the perspective of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, it was always the 'third phosphate island', and this is reflected in the anglophone historiography where, if mentioned at all, Makatea generally occupies the role of a minor player, referred to in Barrie Macdonald and Maslyn Williams' history of the BPC to indicate what the true price of phosphate would have been if the BPC had not been allowed to operate at cost price.[54] In contrast, I argue that the history of the Pacific phosphate industry cannot be told without greater attention being paid to the third phosphate island, Makatea. It is my hope that this thesis will help bring Makatea out from the margins of anglophone historiography and augment our understanding of what exactly occurred on these islands in the name of global agricultural development and food security.

Within most contemporary industry accounts, as well as in a good deal of subsequent nationalist literature, the scientific progress and ingenuity exemplified by the Pacific phosphate industry and antipodean agricultural practice is presented as a point of pride.[55] However, seen from the perspective of the Pacific and from the inhabitants of the phosphate islands themselves, these developments can more readily be described as representing a debilitating form of unequal ecological exchange.[56] 'Ruining Pacific Islands' is the evocative title Teaiwa has chosen to describe the relationship, while Cushman has labelled the destruction of Banaba as representing 'the definitive case of neo-ecological

[54] Pers. comm., Barrie Macdonald, 6 Apr. 2015; C.G. Weeramantry, *Nauru: Environmental Damage under International Trusteeship* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), 239–41. The price of Makatea phosphate was also used as an important yardstick in Nauru's push for control over their phosphate resource and their subsequent case brought against Australia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
[55] The writing of Sir Albert Ellis is most instructive. See Albert F. Ellis, *Ocean Island and Nauru: Their Story* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1935); *Phosphates: Why, How and Where? Or to be More Explicit, Why Needed, How Used and Where Found?* (Auckland: Rotary Club of Auckland, 1942); 'New Zealand Farms and the "Phosphate Islands"', *New Zealand Geographer* 4:1 (1948): 55–68.
[56] See James Rice, 'Ecological Unequal Exchange: Consumption, Equity, and Unsustainable Structural Relationships within the Global Economy', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 48:1 (2007): 43–72.

imperialism'.[57] Nancy Pollock sees phosphate mining on Nauru as 'a prime example of "the natural resource curse" thesis as applied to a small island state in the Pacific',[58] while Carl N. McDaniel and John M. Gowdy have used Nauru's modern history as a 'perfect parable for what our market system is doing to [the] earth'.[59] Like the ubiquitous example of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), the authors see Nauruan history as a cautionary tale for our unsustainable society. And while my personal politics are sympathetic to this line of argument, as John McNeill has written, these kinds of histories do run the danger of reducing complex stories to easy fables.[60]

The complexity of the Makatea story, on the other hand, is what makes it a necessary corrective to the more simplistic narratives that exist. By presenting multiple perspectives on Makatea's past, this thesis aims to push us outside of, or at least interrogate, the otherwise comfortable declensionist mode of environmental history writing which, like the earlier 'fatal impact' approach to Pacific Islands history, overemphasizes the totalizing influence of outside ecological forces at the expense of local agency, continuity and survival.[61] I aim to demonstrate that while mining has most certainly changed the physical and social fabric of the island and its people, the effects of these six decades are not terminal nor are they irrevocable. Unlike Banaba, where the majority of the Indigenous Banaban population were relocated to the Fijian island of Rabi after the Second World War to allow mining to continue unabated, or Nauru, where up to 80 per cent of the island has been mined, mining on Makatea was limited to only one third (859 hectares of a total of 2400 hectares, or 35 per cent) of the island (figure 0.6). Operations also stopped earlier on Makatea than on the other two islands: mining continued until 1979 on Banaba and until the 2000s on Nauru where a similar kind of re-mining project is today being discussed.[62] Put in this context, it is possible to argue that even though the process of

[57] Teaiwa, 'Ruining Pacific Islands', 374–91; Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 135. For a lively discussion on the contributions and shortcomings of Cushman's scholarship featuring leading environmental historians and the author himself, see the online roundtable edited by Christopher F. Jones at *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* 6:2 (2016): 2–33.
[58] Nancy J. Pollock, 'Nauru Phosphate History and the Resource Curse Narrative', *JSO* 138 (2014): 107.
[59] Carl N. McDaniel and John M. Gowdy, *Paradise for Sale: A Parable of Nature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7.
[60] J.R. McNeill, review of *Paradise for Sale: A Parable of Nature,* by Carl N. McDaniel and John M. Gowdy*, Environmental History* 6:3 (2001): 477.
[61] In this, I draw directly from Paul Kreitman, 'Feathers, Fertilizers and States of Nature: Uses of Albatrosses in the U.S.-Japan Borderlands', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2015, i. See, also, the approach taken in James Beattie, Edward Melillo and Emily O'Gorman, 'Introduction: Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire, 1837–1945', in *Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History,* ed., James Beattie, Edward Melillo and Emily O'Gorman (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 13. For wider discussion on the 'fatal impact' approach to Pacific Islands historiography, see K.R. Howe, 'The Fate of the "Savage" in Pacific Historiography', *New Zealand Journal of History* (hereinafter *NZJH*) 11:2 (1977): 137–54.
[62] 'Tests Show Nauru Can Mine Phosphate into 2040s', *Radio New Zealand,* 10 Jul. 2018, accessible at https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/361513/tests-show-nauru-can-mine-phosphate-into-2040s

extraction was similar between the three islands, the scale of extraction, and thus the scale of damage, was not.

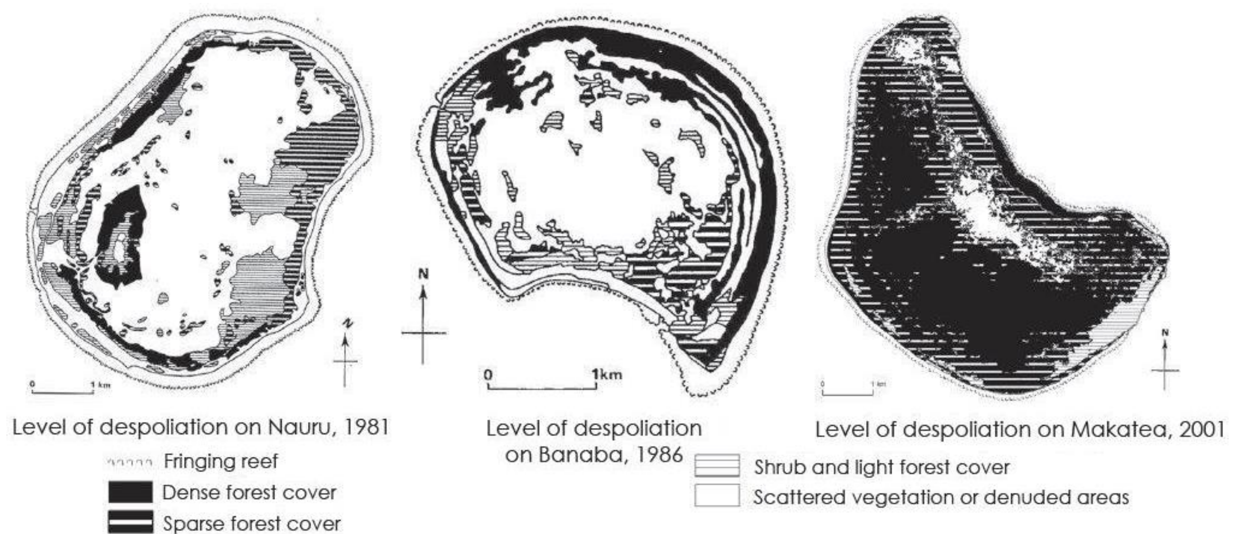

Figure 0.6 Aerial shots showing differing levels of despoliation on Nauru, Banaba and Makatea.
Source: Adapted from Jacq and Butaud, 'L'atoll soulevé de Makatea', 8.

Does the Island Need Saving?

In describing the history of Makatea during its mining era, I am not arguing that since only a third of the island was exploited, we should automatically preclude a narrative of ruin, but I am questioning whether such a narrative is useful and historically appropriate. At its heart, this thesis is about finding a balance between apportioning blame to the destructive processes of Western imperialism and the growing academic imperative to present a hopeful or empowering narrative, necessary not only for our Anthropocene age, but for potentially marginalized Pacific communities.[63] While I am well aware of the environmental and social damage inflicted by phosphate mining and the inequalities that it perpetuated, my role is not to plead the case for Makatea's landowners, nor do they have any desire to be presented over the following pages as victims. Whereas the Nauruans and Banabans both famously lodged cases against the British and Australian Governments for the deleterious effects of mining and their respective failure to rehabilitate mined-out lands, no such case has been launched from Makatea, which has been overshadowed by the effects of France's Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP) or nuclear testing station at the

(accessed 7 Dec. 2020); 'New Nauru Govt Puts Focus on Country's Future Prosperity', *Radio New Zealand,* 2 Oct. 2019, accessible at https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/400130/new-nauru-govt-puts-focus-on-country-s-future-prosperity (accessed 7 Dec. 2020).

[63] Christof Mauch, *Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear* (München: Rachel Carson Center, 2019), 3; Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *Contemporary Pacific* 6:1 (1994): 149–50.

other end of the archipelago.[64] Rather, en lieu of any homegrown initiatives to win compensation, a wealthy Australian mining engineer by the name of Colin Randall has arrived promising rehabilitation in the guise of re-mining the island's residual bed of phosphate.[65] To 'the Australian septuagenarian', as he is most regularly described, the current state of the island is a tragedy, and the problem of filling the holes that mark the interior of the island is an engineering challenge exciting enough to get him out of bed every morning. He believes his project, called *Avenir Makatea*, can save the island; thus the narrative of ruin suits his purposes perfectly.[66]

On the other hand, for those Islanders who oppose the mine, it is not clear that placing undue emphasis on the environmental damage done by the CFPO is going to help their cause. Again, it is not that they deny the detrimental environmental effects of mining; far from it. However, their argument also emphasizes that now they are two or three generations removed, these effects should be put behind them and the much deeper historical identity of the island should be revived. Having asked the question repeatedly whether the mining debris and ruined landscape weighed heavily on the mind, I was more often than not met with the response that it did not: with reactions ranging between those who said they hardly noticed it ('it was part of the wallpaper'), to those who believed it was what made the island unique. Critics of the new mine felt that rather than dwell on past mistakes, it would be better to focus on developing a sustainable, post-mining future for the 90-odd people who now call the island home on a daily basis. To take one example, Jacky Ioane, manager of one of the island's two family-run *pensions* (the other belongs to the *tāvana*), has been developing plans for Makatea to become the 'green-grocer' of the surrounding archipelago, taking advantage of the island's unusually fertile soils to grow garden vegetables or crops such as vanilla for export to the neighbouring low-lying atolls.[67]

Bolstering this viewpoint is the way that 'nature' appears to have regained sovereignty over the island since mining ceased.[68] Today, the island boasts the richest array of plant life in

[64] For examples of Banaban and Nauruan litigation efforts, see Jenny Barraclough, *Go Tell it to the Judge* (BBC, 1979), accessible at https://youtu.be/VS99b9qMTvI; Weeramantry, *Nauru.*
[65] Nicholas Hoare, 'As All Eyes are On Raiatea, An Australian Mining Company Moves Closer to Makatea', *Pacific Islands Report,* 25 Jun. 2017, accessible at http://www.pireport.org/articles/2017/07/25/all-eyes-are-raiatea-australian-mining-company-moves-closer-makatea.
[66] In a 2013 press release, the company declared: 'There are over a million holes on Makatea – rendering it a dangerous wasteland', see Avenir Makatea, Media Release, 18 Jan. 2013, 2.
[67] For a portrait of Jacky Ioane and his latest vision for the island, see Maxime Lebigre, *"Je suis Paumotu" avec Jacky Ioane*, (Tahiti: Polynésie la 1ère, 2020), accessible at https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/polynesie/emissions/je-suis-paumotu/je-suis-paumotu-jacky-ioane-853536.html (accessed 13 Nov. 2020).
[68] Cf. Rob Nixon, who warns against making too much of the regenerative powers of nature. For example, 'the deep-time thinking that celebrates natural healing is strategically disastrous if it provides political cover for

the archipelago (77 native species), exceptional avifauna (including a growing population of Rupe on the verge of extinction elsewhere in the territory), and one of the territory's most diverse range of molluscs.[69] It is classed as 'a hotspot for biodiversity', and a petition comparing the island to Noah's Ark in a bid to have it protected from re-mining has so far attracted over 250,000 signatures.[70] Most credit this remarkable regeneration to the fact that the island has been spared from exactly the kind of industrial intervention that Randall is proposing.

Figure 0.7: Aerial view of Makatea's principal settlement, Vaitepaua (with Moumu in the distance).
Source: Paul Judd, 2018.

Having learned to adapt to the post-mining environment, many on Makatea believe there is no need to be saved from without, especially as their community has begun to flourish from within (figure 0.7). When asked if there was a responsibility for those against the new mine to come up with a project to take its place, artist, political activist and vice-president of the anti-mining association Te Rupe no Makatea, Sabrina Birk, explained simply that 'the Mihiroa feel like they are the real, true landowners of this place. It's their history, it's their culture, it's their family land… And so, they don't feel like they have to do anything.

reckless corporate short-termism', Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 21–2.

[69] Butaud and Jacq, *Atolls soulevés des Tuamotu*, 5; Olivier Gargominy et al., 'L'étrange destinée de l'île de Makatea: de la logique économique du XXe siècle à une logique écologique au XXIe siècle?', *Le Courrier de la Nature* 230 (2006): 34–41; Conservation International, *Makatea, A Site of Major Importance for Endemic Birds* (Apia: CEPF & CI-Pacific, 2013).

[70] Frédéric Jacq and Jean-François Butaud, 'L'atoll soulevé de Makatea: Un « hot spot » de la biodiversité de Polynésie française menacé par des projets miniers', *Le Courrier de la Nature* 280 (2014): 6–8; Sauvons la forêt, 'Sauvons Makatea, arche de Noé de la Polynésie française', accessible at https://www.sauvonslaforet.org/petitions/1075/sauvons-makatea-arche-de-noe-de-la-polynesie-francaise (accessed 17 Nov. 2020).

It's their land'.[71] The problem lies with the fact that for each parcel of land on the island, of which there are over 450, there are anywhere between 50 and 300 *ayants droits* (legal inheritors) across the territory and the world who can claim land ownership rights. Given the vast majority of them do not live on the island, or have never lived on the island, the worry for many Mihiroa is that the decisions of the farflung diaspora will ultimately dictate the island's future.

The Makatea Experience

Regardless of the decision the government and landowners eventually reach about the re-mining project, it is obvious that more research needs to be done to understand the impact of the original mining period before launching into a second one.[72] This pertains not only to the environmental or health effects but to the changes in social and cultural aspects of island life as well. However, this thesis does not pretend to propose a *bilan* or balance-sheet of the good and bad of the mining years.[73] As Alan Lester has argued, the balance-sheet approach to imperial history needs to be thrown out, for it 'makes "benefits" that worked very unevenly seem universal, while it reduces "costs" to specific episodes rather than systematic features of imperial rule'.[74] Such an approach would doubtless make the case of Makatea suffer in comparison with larger mining operations in the Western Pacific, emblematic sites of extreme environmental damage such as the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, or the Grasberg mine in West Papua.[75] The social and political fallout of mining in sites such as these and Panguna on Bougainville which led to Civil War in the 1980s and 1990s, has largely been avoided in the Eastern Pacific where the scale of mineral resource discovery has thus far been much more limited.[76] Without the 'shock and awe' value of these disasters, mining on Makatea

[71] Sabrina Birk, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018.
[72] Several environmental impact assessments have been made in recent years, most noticeably by Charles Egretaud and his company SARL Pae tai – Pai uta under the employ of Colin Randall. See PTPU, *Prospections géologiques: Commune de Rangiroa, atoll de Makatea, archipel des Tuamotu, Polynésie française: Notice d'impact sur l'environnement* (Dossier 12, October 2012, Papeete).
[73] The CFPO have already attempted such a study, see [CFPO], 'Makatéa: Bilan social-économique d'un demi-siècle d'expérience', *JSO* 15 (1959): 199–210.
[74] Alan Lester, 'Time to Throw Out the Balance Sheet', *Snapshots of Empire,* 26 Jan. 2016, accessible at https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/snapshotsofempire/2016/01/26/time-to-throw-out-the-balance-sheet/ (accessed 17 Nov. 2020).
[75] See Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks, 'Resource Wars: The Anthropology of Mining', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 287–313; Patricia O'Brien, 'The Politics of Mines and Indigenous Rights: A Case Study of the Grasberg Mine in Indonesia's Papua Province', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 11:1 (2010): 47–56.
[76] Though the inevitable crossing of the sea-bed mining frontier has the potential to change this, see Pierre-Yves Le Meur et al., 'Deep-sea Mining Prospects in French Polynesia: Governance and the Politics of Time', *Marine Policy* 95 (2018): 380–7.

might therefore have more in common with the cases Rob Nixon covers in his germinal *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor.*[77]

In tackling this historical problem, I prefer to work with the historian's traditional range of methods, using tools such as cause, effect and context to explain what unravelled in and around the island through writing what Stoler would call 'an effective history of the present'.[78] By this, Stoler seeks not to 'mount a charge that every injustice of the contemporary world has imperial roots but, rather, to delineate the specific ways in which waste accumulates, where debris falls, and what constitutes "the rot that remains".'[79] While the mine may have brought material benefits to many Polynesians, these more often than not fell to those who did not call Makatea home. We can equally see that these advantages arguably came at a structural cost in that inclusion in the wage-based economy involved surrendering to the strictures of the colonial state and the separation or exclusion from one's home polity.[80]

By paying close attention to the workers' lot, this thesis suggests that the 'Makatea experience' – as anthropologist Louis Molet christened it – quickened the process of turning Indigenous Polynesians into 'model' French citizens.[81] From the end of the Second World War, workers and their families were recruited from islands such as Rimatara, Raivavae and Rurutu where they might have otherwise had little contact with formal colonial administration. Once on Makatea, the men were introduced to disciplined work and the French language: they even became striking unionists. Children were integrated into secular schooling and their mothers were encouraged to keep busy in the best Protestant sense of the word.[82]

For a scholar such as Robert Nicole, who has argued that 20th-century 'French colonialism is characterized by the violent attempt to control the indigenous population through education', the 'Makatea experience' carries all the features of classic French colonial rule.

[77] Nixon writes: 'In other words, I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable', Nixon, *Slow Violence,* 19.
[78] Stoler, 'Imperial Debris', 211.
[79] Ibid.
[80] I have been told stories from the descendants of workers about men who returned home to find their land taken or sold without their knowledge.
[81] Louis Molet, *Le départ de Makatea de la Compagnie française des phosphates de l'Océanie* (Papeete: ORSTOM, 1961), 16; Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse,* 194–7.
[82] Molet, *Le travail féminin*, 15.

Describing the contours of France's 'discursive dominance' in Polynesia in general, Nicole writes:

> The order of time, the supervision of etiquette, the discipline in dormitories or in plantations, the ritual actions of religion, the isolation of native symbols and other meaning systems, the mechanisms of rewards and punishment, the emphasis on competition and classification by examination, individual achievement, and the choice of curriculum were all effective ways of constructing a new reality and disciplining colonized subjects into this new modus operandi.[83]

While this description marries nicely with what many workers must have experienced on Makatea, Stephen Henningham reminds us to be alert to the limits of the French colonial project, especially in the Pacific where 'assimilationist ambitions' were often constrained by a combination of 'lack of resources and indigenous resistance'.[84] Makatea's 20th-century history, I wish to argue, reveals aspects of both.

On the one hand, the presence of formal colonial administration was, for the most part, weak on the island itself. The colonial purse strings only ever extended as far as providing the island with a single administrator,[85] and little was done in the way of medical screening for arriving workers.[86] On the other, the state was initially more than happy to send a warship whenever there was an unrest that needed quelling. This relationship would change over time, with the state showing a marked reluctance to use any sort of force against the Polynesian workforce in later years. World War Two can be seen as a dividing line in this history in a number of ways, but the most important post-war development was the growth in the Polynesian presence on the island. While the Makatea experience can be interpreted as an exercise in colonial discipline, it also brought a disparate Polynesian population together to an unprecedented degree (figure 0.8). This concentration of workers accelerated, amongst other things, the adoption of Tahitian (*te reo Tahiti*), and not French,

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[83] Nicole, *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol,* 145.
[84] Stephen Henningham, 'New Caledonia and French Polynesia: Towards Independence-in-Association?', *Meanjin* 49:4 (1990): 660.
[85] For a first-person account of life for an administrator on Makatea, see the memoir written by Jean Viremouneix, *Makatea: itinéraire d'un feuillardier limousin* (Tahiti: Scoop, 1997), 17–27, 54–78.
[86] Le Chef de la circonscription administrative des Tuamotu et Gambier to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 22 Oct. 1943, 3, Te Piha Faufa'a Tupuna/Le Service du Patrimoine Archivistique Audiovisuel, Tahiti (hereinafter SPAA), 48W/1974; Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre à Makatea', 22, AN, OCEA/114.

as the lingua franca throughout the territory.[87] It also helped consolidate the power of left-wing unions in the post-war period and the rise of autonomist leader, Pouvana'a a 'O'opa.

Figure 0.8: Shovels in hand, barrows at the ready, a group of young Polynesian men pose for a photo at the diggings.
Source: *Walkabout,* 1 Sep. 1948, 30.

All this points to a further aim of this thesis which is not just to write Makatea back into the historiography of the Pacific phosphate industry, but to reinsert the island into modern French Polynesian historiography hitherto dominated by *l'époque nucléaire* (1966–96).[88] Here, I am arguing that before there was *la bombe*, there was *la pelle* (the shovel), and these things might have more in common than historians have been thus far willing to explore.[89] We know that the discovery of phosphate deposits on Makatea was a boon for

[87] Jean-Michel Charpentier and Alexandre François, *Linguistic Atlas of French Polynesia/Atlas Linguistique de la Polynésie Française* (Berlin: De Gruyter and the Université de la Polynésie française, 2015), 103.
[88] See Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa mon Amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1977); Jean-Marc Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: l'implantation, 1957–1964* (Tahiti: Scoop, 1993); Jean Chesneaux ed., *Tahiti après la bombe: quel avenir pour la Polynesie?* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1995); Jean-Marc Regnault, 'Tahiti avec et sans la bombe', *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire* 53 (1997): 55–67; Gabriel Tetiarahi, 'French Nuclear Testing in the South Pacific, or When France Makes Light of Its Duty to Remember', *Contemporary Pacific* 17:2 (2005): 378–81.
[89] Luc Ollivier, 'Makatea, Moruroa, Fangataufa… Même Combat', *Tahiti Pacifique,* 28 Jul. 2017, 9.

the struggling French colony which, after decades of failed plantation experiments in cotton, coffee, sugar cane and vanilla, was by 1907 the subject of rumours that it would be sold to either Britain or the United States.[90] With early estimates of Makatea's phosphate deposits rivalling Banaba's for size,[91] it should not come as a surprise that the administration quickly began 'looking to Makatea as a very great source of defraying the expenses of the Government'.[92] It did not take long for Makatean phosphate to become the colony's largest export item and by the interwar period the colony was drawing 25 per cent of its revenue from the island.[93]

As Pierre-Yves Toullelan and Bernard Gille have acknowledged, the colony's reliance on a limited range of natural resources, namely phosphate rock and copra, led to a 'rentier economy' not too dissimilar from the petroleum rich nations of the Middle East first described by Hossein Mahdavy in 1970.[94] Such resource dependence left the colonial economy vulnerable to market downturns or, worse still, resource depletion. The 1963 five-year economic plan presented a gloomy outlook, made worse by the widespread knowledge that Makatea's mineable deposits were nearing an end.[95] The impending departure of the CFPO surely played into the hands of De Gaulle and his allies who used the economic downturn as a pretext for transferring France's nuclear testing centre, and its associated jobs and capital, from Algeria to the Tuamotu Archipelago.

The work involved in installing the necessary infrastructure for the CEP was immense. Estimates vary as to just how many Polynesians were mobilized in pursuit of France's atomic goals across the territory, but one study suggests that the number rose from just 770 in 1964 to a peak of 5,400 in 1967.[96] This number would fall to about 2,800 once infrastructure was completed, but given Makatea was home to around 3,000 people at its height in 1962 (2,675 of these being Polynesians), the symmetry in numbers suggests that Makatea closed at exactly the right time.[97] Just as Peter Curson has identified the time

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[90] John T. Arundel, 'Report No. 124', 14 Aug. 1907, 3–4, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bernard T. Balding Papers (hereinafter Balding Papers), MSS Pac. s. 94(3), Box 1.
[91] These predictions were soon reduced to about half the size of Banaba.
[92] Arundel, 'Report No. 124a', 24 Aug. 1907, 6; Arundel, 'Report No. 137', 17 Jan. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1
[93] Pierre-Yves Toullelan and Bernard Gille, *Le mariage Franco-Tahitien: histoire de Tahiti du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Tahiti: Polymages-Scoop, 1992), 112.
[94] Ibid.; H. Mahdavy, 'The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran', in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East,* ed. M.A. Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 428–67.
[95] 'Plan Quinquennal (1964–1968)', SPAA: 48W/2021. See, also, Regnault, *La bombe française,* 56–7.
[96] Toullelan and Gille, *Le mariage Franco-Tahitien*, 136–7.
[97] F. Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', *Cahiers du Pacifique* 5 (1963): 60. Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff more accurately estimate the number of workers finding themselves unemployed at the end of

spent on Makatea by outer island Cook Islands Maori as a significant 'dislodging factor' in their eventual migration to Rarotonga and New Zealand,[98] the same can be said for the likes of the Austral Islanders (some 40 per cent of the island's population) who had left their home islands for Makatea only to end up working for the CEP on Tahiti or taking up employment at the nickel mines in New Caledonia.[99]

Articulating Makatea

Stepping-stone, *clef de voûte,* phosphate wasteland, or post-phosphate paradise: much of this thesis is thus concerned with understanding how these various articulations of the island have interacted across time. Central to my argument is that the island and its history are open to interpretation from multiple, and at times contradictory, angles. How else could the Oxford-educated Robert James Fletcher, who eventually took up a job with the CFPO in 1920, write that he 'found the best', 'the real S. Sea Island', on a place that others had resigned to a dreaded phosphate island? 'Coconuts, pawpaws, breadfruit, and gorgeous flowering shrubs – hibiscus of all sorts, Bougainvillea and many others… The result is more lovely than I could ever have pictured', wrote the man originally enticed to the South Seas by Stevenson's Polynesian tales but instead found himself stuck in the decidedly less romantic New Hebridean plantation system for seven years.[100] The tendency already exists among scientists to transform islands into living laboratories; in the words of Adrian Young, there is an unmistakable urge to 'make islands into microcosms for understanding human nature'.[101] I argue that this urge is even more profound on phosphate islands such is the process of erasure and renewal that mining provides.

According to pro-development *tāvana* of the island, Julien Mai, Makatea's history has been lost to a generation, and it is only now that the current generation is awakening to claim its pre-mining past for its future.[102] To Mai, it is a history still without end:

mining at approximately 500. See Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The French Pacific Islands: French Polynesia and New Caledonia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 170–1.

[98] P.H. Curson, 'The Migration of Cook Islanders to New Zealand', *South Pacific Bulletin* 23 (1973): 25.

[99] Gérard Ringon, 'Vaitapu, un quartier de migrants dans la zone urbaine de Tahiti', *JSO* 32:27 (1971): 238; Hervé Danton, 'La desserte des îles Australes de 1840 à nos jours', *BSEO* 307–8 (2006): 181–2; Hervé Danton, 'Makatea', *BSEO* 258–9 (1992): 39.

[100] Asterisk [Robert James Fletcher], *Isles of Illusion,* rev. ed. (London: Century Hutchinson, 1986 [1925]), 286–7. See, also, Patty O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006), 227–8.

[101] Adrian Young, 'Mutiny's Bounty: Pitcairn Islanders and the Making of a Natural Laboratory on the Edge of Britain's Pacific Empire', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2016, 297.

[102] Julien Mai in Virginie Tetoofa, *Pari Pari Fenua – Makatea* (Tahiti: Ahi Company, 2019), accessible at https://youtu.be/rCdl0sGVAXs (accessed 17 Nov. 2020).

> The history of Makatea is rather like an essay. First, the introduction: They came, we negotiated. Then the body: They came, they mined. But the main question still hasn't been asked: Where is this paper's conclusion? … Where's the conclusion? I think *we* are going to write it.[103]

In waiting for the fate of the island to be decided, my thesis provides both a history of the people who remade the island for first time and a timely re-examination of Mai's simplified version of events. Like other small islands, the intrigue of Makatea and its history lie in its ability to be refashioned or reimagined. However a certain type of narrative has taken hold that privileges the so-called achievements of the first mining period and judges everything that has happened since 1966 as tragic decline. As noted above, this thesis seeks to shift the dominant narrative away from an obsession with the rise and fall of the island and, by taking inspiration from the work of Katerina Teaiwa on Banaba, I aim to move the discussion in more productive directions by trying to understand the historical conditions that created phosphate islands in the 20th century and establishing whether they still exist today.

Despite being the subject of an occasional journalistic feature article throughout the first several decades of the mine, Makatea only began to become the focus of academic writing in the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1959, the CFPO itself published a social and economic evaluation of half a century of industry on the island. Ultimately self-congratulatory, the company nonetheless furnished much important data and left the door 'slightly ajar', as the journal's editors put it, for deeper analysis from independent researchers.[104] Arguably necessitated by the impending exhaustion of the phosphate deposits, two French social scientists were sent to the island to fulfil the challenge of building upon the CFPO's article, and more importantly, investigating what was going to become of the island and the workers once the mine closed down. Though tackling the issue from different disciplinary backgrounds, Doumenge, a historical geographer, and Molet, an anthropologist, agreed that the territory was ill-prepared for the future, and issued warnings about the social and economic repercussions once French Polynesia lost its largest single industry and foreign income earner.

[103] Julien Mai in Navarro-Rovira, *Makatea l'oubli*.
[104] [CFPO], 'Makatéa: Bilan social-économique', 199.

The announcement of the CEP in 1963 effectively put an end to this discussion and very little was written about Makatea from 1966 to the 1990s as the territory and interested researchers were understandably preoccupied by what scholars have since called the ‘nuclear boom’; that is, the ‘creation of a truly artificial economy’ based on French military spending (or ‘atomic rent’) and heightened metropolitan immigration.[105] A notable exception to the rule was the still unrivalled 1972 book chapter by Colin Newbury who, operating in a more detached, academic context, managed to piece together a complicated series of French colonial records to outline the factors that led to the granting of the Makatea phosphate concession in 1917.[106]

Two interrelated dynamics are likely to have led to the renewed interest in Makatea in the 1990s. The first can be traced to a sense of uncertainty afflicting the territory just as the ‘nuclear boom’ looked to be winding down. The second was the 1995 election of the energetic Julien Mai, once described as the ‘instrument of the island’s renaissance’, as the island’s *tāvana*.[107] In 1992–3, French Polynesian amateur historian and government engineer Hervé Danton published the most comprehensive history of the island to date.[108] Drawing from a 1963 geological survey by Jean-Marie Obelliane,[109] as well as the work of Doumenge and Molet, Danton added a considerable amount of detail from local archival records to furnish a valuable narrative of the mining years. Professing neither to evaluate nor judge the period under examination, Danton’s admiration, as a fellow engineer, for the achievements of the CFPO is nonetheless apparent throughout the narrative.[110] And by concluding that ‘Makatea has become a symbol of political failure after having been a symbol of social as well as economic and industrial success’, he nails his colours to the mast.[111] Likening the island’s then status to a ‘black mark in the middle of the table’, he hoped that the rest of the territory would not head in the same direction following the closure of the nuclear testing centre.[112]

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[105] Bernard Poirine, ‘The Economy of French Polynesia after the Nuclear Boom’, *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 14:2 (1999): 93–109; Claude Robineau, ‘The Tahitian Economy and Tourism’, in *A New Kind of Sugar: Tourism in the Pacific,* ed. Ben R. Finney and Karen Ann Watson (Santa Cruz, CA: Center for South Pacific Studies, 1977), 62.
[106] Newbury, ‘The Makatea Phosphate Concession’, 167–88.
[107] Pierre-Marie Decoudras, Danièle Laplace and Frédéric Tesson, ‘Makatea, atoll oublié des Tuamotu (Polynésie française): de la friche industrielle au développement local par le tourisme’, *Les Cahiers d’Outre-Mer* 230 (2005): 13.
[108] Danton, ‘Makatea’, 2–46.
[109] Jean-Marie Obellianne, ‘Le gisement de phosphate tricalcique de Makatéa’, *Sciences de la terre* 9:1 (1962–3): 8–60.
[110] Danton, ‘Makatea’, 3.
[111] Ibid., 42.
[112] Ibid., 44.

Figure 0.9: Opening still from Erick Monod, *Makatea: les gardiens de l'ile* (1993), the littoral zone at Moumu.
Source: screencap, Youtube (https://youtu.be/O9NHBTTWnPU).

Danton's article is complemented by a 1993 documentary by the French Polynesian journalist Erick Monod, *Makatea: les gardiens de l'île* (figure 0.9), which pitches a young Julien Mai against the incumbent mayor, Louise Vaine Ellis. Mai, who had recently returned to the island himself, is shown championing the island's potential to attract families back who had left for Pape'ete and its surrounds in the 1960s. Ellis, one of the guardians of the island (the generation who remained), comes across as much more relaxed about the island's low-key future, set comfortably apart from the fast-developing Pape'ete.

As texts, both Danton and Monod end on a note of uncertainty regarding the island's future; they posit Mai's vision of targeted development against a more romanticized *laissez-faire*, symbolized most readily by nature's reclamation of the island. This theme has become synonymous with all works about Makatea, encouraged no doubt by the election of Mai in 1995. In fact, there is very little in the way of literature or film that does not bear the significant imprint of the *tāvana* and his decades-long campaign to revive Makatea's fortunes. In 2003, he commissioned a team of University of French Polynesia geographers

to investigate the potential of developing the island as a tourism destination. Titled '*Makatea, atoll oublié des Tuamotu*' (Makatea, the forgotten atoll of the Tuamotus), after outlining a series of options for the island, the authors of the study conclude that:

> Everyone who visits Makatea is in agreement about the beauty and unique character of the island compared to the other atolls of the Tuamotu. After a long night at sea, there is something unquestionably magic from the moment that one begins to make out the cliffs… coming to Makatea remains a rare experience and is one that many speak about though few actually do.[113]

Hence, they speculate whether the island's uniqueness is not predicated entirely on its isolation, its singularity and its rewilded state, and warn that any tourist development might run the risk of endangering this status.

A similar theme runs through Jacques Navarro-Rovira's 2010 feature documentary of a similar name, *Makatea, l'oubli,* where Mai's modernizing energy is juxtaposed against the island's more esoteric, even ghostly charm.[114] Not unlike Danton, Navarro-Rovira evokes the tragic nature of the island's modern decline – where the school teacher is depicted deploring the way that Makatea had given so much only to be tossed aside like an old sock – yet despite giving Mai plenty of screen time to outline his vision for the island's re-birth, he still makes space for the voices of those such as the island's nurse, Mehotea Vaitahe, who is happy enough to continue living the way she does on the island, seemingly 'forgotten'.

The obvious response to the forgotten island narrative, however, is to ask: 'forgotten by whom'?[115] If it is forgotten by history, then we must ask: whose history? In terms of historiography, the appearance of a 2008 special issue of the *Bulletin de la Société des Études Océaniennes* on Makatea did much to bring the island back into local historical thought. Consisting of a collection of academic articles, supplemented by both old and new verse (Polynesian *fa'atara* and *fa'ateniteni*), the problem with the issue is that its one historical contribution, by Christian Beslu, is based almost entirely on Danton's 1992–3

[113] Decoudras, Laplace and Tesson, 'Makatea, atoll oublié des Tuamotu', 12.
[114] In an interview with the author, Moetai Brotherson talked about being 'mesmerized by … the magic of this island' during his first visit. He said 'it has a very special energy that you can immediately feel when you arrive there'. See Moetai Brotherson, interview with Nicholas Hoare, 29 Jul. 2018. The same phenomenon was commented on by Danny Pittman in her interview with Nicholas Hoare, 17 Aug. 2018.
[115] There are parallels to be drawn between the presentation of Makatea and Clipperton Island, most notably in Skaggs, *Clipperton: A History of the Island the World Forgot*.

article and thus adds very little in the way of new ground. That said, from Beslu's celebration of the mining years to Mai's odes to the island, the entire issue is a celebration of Makatea's past, present and future. It was a popular edition with local audiences, and the visiting violinist in Navarro-Rovira's documentary is even shown reading a copy during her voyage to the island. However, the extent to which it has been read by people outside of French Polynesia is less certain. The well-commented upon chasm between the reception of anglophone and francophone Pacific scholarship has meant that these stories have not received as wide an audience as they deserve.[116]

For most anglophone scholars of the Pacific, Makatea is well off the map, and aside from the devoted coverage of the re-mining debate by Walter Zweifel at Radio New Zealand Pacific, there has been very little about the island in the Anglophone press. The island is so unknown that one Australian media outlet could get away with describing Makatea, a new destination for the *Aranui 5* cruise liner, as an 'untouched atoll in the Tuamotus', repeating the oft-repeated but erroneous claim that the island featured in the 1998 Anne Heche and Harrison Ford film *Six Days, Seven Nights* shot almost entirely in Hawai'i.[117] Before the arrival of *Avenir Makatea*, key-word searches for the island were almost as likely to result in hits for the rocky, cliff-like coastal areas known as the *makatea* on Mangaia in the Cook Islands than the phosphate island in the Tuamotus.[118] Adding to the confusion is the way geologists use the word *makatea* as a wider term to describe islands like Mangaia with an uplifted coral reef limestone rim surrounding a volcanic island (of which Makatea, paradoxically, does not officially count).[119]

In general histories of French Polynesia, Makatea of course plays a role, albeit a limited one, often compartmentalized from the main thrust of the narrative. In two editions of *Le Mémorial* polynésien*,* the weighty illustrated history of the territory, sections about Makatea appear at the end, all but outside of the chronological narrative.[120] The following paragraph

[116] Léopold Mu Si Yan and Bruno Saura, 'Decolonization, Language, and Identity: The Francophone Islands of the Pacific', *Contemporary Pacific* 27: 2 (2015): 325.
[117] 'Aranui 2020', *Sun Herald* (Syd., NSW), 2 Dec. 2018, 9. In the film, the fictionalized Makatea is resort-style holiday island reachable by chartered flight or a three-day boat ride from Tahiti. Another fictionalized account of an island called Makatea appears in a South-Seas adventure novel by Swedish traveller Gustaf Dillberg, *Äventyr på Makatea-ön* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups Förlag, 1913).
[118] The geological and cultural similarities between the *makatea* on Mangaia and Makatea are striking. See Michael P.J. Reilly, 'Moving Through the Ancient Cultural Landscape of Mangaia (Cook Islands)', *JPS* 127:3 (2018): 325–57.
[119] Lucien F. Montaggioni, 'Makatea', in *Encyclopedia of Modern Coral Reefs: Structure, Form and Process,* ed. David Hopley (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2011), 648.
[120] Philippe Mazellier ed., *Le Mémorial Polynésien: vol. 5, 1914–1939* (Papeete: Hibiscus, 1977), 474–88; *Le Mémorial Polynésien: vol. 6, 1940–1961* (Papeete: Hibiscus, 1978), 504–9.

by the scholar of Hawai'i and wider Polynesia, Amos Patten Leib, is typical of the way Makatea is referred to in general texts:

> Near the northwest end of the Tuamotu Archipelago is Makatea, which differs from the other Tuamotuan islands in that it is constructed of uplifted coral reaching a height of 372 feet above sea level. Scientists use its name to describe other islands of this type that occur elsewhere in the Pacific. About five miles long and two miles wide, it lacks a harbor and is generally less habitable than some of the atolls. Yet for nearly sixty years, from 1908 to 1966, this small island was the most important economic resource in all of French Polynesia, for in its interior were rich deposits of phosphate rock. Two to three hundred thousand tons were dug out annually by imported laborers. In 1966, when the supply was exhausted, the plant closed down and the miners left.[121]

Exceptions to the rule are Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, who fully integrate the phosphate industry into their political and economic history of French Polynesia and New Caledonia, and Robert Aldrich who, in his general history of France in the Pacific since 1940, correctly recognized that 'the impact of mining on Makatea and French Polynesia was immense'.[122] Though I disagree with certain of Thompson and Adloff's interpretations, one could not possibly charge them guilty of neglect. Like Aldrich, the authors well recognized that Makatea was 'the territory's sole important modern industry, for aside from limited deposits of mediocre-quality coal and chromite on Rapa Islands, phosphates are the only mineral resource of commercial importance'.[123] For Colin Newbury, Makatea fit into his history of the colony until 1945 as an illustration of the tensions that existed between the French administration and private (often foreign) enterprise. He judged the island too isolated for any 'effective control of the conditions of extraction and export', commenting that 'too often the Pape'ete administration simply did not know what was going on'.[124]

I have already noted the tendency of French historians to overlook the British involvement in the industry, yet it deserves repeating here just how uncritically Makatea and the CFPO

[121] Amos P. Leib, *The Many Islands of Polynesia* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 48.
[122] Thompson and Adloff, *The French Pacific Islands*; Robert Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 81.
[123] Adloff and Thompson, *The French Pacific Islands,* 131.
[124] Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 254.

are portrayed in these general histories of the territory.[125] For Michel Panoff, Makatea was a success and the CFPO succeeded where others had so often failed for it had managed to get Polynesians to work.[126] For similar reasons, Pierre-Yves Toullelan has judged Makatea a necessary stage in the colony's development between 'the copra and the atom'.[127] Out of all the French contributions, Doumenge's is probably the most revealing as he attempts to compare the role of industry on Makatea with that on Nauru and Banaba, albeit with the same conclusion. For the geographer, Nauru was at the service of Australasian agriculture, Banaba was about subsidizing the British administration of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, and Makatea, although controlled by a private company, allowed the French Polynesian economy to develop with a 'certain insouciance' over the decades.[128]

Ultimately, Doumenge judged the effect of mining on Makatea more profound than on the other two islands because the CFPO, rather than the BPC, eventually succeeded in developing an entirely local *main d'œuvre* (workforce), a step he judged as absolutely essential in the social and economic development of any colony.[129] With such a formula, all three phosphate islands are presented as sacrificial lambs, but it is only with Makatea, where the proceeds of the slaughter are redirected locally, that such a sacrifice is deemed noble or just. It is the same kind of logic that sustained the territory's nuclear testing centre, and it is only now, as the economic benefits of both these ages have diminished and the environmental and social effects have taken their place, that these histories are ripe for revision.

Re-Mining Makatea

As Pierre-Yves Le Meur and Eddy Banaré have recently argued, 'the practice of mining is inseparable from its story-telling: stories of a non-mining past, of a magnified or difficult present, of a future where the contours are sometimes uncertain, while other times, over defined'.[130] Over six chapters and a conclusion, this thesis therefore sets out to interrogate

[125] A recently published memoire by a CFPO doctor fits the mould. See Claude Barbier, 'Journal d'un médecin à Makatea, au temps de la Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l'Océanie', *BSEO* 331 (2014): 4–77.
[126] Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse,* 194.
[127] Pierre-Yves Toullelan, *Tahiti et ses archipels* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), 100–3. It is worth noting that Toullelan writes positively of the nuclear age too, praising it for bringing an 'unimaginable prosperity' to Tahiti: ibid., 95.
[128] François Doumenge, *L'homme dans le Pacifique Sud: etude geographique* (Paris: Musée de l'homme, 1966), 492–3.
[129] Ibid., 465.
[130] Pierre-Yves Le Meur and Eddy Banaré, 'Histoire et histoires: politique et poétique des récits miniers dans le Pacifique Sud', *JSO* 138-9 (2014): 7.

and revise many of the narratives that have been built up around the mine on Makatea. In doing so, I provide a counter narrative to the kinds of interpretations that have been built up around the island; not 'a straightforward, anticolonial history or narrative' that Teaiwa has judged to be inadequate, but one that examines both the island and its industry in equal measure as opposed to earlier studies which lose sight of the former in pursuit of the latter.[131] Like those of Teaiwa and others, this study seeks to tell world or global history through the stories that converge from and upon a particular place rather than risk running hopelessly aground at any one of the multiple islands or other locations that could lay claim to a stake in this story.[132] It is a story that could not be told without reference to the grasslands of New Zealand, Australia's wheatbelt and the rice paddy fields of Japan, but rather than treat superphosphate as a mere agricultural input, beginning at one of the world's many fertilizer manufacturing plants, I have chosen to situate my analysis at the start of the commodity chain, from its Pacific Island's source. From here, I move outwards in a multi-scalar fashion to connect the island to the various nodes or circuits of local, colonial, national, regional, imperial and global importance.

While this approach does in parts resemble a 'biography of a place', it should not be confused for a general history.[133] Instead, my thesis is most concerned with identifying the factors that most contributed to the island's transformation into what most people came to recognize as a 'phosphate island'. Many of these factors belong to the domain of human agency, but some can be attributed to non-human phenomena such as climactic events and the role of the island's flora and fauna, as well as its resource endowment.[134] Given this is a history nominally about rock, pure environmental historians might be disappointed with the lack of attention paid to the geology of the island; others might find inadequate my treatment of soils, plant nutrition and the chemicals phosphorus (P), phosphate (PO_4^{3-}), and its reactive partner added in the process of making superphosphate fertilizer, sulphur (S) or sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4); while others still might be discouraged by my lack of engagement with Tahitian, Mihiroa, Pa'umotu, or Asian-language sources.[135] Such

[131] Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 194.
[132] For a classic example, see Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, the Gambia,* 3rd ed. (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2010). Similar approaches have been pioneered in Pacific biography, see Patricia O'Brien, *Tautai: Sāmoa, World History, and the Life of Ta'isi O.F. Nelson* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).
[133] For a compelling approach as outlined in respect to an island-turned-nuclear testing site in the Aleutian islands, see Peter Coates, 'Amchitka, Alaska: Toward the Bio-Biography of an Island', *Environmental History* 1:4 (1996): 20–45.
[134] For the study undertaken in 1932 by Bishop Museum botanist Gerrit Wilder and his wife, see Gerrit Parmile Wilder, *The Flora of Makatea* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1934). Also, 'Botanical Research in French Oceania', *PIM,* 21 Sep. 1932, 27.
[135] Certainly, future oral historians would benefit from fluency in the vernacular.

critiques are welcome and I hope that one day I will be given opportunity to address them in a different format. For now, this thesis, as briefly outlined below, must suffice.[136]

Drawing from ship's narratives and other written traditions, chapter one is concerned with sketching a picture of the island prior to the mine in an attempt to build on Newbury's suggestion that 'the extent of their [Mihiroa] agriculture on the plateau before 1907 is very uncertain though it was not unimportant'.[137] By doing so I demonstrate that it was not necessarily the discovery of phosphate which brought the island within the European gaze. Rather, it was gradually drawn into regional and global circuits over a series of encounters, not all of which involved Europeans. Even if the plateau had always been dominated by an accumulation of limestone pinnacles which limited the potential of agriculture, I nonetheless underline the wider variety of environmental values that could be derived from the 'thick vegetation' growing between the dangerous blocks and I gesture towards the social role of the island in a fast-changing eastern Polynesian world.[138] Finally, I place considerable stress on the effect of a 1906 cyclone which devastated the local population and opened the door to European 'phosphateers' who arrived just one year later.

Chapter two seeks to understand what happened in the pivotal two to three years after the cyclone and the official discovery of phosphate deposits on the island. By taking advantage of the un-mined Bernard Balding papers now kept in Oxford, I am able to tell the story of how the 'phosphate island' first came into being. Consisting primarily of prospecting reports and other business correspondence between John T. Arundel and his Pacific Phosphate Company associates, these papers provide a sense of how difficult securing title over the island's deposits really was. This was not the story of French ingenuity as is sometimes portrayed in the literature, but an exhausting period of competition and negotiation in order to win over the island's landowners, the French administration, and other enterprising players such as Queen Marau Ta'aroa. Ultimately ending in compromise, and bitter disappointment from Arundel's perspective, I do nonetheless argue

[136] When thinking of the largely solo exercise that is the PhD, one cannot help but be reminded of the great critic of the Canberra-school of Pacific History, Gavan Daws, who noted the amount of 'isolatoes' to come out of the ANU. See Gavan Daws, 'Texts and Contexts: A First-Person Note', *Journal of Pacific History* (hereinafter *JPH*) 41:2 (2006): 252–3.

[137] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 185.

[138] For a succinct geographic description of the island in 1909, see François to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 27 Sep. 1909, 4, Archives nationales d'outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereinafter ANOM), Océanie (hereinafter OCEA) 123.

that the effects of the cyclone made the local population far more susceptible to outsiders' propositions than if they had encountered the 'phosphateers' at an earlier time.

With the final decision on the mining concession not officially granted until 1917, chapter three turns to another pressing concern of the CFPO in setting up the industry: the need for labour. Here, I argue that in deciding to recruit indentured labourers from Asia rather than recruit locally, the island evolved in such a way that it became divorced from its Polynesian context and became even more reliant on favourable outside conditions to develop along the lines that everyone expected. The colonial archive might be frustratingly light on detail to furnish the life stories of the Japanese, Chinese and Indochinese workers who came to Makatea, but it makes up for it with coverage of the various workers' uprisings that occurred on the island prior to the Second World War. Because indentured Asian workers struck violently and early into their contracts, we can safely assume a sizeable gap between what was sold to them at port and the reality on the island. I argue that with little in the way of regulation or oversight, nobody was particularly concerned about improving the state of the island which, according to one late 1930s observer, had deteriorated to such a point that it would make 'the conditions of the ancient convicts in Guiana seem enviable'.[139]

If the opening three chapters are predominantly concerned with the action that took place within the island and its surrounds, chapter four shifts focus towards the wider regional phosphate market. Looking out from Makatea, I explain where the island fit within the scheme of the Pacific phosphate industry which came to be dominated by the British Phosphate Commissioners on Nauru and Banaba after the First World War. I show that throughout the interwar decades the search for a viable market consumed the directors of the CFPO, and that by identifying the traces of Makatea and the CFPO within the voluminous Pacific Phosphate Company and BPC company records, the 'third phosphate island' narrative becomes evident. Facing stiff competition from the state-owned BPC who marketed their product to Australasian farmers at cost price, the CFPO enjoyed only three good years prior to the Second World War. This, I argue, also contributed to the type of 'phosphate island' Makatea became, with the CFPO's lack of success affecting the level of investment the company could redirect back into the island and its operations.

[139] G. André to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 27 Jul. 1938, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124.

Chapter five highlights the Second World War as a turning point in the island's history. Whereas chapter four consolidates the image of the island as bridesmaid, this chapter shows how the events of the War managed to transform Makatea into the bride. The Japanese takeover of Nauru and Banaba meant that Makatea became Australia and New Zealand's sole source of Pacific phosphate and production on the island more than doubled from a pre-war figure of close to 100,000 tons per year to 260,000 in 1945.[140] While output might have increased on Makatea itself, total Pacific supply was down and demand for food had risen on account of the growing appetite among those at the frontlines of the Allied war effort. Hence policy makers in the two Dominions, above all New Zealand, concentrated on securing a steady supply of phosphate from Polynesia and guarding against a possible takeover by Vichy France. One facet of this effort worth special attention was the labour scheme put together by New Zealand's Labour Government to send Cook Islanders to Makatea on year-long contracts, instead of the war in Europe as many Cook Islands Maori would have preferred.

Chapter six takes seriously the post-war moment by discussing how widespread changes in French imperial thinking came to disturb an industry hostile to change. By focusing on the politics of labour once again, this chapter stands in contrast with chapter three as I describe how a predominantly Asian *main-d'œuvre* was replaced by a local Polynesian one, a factor which led to the creation of a very different type of phosphate island. Here, I suggest the amelioration of conditions to make the island attractive to locals was largely driven by workers themselves, but they were aided in this task by a modernizing French colonial department that assigned its officials an important mediating role between the territory's capitalist classes, generally unaware of the 'social revolution' underway in France, and its burgeoning union movement.[141] This chapter thus invites us to rethink conceptions of the phosphate island as a particularly disagreeable place to work, and demonstrates that, by the 1950s, Makatea had become a thoroughly modern environment where wages were sufficient to support most of the trappings expected of modern family life. That said, this newfound optimism was not to last. By the start of the 1960s the dismantling of the phosphate island had begun, and the hard-won gains of the post-war moment were quickly forgotten on the island as the CFPO turned their focus towards a manganese mine in the New Hebrides instead.

[140] Mirko Lamer, *The World Fertilizer Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 448.
[141] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le règlement du conflit du travail survenu à Makatea du 10 au 19 Juillet 1947', 27 Jul. 1947, 10, AN: OCEA/114.

From the apex of the industry in the 1950s, my conclusion quickly shifts tack to grapple with what becomes of a phosphate island once its defining characteristic has been depleted to the point that it cannot be economically mined. In assessing the debates around the re-mining of the island, I show the ways in which memories of the first mining period (real or imagined) have been mobilized to support either pro- or anti-mining positions. It is within these debates that continuities between periods have the tendency to emerge. In making sense of these, I suggest we adopt the perspective of James Clifford and David Hanlon who both make the case for 'contingent and open-ended' histories and the Indigenous *longue durée*.[142] In giving the final word in his closing keynote to the 2016 Pacific History Association conference to Clifford, Hanlon emphasized the utility of the Indigenous *longue durée*, an approach which would entail that 'disruptions caused by colonization, settler-colonialism and modernity can be better seen and understood as brief moments in much longer histories that are passing on the way to more hopeful futures'.[143]

This history of Makatea has been written with Clifford's and Hanlon's words in mind. Like Hanlon, I think that despite the pull of regional, transnational, comparative, and global approaches to history, we 'should not reorder our study of Oceanic pasts to accommodate historiographical trends that emphasize the pragmatic, practical, and utilitarian as defined from elsewhere'.[144] By virtue of having had a third of its land dug up and sent to different corners of the globe, the story of Makatea can be told from multiple vantage points and subsumed within an array of different regional or global contexts. While this thesis definitely gestures to the importance of Makatea to other peoples' histories, if we are to take Clifford's lens of the Indigenous *longue durée* seriously, it must involve a commitment to anchor the story, no matter how deep the ocean floor might be, to a specific location and remain attentive to the Indigenous peoples that belong to that place. Even though the enormous changes of the mining years have made it difficult to trace the continuities in Indigenous history, of the three epigraphs that introduce this thesis – the first, which refers to Makatea's place in world environmental history; the second, which applies to French Polynesia's colonial history; and the last, to Indigenous history – it is the third that reminds us of the continuing, unresolved legacies of the mine (figure 0.10).

[142] David Hanlon, 'Losing Oceania to the Pacific and the World', *Contemporary Pacific* 29:2 (2017): 307.
[143] James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 42 cited in Hanlon, 'Losing Oceania to the Pacific and the World', 307.
[144] Hanlon, 'Losing Oceania to the Pacific and the World', 306.

Figure 0.10: Aerial view of a field of mined-out coral pinnacles on the island's central plateau, Makatea.
Source: Paul Judd, 2018.

Chapter 1: Digging up the Island's Past

Figure 1.1: Beach at Matea, c.1868, C.B. Hoare
Source: Collection Musée de Tahiti et des Îles – *Te Fare Manaha*, D2008.2.21

Long before the islands of the Tuamotu Archipelago gained worldwide attention as the home of France's nuclear testing programme, they were known by Polynesians as the 'islands out in the ocean', *les îles lointaines*.[1] From Makatea and Mataiva in the west to Reao in the east, the 77 atolls of the archipelago are spread over a distance of 1,500 kilometres, making it the largest island chain in the world. As the French archaeologist Jean-Michel Chazine has put it, the archipelago 'is a complex space, comprised of tiny individualized territories in a vast expanse of sea: a few thousand square kilometres of land scattered over nearly two million square kilometres of water'.[2] Yet, despite having been the destination of several high-profile scientific or archaeological expeditions – those of Charles Darwin, James D. Dana, Kenneth Emory, J. Frank Stimson and Te Rangi Hiroa Peter Buck – when it comes to precise dating or data, the settlement of this island group remains a mystery to many Western scientists.[3]

While Makatea belongs geographically to the Tuamotu Archipelago, it is more accurate to say that it is part of the *pays* Mihiroa – the name given to the region and people hailing from the Western Tuamotu who were once bound together by the language of the same name.[4] As the Welshman John Davies of the London Missionary Society (LMS) once described Makatea, it is 'a small island near the Paumotus tho' not one of them'.[5] If anything, the Mihiroa have more in common with the Society Islands to the west – from whence their founding ancestor, 'Ōio, most likely came – than the atolls to their east whose people speak the Pa'umotu language. According to ethnohistorian Paul Ottino, the Mihiroa trace their origin to the '*terre des hommes*' – believed to have been Bora Bora – and their migration stories are quite distinct from those who call the central and easterly islands of the group home.[6]

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[1] Kenneth Emory, *Material Culture of the Tuamotu Archipelago* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1975), 1.
[2] Jean-Michel Chazine, 'Of Atolls and Gardens: An Attempt at Participant Ethno-Archaeology in Tuamotu', in *The Changing South Pacific: Identities and Transformations,* ed. Serge Tcherkézoff and Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon, trans. Nora Scott (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), 194.
[3] Two archaeologists recently pointed out that 'the chronology of colonization of the Tuamotu Islands is marginally outlined, at best', Timothy Rieth and Ethan E. Cochrane, 'The Chronology of Colonization in Remote Oceania', in *The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Oceania,* ed. Ethan E. Cochrane and Terry L. Hunt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 149.
[4] Paul Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire de Rangiroa* (Papeete: ORSTOM, 1965), 7.
[5] C.W. Newbury, ed., *The History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799–1830, Written by John Davies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 272.
[6] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 127, 135–8; Paul Ottino, 'Early 'Āti of the Western Tuamotus', in *Polynesian Culture History: Essays in Honor of Kenneth P. Emory*, ed. Genevieve A. Highland et al. (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1967), 453.

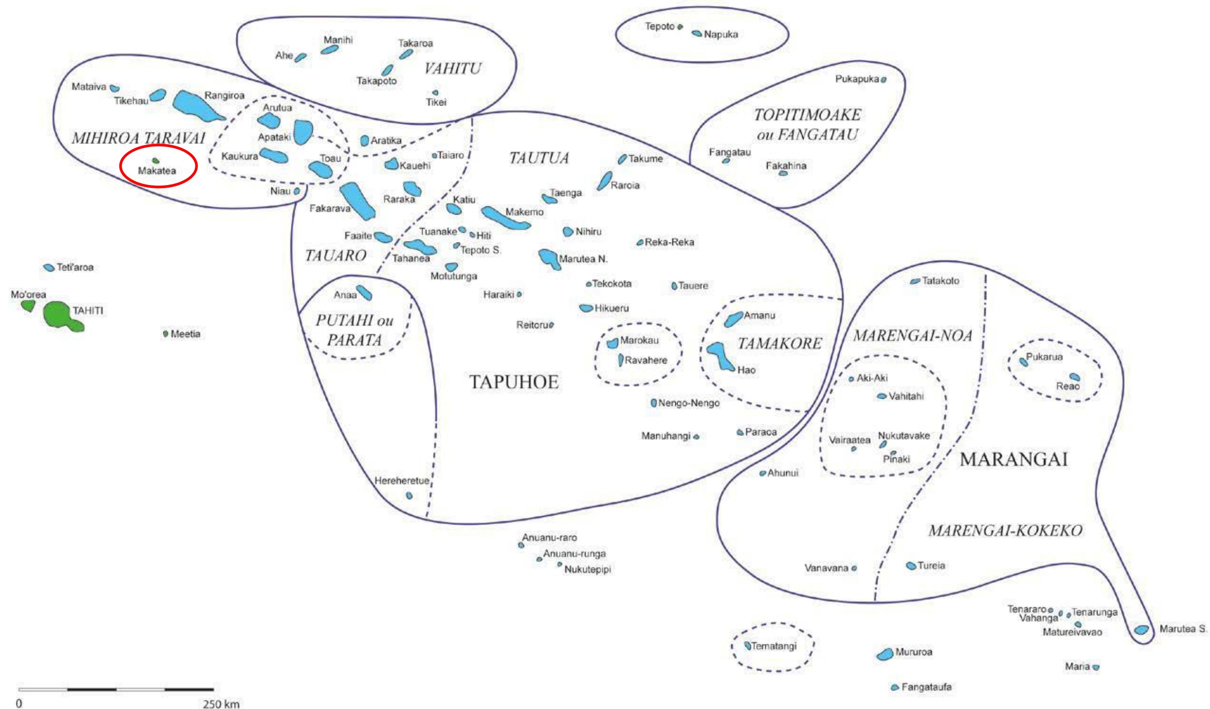

Figure 1.2: Map showing the dialectical and cultural areas of the Tuamotu Archipelago based on Stimson and Marshall's 1964 work. (See appendix 2 for larger version.)
Source: Guillaume Molle, 'Exploring Religious Practices on Polynesian Atolls', 264.

As it lies on the western boundary of the archipelago, Makatea, or Ma'atea as it is known in the Mihiroa and Tahitian dialect (bereft of the Pa'umotu *k*), was the gateway to the Tuamotu islands and even further afield.[7] Voyagers used Makatea, just within the limits of comfortable sailing distance from the Society Islands, as a launching point for further migrations into the low islands of the Tuamotu Archipelago.[8] Tupaia, the Ra'iātean *tahu'a* (religious knowledge holder), political advisor and master navigator, placed the island on a series of maps and island lists drafted while on the *Endeavour* on his way to Aotearoa/New Zealand.[9] According to recent research unlocking the secrets of Tupaia's

[7] Kenneth P. Emory, 'The Tuamotu Survey', *Bernice P. Bishop Museum – Bulletin* 94 (1931): 43; James Norman Hall and Charles Nordhoff, *Faery Lands of the South Seas* (New York: Garden City, 1921), 22.
[8] H.A.H. Driessen, 'Outriggerless Canoes and Glorious Beings: Pre-contact Prophecies in the Society Islands', *JPH* 17:1 (1982): 19; Don Thomas Gayangos, 'The Official Journal of the Second Voyage of the Frigate *Aguila* from El Callao to Tahiti', in *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain during the Years 1772–1776: Told in Despatches and Other Documents, Vol. II,* ed. Bolton Glanvill Corney (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010 [1918]), 187n1; Frédéric Torrente, *Buveurs de mers, Mangeurs de terres: histoire des guerriers d'Anaa, atoll des Tuamotu* (Papeete: Te Pito o te Fenua, 2012), 275–6, 280.
[9] The island lists were dictated in 'meaningful sequences, based on traditional voyaging paths for island-to-island travel'. See Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, 'The Making of Tupaia's Map: A Story of the Extent and Mastery of Polynesian Navigation, Competing Systems of Wayfinding on James Cook's Endeavour, and the Invention of an Ingenious Cartographic System', *JPH* 54:1 (2019): 4–6, 14.

map, Makatea lay on the path of a voyaging route linking Tahiti to the Marquesas, and eventually Oa‘hu in the Hawaiian group (figure 1.3).[10]

In an already complex space, Makatea thus adds further complexity, its geographical position and unique morphology lending the island its function as a bridge between peoples and island groups. That the Mihiroa were viewed as neither strictly Tahitian nor Pa’umotu also complicated the over-simplified racial categories employed by Polynesians and Europeans who, in judging the Society Islanders as culturally and intellectually superior to the Pa’umotu, often confused environmentally determined cultural disparity with innate racial difference.[11] The Mihiroa were a mobile, seafaring people and periodic tropical cyclones and other natural disasters only added to the mobility of these Islanders, who were often forced to take refuge and forge new trading relationships elsewhere in eastern Polynesia.[12]

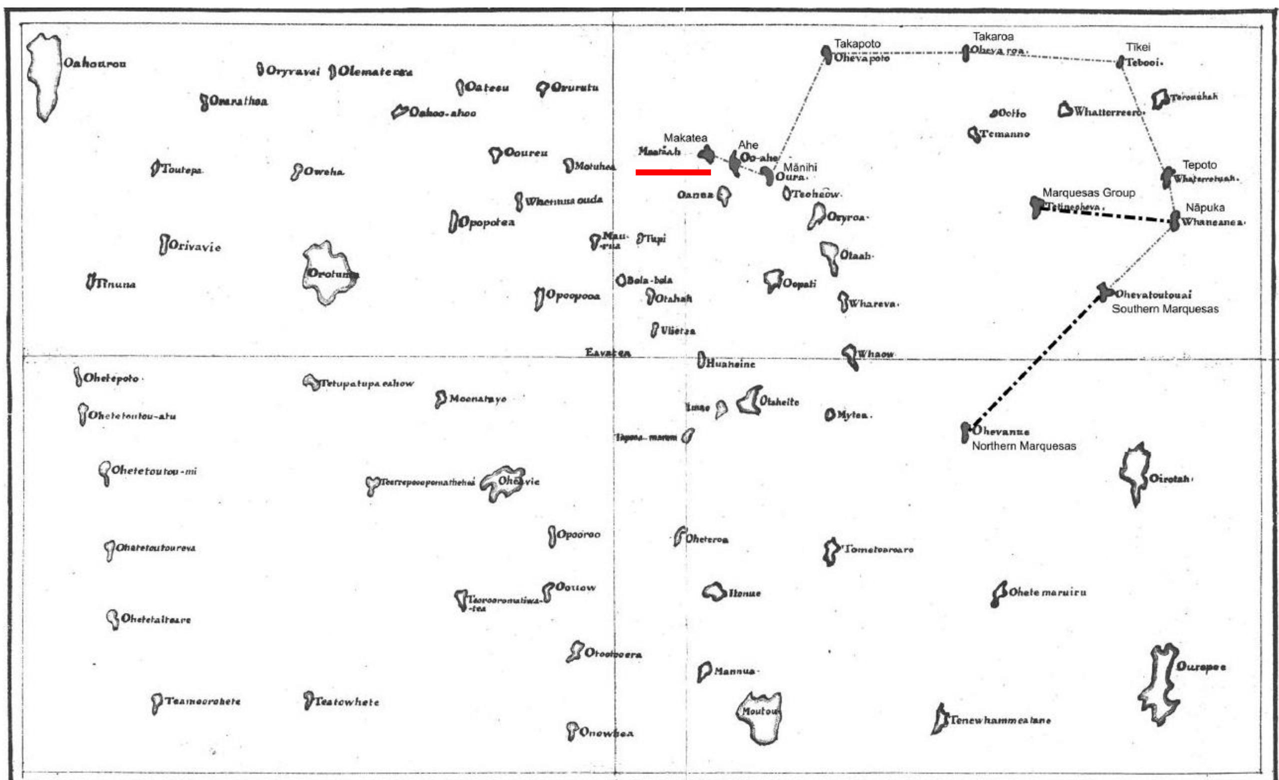

Figure 1.3: Reconstructed copy of Tupaia's Map showing the voyaging routes from Makatea to Tepoto and Nāpuka, and Nāpuka to the Marquesas. (see appendix 2 for larger version.)
Source: Eckstein and Schwarz, ‘The Making of Tupaia’s Map’, 72.

[10] Ibid., 70.
[11] Douglas Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society: Vol. 1, Ethnography* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), 65; Émilie Nolet, ‘Figures du pouvoir dans l’archipel des Tuamotu (Polynésie française): ce que c’est que d’être chef’, *JSO* 124 (2007): 120.
[12] Jean-François Dupon, ‘Les atolls et le risque cyclonique: le cas des Tuamotu’, *Cahiers des sciences humaines* 23:3–4 (1987): 571.

Seafarers from the Tuamotu Archipelago were renowned for being the hardiest of all Eastern Polynesians and, due to their relative isolation and need to maintain communication between atolls and neighbouring islands, they retained their seafaring traditions for a longer time than other groups.[13] Riding the currents that ran between atolls on their *pahi* (double-hulled canoes), the Mihiroa were well situated for trading with the larger Society islands to their west and the smaller Tuamotu atolls to their east. Since Makatea was notably fertile, it made sense to exploit it for its natural resources for longer, uncertain voyages into the 'dangerous archipelago' in search of pearls, pearl shells or treasured red feathers (or *'ura*).[14] Moreover, as it was covered in *tāmanu* trees (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) and other vegetation,[15] the island must have made a fine hub for the construction of ocean-going canoes, such was the quality of timber to be found on the plateau.[16] And as such, on his visit in 1803, the salt-pork trader John Turnbull found the quality of *pahi* 'superior in point of execution' to those on Tahiti.[17]

Phosphate mining changed all of this so that when the members of the famous Bishop Museum Tuamotu expedition set out in 1929 to capture and record the traditions of old, Makatea was little more than an afterthought, visited only once the proper fieldwork had been completed. In the mind of expedition leader Kenneth Emory, not only had Makatea been altered irrevocably in the two decades since mining commenced but, as the 'connecting link' between Tahiti and the Tuamotu Archipelago before this time, it had been 'thoroughly saturated with Society Islands influence' and thus was judged – initially at least – 'the least deserving' of their time.[18] While this logic is comprehensible given the expedition's aims and the prevailing thought of the era that Pacific cultures were somehow outside of history, Emory did not anticipate how mining could also be the archaeologists' friend in that it uncovers the layers of the past with a level of enthusiasm that no archaeological dig could possibly muster. On receiving news that both *marae* ruins and stone artefacts were being uncovered at the phosphate diggings, Emory decided to spend 12 days studying the findings on the island, eventually coming away convinced that the

[13] Emory, *Material Culture of the Tuamotu Archipelago*, 5; Torrente, *Buveurs de mers,* 272.
[14] Douglas L. Oliver, *Ancient Tahitian Society: Volume 1, Ethnography* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), 214; Torrente, *Buveurs de mers*, 279–80.
[15] *Annuaire des Établissements Français de l'Océanie et du Protectorat des iles de la société et dépendances pour l'année commune 1862* (Papeete: l'imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1862), 64. The once sacred *tāmanu* is now commonly exploited predominantly for its oil in cosmetic products, see A.C. Dweck and T. Meadows, 'Tamanu (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) – the African, Asian, Polynesian and Pacific Panacea', *International Journal of Cosmetic Science* 24:6 (2002): 341–8.
[16] Teuira Henry, *Ancient Tahiti,* rev. ed. (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1971), 106.
[17] John Turnbull, *A Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1804, Vol. 2* (London: 1805), 119.
[18] Emory, 'The Tuamotu Survey', 43.

island and its original inhabitants 'still possessed a store of genealogical and traditional material of real value'.[19]

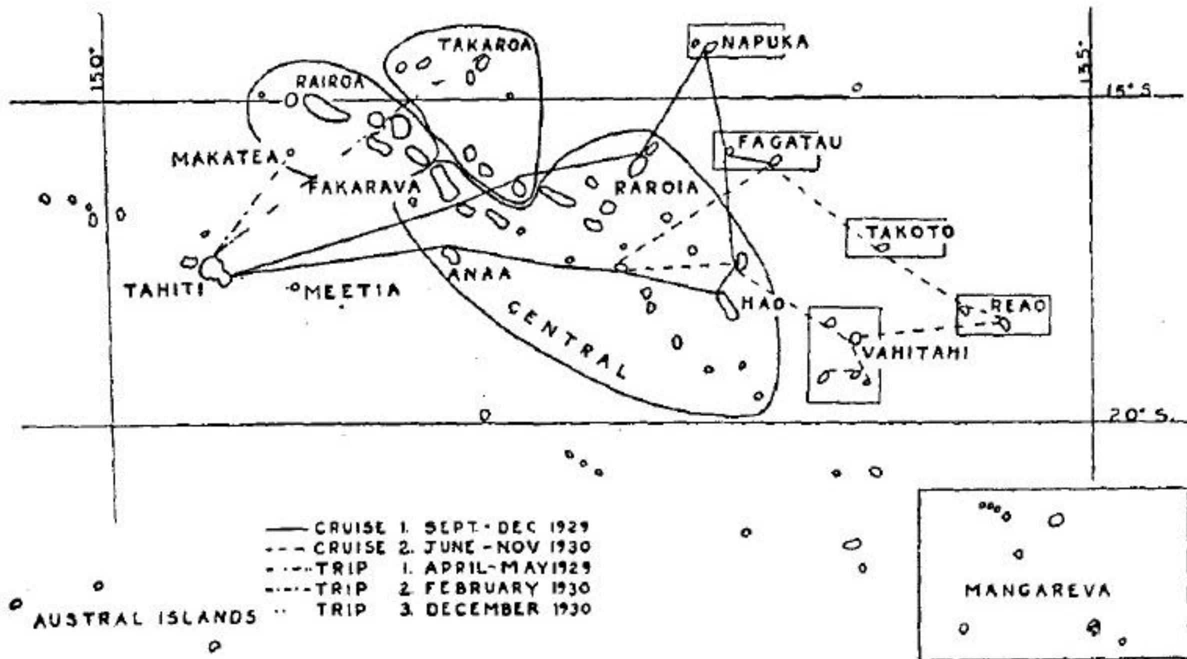

Figure 1.4: Sketch map showing the routes taken during the Bishop Museum Tuamotu expedition, 1929–30
Source: Emory, 'The Tuamotu Survey', 43.

Throughout this chapter I explore a variety of ways that people came to assess the so-called 'real value' of the island prior to its transformation into a phosphate island at the start of the 20th century. I draw from a range of early European observations, which despite being limited on account of their brevity and general superficiality, nonetheless create an overwhelming impression of Makatea's pre-mining environment as being remarkably fertile at least in relation to the low-lying islands that surrounded it. By bringing to light these different articulations of the island and its pre-mining value, I contend that it is easier to imagine alternative post-mining trajectories. I show that prior to the discovery of phosphate, Makatea was being increasingly drawn into larger regional and global circuits whether they were of a commercial, religious or scientific nature. This makes it clear that the turn-of-the-century discovery of phosphate deposits was not the only turning point in the island's modern history. I marshal a body of evidence to demonstrate how factors such as the island's initial 'discovery' by Europeans, invasion by the warring Parata,

[19] Emory, 'The Tuamotu Survey', 44; Bob Krauss, *Keneti: South Seas Adventures of Kenneth Emory* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), 223.

its absorption into the Pōmare Empire, the arrival of Mormon missionaries, French annexation and finally, the effects of two major cyclonic events in the space of three years, were all significant historical junctures.

Without being overly deterministic or teleological, I argue that these events all contributed to the imprinting of Makatea on to the maps and into the minds of outsiders. This awareness meant that by the time the Pacific's phosphate age began, the island emerged as a logical destination for commercial prospecting of the sort that had already taken place at Nauru and Banaba. Importantly, the arrival of French and British phosphateers in 1907 (the subject of chapter two) was just one of a series of significant outside encounters or events buried under the debris of the island's more recent mining history. The island that British entrepreneur John T. Arundel encountered in 1907 was not the island that Jacob Roggeveen and his crew 'discovered' in 1722, nor would it have even resembled the island that Arundel quickly visited in 1871 searching for guano. The Makatea of 1907 was an island in a state of flux, still reeling from the effects of recent events.

Makatea in the Time of the Mihiroa

L'époque minière and the arrival of workers from all over the territory changed, even diluted, Makatea's relationship to the rest of the islands in the *pays* Mihiroa. We know that as both a dialect and an identifier, the use of the term Mihiroa fell out of favour in the 20th century as Tahitian cultural and linguistic supremacy spread across French Polynesia.[20] This does not, however, mean that Mihiroa identity does not hold a certain degree of cultural purchase today, particularly when mobilized as shorthand for landownership in a contested native-title space.[21] Mihiroa history also provides the most appropriate window into the island's pre-mining past. According to the anti-mining advocate Sabrina Birk, who has married into the ancient Marama *'āti* (tribe or clan), 'if we want to respect Makatea we call it Ma'atea. This is how the Mihiroa call it: The food of light'.[22] Locating the island within its proper local historical context thus requires a certain understanding of its relationship to its immediate neighbours: Mataiva, Tikehau and Rangiroa (and to a lesser extent, the other islands of the cultural group, Apataki, Arutua, Kaukura and Niau – the last of which was seen as the bridge between the Mihiroa and Ana'a).[23] Within this region, Makatea

[20] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 128.
[21] For the most straightforward English-language explanation of the thorny land problem in the archipelago, see Moshe Rapaport, 'Between Two Laws: Tenure Regimes in the Pearl Islands', *Contemporary Pacific* 8:1 (1996): 33–49.
[22] Sabrina Birk, interview with Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018.
[23] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 7.

was, and still is, connected to its neighbouring islands via the currents of the sea which facilitated migration and mobility between the islands of the Mihiroa. Ara hao is the name of the current that runs between Makatea and Rangiroa, and the major current connecting Tikehau and Mataiva to Makatea is called the Teauhaapapeua.[24] These ancient routes (*purūmu*) of the Mihiroa also give us clues about the original Polynesian settlement of the region.[25]

According to Ottino, author of several important studies about the history of Rangiroa, the references in Mihiroa tradition to the tumultuous current Teaueripo running between Mataiva and Tikehau are a good indication that migrations to the region were likely to have come from a westerly direction.[26] The point is further established by reference to the similarities in language and ancient calendars of the Mihiroa to the Society Islands, and the fact that the Mihiroa founding ancestor, 'Ōio, not only belonged to the pantheon of gods connected to Havai'i (modern Ra'iātea) but also ran into rough seas on his voyage to the *pays* Mihiroa, a sign that he probably encountered Teaueripo.[27] Closer examination of the oral record reproduced in *puta tupuna* (genealogical manuscripts) and *fa'atara* (a style of poetry or ode), led Ottino to conclude that this initial wave of migration was likely to have occurred up to 28 generations ago, and can be pinpointed to the *terre des hommes* known as Vavau (or modern Bora Bora).[28]

Others have speculated that settlers to the region came from Tahiti via Makatea, but Ottino believed the islands were more likely to have been settled at similar times (or within the space of two to three generations at most), and from the direction of the Leeward Islands and not Tahiti. Even though he felt the evidence regarding Makatea was less certain, he could nonetheless point to a tradition linking the settlement of the island to Tama, son of Marama and Te Ao Nui, and the brother of the Mihiroa founding ancestor, 'Ōio.[29] The remains of *marae* provide further layers of evidence, and in this case ancient stone

[24] Ibid., 132. *Ara hao* is the name of the current mentioned in the *faateniteni* or ode collected by Captain Victor Brisson in the 1920s. See 'Parau faateniteni no Makatea', Brisson Papers, PMB: 1034.
[25] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 131.
[26] Ibid., 133.
[27] Ibid., 128.
[28] Ibid., 127. Note there has been at least three generations since Ottino wrote his book.
[29] Ibid., 134.

structures found in the centre of Makatea facing directly in the direction of Tikehau might suggest settlement from this island via the current Teauhaapapeua (figure 1.5).[30]

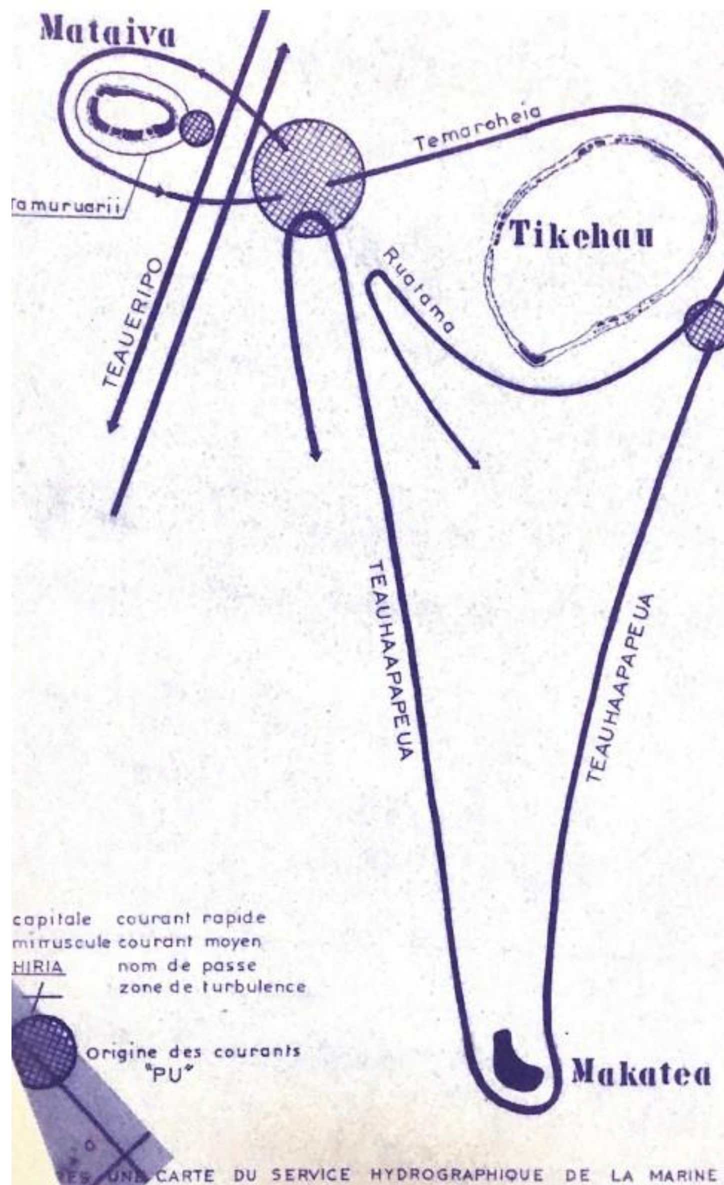

Figure 1.5: Fragment of map demonstrating the trajectory of ocean currents running between Makatea, Tikehau and Mataiva.
Source: Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 132.

Writing in 1965, Ottino insisted on the speculative nature of his research, and despite being confident in his sources, he was also aware that further archaeological research was needed to solidify his theories.[31] As concerns Makatea's ancient past, mining has destroyed much of this ability to verify the oral record; a 2005 archaeological survey of the

[30] Paul Niva and Eli Poroi, *Inventaire du Patrimoine de l'île de Makatea* (Papeete: Associations Tuihana et Terauatiati, 2005), 5.
[31] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 144.

island confirmed as much.[32] Yet a series of chance discoveries throughout the mining years demonstrated that the island was not completely without archaeological worth. I have already mentioned the Bishop Museum stalwart Kenneth Emory, who found only one out of the eight reported *marae* on the island still intact when he visited in 1930.[33] Interestingly, he thought the quantity of *marae* was proof that the island once contained a sizeable population, which could well be correct but in supporting his point he mistook a passage from the influential Belgian merchant and diplomat Jacques Antoine Moerenhout about the potential of a once large population on the island of Meheti'a (rendered as Maita) for evidence of the same existing at Makatea (Matea).[34] Prior to this, two CFPO employees, Aiden Gooding (the *chef de l'extraction*) and Pierre Botiaux managed to amass collections of basalt adzes and wood food-pounders from the 'diggings' which were shared with and used by Emory to illuminate his study on the material culture of the Tuamotu group.[35] Gooding's collection was eventually bought by the anthropologist Donald Stanley Marshall in 1953 on behalf of the Peabody Museum at Salem, Massachusetts.[36]

A further discovery of archaeological note came in 1952 when a site of purported ancient human origin was uncovered in the course of mining near Pu'utiare, Makatea's most elevated spot. The find, undoubtedly a *marae,*[37] consisted of several platforms and rock walls of roughly 75 centimetres in height, and scattered amongst the debris were axes and other stone tools, in addition to a collection of human skulls which the workers promptly re-buried 'in a secret location' before any *popa'ā* (Europeans/non-Islanders) were able to get their hands on them.[38] News of the remnants piqued the interest of the CFPO doctor and part-time anthropologist Bernard Villaret who interpreted the site as evidence to support his theory that Makatea was once inhabited by 'pre-Polynesian, probably Melanesian' people.[39] The native Parisian could not explain why such a site, if it were

[32] Niva, 'Inventaire historique et archéologique de Makatea', 50. Though other sites, such as the Ra'iupu *marae,* were preserved, see Vérin, 'Ra'iupu Marae of Makatea', 212.
[33] Kenneth P. Emory, *Tuamotuan Stone Structures* (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1934), 28.
[34] Ibid.; J.A. Moerenhout, *Voyage aux îles du Grand Ocean, Vol. 1* (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1837), 211. For an English translation, see J.A. Moerenhout, *Travels to the Islands of the Pacific Ocean,* trans. Arthur R. Borden, Jr. (New York: University Press of America, 1993 [1837]).
[35] Emory, *Material Culture of the Tuamotu Archipelago*, 20–21; Krauss, *Keneti,* 224.
[36] Donald S. Marshall, 3 Feb. 1953, 327, Donald Stanley Marshall Polynesian Expedition Journals (hereinafter Marshall Journals), PMB: 1335, Box 7.1, Reel 1.
[37] Niva and Poroi, *Inventaire du Patrimoine de l'île de Makatea*, 5.
[38] Bernard Villaret, 'Découvertes Archéologiques à Makatea', *BSEO* 100 (1952): 421.
[39]Ibid., 422. Villaret was also a prolific writer, with 15 books and six documentary films to his name on the Pacific alone. See Patrick O'Reilly and Raoul Teissier, *Tahitiens: Répertoire biographique de la Polynésie Française,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Musée de l'Homme, 1975), 595.

Polynesian, would exist so far inland, at a distance from both the sea and the island's main sources of water. So he instead landed upon his theory that it must have belonged to an earlier wave of migrants, perhaps forced to take refuge on the island where they deliberately chose to settle at the highest possible point to keep an eye on invaders, and grew vegetables instead of living off the sea like the doctor presumed a Polynesian community would.[40]

Villaret was encouraged to pursue his theory further when, nine months later, workers uncovered the skeletal remains of two human beings just 300 metres from the original site, this time whisked away 'as discreetly as possible' (that is, before locals could give them a customary reburial) on account of their apparent 'scientific interest'.[41] Excited that he had discovered physical proof of 'primitive humanity having existed tens of thousands of years ago' on the island,[42] Villaret arranged to have the remains (known as *ivi tupuna* in Tahitian) sent to Paris where they could be examined and even carbon-dated by experts at the Musée de l'Homme.[43] Newspaper articles throughout the region suddenly appeared with articles touting the discovery of 'Makatea Man' predating the famed 'Peking Man'.[44] Unfortunately for Villaret, at this point the Parisian scientists quelled his enthusiasm. Not only were his skulls found to not differ dramatically from an earlier collection of Makatea skulls housed by the museum (see below), but the biological anthropologist assigned to the task informed him that there was no such thing as a single Melanesian or Polynesian type and, even if there were, he did not see any reason why the skulls would be Melanesian rather than Polynesian.[45]

Notwithstanding Villaret's determination to chase a scoop, the idea that Makatea might have been settled by multiple groups is not necessarily without foundation. Ottino, after all, asked whether a population might have existed in the region prior to the arrival of 'Ōio, and popular ideas about Melanesian or proto-Polynesian settlement abounded well into the 20th century, due in no small part to the theory of two distinct 'races' of Polynesian first proposed by the naturalist J.R. Forster on Cook's second Pacific voyage and later

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[40] Villaret, 'Découvertes Archéologiques à Makatea', 422.
[41] Marcel Richet, 'Proces – Verbal', 30 May 1953, SPAA: 48W/1212.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Radiocarbon dating was still in its infancy in France, Bernard Villaret, 'Les cranes préhistoriques de Putiare à Makatéa, Polynésie française', *JSO* 15 (1959): 331.
[44] 'World's Oldest Skeletons', *Kalgoorlie Miner,* 2 Jul. 1953, 1; 'Des ossements découverts à Tahiti sont attendus à Paris', *Le Courrier Australien,* 21 Aug. 1953, 5; 'Makatea Man?', *PIM,* Sep. 1954, 51.
[45] S. de Félice, 'Les cranes préhistoriques de Putiare à Makatéa, Polynésie française', *JSO* 15 (1959): 331–3.

interpretations of the wars with Ana'a (see below).[46] Ottino pointed to certain oral traditions that spoke of the Marama '*ati,* that of 'Ōio, as the 'true Polynesians' but nonetheless also made reference to the *manahune* (or guests) from both Tahiti and the eastern islands of the Tuamotu who were darker-skinned, frizzy-haired and, according to some, settled on Rangiroa prior to the arrival of 'Ōio.[47] This is not the place to pursue such a theory but it points once again to the contested historical origins of the Mihiroa and the island of Makatea.

Another origin story has been offered by Makatea's longstanding *tāvana* (mayor or chief) Julien Mai, a man well-steeped in island lore. Here, he recalled the first words that came from the mouths of the original settlers – those whom he calls the 'kings who came from the skies' – in a *fa'ateniteni* or ode to the island composed for a 2008 special issue of the *Bulletin de la Société des Études océaniennes*.[48] Reaching the final stanza, Mai, the son of one of the island's long-serving *mūto'i* (Indigenous police officers), recites the 'secret words' of the first arrivals:

Makatea e fenua 'auhune	Makatea, prosperous land
E fenua ruperupe	Lush land
E ma'o tārere nō te moana nīnamu o te ra'i	A shark suspended in the blue ocean of the sky
E fenua tāhia e te mata'i	An island caressed by the winds
O te fenua mo'a teie	A sacred land. [49]

These words, 'secret' or not, lay the foundations for the remaining pages of this chapter where similar sorts of observations are made time and time again by 18th- and 19th-century visitors of European persuasion, underscoring the natural richesse of the island. Students of Pacific Islands history will recognize the importance of establishing the fact that phosphate islands once harboured lush environments to counter wider colonial mythmaking around sites of natural-resource wealth that seek to minimize the effects of mining by downplaying the original state of the environment. As Teresia Teaiwa famously underlined in an evocative essay: 'lush. In an essay i wrote in 1991 i made the mistake of

[46] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 138; Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania, 1511–1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 90.
[47] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 138.
[48] According to Teuira Henry, the islands west of Fakarava – that is the islands of the Mihiroa – were ruled as 'independent little kingdoms', Henry, *Ancient Tahiti*, 110.
[49] Julien Mai, 'Te parau mo'e o Makatea/Mots secrets de Makatea', *BSEO* 314 (2008), 6–7. English version has been translated from the French by the author: *Makatea, terre prospère; Terre luxuriante; Requin suspendu dans l'océan bleu du ciel; Île caressée par les vents; Terre sacrée*.

describing ocean island as 'lush'. i meant lush before the british started mining the hell out of it. but I guess i didn't make that explicit enough'.[50] As we will soon see, in Makatea's case, the idea of 'a lush island' was made explicit by the procession of European voyages that called into the island on their Pacific travels, leaving no doubt that the island was unique.

On the Map

Whereas Makatea was most likely settled by Polynesians from the west, it was more often than not visited by Europeans coming from the east who reached the Tuamotu Archipelago after a long Pacific crossing from the Americas (figures 1.6–7). Just as Nauru was initially judged a Pleasant Island by its late 18th-century European discoverer, Makatea was given the similarly favourable, if rather prosaic, 'Refreshment Island' (*Verquicking*), by the first Europeans to set foot on its shores earlier in the century.[51]

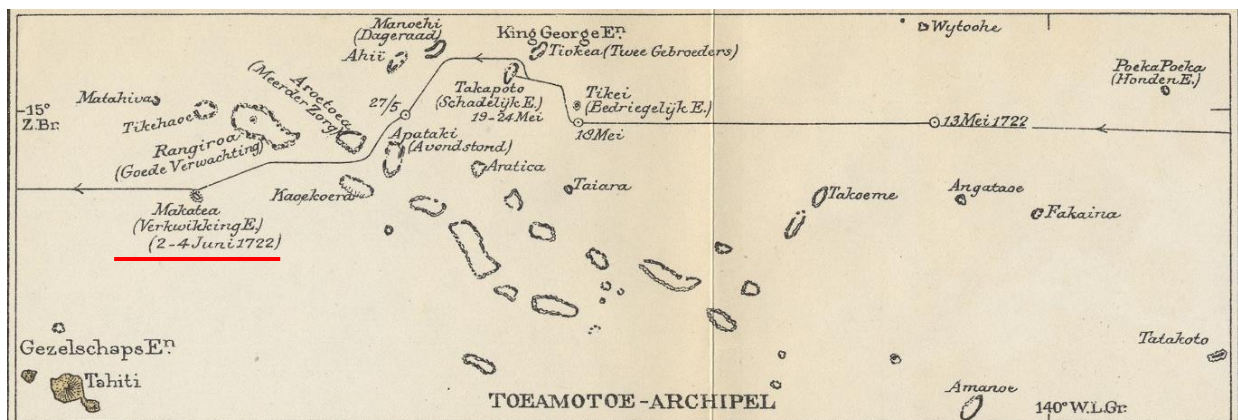

Figure 1.6: Map showing the route of Roggeveen's expedition through the Tuamotu Archipelago, 1911.
Source: John Delaney, Princeton University Library
(https://libdbserver.princeton.edu/visual_materials/maps/websites/pacific/roggeveen/roggeveen.html)

Emerging out of the so-called *Labyrinthe* to the east and arriving on the evening of 1 June 1722, the famous white cliffs of Makatea could not have come a day sooner for Jacob Roggeveen and his scurvy-ravaged crew who had been growing increasingly ill by the day.[52] Two weeks earlier they had lost the majority of their food supplies when one of their three ships ran aground at the island of Takapoto (which was given the name Disastrous), so the sudden appearance of this high island, apparently almost missed in the dark, must

[50] Teresia Teaiwa, 'Yaqona/Yagona: Roots and Routes of a Displaced Native', *UTS Review* 4:2 (1998): 95.
[51] Several authors claim the island was first located, though not visited, by the Portuguese navigator Pedro Fernandes de Quirós in 1606 who gave the name Sagitaria. Yet this could have equally been Rangiroa, or Ana'a. See W.J.L. Wharton, 'Note on the Identification of La Sagittaria of Quiros', *Geographical Journal* 20:2 (1902): 207–9.
[52] K.F. Behrens, *Histoire de l'expedition de trois vaisseaux envoyés par la Compagnie des Indes Occidentales des Provinces-Unies, aux terres australes en MDCCXXI* (The Hague, 1739), 153; Andrew Sharp, ed., *The Journal of Jacob Roggeveen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 137.

have produced a sense of expectation among their hungry men, no doubt still wary after their deadly skirmish on Rapa Nui (Easter Island) two months earlier.[53]

For Makatea's inhabitants, by way of contrast, these visitors, around 50 in total, must have made a pitiable sight stumbling from their ships into their smaller sloops to make their way to the shores of Moumu (where they were helpfully guided by the Islanders). Stories of their initial reception on the beach differ. Possibly owing to Captain Cornelis Bouman's account of the second morning where the Dutchmen were welcomed 'as friends', the historian J.C. Beaglehole writes that the landing party were met by a 'crowd of islanders', 'unarmed and peaceable'.[54] Roggeveen's account, on the other hand, is clear about the Islanders on this first morning being 'armed with staves of 12 to 14 feet long' which were adorned with a 'sharp bone of some animal'.[55] The popular account of low-ranking German soldier, Karl Friedrich Behrens, published prior to the discovery of Roggeveen's journal but deemed by Andrew Sharp to have 'little value' due to his frequent 'added inventions', accords with Roggeveen's: the holders of the weapons, he suggested, gave off every impression that they would not be afraid of using them.[56] In response to an attempt by one of the Island men who had been helping bring the sloops ashore to seize the ship's sword and use it against them, a flurry of shots were fired beachside, in Behrens's words, to 'clean the shoreline'.[57] Roggeveen clarifies their muskets 'deliberately shot amiss', but the desired effect was achieved as the firing quickly caused the Islanders to part, allowing the Europeans to cross the beach 'unhindered'.[58]

Roggeveen immediately ordered his men to go looking for provisions, reportedly finding without too much difficulty 'a half sack of greens (being a sort of wild purslane and garden cress), which being boiled with fowls was an outstandingly good refreshment for those who lay sick in their bunks'.[59] With whispers that an even greater 'abundance of greens' could

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[53] Cornelis Bouman, the captain of the voyage's second vessel, the *Thienhoven,* gave the island the name 'Unknown Danger' (or 'Ontwetent Gevaar') on account of their initial failure to sight the island, Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 138n1. 10 to 12 Rapanui were killed by Roggeveen's men during their initial encounter on 10 April. See Sharp ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 95.

[54] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 138n2; J.C. Beaglehole, *The Exploration of the Pacific,* 3rd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 183.

[55] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 137.

[56] Ibid., 17; Behrens, *Histoire de l'expedition de trois vaisseaux,* 156. It is worth noting that some early French appraisals nonetheless considered Behrens' account as being faithful to Roggeveen's. See Patrick O'Reilly and Édouard Reitman, *Bibliographie de Tahiti et de la Polynésie française* (Paris: Musée de l'Homme, 1967), 29.

[57] Behrens, *Histoire de l'expedition de trois vaisseaux,* 156.

[58] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 137–8.

[59] Ibid., 138.

be found further inland, Roggeveen bestowed the name Refreshment Island to Makatea on board that night, supplanting Captain Bouman's original moniker, Unknown Danger.[60]

The next morning, 3 June, the Europeans were welcomed back on to the beach as friends, and a ceremony of gift-giving, conspicuously absent from the previous day, took place with coconuts being exchanged for European beads and combs.[61] In addition, a mutual inspection of bodily private parts seemingly pleased and reassured all who took part. According to Bouman, 'the whitest and best-made' of the Europeans were 'very inquisitively touched' by the young women presented to them.[62] After receiving their '*mille caresses*',[63] some of the women tried inviting the men up onto the plateau where 'everything was in abundance' but, miraculously, the men managed to resist their advances for the moment and 'found it more appropriate' to stay on course collecting as many greens as possible from the sea-level village and surrounding terrain.[64]

Either in pursuit of coconuts and bananas (Roggeveen) or birds and cattle (Bouman),[65] the men, after having collected four sacks of 'greens', eventually decided to mount the path from the village at Moumu to the plateau via the narrow path first pointed out to them by the Island women. According to Roggeveen:

> Coming to the ascent (being a narrow path where only one man can go at a time, having much difficulty in climbing up and keeping himself firm, because the passage is like a groove, which has on each side sharp coral as a wall) the Indians beckoned us, but having climbed up scarcely halfway, we were greeted with a hail of stones from the surrounding trees, by which one man of the ship *Thienhoven* was wounded in the head, and also our Sergeant in the elbow and in the loin.[66]

At this point, the Europeans opened fire killing either five or six (Roggeveen), or eight or nine (Bouman) Islanders. Only in Behrens' account was it mentioned that the chief, or 'King of the island', featured among the number felled.[67] In response, Bouman writes the

[60] See above, 54fn41.
[61] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 138n2.
[62] Bouman wrote: 'One of our men let his breeches down and showed what he was in sex, whereupon they undid their clothes and showed also how they were shaped, being slender and fine in build': ibid.
[63] Behrens, *Histoire de l'expedition de trois vaisseaux,* 159.
[64] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 139n2.
[65] But certainly not women.
[66] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 140.
[67] Behrens, *Histoire de l'expedition de trois vaisseaux*, 160.

Islanders 'began to throw or roll down stones as strongly as hail falls from the sky, so that our men because of the great danger fled through the trees to the beach'.[68]

Further research needs to be undertaken into 'the other side of the beach' at this time to understand why the Mihiroa on Makatea might have reacted as they did.[69] Aside from plotting revenge for the musket fire on the opening morning, it seems possible that in helping themselves liberally to the island's bounty on the first and second days, the crew overstepped the mark and failed to respect the Islanders' hospitality.[70] Another interpretation might be that the Islanders understood their land was a coveted place and, perhaps being accustomed to defending it from outsiders, cleverly used their knowledge of the land to lure the visitors into a trap before sending them packing. For his part, Jean-Claude Teriierooiterai surmised that just as the Tahitians attacked Samuel Wallis in 1767 because of their knowledge of earlier Spanish massacres and subsequent illness in the Marquesas, the Mihiroa might have been responding to these earlier events, striking before it was too late.[71]

Whatever the reason, with this deadly encounter Roggeveen's Refreshment Island had become the personification of Bouman's Unknown Danger. Even though Behrens would prophetically note that 'there was a strong chance that there were metals and other precious things hidden in the bosom of the island', no such secrets were revealed on this occasion.[72] For Roggeveen, the Islanders' spirited resistance was decisive, and a decision was quickly made to abort their search for Captain Edward Davis' great southern continent, and start making their way directly to the East Indies instead (figure 1.7).[73] For the Mihiroa on Makatea, their island was now on the European map. The Islanders managed to repel this first excursion, but as a high island in a sea of dangerous low-lying atolls, Makatea was always going to be a conspicuous site for the increasing number of Europeans roaming the region for the following century or two. Important in the history of Polynesian encounters is the fact that these events took place over 40 years before Wallis first set foot

[68] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen*, 139n2.
[69] Greg Dening, 'Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay', *History and Theory* 41:1 (2002): 9–11.
[70] Claude Robineau, 'Reciprocity, Redistribution and Prestige among the Polynesians of the Society Islands', in *French Polynesia: A Book of Selected Readings,* ed. Nancy J. Pollock and Ron Crocombe (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1988), 185–6.
[71] Jean-Claude Teriierooiterai, 'Contextualising the *Bounty* in Pacific Maritime Culture', in *The Bounty from the Beach: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Disciplinary Essays,* ed. Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018), 33.
[72] Behrens, *Histoire de l'expédition de trois vaisseaux*, 162.
[73] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 140.

on Tahiti. As Teriierooiterai suggests, contact between island groups means it is highly likely that news of events on Makatea made their way to Tahiti and the rest of the Society Islands, forewarning others about the potential dangers and opportunities provided by future European visits.[74]

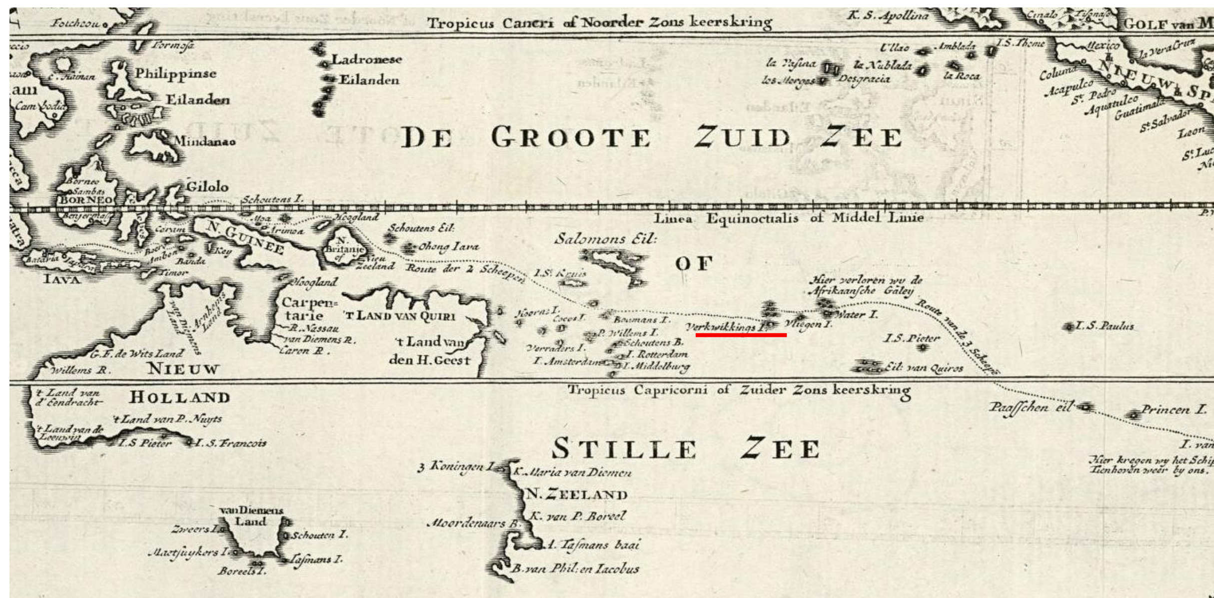

Figure 1.7: Map of the voyage to the 'South Land' by Jacob Roggeveen, c.1787.
Source: Wikicommons

European Encounters

From Roggeveen's visit onwards, European observations about the island and its people were almost entirely complimentary. To borrow Bronwen Douglas' concept of 'Indigenous countersigns', one can read the slippage between Roggeveen's favoured neutral term 'Indian' to the more pejorative descriptor, 'this black', when describing the actions of the Islander who attempted to steal a sword during their crossing of the beach, as a countersign of Indigenous agency that upset the arriving crew.[75] But none of these descriptions was anywhere near as disparaging as what was written about the Islanders of the low-lying atolls further east than Makatea. The trader John Turnbull, who visited Makatea in February 1803 on one of his many voyages from Port Jackson (Sydney), would judge the appearance of the Tuamotu Islanders he encountered prior to Makatea as 'loathsome and forbidding', and 'deprived by nature of all other means of support'. The

[74] Teriierooiterai, 'Contextualising the *Bounty* in Pacific Maritime Culture', 33. As the wreck of *De Africaansche Galey* at Takapoto was in living memory of people on Tahiti in 1791, it is safe to assume there was knowledge about Makatea too. See James Wilson, 'Appendix', *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean, Performed in the Years 1796, 1797, 1798, in the Ship Duff, Commanded by Captain James Wilson* (London: T. Chapman, 1799), 328.

[75] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 137; Douglas, *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania,* 22–4.

darkness of their skin was accentuated and 'their persons were thin and meagre, their hair was thick and shaggy, and their bodies appeared to be covered with filth'.[76] While Turnbull appeared to believe in the popular idea that there were two distinct races of Polynesian, we can also observe a link between his descriptions of people and his views on the meagre resources on offer to the atoll-dwellers.

By contrast, descriptions of Makatea, which was generally the first high island seen by European explorers after days or weeks navigating the low islands of the Tuamotu, always benefited by being a point of comparison. Captain Bouman described the men he observed as 'strong and well-made fellows', while Behrens thought they were 'strong, robust, lively and well-made'. Both accounts carried the implication that the 'very fertile' soil of the island helped sustain not just a 'large quantity of trees, principally palm, coconut, and ironwood', but a healthy population too.[77] No attempt seems to be made at enumerating the island's population but from 'the crowds' that appeared on the beaches for both Roggeveen's and Turnbull's crews, it could well have been into the hundreds. Whereas the Tuamotu Islanders to the east paid Turnbull and his crew scant attention, his arrival at Makatea was marked by the presentation of an 'abundance of bread-fruit and cocoa nuts' for trade. The Islanders he encountered were curious and inquisitive about the European technology on offer, going on board to examine the workings of the ship's water pump and mariner's compass, a response which tallied with Turnbull's belief that those Islanders who had not yet encountered Europeans were 'shy, reserved, and very suspicious'.[78]

These European and other *popa'ā* observers were also important witnesses to the first stirrings of modern population change on the island. Turnbull's account makes it clear that Makatea's inhabitants had not only already encountered Europeans but in finding that 'it was governed by a deputy sent by Pomarrie from Otaheite, being the most distant spot under his authority', the trader was probably the first outsider to establish the link between Makatea and the Society Islands in writing.[79] Turnbull found the local inhabitants 'bore a strong resemblance to those of Otaheite [Tahiti]', which is probably a fair reflection of the Mihiroa whose language differs very little from Tahitian. But there is also a strong chance that many of those he encountered on the island were in fact Tahitians given the presence

[76] Turnbull, *Voyage Round the World,* 113–16.
[77] Sharp, ed., *Journal of Jacob Roggeveen,* 138n2; Behrens, *Histoire de l'expédition de trois vaisseaux,* 162–3.
[78] Turnbull, *Voyage Round the World,* 116–20.
[79] Ibid., 118.

of a 'very large double canoe, which had left Otaheite six months before to collect tribute'.[80] It was the Tahitian deputy who encouraged the Islanders to go on board Turnbull's ship, and explained to them the power of the European weapons.

Of interest is the fact that as far as Turnbull was able to ascertain, the Islanders had seen only one European vessel prior to their arrival, and that it was probably a two-masted brig.[81] This could have been a misunderstood reference to the two Dutch sailing ships that visited 80 years earlier, or it could instead be a reference to the Basque sailor José de Andía y Varela who passed an island thought to be Makatea in 1774 on the packet-boat *El Jupiter* (the second of two Spanish vessels sent from Callao to counter James Cook's first Pacific voyage).[82] The problem with this theory is that following the coordinates recorded for the voyage from Ana'a to Mo'orea, the store-ship could never have been closer than 93 miles from Makatea. If true, it would not be for the last time that the islands of Makatea and Meheti'a were confused for one another in history.[83]

That said, the inhabitants of Makatea could still have learned about the Spanish by other means, especially as travelling with them was the Polynesian *fa'atere* or master mariner named Puhoro (Pujoro in Spanish and Puoro in the Mihiroa dialect), who, like Tupaia on Cook's first voyage, was an invaluable repository of information about the islands of the region.[84] The Spaniards were led to believe the navigator came from Makatea, which he described as being particularly rich in pearls (a fact corroborated by Turnbull who recorded the popularity of the pearl oyster-shell necklace on the island). However, as recently noted by Anne Salmond, it is perhaps more probable that he came from the village of Ma'atea on Mo'orea.[85] The uncertainty over Puhoro's home and the identity of the earlier European vessel notwithstanding, the portrait of Makatea given to the Spaniards by their interlocutors

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 121.
[82] 'The Journal of Don José de Andía y Varela', in *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain during the Years 1772–1776: Told in Despatches and Other Documents, Vol. II,* ed. Bolton Glanvill Corney (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010 [1918]), 240; Rainer F. Buschmann and Rafael Ramírez, 'Manuscript XXIX: Máximo Rodríguez's 'Lost' Prologue', *JPH* 49:3 (2014): 328.
[83] Gayangos, 'Official Journal of the Second Voyage', 189n2; 'Journal of Don José de Andía y Varela', 240n3.
[84] On account of his pearling voyages, Puhoro was well-acquainted with up to 15 islands in the north-western corner of the Tuamotu archipelago, all of which were said to belong to Tahiti.
[85] 'Journal of Don José de Andía y Varela', 240; Turnbull, *A Voyage Round the World,* 118–9; Anne Salmond, 'Their Body is Different, Our Body is Different: European and Tahitian Navigators in the 18th Century', *History and Anthropology* 16:2 (2005): 180–1; Anne Salmond, 'Hidden Hazards: Reconstructing Tupaia's Chart', *JPH* 54:4 (2019): 536.

on Mo'orea was in line with other European accounts: '*Urus* [breadfruit], coco-nuts, plantains, fish, and good pearls are plentiful'.[86]

Despite forming similar first impressions to Turnbull and Roggeveen before them, the July 1820 reception of the Baltic-German circumnavigator Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen and his Russian crew at Makatea was markedly different from Turnbull's experience some 17 years earlier.[87] Coasting along the island's northern shore, the *Vostok*'s artist Pavel M. Novosil'skii thought the island 'resembled the dark walls of a high fort, on the summit of which a grove of coconut palms waved in the wind'.[88] Echoing earlier visitors from the east of the archipelago, the ship's scientist Ivan Michailovich Simonov wrote:

> Here was no longer that nature that we had seen in the labyrinth of low coral isles… Here, instead of shores that barely reached above sea level, were crags and cliffs on which grew luxuriant verdure, with coconut palms and other shade-giving trees.[89]

However, in place of the usual crowds of people waiting to greet the arrivals on the beach at Moumu, stood just four desperate-looking young men, who, in Bellingshausen's words, were 'waving to us with branches and one with a piece of matting tied to a pole'.[90] Having dropped two of their launches to meet them, two of the boys immediately began swimming out and begged to be taken away with the group of 20 Russians.[91] As it was, all four boys were castaways from Ana'a, stranded on Makatea after being blown of course during a storm. Their party had originally consisted of 10, but six of them had earlier fallen victim to a hostile rival party who happened to arrive at Makatea at the same time as them.[92] The remaining four, ranging in age between 12 and 17 years of age, had managed to escape

[86] Gayangos, 'Official Journal of the Second Voyage', 189.
[87] For more on the Bellingshausen-Lazarev Antarctic expedition (1819–21), see Bronwen Douglas and Elena Govor, 'Eponymy, Encounters, and Local Knowledge in Russian Place Naming in the Pacific Islands, 1804–1830', *Historical Journal* 62:3 (2019): 709–40.
[88] Pavel M. Novosil'skii in Glynn Barratt, *The Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 67.
[89] Ivan Mikhailovich Simonov in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 72.
[90] F.F. Bellingshausen in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 63.
[91] Ivan Mikhailovich Simonov in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 72. Their names were inaccurately recorded by the Russians as Alarik and Tuloin.
[92] This hostile party was recorded by Bellingshausen as being the Vageitu [Vāhitu?] people coming from the island of Tai [Tikei?], see Bellingshausen in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti,* 145.

and had taken refuge in the nearby bushes and caves, only to reappear with the arrival of the Europeans who they had heard were often friendly and did not eat people.[93]

Other observations made during the Russian visit tend to suggest that much had changed in the 17 years since Turnbull's arrival. For one, apart from the four boys encountered, the Russians 'observed no signs whatever of permanent settlement'.[94] While the veracity of such a claim made after only one and a half hours on the island could well be questioned, the four boys, who were described as having 'had to devise various ways of obtaining the necessities of life', did not mention the existence of a local population while having their story further interrogated upon reaching Tahiti, nor apparently did the hostile war party who were content to leave as soon as they had killed their rivals.[95] The Russians also observed the 'well wooded' western coast of the island on leaving for Tahiti which probably suggests there was no settlement at Temao either. What could have caused such dramatic depopulation at Makatea between Turnbull's and Bellingshausen's visits?

The Flight of the Mihiroa

What the Russians failed to realize is that though their boy refugees from Ana'a may have been helpless victims in this instance, for many years previously it was their own island-folk who terrorized the islands of the Mihiroa and were the cause of mass migration to Tahiti's *presqu'île*, Ta'iarapū. This history of imperial expansion has infused Pa'umotu storytelling over the centuries and the wars are still referred to periodically during speeches and reinterpreted through dance and other performances during the annual Heiva cultural festival on Tahiti. One version of the story was recounted to the Bishop Museum's naturalist Alvin Seale by an inhabitant called 'Tarie'[96] during his four-week visit to the island in December 1901–January 1902:

[93] Pavel M. Novosil'skii in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 67. In the words of Simonov: 'Subsequently, and also by chance, there had arrived on the same shores a number of canoes carrying natives of another island, who had doubtless been conducting hostilities against the people of Anna[sic] Island; and these foes, being stronger than Alarik's and Tuloin's countrymen, had attacked and consumed six people. The four boys had escaped a similar fate by hiding from the cannibals in bushes and caves'. Simonov in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 72. See, also, Bellingshausen in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 64.

[94] Simonov in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti,* 73; Bellingshausen in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 63. A reference to the 'abundant springs of fresh water' suggests they found the famous fresh-water grottoes of Hina and Vairoa situated at the foot of the cliffs at Moumu.

[95] Bellingshausen in Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti*, 63, 145–6.

[96] I have not been able to track down the identity of the man who Seale described as being 'built like a god of the sea, with a body as perfect as that of an athlete of ancient Greece', and having 'as brave and loyal a heart as ever beat under a skin of brown', though it is possible that he is the 'Tiare' referred to in chapter 2. See Alvin Seale, *Quest for the Golden Cloak and Other Experiences of a Field Naturalist* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1946), 10.

> Long ago, in the days of my grandfather, there was another people living on this island. The women were beautiful, the most beautiful to be found in all the South Seas. Far to the eastward was a large island ruled by a strong chief. One day a captive told this chief of the beautiful women of Makatea, and the description of these fair islanders so fired the man that he immediately sent off a trusted sub-chief and many warriors in war canoes to raid Makatea. The attack was so sudden and unexpected that the people of Makatea were unable to defend themselves and the invading forces killed the men and took the women. A few of the people, however, escaped to the opposite side of the island and took refuge in the caves where they planned to remain until the enemy had sailed away.
>
> But the enemy did not sail away. So pleased was the sub-chief with the island and its women that he decided to brave the anger of his high chief and remain. He therefore destroyed the war canoes and gave each of his warriors many wives from among the captured women.
>
> But soon this chief learned that all the men of the island, such as he had not slain, were hidden in the great caves of the cliff. So he laid siege to the caves and their occupants, but in vain. The men resisted every attack, and the women who accompanied them fought bravely at their sides. When the chief found he could not take the caves by assault, he set guards to watch both night and day to prevent his foes from obtaining food and water. Even this did not force their surrender although their sufferings were intense. Some lost their minds and flung themselves down the face of the cliff and one by one they were overtaken by death, but they did not yield. Ever since that time strange and weird noises like the wailing of people in great distress can be heard coming from these cliffs. Doubtless it is the spirits of the dead.[97]

Seale's account is one of many that try to explain the motives of the warriors from Ana'a (known as the Parata, named after the region's 'most ferocious man-eating shark') against the Mihiroa over this period. While each island has its own particular interpretation of the history, all seemingly agree that the bloodiest of all military expeditions was saved for the islands of the Mihiroa.[98] In establishing their version of events, Ottino and Emory drew

[97] Ibid., 11–12.
[98] Kenneth P. Emory and Paul Ottino, 'Histoire ancienne de 'Ana'a, atoll des Tuamotu', *JSO* 23 (1967): 29, 48.

from two different oral traditions originating from Ana'a. According to these accounts, after conquering the islands of the central Tuamotu and some of the far-flung islands such as Vahitahi in the 17th and early 18th centuries, the Parata sought to expand their empire into the western Tuamotu by launching an attack on either Rangiroa or Kaukura, depending on which tradition is believed. While neither of these histories singles out Makatea as the reason for the invasion (such as the account given to Seale by 'Tarie'), Makatea nonetheless plays a central role in the events that unfold.

The first story was recounted to Emory and his colleague Frank Stimson in the 1920s by the local knowledge-holder Paea a Avehe (one of the last of his kind on Ana'a). Paea's version has it that faced with a flotilla of up to 50 grand *pahi*, the inhabitants of Rangiroa fled to Makatea. Noticing the fleet had followed them, the refugees famously cried: *O parata teie i te hëe 'are* (There are the Parata who proceed like the waves of the ocean), before continuing on to Tahiti leaving the Makatean population either to take refuge in the numerous caves peppering the island's cliffs, or face the wrath of the advancing warriors in the vein of their chief warrior, Te Tautua, who was slain alongside the other unfortunate few who could not find refuge in the cliffs. It is a well-known tradition that in order to lure the rest of the starving Mihiroa out of their hiding places, the Parata employed the successful strategy of tempting them by leaving coconuts outside the entrance points.[99] Continuing to Tahiti, the Parata found that Pōmare II had granted refuge to the fleeing Mihiroa and after demanding an end be put to the war, the Mihiroa were allowed to return to their islands.[100]

The second tradition came from a *puta tupuna* found in the collection of Paul Nordmann on Manihi, but originating from Hiti a Vaea, also from Ana'a.[101] It differs in that the Parata launched their initial attack on the inhabitants of Kaukura, forcing them to retreat to Tahiti via Rangiroa and Makatea where the alarm was raised among the local populations who joined the party of refugees fleeing to Tahiti.[102] Like the earlier tradition, those who remained at Makatea were slaughtered, all except for a man named Taia who managed to outclimb his assailants on the cliffs. At Tahiti, the Parata were also given some land at

[99] And thus, the saying *E mea tanoka hia to Makatea ki te pufa* (one can always trick the Makatean with copra) was born, ibid., 49.
[100] Ibid., 50.
[101] Torrente, *Buveurs de mers,* 324.
[102] Like Makatea, the Russians found Kaukura virtually uninhabited in 1820. See Barratt, *Tuamotu Islands and Tahiti,* 27. It is probable that up to 38 atolls were deserted as a result of the Parata invasions.

Tautira in Ta'iarapū and Pōmare II managed to establish a truce, with Rongo, the leader of the Parata, agreeing to recognize the King's authority (known as Rongo's Peace).[103]

Working with oral traditions that utilize generations (c.25 years) rather than decades to delineate time, Ottino and Emory's dating for this period was always going to be more speculative than scientific. Despite this, they have good reason to suggest most of the attacks which led to the exodus to Tahiti occurred during the second half of the 18th century, and that peace was established around the 1820s.[104] Moerenhout, who in his capacity as United States consul to Tahiti developed a strong, but in many ways flawed, interest in Polynesian ethnography, suggested the high point of the wars must have taken place between 1800 and 1815, a statement repeated by the early French scholar, Eugène Caillot, in 1910.[105] Frédéric Torrente, who has recently built on Emory and Ottino's work with a more thorough analysis of Paea's traditions, has provided his own chronology which dates the opening salvos between the Parata and the Mihiroa to 1750, the defeat and retreat of the Mihiroa to 1800, and the peace and repopulation of the islands to 1818.[106] By coupling Turnbull's account with the Russian experience at Makatea, we can further clarify the chronology of these major events to support the conclusion of archaeologist Guillaume Molle who, in conversation with all these scholars, has ventured c.1806 as the date of Mihiroa exile.[107]

Taking into consideration Turnbull's observations of a large and well-off population at Makatea, it does not seem that an invasion could have occurred prior to 1803.[108] Yet, the Parata attacks must not have happened all that long afterwards because by 1808 LMS missionaries had written:

[103] Emory and Ottino, 'Histoire ancienne de 'Ana'a', 50. However, the Russian evidence suggests that this peace was not uniformly respected with reprisal attacks evidently occurring against Islanders from Ana'a in the years that followed.
[104] Ibid., 52.
[105] Moerenhout, *Voyage aux îles du Grand Ocean*, 370–71; A.C. Eugène Caillot, *Histoire de la Polynésie Orientale* (Paris, 1910), 386. For a discussion on why Moerenhout's accounts should be treated with caution, see Patty O'Brien, '"Think of Me as a Woman": Queen Pomare of Tahiti and Anglo-French Imperial Contest in the 1840s Pacific', *Gender & History* 18:1 (2006): 109, 112–3.
[106] Torrente, *Buveurs de mers,* 17.
[107] Guillaume Molle, 'Exploring Religious Practices on Polynesian Atolls: A Comprehensive Architectural Approach towards the *Marae* Complex in the Tuamotu Islands', *JPS* 125:3 (2016): 280.
[108] But this is not to say the Parata had not begun to wreak havoc elsewhere. Captain James Wilson of the *Duff* commented that many people he encountered on Tahiti could recount the loss of one Roggeveen's ships in 1722, strongly suggesting that there were refugees from Takapoto already in exile on Tahiti by the 1790s. See Wilson, *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean,* 337.

> Many of the *Paumotu* or inhabitants of the eastern islands were at Tahiti at this time, on account of the cruel wars that had lately happened, between the two parties of them called the *Auura* [Mihiroa] and *Parata*.[109]

If Turnbull's evidence helps us determine that the invasion happened at some point between 1803 and 1808, the Russian testimony of encountering a deserted island in 1820 can be used to suggest that even if peace was declared on Tahiti in 1818, it must have taken at least several more years for the population of Makatea to return home. Moerenhout visited the island himself in March 1829 and commented that 'this little land, formerly very populous, is almost a desert today and contains scarcely more than thirty inhabitants'.[110] We are therefore able to conclude, with some certainty, that the effect of the Parata invasion was profound and led to more than just momentary exile. At some point following Turnbull's 1803 visit, the Mihiroa were displaced to Tautira on Tahiti's *presqu'île* (Tahiti Iti/Ta'iarapū, figure 1.8), and it took several decades for those of them who wanted to return to Makatea to do so.

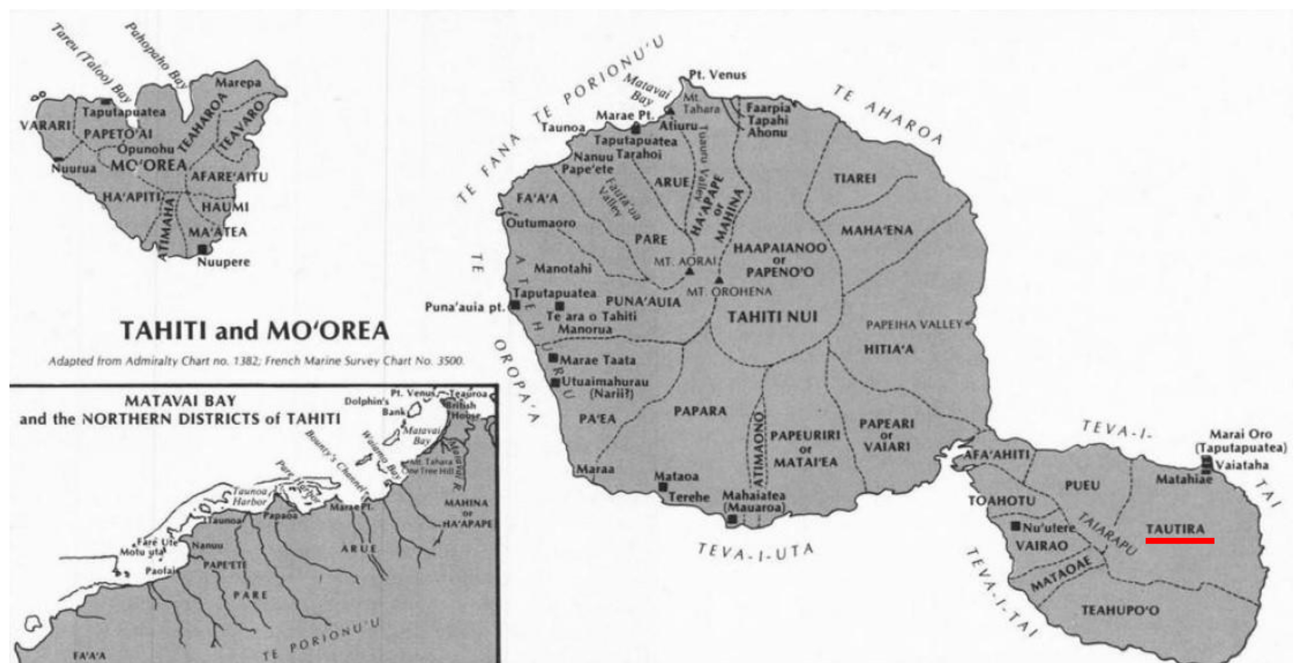

Figure 1.8 Map of Tahiti and Mo'orea showing the location of Tautira on Ta'iarapū.
Source: Newbury, *Tahiti Nui*, 16–17.

The 'Tahitianization' of the Island[111]

What is clear, however, is that many Mihiroa never returned to Makatea after their exile and instead chose to remain on Tahiti, settling at Ta'iarapū where many Mihiroa families

[109] Newbury, ed., *The History of the Tahitian Mission*, 107.
[110] Moerenhout, *Voyage aux îles du Grand Ocean*, 376.
[111] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire,* 30.

remain to this day. While these links to Tahiti are often thought to date to the Pōmare era and the Parata wars, the island's ties to both Tahiti and Mo'orea are potentially much deeper.[112] *Pace* Ottino, there are those who believe that Makatea could have been peopled directly from Ta'iarapū, independently from the rest of the Mihiroa.[113] How ancient these linkages and stories really are is difficult to say, but there is one readily identifiable event that might help us trace these connected histories.

Returning once more to the Mihiroa oral record brings us to the tradition of a 'horrific natural disaster' that devastated much of Rangiroa, and according to Ottino was 'infinitely more violent than the cyclones at the start of the [20th] century'.[114] This event, a cataclysm, is said to have put an end to Mihiroa isolation and self-subsistence, the damage doubtless causing the Mihiroa to seek help from further afield, most probably the richer, high islands such as Tahiti and Mo'orea. For his part, Ottino suggests the event could have been a tsunami caused by the c.1450 eruption at Kuwae (in modern Vanuatu), thought by some scholars to have been the world's first truly global event and possibly the most important event of the 15th century.[115] Chris Ballard has recently catalogued a wide range of possible impacts emerging from this cataclysm including tsunamis across the Pacific, and extreme climate change causing famines and epidemics as far away as Europe.[116] With these widespread effects in mind, it seems more than plausible that a similar if not greater degree of societal change occurred in the recently settled islands of the western Tuamotu, especially on low-lying islands where taro pits were likely wrecked with salt water.

The importance of this deeper history lies in the way it can be interpreted as having established the pattern for later Mihiroa mobility. In times of peace, Tahiti and Makatea were linked for reasons of trade and commerce, and in times of war the Mihiroa turned to their Tahitian trading partners for protection and refuge. As Jennifer Newell has found, there are reports going back to the 18th century showing 'Tahitians to be traveling regularly to the drought-prone Tuamotu atoll[s] … to trade Tahitian produce for Tuamotu turtles,

[112] Henry, *Ancient Tahiti*, 110.
[113] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 129; Ottino, 'Early 'Āti of the Western Tuamotus', 453.
[114] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 26, 92.
[115] Chris Ballard, 'The Lizard in the Volcano: Narratives of the Kuwae Eruption', *Contemporary Pacific* 32:1 (2020): 105–6. Using his methodology of counting generations, Ottino was out by about a century, dating the event to 1560. See Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 92.
[116] Not to mention a suite of political changes (including even the fall of Constantinople). See Kevin D. Pang, 'Climatic Impact of the Mid-Fifteenth Century Kuwae Caldera Formation, as Reconstructed from historical and Proxy Data', *Eos, Transactions of the American Geophysical Union* 74:43 (1993): 106, in Ballard, 'The Lizard in the Volcano', 106.

pearls and pearl shell, mats, and white dog fur for fringing *taumi* (visually striking warriors' breast plates)'.[117] In Makatea's case, pearls and pearl shells appear to have been the most sought after natural resource but, as we will see shortly, a wide range of Tahitian-introduced plant species were also cultivated on the island, adding to its trading potential.

We can be confident in saying that the events of the early 19th century further integrated Makatea into the growing Tahitian political and cultural sphere under the leadership of the Pōmare family. We have already established the tribute-exacting presence of the Pōmare dynasty on Makatea from at least 1803, but with the support of the men of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and strategic alliances with rival chiefs, Pōmare II (who personally converted to the Congregationalists' religion in 1812) managed to extend his sovereignty across the Society Islands and the islands of the western Tuamotu, thereby extending the 1819 Pōmare Code, the first set of codified laws for the kingdom, to all the islands under his control.[118] Protestantism had become the kingdom's so-called 'national religion' after the battle of Fē'ī Pī in 1815, but the first LMS Missionary, a Tahitian by the name of Ruatai, was not sent to Makatea until 1829 after a request was made by one of the Mihiroa refugees from Makatea living at Tautira.[119]

The timing of his mission is curious, and one wonders whether the request was made to counter the spread of the anti-LMS millenarian movement known as the Māmāiā*,* whose heartland was amongst the Mihiroa refugees on Ta'iarapū. Moerenhout's journals add further to this speculation for the suggestion that Ta'aviri, the leading *ari'i* of Ta'iarapū, had been banished to Makatea in 1832 for effectively taking up arms over Pōmare IV's decision to marry a Huahine *ari'i.*[120] However, once again, Makatea has been mistaken for Meheti'a as LMS missionary David Darling's report on the affair makes it clear that 'the chiefs who were the cause of the disturbance have been judged, and sent to Metia [Mehetia] an island to the eastward of Tahiti'.[121]

[117] Jennifer Newell, *Trading Nature: Tahitians, Europeans, and Ecological Exchange* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 103.
[118] Niel Gunson, 'Pomare II of Tahiti and Polynesian Imperialism', *JPH* 4 (1969): 68; Newbury, *Tahiti Nui*, 51; Karen Stevenson, ''Aimata, Queen Pomare IV: Thwarting Adversity in Early 19th Century Tahiti', *JPS* 123:2 (2014): 142.
[119] William P. Crook, Taiarapu, 15 May 1829, 8, Records of the London Missionary Society (as filmed by the AJCP), South Seas Journals, File 94–5, Box 6; Niel Gunson, 'Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1959, 426, 574.
[120]'…a not very severe condemnation in view of the odiousness of his crime', according to Moerenhout. See *Voyage aux îles du Grand Ocean*, 376.
[121] David Darling to the Directors, London, 10 Apr.1833, 6, Records of the London Missionary Society (as filmed by the AJCP), South Seas Letters, Box 9. Moerenhout's mischaracterization of Makatea had it erroneously listed as a 'lieu de déportation' in later government publications. See *Annuaire des Etablissements Français de*

In explaining why he thought the punishment for Tavari'i was not severe enough, Moerenhout said it was 'because Matia is only about two degrees from Tahiti, all of whose products are found there'.[122] Despite it being possible that the Belgian merchant was still mistakenly referring to Meheti'a at this point (both Makatea and Meheti'a are at a similar longitudinal distance from Tahiti), his comments tally with the words of members of the United States Exploring Expedition, whose descriptions reinforce the 'trade in nature' between Makatea and Tahiti that must have been in full swing by the time they visited the island in 1839.

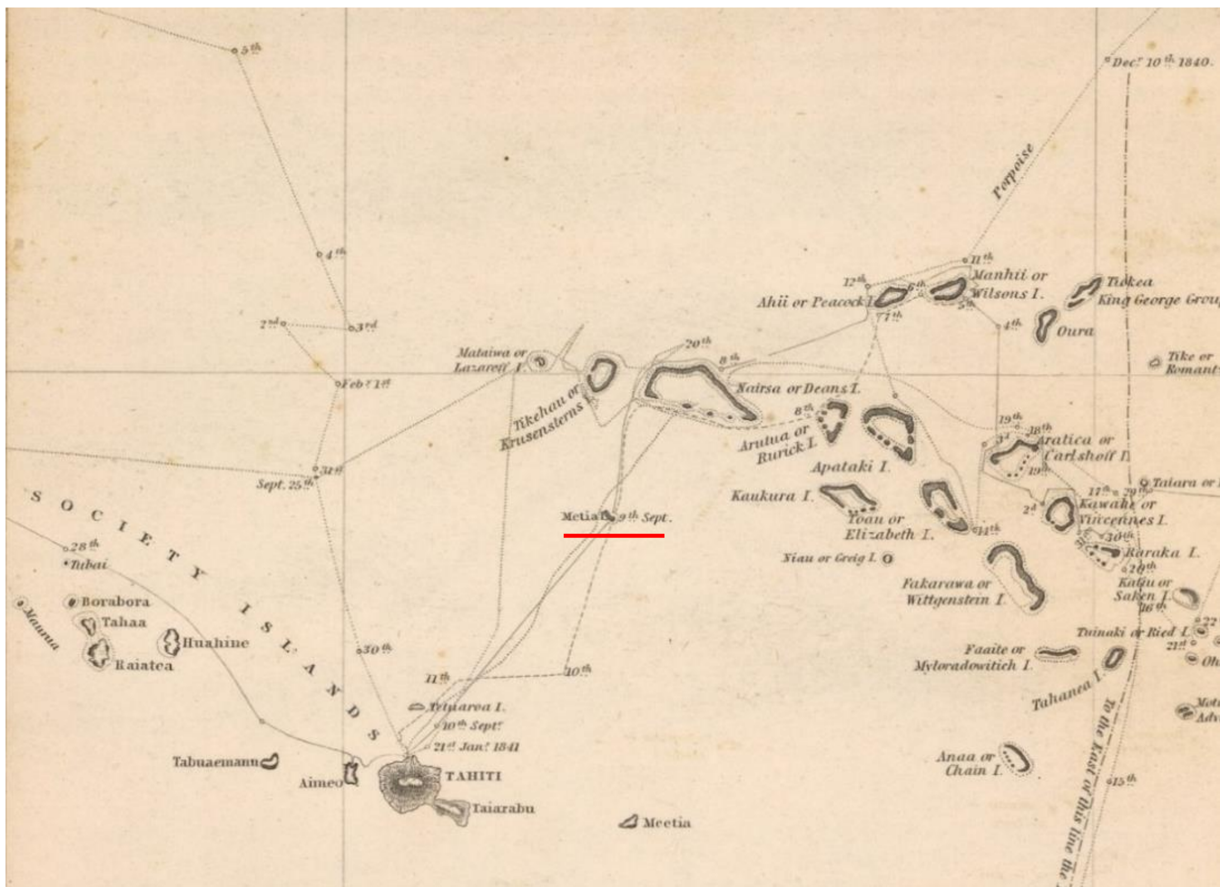

Figure 1.9: Section of the United States Exploring Expedition Map of the Pa'umotu Group, 1845.
Source: David Rumsey Map Collection, Wikicommons.

American Encounters

The United States Exploring Expedition, now more commonly known as the Wilkes expedition in reference to its tempestuous leader, Charles Wilkes, arrived at Makatea on 10 September 1839 after almost a month traversing the Tuamotu islands (figure 1.9). Like

l'Oceanie et du Protectorat des Iles de la Societe et dependances pour l'annee commune 1864 (Papeete: Imprimerie du Gouvernment, 1864), 25.

[122] Moerenhout, *Voyage aux îles du Grand Ocean,* 376.

the famous British and French exploring expeditions before it, the Wilkes expedition was intricately linked to imperial expansion. As Patrick Kirch has put it, 'the United States was making a late entry into the imperial game of Pacific explorations'.[123] The stated aims might have been scientific and commercial but lying squarely behind the motives for the expensive voyage was a US desire to counter the growing British and French presence in the region. That said, consisting of six ships filled with some of the New World's most talented scientists (the geologist James Dana and naturalists Titian Peale and Charles Pickering included), the sheer magnitude of scientific data accumulated in the course of the expedition matched that of the Cook expeditions.[124] For the purposes of this study, the timing of the expedition's arrival at Makatea helps clarify important aspects of the island's post-war recovery.

Without referring to it explicitly, the American accounts nonetheless suggest that Makatea had well and truly recovered from the devastation of earlier in the century. Both Wilkes' and Pickering's accounts describe a land of plenty complemented by a range of 'products' introduced from Tahiti over the preceding decades. On arrival they found the locals 'devouring' raw fish 'with great gusto'. After being left to explore the island for several hours, they 'were taken again to the chief's house, and entertained with cocoa-nuts, baked taro, and bread-fruit'.[125] Wilkes also referred to the Islanders' habit of roasting Makatea's abundant crabs, perhaps the first written reference to its famous coconut-crab delicacy, the *kaveu.*[126] Whereas the island was reportedly lacking pigs at the time of Turnbull's visit, his main interest, the island now had 'an abundance of pigs and poultry'. Reference was made to the development of horticultural practices on the island's plateau where 'the rich soil on the upper and interior part of the island produced taro, sweet potatoes, melons, yams, and some tobacco, while the bread-fruit and cocoa-nuts were hanging in clusters over their dwellings'.[127]

The image created by Wilkes and Pickering of an island of plenty is further reinforced by the chief naturalist and artist, Titian Ramsay Peale, who felt that 'the appearance of the

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[123] Patrick V. Kirch, review of *The Shaping of American Ethnography: The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 1838–1842*, by Barry Alan Joyce, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 58:2 (2002): 293.
[124] David R. Stoddart, '"This Coral Episode": Darwin, Dana, and the Coral Reefs of the Pacific', in *Darwin's Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific,* ed. Roy MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 23–4.
[125] Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring* Expedition, 341, in Margaret Rose Orbell Papers relating to songs of the Tuamotu Islands (hereinafter Orbell Papers), Alexander Turnbull Library (hereinafter ATL), fMS-Papers-12157-02.
[126] Ibid., 339-40.
[127] Ibid., 339.

grass, and tropical vegetation along a path which I followed shooting Pigeons was more picturesque than any similar spot I have visited'.[128] According to Peale, this was the expedition's first encounter with the 'magnificent Oceanic Pigeon', described as being 'in great numbers, very fat, and easily shot' (he collected six of them).[129] This 'pigeon' is the island's present-day emblem, the endemic Rupe (coined *Ducula aurorae* by Peale), said to have the voice of a person and which somehow survived the mining era on Makatea despite being driven out of Tahiti due to similar reasons of overhunting and habitat loss.[130] The Rupe's persistence on Makatea speaks to the island's historical value as a refugium for birds in former times of sea-level variation and thanks to Peale's observations, ornithologists have a means of tracking population change in this important species.[131]

Wilkes and his crew left for Tahiti in the evening 'under the impression this little community was a happy and contented one'.[132] Wilkes's official description in his volume on hydrography recorded that the island was:

> … well covered with trees, and yields abundantly all the products of the Polynesian islands; is well inhabited, the village being situated on the north-eastern side, where a friendly reception will always be found from the natives, who are disposed to offer everything they have to part with, in exchange for old clothing, &c. &c.[133]

While the population of about 300, all situated on the eastern shore at Moumu, might well have been happy, their dispositions 'amiable and mild',[134] it is important to keep in mind how different this population might have been from that prior to the exodus. Makatea's absorption into the Pōmare Empire was hastened through its repeopling by a mixed group of Tahitians and returning Mihiroa who would have brought with them an infusion of Tahitian flora and fauna. Pickering, for example, found the 'Natives very friendly, partaking evidently of the "Tahitian Civilization"', further noting that 'several present were said either to belong to, or to have visited the latter island', with some even speaking words of English

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[128] Poesch, ed., *Titian Ramsay Peale,*156.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Kenneth P. Emory, 'Tuamotuan Bird Names', *JPS* 56:2 (1947): 191; Jean-Claude Thibault, 'Remarques sur l'appauvrissement de l'avifaune polynesienne', *BSEO* 182 (1973): 265; Roland Seitre and Julia Seitre, 'Causes of Land-Bird Extinctions in French Polynesia', *Oryx* 26:4 (1992): 217.
[131] Alice Cibois, Jean-Claude Thibault and Eric Pasquet, 'Influence of Quaternary Sea-level Variations on a Land Bird Endemic to Pacific Atolls', *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 277:1699 (2010): 3449.
[132] Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring* Expedition, 341, in Orbell Papers, ATL: fMS-Papers-12157-02.
[133] Charles Wilkes, *United States Exploring Expedition during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 under the Command of Charles Wilkes, Vol. 23, Hydrography* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1861), 108.
[134] Poesch, ed., *Titian Ramsay Peale,* 156.

– proof of the increasing level of interactions between Islanders and others from the *popa'ā* world.[135]

The Wilkes expedition paved the way for another English-speaking, American visitor of note, the Mormon missionary and former whaler Benjamin F. Grouard who came to Makatea in 1846 as part of the first phase of Mormon penetration into the Pacific. As we shall see, this religious incursion was judged a threat to the old LMS/Pōmare order as well as the growing French administrative presence in the islands.

Mormons, Saints, and a New Historical Course

The New Hampshire born Grouard, or Turuati, as he was known by locals, was a member of the first Mormon mission to the Pacific; a group of four men sent by Joseph Smith for the purpose of spreading the new American religion to the 'islands of the sea', a region which occupied a privileged position in Mormon theology owing to the Church's belief that Polynesians, like the Native Americans, traced descent to the Israelites (and also the Nephite ship-builder, Hagoth, said to be lost in the Pacific Ocean).[136] While Grouard's colleague Addison Pratt (also from a whaling background) established a successful station at Tubuai in the Austral Islands (the first island the group came across),[137] Grouard, the youngest of the group, was given licence to roam the islands of the Tuamotu Archipelago, chosen for its relative lack of competition from white LMS missionaries as well as a limited French presence.[138] Grouard spent a month on Makatea in total and, despite encountering initial hostility on account of the locals mistaking him for a French Roman Catholic, by the end of the visit he had baptized some 84 Islanders.[139]

Having run away from his Puritan parents at the age of 14 to join the burgeoning New England whaling industry, Grouard converted to Mormonism in the 1830s and, when the opportunity came, he made the leap from New Bedford whaler to missionary schooner. Both pursuits played into his evident appetite for adventure, but it was during his six-year

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[135] 'Charles Pickering Journal', 1838-1841, P-118 microfilm, Massachusetts Historical Society. My thanks to Will Scates Frances for kindly sharing this source.

[136] Bruno Saura, *Les Sanito te Mau Sanito: histoire de l'Eglise réorganisée de Jésus-Christ des saints des derniers jours en Polynésie française* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1994), 15 (my thanks to Paul Judd for his gift of this book); Amanda Hendrix-Komoto, '"Playing the Whore": The Domestic and Sexual Politics of Mormon Missionary Work on Tahiti Nui and in the Tuamotus', *Journal of Mormon History* 41:3 (2015): 77, 80.

[137] The two other missionaries did not last long in the field. Knowlton F. Hanks died on the voyage out from tuberculosis, and Noah Rogers, a lawyer, returned home in late 1845 out of fear for his family's safety in Missouri.

[138] Hendrix-Komoto, '"Playing the Whore"', 59.

[139] Norman Douglas, 'Latter-Day Saints Missions and Missionaries in Polynesia, 1844–1960', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1974, 84.

mission to Polynesia that he made his greatest mark, implanting a new American religion that in both its original, and its later Sanito or Kanito (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), forms has remained popular in the region and on Makatea itself until the present. Mormon historian Amanda Hendrix-Komoto suggests that the humble Mormons of this period were far better suited to win over their Polynesian flock than their stuffier, socially distanced rivals from the London Missionary Society. Grouard's 1846 marriage to Tearo, the daughter of an Ana'a chief, was perhaps the ultimate example of this suitability, confirming LMS suspicions that these American newcomers were not only sexually immoral (Grouard had left his white wife behind in Philadelphia) but were also willing to blur the well-demarcated lines between white and Indigenous society.[140]

Mormon willingness to enter and live in the homes of their Island hosts, however, increased their standing among the Polynesian population. While Grouard's marriage to Tearo was probably the main reason for the religion's widespread adoption on Ana'a, Mormonism also appealed to Polynesians on account of its prophetic or 'visionary' nature.[141] Indeed, to the men of the LMS, Mormonism had far too much in common with the millenarian Māmāiā movement they had only just succeeded in stamping out.[142] And even though the official Mormon view of Indigenous peoples was complicated, Grouard would have believed in the imminence of the Millennium and the need to 'gather' their converts to Zion so that they could be spiritually and physically transformed in time to partake with their white brethren in God's kingdom on earth.[143] Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp makes reference to how these early Mormon teachings must have 'radically altered' Polynesian conceptions of 'time and space'; how Grouard and his partners must have set the 'people on a new historical course, radically changing their sense of the world'.[144] This might be overstating the influence of what was after all just a handful of penniless men doing their best to survive in a potentially hostile environment where their ability to get fed depended almost entirely on the charity of the populations they were meant to be serving. Yet we should not discount the importance vested in these men by the communities on Makatea and elsewhere in the archipelago. Especially as these were communities that had not only recently been exiled in their own right, but had also been crying out for the opportunity to have their own white

[140] Hendrix-Komoto, '"Playing the Whore"', 90.
[141] Ibid., 60.
[142] Ibid., 75–6.
[143] Ibid., 77–84.
[144] Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, 'Looking West: Mormonism and the Pacific World (Tanner Lecture)', *Journal of Mormon History* 26:1 (2000): 43.

missionaries ever since the LMS decided to concentrate its efforts in the Society Islands instead.[145]

No matter how much they might have resembled beachcombers in appearance, the Mormons represented a perceived political threat not only to the LMS but also to the French who had declared a protectorate over much of the islands in 1842. By the 1850s, the French had begun making life difficult for the American missionaries, restricting their ability to move throughout the protectorate and insisting they have enough money to survive by their own means rather than through the goodwill of the Polynesians.[146] The final blow for all non-Catholic missionary activity came in 1852 when the French introduced a law effectively bringing all churches under state control.[147] This led famously to the mass resignation and departure of the LMS missionaries (and their replacement by a state-ordained Protestant church), and also the return to the United States of the majority of Mormon missionaries including Grouard.[148] The missionary vacuum allowed Catholicism to take hold over most of the Tuamotu Archipelago, except on Makatea and other islands of the Mihiroa where the Mormon religion remained popular albeit in splintered form (Mormons, Israelites, the Sheep, Abraham's Church, Darkites, and Whistlers to name just a few).[149]

As R. Lanier Britsch has written, 'the story of the saints from 1852 to 1892 is sketchy at best'.[150] Yet we know that in the absence of a formal Mormon presence, Joseph Smith III's Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, known in Polynesia as the Sanito or Kanito (a transliteration of Saints), was able to gain a foothold on Makatea and several other islands in the archipelago thanks to the missionary Thomas W. Smith, allowed into the territory in 1884 through the diplomatic efforts of United States Consul, Dorence Atwater.[151] By February 1896, visiting Mormon church historian Andrew Jenson reported that the entirety of Makatea's population of around 150 were an industrious group

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[145] Hendrix-Komoto, '"Playing the Whore"', 86.
[146] S. George Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise: Early Mormons in the South Seas* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1959), 26.
[147] Gunson, 'Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas', 430–31.
[148] Ellsworth, *Zion in Paradise,* 29. Grouard took his second wife, Nahina, and their three children with him. Their son Frank Grouard was 'captured' by Sioux tribes before eventually participating in the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn on the side of the Government, acting as a scout and interpreter. See Joe De Barthe, *Life and Adventures of Frank Grouard: Chief of Scouts, U.S.A.* (St. Joseph, MO: Combe Printing, 1894).
[149] R. Lanier Britsch, 'The Refounding of the LDS Mission in French Polynesia, 1892', *Pacific Studies* 3 (1979): 69. Makatea would escape the presence of the Catholic Church until a mission was eventually opened in February 1909, see P. Hodée, *Tahiti, 1834-1984: 150 ans de vie chrétienne en église* (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1983), 208, 581.
[150] Britsch, 'The Refounding of the LDS Mission', 69.
[151] Saura, *Les Sanito te Mau Sanito,* 73.

of 'Josephites', producing 'copra, beans, sweet potatoes, etc., which latter products the natives have commenced to import to other islands'.[152] In reality, there was probably little difference between the Sanito and the 'Brighamistes' (those who followed Joseph Smith's ordained successor, Brigham Young) at this point, and the establishment of the Sanito church was more a result of good fortune and the absence of other religious competition. Sharing a schooner with Sanito missionary Clyde F. Ellis on a trip through the archipelago some decades later, New Zealand anthropologist Te Rangi Hiroa Peter Buck admitted that he was 'not yet quite clear as to what Denomination he [Ellis] belongs to. I fancy that it is the Latter Day Saints as distinct from the Mormons. However, he has nice thoughts towards the Polynesians which is a good start in any religion'.[153] This final comment gets to the heart of the enduring appeal of the Reorganized Church which, out of all imported denominations, has probably been the most tolerant of Polynesian culture and social organization.

A Treasure Land

Though none of Makatea's 18th- and 19th-century European visitors could quite put their finger on the reason why, there was a sense that Makatea was, or was soon going to be, an island of some economic importance. I have already referred to Karl Behrens' early 18th-century predictions about their being riches hidden in the bosom of the island, but in the accounts that followed we observe a broader pattern emerging where visitors described and calculated what the island possessed in terms of natural resources. From the 1860s, a description of the island was consistently included in the French government's *Annuaire,* generally mentioning its food crops and valuable *tāmanu* and coconut trees for producing *mono'i* (coconut oil scented with *tiare*).[154] The publication of this type of information, plus the increased volume of trade between the island group and Tahiti through the likes of the Salmon-Brander trading empire, meant the island was becoming even more popular with outsiders in the later decades of the century.[155] The photographer Charles Burton Hoare,[156] whose photos adorn this chapter, visited on a three-month tour of the archipelago around 1868, stopping to take a series of pictures of the landscape and

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[152] Andrew Jenson, 'Jenson's Travels', *Deseret Weekly,* 20 Jun. 1896, 2.
[153] Sir Peter Henry Buck, Diary, 4 Sep. 1934, 11, ATL: qMS-0294.
[154] See, for example, the *Annuaire des Etablissements Français de l'Oceanie* (1864), 25.
[155] Claus Gossler, 'The Social and Economic Fall of the Salmon/Brander Clan of Tahiti', *JPH* 40:2 (2005): 203–4.
[156] No relation, so far as the author is aware.

its people, the first of its kind from the island (figures 1.1, 1.10).[157] The crew of the *Seignelay* also visited in 1877 during their five-year, French-sponsored Pacific expedition, with Captain Paul-Émile Lafontaine predicting that the Tuamotus would soon play a large commercial role in the copra trade and Alphonse Louis Pinart allegedly going as far as suggesting Makatea contained copper, iron and lead.[158]

The government *Annuaire* also mentioned Makatea's 'curious' burial caves, previously referred to in the example of Alvin Seale, but here explored by the *Seignelay*'s ethnologist and linguist Pinart who managed to collect one or two sacks' worth of skulls on his one-day visit.[159] These were the original collection of Makatea skulls used to compare Villaret's find in the 1950s at the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris. And even though Pinart succeeded in taking them away, it was evidently a close-run affair with Lafontaine euphemistically recording that 'without the intervention of M. Mariot [an old resident of the Tuamotu islands], he [Pinart] would have perhaps passed a bad quarter of an hour' with the island's inhabitants, clearly upset by his grave robbery.[160]

These burial sites, halfway up Makatea's cliffs, were the domain of the *pirimato,* those men who looked after the dead on the island and had the sole right to enter these sacred spaces. Pinart, like other *popa'ā,* was fascinated by the mysterious presence of coffins so high up in the cliff face. Yet whereas stories abound on the island about visitors breaking taboo and running into bad fortune soon after, Pinart seems to have escaped such a fate.[161] The collection of *ivi tupuna* or ancestral remains, taken by Seale during the Bishop Museum's first ever 'South Sea expedition' in 1901–2, was returned to Makatea 100 years later (2002), but the Pinart and Villaret collections still remain in Paris, awaiting identification, repatriation and reburial.[162]

Little wonder the son of the now infamous Louis Agassiz, Alexander Agassiz, scientist and leader of the 1899–1900 US Fish Commission expedition to the Pacific (the Cruise of the *Albatross*), found Makatea to be 'perhaps the most interesting' of all the Tuamotu

[157] Keith Giles, 'Charles Burton Hoare (1833–c.1879), a Mancunian in Paradise', *New Zealand Legacy* 23:1 (2011): 14–16. The Musée de Tahiti et des Îles – *Te Fare Manaha* has assigned the dates of c.1874–75 to the photography, but this is unlikely given the chronology of Hoare's career presented by Giles.
[158] Lafontaine, *Campagne des mers du Sud,* 267; Arundel, 'Report 124a', 24 Aug. 1907, 7, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[159] Lafontaine, *Campagne des mers du Sud,* 267.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Navarro-Rovira, *Makatea l'Oubli*.
[162] Seale, *Quest for the Golden Cloak,* 14.

islands.[163] In the course of two one-day visits to the island on 26 September and 6 October 1899, Agassiz, a close friend of Christmas Island phosphate pioneer, Sir John Murray, and guano trader, John T. Arundel, completed the most thorough geological survey of the island to date. Well-received by the local population who presented the Harvard scientist and his colleagues with a 'gift of cocoa-nuts, cocoa-nut oil (a brand of special note is made here), some flowers, and some chickens',[164] Agassiz returned the favour by telling the Islanders that he had seen enough during his short visits to know that they had 'a *Treasure Land*'.[165]

Figure 1.10: Heads, Matea c.1868, C.B. Hoare.
Source: Collection Musée de Tahiti et des îles – *Te Fare Manaha*, D2008.2.51.

[163] Alexander Agassiz, 'Makatea: "Albatross" Tropical Pacific Expedition', 1, in Miscellaneous Correspondence of John T. Arundel, 1902–09, PMB: 495.
[164] The expedition's doctor, James C. Pryor, recounted how the route taken up the 'natural stairway' to the plateau and across the island to Moumu took in 'some of the most picturesque gorges I have ever seen'. They then 'met six native women, young and buxom, who wholly innocent of any of the refinements of dress except the "mother hubbard" loose gown', shook the hands of the men. Once 'the handshaking process was over, they turned and with shrieks of excitement ran ahead of us as fast as they could to announce to the village our approach'. James C. Pryor, 6 Oct. 1899, 102, 104, in James C. Pryor, Private and Unofficial Account of Scientific Cruise, PMB: 772.
[165] John T. Arundel, 'Report 124', 14 Aug. 1907, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1 (original emphasis).

Makatea, like the rest of Eastern Polynesia, thus continued to evolve socially and culturally throughout the 19th century as sporadic visits by European explorers and scientists made way for formal French colonial administration marked by the territory's official annexation in 1880. However, as Pierre-Yves Toullelan and Bernard Gille describe it, the archipelagos were the 'poor cousins' of the colony and had always been 'neglected' as far as formal administration was concerned.[166] By the turn of the 20th century, even with the clumsy implementation of individual land title, the French colonial presence in the Tuamotu Archipelago was still sporadic, predominantly concerned with regulating the pearling industry.[167] Such *laissez-faire* attitudes to colonial governance allowed foreign religious movements such as the Sanito and scientists like Agassiz to play outsized roles in the island's historical development.

The fallout from the cyclones of January 1903 and February 1906 would change France's relationship to the region, however. Having already come to the realization that colonial rule could be a thankless task, these two El Niño events pushed the administration finances further to the brink as the costs of the damage and losses in economic activity weighed heavily on the administration keen to avoid 'the loss and definitive ruin' of their colony.[168] For the Tuamotu Archipelago, the death toll from the first cyclone stood at over 500 whereas the second cyclone resulted in 120 victims and the destruction of around half the buildings in the colonial capital, Pape'ete.[169] The Sanito chapel on Makatea was destroyed in 1903 but fortunately the rest of the island was spared from the worst of the damage.[170] The same could not be said for the 1906 cyclone, which left the 40-person village of Temao 'utterly destroyed' and wiped out half of the main village of Moumu as well.[171] The waves were so powerful that 'not the slightest vestige' remained at Temao; worse still, the 40-foot high burial caves were swept of their human remains.[172] Given the numbers of Sanito and Mormon believers across the Tuamotu islands at this time, it should

[166] Toullelan and Gille, *Le mariage Franco-Tahitien,* 98.
[167] Moshe Rapaport, 'Oysterlust: Islanders, Entrepreneurs, and Colonial Policy over Tuamotu Lagoons', *JPH* 30:1 (1995): 39–52.
[168] Governor Philippe Émille Jullien put the deficit at 100,000 francs. See Jullien to M. le ministre des colonies, 2 May 1906, 1, SPAA: 48W/115.
[169] In terms of cultural heritage, the 1903 cyclone destroyed Catholic mission archives on Ana'a and many other private genealogical collections, Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire*, 14n14.
[170] Saura, *Les Sanito te Mau Sanito,* 100.
[171] Another effect was the sinking of the *Eimeo* off the coast of Makatea, reputedly seen years later in the form of a ghost. See Anne Hervé, 'Magie et Sorcellerie chez les Indigènes de l'archipel Paumotu', *JSO* 4 (1948): 56.
[172] Arundel, 'Report 124a', 24 Aug. 1907, 4, 7, Balding Papers, Box 1; Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 5, Balding Papers, Box 1.

not be a surprise that these two disasters were interpreted as the beginning of the end of days.[173]

A prophetic movement not too different from the Māmāiā of the 1830s gained popularity among Sanito followers in the wake of the cyclones. Known as the Pupu Autahu'araa, the movement originated on Ana'a in 1905 before spreading to Makatea soon after.[174] According to Bruno Saura, its appeal could be credited to 'the end-of-days atmosphere that accompanied the destructive cyclones in the islands of Polynesia and particularly the Tuamotu'.[175] Further effects of the cyclones include hundreds of Islanders from the region choosing to seek refuge once again on Tahiti where they forged new relationships of various forms of dependence with Tahiti landowners. Just as Ottino saw the tsunami of c.1450 as a 'turning point' that marked the end of the Mihiroa's relative isolation, we probably need to view the cyclones of 1903 and 1906 in a similar light.[176]

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the depths and layers to Makatea's pre-mining history. The accounts and traditions brought together here make it clear that the island was valued by Polynesians and *popa'ā* alike for its natural fertility and the fact that population-sustaining crops could be grown more readily than on the low-lying atolls that surrounded it. In this respect, it truly was a 'lush' island, a point which deserves emphasis if we are to differentiate between the 19th-century mining legacies on uninhabited and often barren Pacific guano islands, and the later effects of mining on the great phosphate islands, where the stakes were so much higher on account of their long human and non-human histories. Even though half a century of mining has erased many of the physical traces and severed some important ties to this rich past, these fragments are some of the best clues we have to possible futures for the island. Of course, the Mihiroa cannot return their land to exactly how it once was, but in terms of settling on an appropriate level of development, surely Wilkes' 'happy and contented' population of about 300 provides a more sustainable model

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[173] Bruno Saura, 'Entre prophétisme autochtone et millénarisme chrétien: le mouvement Pupu Autahu'ara'a de Tahiti et des Tuamotu (1905–1912)', *JSO* 104 (1997): 16.

[174] Saura, *Les Sanito te Mau Sanito,* 102.

[175] Ibid., 103. Around 100 adherents were excommunicated from the Sanito Church over the course of 1907, dampening enthusiasm for the movement which was at its height immediately after the 1906 cyclone. By 1913 the movement had died out completely. See ibid., 103–5.

[176] Ottino, *Ethno-Histoire,* 147.

for the future than the 3,000 inhabitants who drained the island of most of its natural value during the peak mining years.

As this chapter has shown, Makatea has been articulated in many ways over time, but as the story of the fleeing Mihiroa demonstrates, an isolated fortress was not the most enduring of these. Just as we can picture Makatea ‘caressed by the winds’ that surround it, we need to view the island’s history in relation to the neighbouring Mihiroa islands and Tahiti, whose people came and went with the currents and trade winds. Today, the Mihiroa are a diasporic people, with many more landowners living outside Makatea than on it. What this chapter illustrates is that these migrations belong to a long story in which the mining period should now be seen as just one chapter. Before that mining commenced, the Parata invasion and the absorption of the island into the Pōmare Empire had quickened the pace of change and brought foreign ideas, religions, seeds and animals to its shores.

Environmental cataclysms such as the eruption at Kuwae and the cyclones of 1903 and 1906 were further key historical junctures. An understanding of these dislocating currents and events in Makatea’s history allows us to better appreciate why the prospect of phosphate mining might have proven attractive to a majority of Islanders in 1907. As he would soon learn, John T. Arundel – who was in fact already familiar with Makatea, having spent a night on the island in 1871 during an unsuccessful search for guano – stumbled into a dynamic setting, where the events of the 18th and 19th centuries continued to have a large bearing on mining negotiations. For the French notary, Auguste Goupil, the cyclones provided the perfect pretext to act on the knowledge he had acquired some years before about the existence of phosphate deposits. The following chapter seeks to explain how these men came together, largely by coincidence, to turn Agassiz’s so-called treasure land into a reality.

Chapter 2: The Coming of the Phosphate Age

Figure 2.1: John T. Arundel (middle) and his fellow phosphateers, Makatea 1909.
Source: Arundel Papers, NLA, MS5410, Box 16.

In the early months of 1908, downtown Pape'ete was awash with rumour and intrigue.[1] Even a casual observer would have found it hard to miss the sense of optimism spreading through the smattering of *clubs*, *magasins* and *hôtels* in the cyclone-damaged colonial capital, as word had escaped about the discovery of significant phosphate deposits in the Tuamotu Archipelago. At last, the struggling port-town's *commerçants* (European, Tahitian and Chinese alike) had something to be excited about, and they engaged in eager contemplation about what this discovery might mean for their own futures and those of the colony. The reappearance of English businessman John T. Arundel, not seen since the halcyon days of the Salmon-Brander trading dynasty some years earlier, only added to the impression that something important was afoot.[2] Arundel, the 19th-century 'Anglo guano lord' and now vice-chairman and director of the Pacific Phosphate Company,[3] was much amused, if not slightly concerned, by a conversation he overheard at breakfast one March morning:

> One gentleman had apparently just arrived by the 'Manapouri' and was remarking to another how the place had gone down since his last visit. The Tahitian resident whoever he was said 'Ah well, that will all soon be altered, the phosphate company will be coming here, and as they will pay a royalty of 5 francs per ton the finances will soon be in a prosperous condition'.[4]

In recounting this story to the French interim governor, Édouard Charlier, Arundel gently suggested that 'it would be very unwise to kill the goose with the golden eggs'. The question of fixing an acceptable royalty price was one of the major sticking points in the negotiations, and the idea of five francs per ton would have made the famously parsimonious Englishman choke on his breakfast. Charlier assured Arundel 'that no such royalty was intended', and that they 'must not believe everything [they] hear in Tahiti'. However, even here, at Charlier's suggestion that one franc per ton was more appropriate, Arundel shot back to the effect 'that 50 centimes was quite sufficient'.[5]

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[1] And it was not just because the writer Jack London was in town. See John T. Arundel, 'Report 143', 28 Feb. 1908, 9, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[2] Gossler, 'The Social and Economic Fall of the Salmon/Brander Clan', 193–212.
[3] The title is Gregory T. Cushman's, see, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 93.
[4] Arundel, 'Report 144', 17 Mar. 1908, 9, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[5] Ibid.

The anecdote introduces just one of the many lines of friction that accompanied the development of the phosphate industry in the colony. While the affair was particularly fraught in Pape'ete, where it was remarked that even 'the very walls have ears',[6] developments were no less heated on Makatea, where deposits of note were first surveyed in August 1907. In fact, multiple layers of relationships needed to be carefully negotiated in order for the private company – which would eventually take the name of the CFPO – to exploit this much-coveted 'phosphated land'.

This chapter concentrates on a series of events that took place on Makatea and Tahiti between 1907 and 1909, a period book-ended by two very different kinds of voyage: the four-month voyage of the *Tyrian* where Arundel first confirmed the existence of phosphate deposits on Makatea, and the ill-fated maiden voyage of the *Ocean Queen,* the steamer originally set to be named in honour of Arundel, that came to a watery end on the reef at Moumu in September 1909. I outline the complicated negotiations that took place over this time, including Queen Marau Ta'aroa's intervention, the political split on Makatea itself, and finally the rear-guard action by a so-called millionaire to stop the men of the CFPO from gaining the concession for themselves. The spotlight throughout this chapter is firmly on the actions of key personalities in the development of the phosphate industry on Makatea and thus it does not concern itself with the negotiations the company entered on other islands in the region where deposits of varying value were also discovered (such as Niau and Mataiva), nor does it seek to detail the convoluted legal story which plagued both company and colony until the eventual granting of the concession in 1917.[7] Rather, I seek to explain how the agency of key personalities such as Arundel, Goupil, Marau, and 'Tiare' on Makatea contributed to the establishment of the mine.

Much of the material for this chapter comes from the underutilized reports made by Arundel and others now housed in the Bernard Balding Papers at Oxford's Bodleian Library. While acknowledging the limitations of approaching the period from the perspective of the British capitalists who drove the agenda, their detailed reports give us an unprecedented view into the physical and personal trials faced on both Tahiti and Makatea. Arundel's accounts offer more developed versions of the sketchy notes left in his diary or the brief comments

[6] Ibid., 3.
[7] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 167–88. For early reports on Niau and Mataiva in the Balding Papers, see J.M. Ellis, 'Niau', 20 Feb. 1908; J.O Ferrier, 'Report on Visit to Niau', 10–11 Feb. 1908; A. Fradet, 'Report on His Second Voyage to the Island of Niau', 21 Mar.–14 Apr. 1908; G.C. Ellis 'Notes of Memoranda re Island of Matahiva, dictated by Mr. J.A. Coane before leaving Tahiti', 31 Jan. 1908; J.M. Ellis, 'Report on Visit to Matahiva', 30 Jan. 1908.

included in his correspondence.[8] They provide us with a rich and, at least thus far, unrivalled source for a history that is, in comparison with the histories of the other Pacific phosphate islands at least, decidedly undeveloped and lacking in detail about the personalities involved in these events. In addition to unearthing this new material about some well-known characters in French Polynesian and Pacific history, this chapter complements the important French archival work of Colin Newbury by offering an agent-driven account of the ways in which land-use rights on Makatea were ultimately transferred from *fatu fenua* into the hands of the CFPO.[9]

One line of this chapter's argument is that rather than creating entirely new animosities, the discovery of phosphate in the territory appears to have deepened or entrenched previously existing ones. As Arundel would soon realize, his 1907 arrival brought him into the centre of a lively yet fraught world that left him wishing he 'had never heard of these deposits in the Eastern Pacific'.[10] Even though the 'phosphateers' eventually succeeded, in contrast to the well-celebrated 'origin stories' attached to phosphate mining on Nauru and Banaba, there is a decided lack of romance in Makatea's story.[11] From the death from typhoid of one the ship's crew moments after the *Tyrian*'s arrival in Tahiti, Arundel and the Pacific Phosphate Company suffered multiple setbacks over the following two years as they tried to replicate the pattern previously established on Nauru and Banaba.[12] While documenting examples of well-known tropes in Pacific history such as Indigenous resistance and collaboration, colonial competition and subterfuge, the narrative presented in this chapter serves to remind us that phosphate islands are not all made the same way, and that the particular events and dominant ideas involved in the making of each one go a long way to determining these islands' futures.

Given that the two-year affair ended with the complete wreck of a vessel dedicated to the career of the chief protagonist, it is unsurprising that Makatea does not feature prominently

[8] Arundel's physical diary is kept at the National Library of Australia (hereinafter NLA) but can also be accessed on microfilm at PMB: 490 (Reels 1 and 2 cover the periods from 1907 to 1909). Important correspondence is contained in PMB: 495 and 1175 also. Many thanks to the University of New England historian, Ross Lamont, who gave me access to his photocopies of the Balding Papers before I could consult them on site in Oxford.
[9] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 167–88.
[10] J.T. Arundel to A.H. Gaze, No. 223, 6 Jan. 1908, Pacific Islands Company, London Office 1896–1908, PMB: 1175, Reel 9.
[11] R.D. Japp, 'Romance of Nauru Phosphate', *Midnight Sun* (Vic.), 4 Jun. 1921 in National Archives Australia (hereinafter NAA), Melbourne: R140, Box 2; 'Unsuspected Wealth in Barren Rocks: Romantic Story of Pacific Phosphate Industry', *Pacific Islands Monthly,* 16 May 1939, 17–20.
[12] The man who died was a young Australian coal-trimmer by the name of Robert Dawson. He was buried at the Roman Catholic cemetery at Pape'ete. See Arundel to Secretary, PPC, London, 19 Aug. 1907, PMB: 1175, Reel 6. Another fatality occurred on the expedition when the cook Archibald M'Gregor fell off the gang plank and drowned once the ship had returned to Sydney. See 'Cook Drowned at Balmain', *Evening News* 30 Oct. 1907, 4.

in the narratives of the Pacific Phosphate Company. While this is hardly problematic in itself, it has meant that Britain's role in the remaking and reimagining of Makatea as a phosphate island has been consistently under-estimated (figure 2.2).[13]

Figure 2.2: A Manchester relic from the island's former power station.
Source: Nicholas Hoare, 2018.

Reinserting Arundel and the Pacific Phosphate Company into this narrative not only reminds us of the folly of believing we can study any of the three great Pacific phosphate islands in isolation from the others, but is a further reminder of how phosphate islands are made. Without Arundel's experience, expertise and general naivety regarding the complications and animosity existing within the colony at the time, it is perhaps unlikely that 'French industry' alone would have succeeded in transforming Makatea like he did.[14] Finally, as much as Arundel's 1907 arrival was a catalyst for change, it bears repeating that he did not operate in a vacuum. As I will shortly demonstrate, not only had

[13] According to one journalist's account, the birth of the industry was entirely down to Étienne Touze. See Michel Anglade, 'Makatea: l'île des phosphates à la veille de la fin', *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 4 Mar. 1966, 6.
[14] Bonhoure to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 Sep. 1910, 4, ANOM: OCEA/122.

manoeuvring already begun on the French colonial side of the equation but the inhabitants on Makatea were also in a state of flux, caught in the process of working out how they were going to rebuild their home after the 1903 and 1906 cyclones. It was therefore this combination of factors, rather than any one alone, that accelerated Makatea's 20th-century transformation into a phosphate island.

Maitre Goupil, Mr Arundel, and the Discovery of Phosphate

As shown in the previous chapter, by the first decade of the 20th century Makatea was by no means unknown to *popa'ā*, and *popa'ā* were equally not unknown to the Islanders who lived there. During his 1899 visit, Agassiz and his crew used the services of an English-speaking resident-trader, Ed Bonnefin,[15] to communicate with the Island population, and by 1907 an 'energetic' French schoolmaster by the name of Monsieur Normand had established himself on the island by marrying into a high-ranking family.[16] The Établissements français de l'Océanie (EFO) might have been officially annexed to France in 1880, but it was not until the hasty introduction of individual land title in 1887 that the French colonial presence was truly felt on the island. Yet even then, according to the lawyer Jean Delpit in 1910, land on Makatea remained 'in the most absolute state of indivision': the 1887 law arrived at Makatea 'stillborn' and contributed nothing but an 'adornment' to the judicial debates of the era.[17] Delpit, who would later represent a rival group in their case against the CFPO, argued that the titles drawn up on Makatea in the years following the law's introduction rested on 'errors and forgeries'.[18] As Newbury put it more broadly, 'while the formalities of French law on lease, sale, and contract made inroads into local concepts of property where rise in land values was greatest, the overall picture was one of very limited alienation'.[19] Ignoring the fact that the French administration might have failed to fully implement its system of land tenure at this time, it is nonetheless significant that Makatea, alongside valuable land on Tahiti and the pearl lagoons of the Tuamotu Archipelago, was chosen as a site to be surveyed at such an early stage.

[15] Eduard Bonnefin died during the 1906 cyclone on board the wrecked *Eimeo*: 'Steamship Mariposa Arrives from Tahiti with Further News of the Death-Dealing Hurricane', *San Francisco Call,* 9 Apr. 1906, 13.
[16] Pryor, 6 Oct. 1899, 103, PMB: 772; Arundel, 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 12, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[17] Delpit's exact words, in French, were: '… le décret du 24 aout 1887 étant resté lettre morte ou mort-née à Makatea, ne constitue aujourd'hui qu'un ornement gratuit aux débats judiciaires', Jean Delpit, 'Requête en Licitation et partage 223 immeubles de l'ile Makatea', 26 Sep. 1910, 27, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[18] Jean Delpit, 'Requête en Licitation et partage 223 immeubles de l'ile Makatea', 26 Sep. 1910, 27, ANOM: OCEA/124. See, also, Jean Delpit to Gov. des EFO, 21 Dec. 1908, 1, SPAA: 48W/996.
[19] Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 226.

Figure 2.3: Maitre Goupil, 1909.
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

A principal beneficiary of this 'land title headache' was the *notaire* Auguste Goupil (figure 2.3),[20] one of the *'grands seigneurs'* of the new French colony who had purchased LMS missionary John Orsmond's enormous property at Puna'auia on the west coast of Tahiti in 1873, thereby facilitating his entry into the copra trade.[21] As the 1887 land decree required that all land claims and counterclaims be registered within a short window (with all unclaimed land going to the state as public domain), this resulted in protracted and complicated legal proceedings and a surge in business for the relatively small number of colonial lawyers. With this steady income secured, Goupil was able to edit and run the pro-French newspaper the *Océanie française* in which he led campaigns against the Pōmare family and disseminated his 'assimilationist' politics, calling for the swifter adoption of French Republican policies, laws and values.[22] As a high-ranking member of most of the

[20] *'Le casse-tête foncier'*, Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse*, 127.
[21] Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 227.
[22] Ibid., 209; Michel Bailleul, 'La Presse en Polynésie française: 1845–1957, survol d'un siècle d'histoire', *Archipol: Le cahier des archives de la Polynésie* 4 (2001): 24.

colony's various political councils from the 1880s, he managed to further his pro-Republican, anti-Pōmare stance. His presence in the historiography of the colony is perhaps smaller than it deserves to be due to the destruction of his vast personal archive in a 1962 fire.[23]

Though firmly based on Tahiti, Goupil was by no means unfamiliar with the Tuamotu Archipelago, having represented the interests of the French administration in the late 1880s in its attempt to gain property rights over lagoon resources by having them classed as public domain.[24] It was perhaps over this period that he first learned of the existence of what he termed 'guano' on Makatea thanks to the presentation of samples from an area of the island curiously called *tutae manu* (literally, bird dung).[25] This story could well be the source of the often repeated (but never substantiated) French claim that a close friend of Goupil's and one of the architects of the 1887 land reforms, Lieutenant Frédéric Bonet, discovered Makatea's deposits in around 1890.[26] However, given the name of the zone in which it was found and the lack of knowledge about phosphate islands at this point, it seems more likely that what was discovered was organic guano and the men were none the wiser about the rich inorganic rock that lay underneath it.

Even if Bonet or Goupil had known about Makatea's sizeable deposits, neither man appears to have been particularly motivated to take action, that is until the turn-of-the-century voyage of Alexander Agassiz convinced Goupil of the value of their find.[27] Despite never meeting the geologist in person, Goupil's son-in-law, Dr Fernand Cassiau, appears to have learned all about Makatea's potential after encountering the American on Mangareva, where he was posted as French Resident.[28] Emboldened by this new information, Goupil alerted Governor Gallet of the need to collect further samples, which, this second time, proved far more promising. They were said to have resembled the 'guano

[23] O'Reilly and Teissier, *Tahitiens,* 223–4.
[24] Ibid., 223; Rapaport, 'Oysterlust', 42–3.
[25] Goupil received these samples from a Makatea *demi* by the name of Aurier, 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 9, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[26] The claim appears to have originated with both O'Reilly (1962) and François Doumenge (1963), and has been repeated by Danton, 'Makatea', 7. In conversations Goupil had with Arundel in 1907, he said he had known of the existence of deposits for 20 years. However, a 1911 memorandum on the situation put the date of discovery at 'around 1898'. See Ministère des Colonies, 'Note', 23 Oct. 1911, ANOM: OCEA/121. Colin Newbury left the question open, admitting 'It is not known with certainty who discovered Makatea phosphates'. Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 169.
[27] Goupil admitted to not remembering what the results of the analysis of the samples showed, and, according to Arundel, 'evidently did not think them of very great value at the time'. See Arundel, 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 9, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[28] Ibid., 6.

rock' once discovered on Flint Island in the Central Pacific by Arundel.[29] Yet even with this intelligence, nothing further eventuated as the Governor's visit to Makatea in January 1900 was interrupted by inclement weather, making it impossible for him to locate the site where the promising samples came from.[30] It would take several more years, and an Anglo-Saxon challenge, to stir the French colonial bureaucracy into action.

Cassiau was evidently not the only person Agassiz spoke to about Makatea because in September 1905 a Marseille shipbroker by the name of Eugène Salles applied – unsuccessfully as it turned out – for a concession to explore the island's deposits.[31] How could such a man, bankrupted in a 1901 shipwreck, come to have known about these deposits? The answer lies in the fact that Salles was working undercover for the Pacific Phosphate Company, whose director, Arundel, had also been tipped off by Agassiz about Makatea in 1902.[32] It does not seem that Salles' British employers had been revealed to the authorities, which makes the administration's 'famous' response to his inquiry – that there were no deposits to be found on the island – curious.[33] To understand why the French administration were so cagey about the discovery is perhaps outside the scope of this chapter, but there might have been more to it than colonial inefficiency.

The content for the 'famous' letter denying the existence of deposits on Makatea came from the administrator of the Tuamotu Archipelago, Charles-Adolphe Marcadé, who had collected samples from Makatea judged to be nothing but 'road-dust'.[34] Not all that dissimilar from how Arundel had ruled Makatea out of his reckoning in the 1870s due to the plateau being covered in vegetation, the French administrator concluded that 'even if we were to suppose that the land was rich in phosphate or guano, it would be impossible to hand it over to exploit because the entire plateau is occupied and cultivated'.[35] As Marcadé would come to play an important role in defending the rights of certain Makatean landowners in later years, it is worth asking whether he might have deliberately led Salles astray.[36] Was he motivated by a wish to protect the island and its inhabitants from these

[29] Ibid.
[30] Gallet to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 14 Mar. 1900, 3, ANOM: OCEA/23.
[31] Voss to Arundel, 9 Feb. 1909, 1, PMB: 495.
[32] Arundel to A.J. Reeves, 15 Aug. 1902, in Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3.
[33] Marcadé to Jullien, 9 Oct. 1906, ANOM: OCEA/123; Voss to Arundel, 9 Feb. 1909, 1, PMB: 495.
[34] Arundel, 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1; Voss to Arundel, 9 Feb. 1909, 1, PMB: 495.
[35] Marcadé to Jullien, 9 Oct. 1906, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[36] Newbury referred to him as the 'enemy of the Company', see Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 183.

circling sharks? Or was he just safeguarding the interests of the powerful Goupil, keen to keep the knowledge of this discovery within the colony?

The fact that Governor Jullien gave Salles the impression that this was the first time the administration had heard anything about Makatea's deposits is surprising given Goupil's earlier activity and the fact Governor Gallet visited Makatea himself in search of the resource. But given the high level of turnover in the colony's administration (24 governors in the 36 years prior to the First World War), perhaps there was a genuine breakdown in communication between administrations. A more likely explanation is that Marcadé and Jullien were doing their best to stall further developments to give their administration time to adapt to the fast-changing situation which their present legislation was not equipped to deal with. In the end, the colony's hand was forced by the arrival of a group of enterprising Englishmen who, from their experience in the central Pacific, were far more familiar with the stakes involved in claiming phosphate islands than anyone in French Polynesia.

The Cruise of the *Tyrian*

As difficult as it is to extricate the truth from these exchanges and confidently state who really 'discovered' Makatea's phosphate deposits, we know that Arundel was not discouraged by what he and others would later refer to as this 'famous letter' denying their existence.[37] And why would he be? The man from Gravesend, a 'place where ships and a sense of adventure to the ends of the earth were ever present',[38] had forged a successful Pacific trading career during the Pacific's guano age precisely by not being discouraged where others might have been. A godly man like his LMS home-secretary grandfather, Arundel owed his success more to the 'gospel of hard work' than possessing any particular entrepreneurial genius. Much of his early fortune, for example, came by revisiting, or re-scraping, central Pacific islands guano islands most assumed were already exhausted. His business model relied on two things: first, the exploitation of cheap Indigenous labour whom he recruited to work on his cheaply acquired guano islands; and two, the creation of coconut plantations alongside the guano works to help him weather the effects of decreases in the price of guano. As Cushman has argued, Arundel justified the first of his

[37] Voss to Arundel, 9 Feb. 1909, 1, PMB: 495. The Norwegian captain of the *Ocean Queen* Christian Johannessen would also try to claim credit for bringing the island to Arundel's attention. For the case he made, see Johannessen to Arundel, 2 Feb. 1909, Johannessen Correspondence, 1907–1909, PMB: 495. In response, Arundel denied that Johannessen played any part in his thinking even though he had previously written that the Norwegian was 'the first to bring the island to my notice', and recommended that he be remunerated for it. Arundel to E. Cayford, 4 Dec. 1907, PMB: 1175, Reel 6.

[38] Irene Fletcher, 'Introduction', p.iii, PMB: 1227.

business tenets as 'a form of evangelism that acculturated Pacific Islanders to pious lives of hard work',[39] while the second needed little justification as it helped him build 'an empire of trade that stretched over 12,000 kilometres across the Pacific Ocean'.[40]

Once described as 'the Pacific Cecil Rhodes who would rather have been a missionary',[41] like many imperial men, Arundel's success owed much more to good fortune than he ever let on. He was assisted by his LMS connections which helped smooth his recruiting path in LMS strongholds such as Niue and the Cook Islands; his relationship to British administrators, such as Arthur Hamilton-Gordon (Lord Stanmore), who gave him a voice at the Colonial Office; and his partnerships with business figures such as William Hesketh Lever (Lord Leverhulme from 1917) who provided capital and markets for his products. It is not that Arundel never experienced failure (his inability to turn a profit after securing the hotly contested Clipperton Island guano deposits in 1899 stands out as one of them), nor was he immune to tragedy (in 1886 his twin sons died barely one-month out of the womb), yet his credo was certainly that hard work paid off.[42] His involvement in the chance 'door-stop' discovery of the 'the greatest high-grade phosphate deposits in the world' on Nauru and deposits of at least 22 million tons on neighbouring Banaba, just as his guano islands were nearing exhaustion, might have been interpreted as divine reward for three decades of Christian toil. With luck thought to have been firmly on his side, Arundel could not be deterred by the Salles affair and launched plans to investigate Agassiz's treasured land, code-named 'Teatree Island', himself in 1907.[43]

In March, Arundel brought together several French and Pacific Phosphate Company contacts (Salles included), and a small amount of capital, to form the Société française des îles du Pacifique, his first 'French' company, located on the Rue de Chateaudun in Paris. Armed with Agassiz's 1903 publication of plates and findings from the *Albatross* expedition,[44] Arundel chartered the Howard Smith Company's 'very nice little steamer', the repurposed *Tyrian*, for a tour of the Pacific. Joining him was his long-time business associate George C. Ellis (father of Sir Albert Ellis of Banaba fame), his son James M.

[39] Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 94.
[40] Ibid., 98.
[41] 'Maude Review of Phosphateers', in PMB: 1227, Reel 1. See, also, Robert Langdon, 'The Exploits of the "Cecil Rhodes of the Pacific"', *Pambu Newsletter* 33 (1973), 1–7; Robert Langdon, 'Arundel, The Shy Cecil Rhodes of the Pacific Islands', *PIM,* Apr. 1974, 59–61.
[42] Skaggs, *Clipperton*, 92–3.
[43] Voss to Arundel, 9 Feb. 1909, 1, PMB: 495.
[44] Alexander Agassiz, *The Coral Reefs of the Tropical Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Museum of Comparative Zoology, 1903).

Ellis, analyst Alfred E. Stephen,[45] Dr. Robertson (as neither Arundel nor Ellis senior were in the best of health), Arundel's private secretary J.P. Burrows, 'and one or two others' (including Captain Christian Johannessen and the 'two mammas', Mrs Ellis and her travelling companion, a friend called Miss Lang).[46] The four-month 'business' cruise took in Gomen in New Caledonia, Ocean Island, Nauru, Tarawa, Suva, French Polynesia and Pitcairn Island before heading back to Sydney via Arundel's old central Pacific guano islands: Henderson, Oeno and Fanning. The touring party then returned to tie up affairs started on the way out in Suva, Nauru and Ocean Island where they returned 11 Banaban families previously stranded in Tahiti.[47] With the exact 'destination or mission' having not been 'divulged' before they left,[48] the Australian press – which Arundel characteristically dismissed as 'people who know little or nothing about it' – nonetheless speculated about the intention to visit a yet unexploited island, though noting that 'nothing definite has transpired in this connection'.[49]

If the ship departed Sydney under a shroud of mystery, its arrival at Tahiti in mid-August was even more secretive. Quickly dubbed the 'mystery ship', the men tried their best to keep a low profile.[50] Unbeknown to Arundel was the fact that Auguste Goupil's son, Albert, was already on Makatea in search of what he thought was guano, and since July he had 'secured the right from the Natives to about 1/3rd of the Island' at the rate of two francs per ton of material raised.[51] At this point, it appears that Arundel flirted with the possibility of abandoning the expedition to Makatea altogether, but thanks largely to 'the old friendship… of over 30 years' standing' between copra traders Goupil the elder and Arundel, it was decided that 'forces should be joined', and the two parties (including

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45 Stephen became the President of the Pacific Islands Society based in Sydney. His papers are at the Mitchell Library, MLMSS 524. Arundel would fall out with him over competing claims to Clipperton Island's deposits.

46 Arundel to Arthur J. Brander, 8 Jul. 1907, PMB: 1175; 'Phosphate Islands', *Western Mail,* 6 Jul. 1907, 22. It was the Makatean Hiti a Hiti who christened the two women the 'mummas' of the ship. See Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.

47 Arundel to Gaze, 29 Aug. 1907, PMB: 1175. Summaries of the voyage can be found in various Australian newspapers on 29 October, see 'Island Cruise: Return of the Tyrian', *Daily Telegraph,* 29 Oct. 1907, 8; 'The Tyrian's Cruise in the South Seas: Visit to Pitcairn Island', *Australian Star,* 29 Oct. 1907, 7. Arundel appeared to be keen to make the most of the voyage, saying that 'we should do our best to clear up all the doubtful positions in the Pacific while we are in this part of the world', Arundel to Sec. Pacific Phosphate Company, London, 29 Aug. 1907, 2, PMB: 1175, Reel 6.

48 'The Tyrian's Cruise in the South Seas: Visit to Pitcairn Island', *Australian Star,* 29 Oct. 1907, 7. The 'deviation to Ocean Island and back' was to keep the main destination of the cruise a secret. See PPC (London) to PPC (Melb.), 20 Dec. 1907, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3.

49 'The Tyrian's Cruise in the South Seas: Visit to Pitcairn Island', *Australian Star,* 29 Oct. 1907, 7; Arundel to Secretary, PPC (London), no. 296, PMB: 1175, Reel 6; 'Phosphate Islands', *Western Mail,* 6 Jul. 1907, 22.

50 Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.

51 Arundel, 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 2 (repeated in Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1).

Auguste Goupil's son-in-law, the engineer and chief of public works, Étienne Touze) set sail together on the *Tyrian* at 6pm on 19 August.[52]

Figure 2.4: Arundel (sitting in white), next to Mrs Ellis on the *Tyrian*, 1907.
Source: NAA (Melb.): R32, S108.

The crew ran into their first spell of bad weather on the overnight run to Makatea, arriving the next morning to find the island obscured by heavy squalls.[53] However, their luck greatly improved from the moment they were welcomed ashore at Moumu by the *tāvana,* Teare a Tematuanui (referred to by Arundel as Tiare). It did not take long for the experienced George Ellis to find evidence of phosphate rock in between the coral pinnacles just outside the village. Once the party reached the plateau, it soon became apparent that the deposits were much larger than the Goupils, who were still confused about the distinction between guano and phosphate, had previously imagined.[54] Split into groups and guided by local men, the English and Frenchmen from the *Tyrian*, were 'on the tramp' for the greater part of the day, with George Ellis giving an initial opinion that the deposits were 'of great

[52] Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1. Those who joined the *Tyrian* crew at Tahiti were A.J Brander, Brander's wife and child, Auguste Goupil, Touze, and also Normand, the so-called French Resident on Makatea, see Arundel to the Secretary, PPC, 28 Aug. 1907, PMB: 1175, Reel 6.
[53] Arundel, 'Report 124a', 20 Aug. 1907, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[54] Ibid., 2.

importance', and could be 'at least equal' to the estimates regarding the size of Banaba's deposits (this estimate was quickly revised to one half of Banaba).[55] Large pinnacles of 'pure phosphate rock' were found, and although testing samples was 'extremely tiring, amidst myriads of mosquitoes, and in the broiling sun', both Ellis and Stephen judged the quality to be excellent.[56]

Figure 2.**5**: **Lunch on Makatea (Arundel seated with hat), 1907.**
Source: NAA (Melb.): R32, S108.

Thanks to the time saved by Albert Goupil having already initiated negotiations with landowners, the group only needed a couple of days on the island. As Arundel himself admitted, 'the greatest difficulty' in his line of business 'had always been the arrangement with the native owners of the soil', so to have had the Goupils secure contracts with one-third of the 622 registered landholders on both Tahiti and Makatea itself was a massive coup.[57] The ability of the Goupils to secure these contracts certainly impressed Arundel who later admitted 'how difficult it would have been to carry on these operations' without

[55] Ibid., 12.
[56] Ibid., 4; A.E. Stephen, 'Report 124b', 21 Aug. 1907, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[57] Arundel, 'Report 124', 14 Aug. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1; Arundel to Gaze, 17 Aug. 1907, 1, PMB: 1175, Reel 9.

their assistance.[58] He would also remark on 'the hold that Maitre Goupil appears to have over these natives', and discovered that this could be traced to the 1906 cyclone and its aftermath which saw many Mihiroa migrate to Tahiti where they would work and lease land from him at his estate in Puna'auia outside of Pape'ete.[59] Though not commented on at the time, that the majority of these contracts were signed with people no longer living on Makatea and under Goupil's patronage might be viewed as an early indication of the merit of the contracts in general.

Arundel was nonetheless happy enough from a legal perspective with what had been drawn up by the Goupils,[60] though he 'regretted that such a high price' had been entered into, noting that landholders on Angaur, Nauru and Banaba were all receiving much less than the two franc per ton royalty included in the Goupil contracts.[61] Back at Tahiti the two factions got down to business, with Arundel insisting that the two franc per ton royalty 'was quite out of the question' and enjoining Goupil to halve it.[62] According to Arundel, a two franc per ton royalty would have been fitting if the mineral were guano, but in the new 20th-century world of high-quantity rock phosphate, one franc per ton was more than sufficient.[63] Despite the extra work this would entail, the Goupils were persuaded it was a good idea and Albert was assigned the task of renegotiating the original contracts. In return, Goupil expressed his fear that Arundel was only interested in crowding out competition for his Banaban and Nauruan enterprises, so he demanded a guarantee that work would start on the island within a nine-month period, and also a management position for his son-in-law, Touze.[64] Both requests were agreed to, with Arundel taking a particular liking to the 33-year old Touze, a man who spoke English 'fairly well', was a hard-nosed negotiator, and appeared to be 'thoroughly posted up in Phosphates' having had prior experience with a French phosphate works at La Rochelle in the southwest of France.[65] It

[58] Arundel, 'Report 137', 17 Jan. 1908, 8, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[59] Ibid.; Arundel, 'Report 138', 21 Jan. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[60] Arundel even stated that he thought the contracts were 'likely, provided we find that the deposits are worth working, to be much more satisfactory than the one originally intended', Arundel to Harold Gaze, 17 Aug. 1907, 1, PMB: 1175, Reel 9.
[61] Arundel, 'Report 124', 14 Aug. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[62] These negotiations were recounted after the fact by Arundel in 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[63] It was Arundel's great fear that word of the price offered to landowners on Makatea would leak and 'cause trouble at Ocean Island and Nauru', 'Report 124', 19 Aug. 1907, 13, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[64] Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[65] Arundel, 'Report 124', 14 Aug. 1907, 3–4, 11, Balding Papers, Box 1.

helped too that Touze had a favourable opinion of Englishmen from his previous business dealings, and felt he could trust Arundel and Ellis.[66]

With this internal company business out of the way, the group decided to return to Makatea on 31 August with the goal of obtaining the rights to at least four-fifths of the land.[67] Only then would Arundel be confident that operations could proceed, as 'in the meantime anyone can go and negotiate with the natives for the unassigned lands', something Arundel suspected many on Tahiti would be capable of doing, 'even for the sake of opposing M. Goupil'.[68] Fortunately for them, the second visit was even more successful than the first. Their prospecting was assisted by the local population every step of the way and by the time of their departure, Hiti a Hiti, principal landholder and 'evidently a firm friend of the company's', had given them a farewell speech declaring, as recalled by George Ellis, that 'we had won their hearts'.[69] At this stage, the only real problem appeared to be the island's mosquito population, with both Arundel and Ellis writing how 'exceedingly unfortunate' it was to find the island was 'frightfully infested'. To them, this made 'the place almost unendurable to new-comers', and they noted that they 'even worry the Natives'.[70] 'Undoubtedly', the pair added, 'it takes a lot of the music of the place away'.[71]

The reason why the *Tyrian* party was so well-received by the island's inhabitants is not self-evident. Aside from the influence of Auguste Goupil, the fact that the group was led by Arundel or, as he was referred to throughout the Pacific, 'Aneru of the pleasant smile and speech', a man who, according to his unpublished biographer, possessed 'a personality that strongly appealed to the native temperament', could have been part of the explanation.[72] Yet we should be suspicious of such claims. According to the LMS librarian Irene Fletcher, 'he never learned a word of any native language'.[73] And, more to the point, the existence of several documented cases of mistreatment of Island workers might prompt some scepticism about his supposed attractiveness to Islanders.[74] Rather, it

[66] Ibid., 4.
[67] Arundel was worried about repeating the mistake made on Starbuck Island where only the land with deposits was secured and not the parcels that would facilitate shipping.
[68] Arundel, 'Report 124a', 26 Aug. 1907, 9–10, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[69] G.C. Ellis cited in Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 4–5, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[70] I can confirm that the island's mosquitos can be trying for newcomers even today.
[71] Arundel and G.C. Ellis, 'Report No. 124g', 19 Sep. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[72] Aimée Bright, 'Biography of Arundel, John', Book 1, Chapter 1, 6, Papers of John Arundel, NLA: MS 8904. A sea-captain, cited by Bright, believed it all came down to Arundel's voice: 'a good voice goes further with natives than anything else'. See Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 2, 5.
[73] Irene Fletcher, 'Introduction', PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[74] For instance, his 'tyrannical lordship over Starbuck Island' rubbed his Cook Islands workers the wrong way, and he also mistreated Niuean workers on occasion. In one case, he stranded a couple on the desolate Hull Island for

appears that material gifts were used to good effect in persuading the island's leaders to support their efforts.[75] For example, Hiti, who had expressed his wish 'to improve the breed of fowls' on the island, was presented with five hens and a rooster, and Tiare, who had earlier asked for a gun, was presented with George Ellis's 'breech-loader' accompanied by 'a large framed oil painting of a sacred subject'.[76] The latter gift Tiare said he would display in the Sanito church destroyed in the 1903 cyclone that the community was planning to rebuild using their phosphate money.

Indeed, the cyclones of 1903 and 1906 appeared to have had a marked effect on the island and its population (estimated by Arundel to have been at about 290).[77] For the first time, the reports reveal a certain degree of dependence that had been virtually absent from previous accounts of the island. Hiti told Arundel that 'they got so little for their copra that he and his friends were only too glad to think of the money they would make when we came to work the island'.[78] Meanwhile James Ellis would comment that 'this is a very poor place for fish and I pity the people in their living. It will be a boon for them when the Phosphate gets under weigh and they receive some cash'.[79] In general, the appeal of newfound wealth among the population after several years of hardship is impossible to deny (Ellis was once interrupted by a group who asked him whether it was gold they were looking for)[80], but whether those on the island understood the reality of the project and the quantity of the royalty they would receive at this point is more difficult to say. Moreover, not everybody on the island supported the developments, with an 'influential man' by the name of Tevivi[81] obstructing negotiations with Albert Goupil and, alongside another influential Islander named Tara a Pou, casting doubt on the *Tyrian* party's expertise.[82] However, as we shall see later on, the visitors tried their best to explain to the Islanders

13 months where they were required to live solely on coconuts, crabs and rainwater. See Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 94, 98.

[75] It was hardly caviar and champagne, yet Arundel presented the locals with '5 cases of tinned meat and 7 large tins of biscuit'. See G.C. Ellis cited in Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.

[76] Ibid.

[77] The *Annuaire des EFO* recorded a population of 132 on the island for the years 1904–09.

[78] G.C. Ellis cited in Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 5, Balding Papers, Box 1.

[79] 'Extract from private letter from J. Morgan Ellis', 7 Jan. 1908, Balding Papers. James Ellis also wrote how he 'had always thought Flint Isd. a hard place to secure enough fish, but this place is ten times worse, unless a shoal of bonito come near, these people obtain scant supply of fish', J. M. Ellis, 8 Jan. 1908, Balding Papers, Box 1.

[80] Arundel, 'Report 124d', 31 Aug. 1907, 2–3, Balding Papers, Box 1.

[81] Tevivi a Maomao, also known as Tevivi Tepehu (1854–1918).

[82] Arundel, 'Report 124d', 31 Aug. 1907, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.

as 'fully and clearly' as possible what it was they were looking for and what the project would entail.[83]

Leaving Makatea, the group were optimistic yet realistic about how much work was needed to be done to get 'under weigh'. Thus despite Arundel announcing the trip a success to Sir Everard im Thurn, the new High Commissioner for the Western Pacific,[84] he cautioned in another letter (to Agassiz) that an 'immense amount of time, labour and money will have to be expended to make the place a profitable speculation'.[85] Goupil even decided to invite the two dissenters, Tevivi and Tara, to Tahiti with them so they could be convinced of the project's merits.[86] Little did Arundel know at that point of the difficulties he would soon encounter on Tahiti once Madame Marau, the last Queen of Tahiti, 'thoroughly spoilt the business for everybody by raising the price to 2.25 francs'.[87]

The 'Intrusion' of Madame Marau[88]

Joanna Marau Ta'aroa a Tepau Salmon, daughter of an aristocratic Tahitian mother, Ari'i Taimai, and the British merchant Alexander Salmon, was married to Ari'iaue (Pōmare V), son of Queen Pōmare IV, at the age of 14. Despite their unconventional marriage the pair were crowned King and Queen of Tahiti after the death of Pōmare IV in 1877. France would formally annex the territory just three years later, abolishing the monarchy in the process and thus making Marau the 'last Queen of Tahiti'.[89] By 1907 she was in her late-forties and living off a French government pension worth the equivalent of £20 per month.[90] She held little in the way of formal power in the colony after control was ceded to France, but still nonetheless had considerable *mana* within Polynesian society which she drew on when dealing with the company. Having grown accustomed to a certain cosmopolitan way of life, she naturally found it difficult to retreat into her restricted role within Tahiti's Indigenous community; she wanted to remain at the top of colonial society too. Thus it was

[83] Ibid.
[84] Arundel to Im Thurn, 18 Sep. 1907, NAA: MP1174/1, 1094.
[85] Arundel to Agassiz, 21 Sep. 1907, 2, PMB: 495.
[86] Arundel, 'Report 124e', 11 Sep. 1907, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[87] Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[88] 'Intrusion' was Goupil's term. See Goupil to Cayford, Arundel and Ellis, 16 Dec. 1907, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[89] For a brief English-language biography, see Nicholas Hoare, 'Marau Ta'aroa, the Sydney-schooled "last Queen of Tahiti"', *The Conversation*, 12 Sep. 2019, accessible at https://theconversation.com/hidden-women-of-history-marau-taaroa-the-sydney-schooled-last-queen-of-tahiti-122539.
[90] Arundel, 'Report 133', 3 Jan. 1908, 13, Balding Papers, Box 1.

said ‘whenever any new business was proposed by anyone in Papeete, Madame Marau Salmon always wished to interfere for her own benefit’.[91]

Soon after returning to Pape’ete, Arundel received a letter from Arthur Brander, whom he had employed for the *Tyrian* expedition but who was also Madame Marau’s nephew, ‘regretting that Maitre Goupil had not approached Madame Marau Salmon on the question of the Pomare succession interests in the island of Makatea, and prophesying a great deal of trouble through his omission in this respect’.[92] Now, the Brander clan was one of the two dominant families in Pape’ete towards the end of the 19th century, and Arundel’s relationship with them went back many decades. The other half of the trading dynasty was the Salmon family, to which the Brander family were connected through marriage.[93] As Claus Gossler has pointed out, the two families once dominated colonial business but by the turn of the century, their influence had all but petered out.[94] This meant that by 1907, it was no great secret that Marau was ‘hard up’ and looking for ways to re-establish the Salmon-Brander name and fortune.[95]

There was more than just economic deprivation driving Marau’s decision to interfere with the Makatea business, however. There was also the little matter of her longstanding resentment of Auguste Goupil. It was Goupil who assisted Pōmare V in freezing Marau and her three illegitimate children out of an inheritance by instead diverting his property to a nephew. ‘Madame Marau’, Arundel was told, ‘is not a woman to forget anything of this sort’. Thus, while writing she was ‘sorry’ that she was ‘obliged to cross him [Goupil]… In this matter I had to uphold a question of family traditions too much put aside in this case’.[96] Arundel tried to explain his decision to side with Goupil in a diplomatic fashion, stating ‘that the Maison Brander has ceased to exist for many years’, and that since his business was ‘simply of a legal nature’, it was only natural that they ‘were placed in the hands of Maitre Goupil, who is acknowledged by everybody to be the best lawyer in Tahiti’.[97] Yet Marau was not going to be brushed off lightly, and it would take several more months of

[91] Arundel, ‘Report 139’, 29 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[92] Ibid.
[93] When Henry Adams visited Tahiti in 1891 he wrote: ‘Society now consists, as far as I can learn, of the Branders and their connection[s]’. See Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, 6 Feb. 1891, in J.C. Levenson et al. (ed.), *The Letters of Henry Adams, Vol. III, 1886-1892* (Cambridge, 1982), 4034, in Gossler, ‘The Social and Economic Fall’, 193.
[94] Gossler, ‘The Social and Economic Fall’, 193.
[95] Arundel, ‘Report 143’, 28 Feb. 1908, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[96] Marautaaroa to Arthur Brander, 2 Oct. 1907 (attached to Report 137), Balding Papers, Box 1.
[97] Arundel, ‘Report 133’, 3 Jan. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.

negotiating to reach a point where Arundel's decision to side with the 'deadly enemy' of the Salmon/Brander clan was able to be put to bed.

Figure 2.6: Queen Marau, probably in her 50s, c. 1923–29.
Source: Wikicommons.

While Marau's challenge rested partly on an appeal to inherited rights to land in the Tuamotu (these were heavily disputed by Goupil and others, including the French government), she was also simply offering landowners a more attractive price. Knowing the influence she had among the people of Makatea, and those of the Tuamotu more generally,[98] as well as the high levels of prestige these people attached to owning land on Tahiti, Marau was able easily to swap some of her rights to land on Tahiti with the rights

[98] Ibid., 3.

to certain lands on Makatea.[99] Her actions were incredibly frustrating for Arundel and Goupil, but it was undeniably clever as she forced the company to come to a begrudging agreement with her.

The battle-lines were drawn over the validity of one another's' contracts. Touze believed Marau's contracts were 'so imperfect … that it is not possible to purchase them definitely as they stand'.[100] And Goupil referred to her foolishness in having bought 'the earth and the stones (*te repo I te afai*)' of the land rather than making direct reference to phosphate (thus, Goupil imagined a situation where Marau 'may be compelled by the vendor to take delivery of common dirt and stones at 2f.25 per ton').[101] In return, Madame Marau dismissed nearly all the contracts drawn up by Goupil as 'null and void', and provided a long list gesturing to their many faults (blank spaces, forgeries, signatures of minors, etc.).[102] Arundel admitted in reply that some of Goupil's contracts were not perfect, especially those with minors, but maintained that this affected only a few cases, and 'would not materially lessen the areas covered by 430 (or thereabout) contracts which he now holds'.[103] Marau, however, was undeterred by the fact that Goupil had secured the majority of contracts, with her strategy resting on gaining control of certain strategic pockets of land in order to frustrate the enterprise.

With Arundel refusing to meet Marau in person (Arundel was to tell Ellis, 'I much dislike talking business with women'),[104] the legal fight between the two parties continued throughout January and February 1908. These were tense weeks on Tahiti and the rivalry between Marau and the company only increased as the stories circulating the town got taller. Captain Winifred Brander, the intermediary between the factions, expressed his 'regret … that so many idle tales had been carried by the natives from one side to the other', to which Arundel responded 'that this was not confined to the natives only' and that 'the people of Tahiti, both brown and white, were too fond of discussing matters that did not in any way concern them'.[105] What Arundel failed to realize was that Makatea had ceased to be a simple business affair, having become intimately linked to the fortunes of the colony: everyone felt they had a stake in it. Even the Chinese merchants were said to

[99] Much of this land was judged outside the phosphate zone. See Arundel, 'Report No. 143', 28 Feb. 1908, 12, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[100] 'Notes by M. Etienne Touze on Madame Marau's Contracts', 30 Dec. 1907, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[101] 'Remarks on Madame Marau's Contracts by Maitre Goupil', 28 Dec. 1907, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[102] 'Memorandum of Remarks relative to Mr. Albert Goupil's Contracts', 10 Jan. 1908, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[103] Arundel to Madame Marautaaroa Salmon, 6 Jan. 1908, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[104] Arundel, 'Report 133', 3 Jan. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[105] Arundel, 'Report 138', 21 Jan. 1908, 8, Balding Papers, Box 1.

have been 'nibbling at the business' in the hope of securing contracts of their own.[106] While an amicable agreement was eventually reached by the end of February, in order to make sense of the deal we need to explore how these Tahitian animosities played out on Makatea itself, where both the company and Marau threw themselves into the business of courting local landowners.

Division on Makatea

As Albert Goupil informed George Ellis, land on Makatea was still largely split between two great families, those of 'Tiare' on the one hand, and 'Hiti' on the other.[107] Intermarriage between the factions had eroded some of the differences over the years (indeed, this is what led to the complicated situation of up to 16 to 20 people possessing legitimate claims to single plots of land), but it was still the case that 'the present chiefs of these names are the ancestral chieftains, and they trace their lineage away back for many generations through their blood-relations with one another'.[108] Power had apparently moved back and forth between the two great families for centuries.[109] And according to Goupil, as Marau was cognizant of these ancient cleavages, she 'used and is using the Hiti branch as a wedge to split asunder the family ties and the blood-relationships'.[110] Despite having very publicly taken the side of the company during the *Tyrian* visit, by the early months of 1908 Hiti, described by Ellis as 'a shifting, cunning, unreliable man, a great talker, and full of the old time native ways', had shifted to Marau's camp. Meanwhile, Tiare, the *tāvana*, who was said to have commanded the loyalty of the majority of Islanders, stood with Goupil and the company.[111]

Arundel's reports suggest that while island relations were considered to have been relatively peaceful under Tiare, the two factions were at each other's throats just eight years beforehand. Ellis referred to a 'great disturbance' which resulted in the then *tāvana* being bound to a tree by two men, Tevivi and Pua. Ellis was not able to ascertain just what the 'serious quarrel' was all about, but he knew enough to realize the disturbance had led to the installation of Tiare as *tāvana*, 'and peace has reigned ever since'.[112] Clearly, though, it was only ever a peace of sorts as come 1908, the phosphate question had split

[106] Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[107] 'Report No. 3 on Visit to Makatea by G.C. Ellis', 1 Feb. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 13, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[110] 'Report No. 3 on Visit to Makatea by G.C. Ellis', 1 Feb. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

the community once more with Tevivi and Pua seemingly taking advantage of the newfound animosity to side with Marau and push their old own claims to power. According to Auguste Goupil, for instance, Tevivi was her right arm, and Hiti her left.[113] He thought that despite possessing one of the largest landholdings on the island, Hiti had never been a recognized *ari'i*, so one can see the allure in siding with Marau against the more established figure, Tiare, who was firmly in the Goupil/Arundel camp.[114]

While there was a split in opinion regarding who they wanted to mine the island for them, it seemed that there was a unanimous wish for mining to go ahead. In January Tiare took Ellis on a tour of his land, where he purportedly said that 'all this land belonged to his family, and henceforth it is ours [the company's]'.[115] Tiare labelled Ellis *fēti'i* (family), which as Ellis noted, 'means a great deal, coming from the chieftain himself', and the *tāvana* concluded by saying that the visit of Arundel and Ellis 'was a great honor to the people of Makatea, and he hoped that work would be established for the benefit of the island and ourselves.'[116] On 24 January, Ellis called a meeting with leaders from the two factions to show them 'before and after' images from Nauru 'so that he might make clear to the natives the change made in an island when we work it.'[117] Ellis described their reaction in the following manner:

> Great was their amazement on hearing all that was being done, and they acknowledged that it was greater work than they could understand. They said that they were in a state of confusion in their minds at the work of the rock-breakers, the driers, and the cableways and the whole thing – they were really tumbled up and down in their brains.[118]

[113] Auguste Goupil to Cayford, Arundel and G. Ellis, 16 Dec. 1907, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[114] The observations about Hiti a Hiti are not entirely true, as he was first named adjunct-chief in 1889, before becoming chief and president of the district council from 1896–1900 and a council member until at least 1908.
[115] Someone in the company must have taken this literally as in some reports and maps, the highest point of the island, Pu'utiare (mistakenly thought to be named after Tiare), was labelled Mount Arundel. See 'Analyses made at Makatea laboratory', 1 Jan. 1908, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[116] 'Report No. 3 on Visit to Makatea by G.C. Ellis', 1 Feb. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1. Tiare would lay further lavish praise on Ellis and Arundel at the wedding of two of his relations the next Monday. George Ellis recorded how: 'Tiare made a speech and said that "These children" (their ages ranging from 26 to 37), belonged to him and were of his family, and now that Mr. Arundel and I have come to this island that we shall also be their fathers'. See 'Report No. 3 on Visit to Makatea by G.C. Ellis', 1 Feb. 1908, 7, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[117] Captain Wilmot of the *France Australe* was used as an 'independent witness' to do Ellis' bidding as Wilmot was also on board the S.S. *Archer* when it was in the Pacific Phosphate Company's employ in Nauru and Banaba. See 'Report No. 3 on Visit to Makatea by G.C. Ellis', 1 Feb. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[118] Ibid.

While Ellis's interpretation of their reaction to the images places emphasis on the amazement shown by the scale of the industry, he does not appear to have countenanced that their amazement may have been more akin to shock than wonder. Here, for the first time, was evidence that their island was going to be dramatically transformed. Was the tumbling supposedly going on in their brains more a sign of unease as it finally hit home what they had agreed to? Without further first-hand evidence, the definitive answer is elusive and there is a danger of projecting on to the population a modern environmental ethic that did not necessarily exist. We do know, however, that the photos were not enough to perturb Tiare, who remained a staunch ally of the company. He was apparently 'very anxious to see the world' and already had his sights set on accompanying James Ellis to New Zealand when his furlough was due in two years' time.[119] All he needed to achieve this goal was an end to the impasse between Marau and the company in Pape'ete.

Champagne and Reconciliation

Tiare did not have to wait all that long to have his wishes granted. From early on it seemed that Marau found herself in a losing battle, and the weeks of holding out were interpreted within the Arundel faction as a face-saving exercise. As noted, the company knew she was not 'flush with either cash or goods'.[120] They therefore devised a strategy not so much about delivering a decisive legal blow, but waiting her out and starving her of resources. It was rumoured that as early as the second week of January, she conceded that her contracts were faulty, and though it 'apparently caused her very great anger' she admitted it would be 'far better for everybody that there should be only one company working Makatea', and that company should be Arundel's.[121]

The company, for its part, was helped by the poor regard in which Marau was viewed by the French. The administration could not stand the way she had taken to using royal titles in her correspondence, and Arundel was led to believe that 'if she used many more of these royal titles, and claims more royal attributes, a very summary stop to her proceedings will be applied by the French Government'.[122] Commodore Buchard, who 'described her as a dangerous woman, whom the authorities were keeping a very strict watch upon',[123] was another who believed Marau had no claims 'whatever in the Paumotu Group' in regard

[119] Arundel, 'Report 143', 28 Feb. 1908, 5, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[120] Goupil to Cayford, Arundel and G.C. Ellis, 16 Dec. 1907, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[121] Arundel, 'Report 135', 9 Jan. 1908, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[122] Arundel, 'Report 137', 17 Jan. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[123] Ibid., 3.

to the Pōmare succession.[124] Her alleged impertinence was made all the worse by the fact that she was not even a French citizen, which led Arundel to observe that it 'was considered very likely that the French Government would avail themselves of their complete power and extradite her on the score that she was dangerous politically to the French regime'.[125] That said, even Commodore Buchard, who got along so famously with Arundel, believed Marau 'a most *clever* woman' and that Goupil was 'under-estimating her power'.[126]

Ultimately, however, Buchard, like most colonists, 'was looking to Makatea as a very great source of defraying the expenses of the Government'.[127] Even though the French administration was under instruction from Paris not to openly favour the company,[128] Arundel was relieved to learn from Goupil 'that the feeling of the Frenchmen in Tahiti was decidedly in our favour, and great anxiety is felt as to the interference of Marau spoiling the whole business'.[129] Fortunately for the company, it was Marau who called for the lawyers to give them some space, and sought to move things onwards to 'a friendly negotiation' where she was to seek a 'financial proposition' from Arundel.[130] Arundel's initial offer of 40,000 francs or £1600 fell 'so very short of... [her] hopes and pretensions' that it was rejected out of hand.[131] By the end of February, however, it was agreed to give Marau a royalty of 37.5 centimes per ton of phosphate exploited.[132]

Arundel and Ellis recognized the value of having Marau on their side, expressing their respect for 'her intimate knowledge' of the Tuamotu region and its people.[133] Once she had thrown in her lot with the Englishmen, Arundel even wrote that he and Ellis 'came away very much impressed with her wonderful power and business-like sagacity'. Marau, added Arundel, 'is certainly a woman to have on your side instead of your enemy'.[134] Thus, during the evening of 28 February, 'Champagne was then brought in, and we all drank

[124] Ibid., 4.
[125] Arundel, 'Report 139', 29 Jan. 1908, 11, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[126] Arundel, 'Report 136', 13 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[127] Arundel, 'Report 137', 17 Jan. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[128] Arundel, 'Report 136', 13 Jan. 1908, 1–2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[129] Arundel, 'Report 135', 9 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[130] Ibid., 1.
[131] Marautaaroa Salmon to Arundel, 11 Jan. 1908, Balding Papers, Box 1. Arundel would write: 'Of course we never expected her to give in for 40,000 frs. but at the same time if she is unreasonable, she may have to be severely left alone, and when we start operations more of her followers will no doubt fall away from her than have done already, and the whole thing may collapse'. Arundel, 'Report 136', 13 Jan. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[132] Arundel, 'Report 144', 17 Mar. 1908, 3, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[133] Ibid., 4–5.
[134] Ibid., 5.

success to the Société française des îles du Pacifique', the then name of the company.[135] Marau then expressed her pleasure at hearing that the worked-out lands on Banaba had proven capable of being planted on again once the phosphate had been extracted.[136] Could this have been a further example of concern about the fate of the island under the mine? Again, we can only speculate, because as was the case with Tiare, this potential moment of unease was quickly swept away by the smooth words and confident ideology of Arundel and his fellow 'phosphateers' – all washed down by champagne and the promise of a steady stream of royalties. The party came to an end at the respectable time of 9 p.m., with Arundel, a reputed teetotaller, heading home to tend to his business correspondence and journal entries in order to see out his famous 18-hour workday.

Yet another Intrusion

Almost as soon as Arundel pronounced that 'the matter is a thing of the past', he found himself involved in yet another business dispute that again placed the project in danger.[137] It was not a 'clever' local woman standing in his way this time, but a 'rather impressive' man, 'strong, well built, of middle age' and above average height. He was even rumoured to have received the *Légion d'honneur.*[138] His name was Albert Bonnel de Mézières, and he was employed by a German-backed, rival company to create difficulties for Arundel and colleagues in the colony. He had made his name in colonial Africa as a sort of French Flashman, an imperial careerist taking part in multiple expeditions with the aim of opening the continent for French trade and commerce (figure 2.7).[139] As such, he was a man after Arundel's heart, whose accomplishments in the name of empire rivalled his own and hence, he was treated accordingly as a worthy rival.

[135] Ibid., 8.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Arundel to Brander, 14 Apr. 1908, 2, PMB: 1175, Reel 7.
[138] 'Report No.6 by G.C. Ellis, Papeete, 22 Jul. 1908', 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[139] *The Flashman Papers* were a series of novels authored by George Macdonald Fraser following the life of Sir Harry Flashman, a fictional colonial hero who first appeared in Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857). For more about Albert Bonnel de Mézières, see Numa Broc, *Dictionnaire Illustré des Explorateurs Français du XIXe Siècle Afrique* (CTHS: Paris, 1988), 36, or the confidential police report collected on him and his company which appears in Le Préfet de Police to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 28 Oct. 1908, ANOM: OCEA/122.

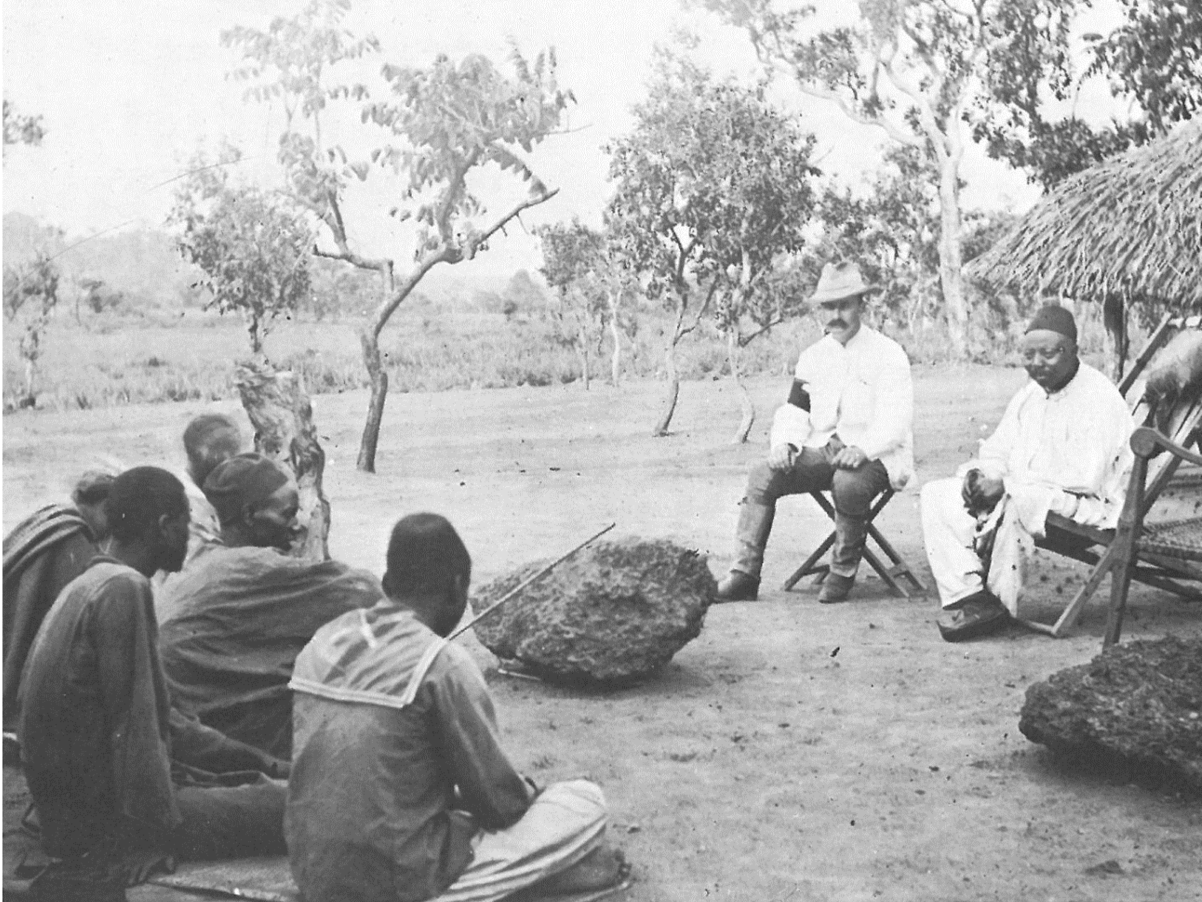

Figure 2.7 Albert Bonnel de Mézières (seated with black armband) in the French Congo.
Source: Broc, *Dictionnaire Illustré des Explorateurs Français du XIXe Siècle Afrique*, 36.

With his identity not yet ascertained, De Mézières arrived on Makatea in July 1908 ‘dressed with all his decorations’ and evidently in a charitable mood. ‘To the first man he shook hands with, he gave fr. 100; to the second, who brought him three cocoa-nuts, he gave 50 fr. and it is said to the people assembled, he gave 500 fr for them to have a picnic’, went the report from the company clerk stationed on Makatea. As George Ellis aptly summarized, ‘he appears to have opened his purse-strings very freely, and has done all he could to impress the Makateans’.[140] Arundel complained that his behaviour led to some of ‘the most intolerable and absurd’ requests for advances from the Islanders hitherto content with canned meat, biscuit and the prospect of future riches. One man, ‘being tired of walking’, asked for an automobile,[141] while there was another rumour that Hiti would be sent a wife from France.[142] Charles Albert Chassaniol, Marau’s ‘evil genius’ from the

[140] ‘Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis,’ 1 Aug. 1908, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[141] Arundel, ‘Report 147’, 2 Sep. 1908, 19, Balding Papers, Box 1. The automobile was first introduced to the colony in 1902 by Émile Vermeersch, Auguste Goupil’s brother-in-law.
[142] Ibid., 17.

previous affair, offered to provide his services to Arundel because ‘he was entirely “disgusted” with what was transpiring’.[143]

De Mézière’s sudden appearance raised the stakes, and Arundel’s team felt compelled to match his offers, finding themselves trapped in a dangerous rivalry for the affection of the local population. As Ellis wrote in late July:

> We have to give continued heavy advances to these land-owners at Makatea, who are now really a large body, and of course are greatly excited over the de Mes. [sic] proposals, and see before them the prospect of future wealth. The natives are excited here [Tahiti] also, and all the town is talking. In considering this question of advances, which is now serious in its proportions, I feel this is not the time to adopt a cheese-paring policy, or cut down the orders too severely. If we do this, the natives would at once say: “ah, there is no more money, we must look out!” The advances we have made, and the goods sent up, have greatly assured them during the last six weeks. Of course, when they are provided with houses, sewing-machines, clothes, tools and food, their requirements will be pretty fully satisfied: and there is no doubt it would be disastrous at the present moment to shutdown on these advances.[144]

The result of all this was that at least half of the population was rumoured to have switched their allegiances to the flashy newcomer by the end of July.[145] The tide of public opinion in Tahiti and metropolitan France appeared to have turned swiftly against Arundel as well. Earlier in 1908 Goupil had admitted to his business partners ‘that he wished we did not look so thoroughly English as we do’ because the Governor ‘had a kind of prejudice against English people and English interests’.[146] Thus once a report by the British Consul R.T. Simons found its way into the French press in the middle of the year, warning that they were ‘an English company who are exploiting Makatea under a French name, with English capital behind it: and that it will give employment to English shipping’, Ellis added that it had become ‘more than even good Frenchmen can stand’.[147] As a result, Marau claimed

[143] ‘Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis, 1 Aug. 1908, 8, Balding Papers, 8, Box 1.
[144] Ibid., 2.
[145] Ibid., 6.
[146] Arundel, ‘Report 134’, 6 Jan. 1908, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[147] ‘Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis’, 1 Aug. 1908, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1. There was a certain irony to this line of thought as Arundel soon discovered that 60 per cent of the large capital reserves De Mézières was drawing from were held by a London firm. See Arundel, ‘Report 155’, 10 Jan. 1909, 1, Balding Papers, Box 1.

that 'the populace of Papeete' had shifted to De Mézière's side.[148] Hence she endorsed sending in the gendarmerie, thinking they 'would have more effect on the native mind than even the Governor'.[149]

De Mézières' behaviour on Makatea was clearly an affront to the sober-minded gentlemen of the company. However, while Arundel was worried that the 'champagne was flowing pretty freely at the De M. table on Makatea', he was probably more concerned that his number one ally, Tiare, was partaking in it.[150] It was De Mézières' deliberate use of obstructive tactics and his growing popularity with landowners that aggravated them the most. For example, De Mézières' set about purchasing lands on the Temao foreshore, the only viable location for loading phosphate, knowing that this 'could give us trouble for a long time'.[151] The discovery of his true identity, and the realization that he could draw from massive capital reserves earned from Algerian phosphate, put nobody at ease. In Goupil's words, De Mézières' only concern was to 'block us and keep us blocked by losses, not as much to get Makatea as to keep it from being exploited'.[152] Though it is has been difficult to find his own thoughts on the matter, De Mézières was apparently happy to be dealing with a nominal French company, whom he judged 'so much easier to overthrow… than if it were English, when it would be more difficult and a diplomatic matter'.[153] He left Tahiti confident, telling the San Francisco press on his way back to Europe that he would return in three months with 'French capital and authority to begin the work'.[154]

Though he might not have caused a diplomatic incident per se, De Mézières' arrival on the scene was enough to induce the French administration and colonial ministry to interfere in the fast-developing squabble between Arundel and Goupil's company, the Société française des îles du Pacifique (which officially changed its name to the Compagnie française des Phosphates de l'Océanie in October 1908), and the newcomers (at this point called the Compagnie de l'Océanie française but later the Compagnie française des Phosphates du Pacifique). In any case, the Tahitian administration had little choice as the

[148] 'Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis', 1 Aug. 1908, 5, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[149] Ibid., 5.
[150] Arundel recounted that throughout the course of the evening 'De M had a great quarrel with Capt. Wilmot over a woman'. See Arundel, 'Report 147', 2 Sep. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[151] 'Precis of Mr. Agache's Report', 21 Sep. 1908, 5, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[152] 'Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis', 1 Aug. 1908, 6, Balding Papers. See, also, the August conversation between Arundel and Renault of the Banque de l'Indo-Chine recorded in Arundel, 'Report 147', 2 Sep. 1909, 13, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[153] 'Report No.7 by G.C. Ellis', 24 Jul. 1908, 6, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[154] 'Phosphate Found in Huge Bulk: French Agents Arrive from Tahiti with News of Discovery', *San Francisco Chronicle,* 4 Sep. 1908.

conflict resulted in some 70 cases being presented to the local courts disputing the validity of each sides' contracts.[155] With both companies also lodging official requests for a concession to mine the island, the official response was that under an 1810 law phosphate rock deposits were technically defined as quarries (*carrières*) and not mines, and therefore not concessionable.[156] However, seeing the mess unfolding in the courts, the administration knew that it would not be wise to let the two companies continue as they were, negotiating for land parcel by parcel. For the government, they had two principal concerns: one, that the mine would go ahead as quickly as possible; and two, that the 'native mind' would not be overly corrupted in the process. Complicated and drawn-out court proceedings involving Indigenous landowners clearly risked endangering both. So calls to establish a new mining code based on New Caledonia's – abrogating the need to deal with individual landowners – were received warmly, if not finally implemented until 1917.

In the meantime, one area where the administration thought it could constructively intervene was in regards to granting use rights for lands on the island classified as public domain.[157] Fearful of further delays, in April 1909 rights to the port at Temao were granted to the CFPO despite the matter not yet being settled in the courts.[158] This allowed the CFPO to start transporting machinery to the island via the *Cholita* (the small steamer they hired from Callao), as well as make progress on developing the island's infrastructure which, by the time of Governor François' four-day visit in late August 1909, had taken noticeable shape. Not only had the CFPO installed a wooden jetty, offices, hangars and rudimentary barracks for the 180-odd Polynesians they managed to recruit for the task, but they had already mined 50 tons of phosphate.[159] In comparison, the Governor commented that the rival company had made little progress and, while wishing to remain objective, he could not help but think he made the right decision back in April. The suspicion held by many that De Mézières and his company never intended to mine the island, but rather were more concerned with muddying the waters for as long as possible through the courts in order to eliminate a competitor, was hard to budge.[160] To further

[155] 'Note sur la situation litigieuse des deux Compagnies actuellement en présence à Makatea pour l'exploitation des gisements de phosphates dans cette île', 24 Sep. 1909, 6, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[156] Telegram from M. le Ministre des Colonies to Consul France, San Francisco pour Gov. Tahiti, 30 Jul. 1908, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[157] It pays to remember that under the 1887 land law, whatever land was not registered shortly after the official 1890–1 survey, automatically became public domain.
[158] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 175.
[159] François to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 27 Sep. 1909, 5, ANOM : OCEA/123.
[160] This was argued by the CFPO. See Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 28 Dec. 1910, ANOM: OCEA/124.

consolidate their position, the company decided that the moment had come to lay and establish moorings off Port Temao, in what were some of the deepest waters then known to the industry. Given the difficulty of the task, Arundel, with all his Pacific experience, and his team of British engineers, was called upon to provide the necessary equipment and expertise to oversee the operation.[161] A new ship, named the *Ocean Queen* in reference to Arundel's famous 'Coral Queen Guano' from Starbuck Island, was fitted out for the task.

The Death of the *Ocean Queen*

Figure 2.8: 'Poor Queen, she caught her hair in the rocks and it dragged her under the sea'.[162]
Source: Arundel Papers, NLA, MS5410, Box 16

Long since passed from the memories and received stories of the majority of Makatea's inhabitants is the story of Arundel and the shipwreck of his steamer, the 'beautiful' *Ocean Queen,* during its maiden 1909 voyage.[163] The wreck, of which nothing remains today, effectively brought the curtain down on an illustrious Pacific trading career. What was meant to be his coronation tour in fact turned into his dethroning as the steamer ran

[161] Arundel was widely recognized as an authority in laying moorings. See Bright, 'Biography of Arundel, John', Part 2, Book 3, Chapter 4, 4–5, Papers of John Arundel, NLA: MS 8904.
[162] Unnamed Tahitian in Lilian Arundel to Felician Magazine, 30 Nov. 1909, 8, PMB: 1227, Reel 2.
[163] Sydney Arundel to Balding, 28 Sep. 1909, PMB: 1227, Reel 2.

aground on the notoriously dangerous reef off Moumu. In mid-January 1910, a good four months after the event, Californian newspapers ran articles purportedly 'breaking' news about Arundel's ill-fated voyage the previous year in typically sensational fashion. 'Phosphate King Marooned on Island', read the *Pasadena Star*; 'a Robinson Crusoe experience of the twentieth century' it continued, as it painted a picture of 'the world's greatest phosphate magnate' embarrassingly cut down to size. The articles contained various factual errors, of the type Arundel was all-too-familiar-with yet no less frustrated by. And the reports appear have been based almost completely on hearsay that undoubtedly had been spreading ever since his unexpected arrival into San Francisco on the *Mariposa* on October 9. The Pasadena newspaper believed news of the disaster had been 'carefully suppressed because of the influences it might have in financial circles', though the *San Francisco Call* briefly reported the news in October 1909, as did various antipodean newspapers.[164]

According to the ship's captain, Christian Johannessen, the ship had been travelling at full-speed since leaving Pape'ete the night before until around 10 in the morning when he ordered it to slow its course as it was approaching the island. Without mentioning anything about 'flying her dress of gay flags' to impress the Islanders living at Moumu, Johannessen records that 'the engines suddenly ceased to work' at 10:15. Receiving news from below that the 'Aft Eccentric Rod on the high pressure cylinder was bent' (the same problem the ship encountered earlier in the voyage)[165], Johannessen

> at once ordered the rudder to be put to Port and the vessel to be swung out with her head right off the shore, at the same time telling the Second Engineer to go down and make the Engineering staff do everything in their power to get the engines to work, as the strong wind and current right on shore would drive the vessel on to the reef in a very short space of time.[166]

These evasive manoeuvres failed to stop the inevitable, and the steamer struck the reef: '[t]he vessel banged to and fro, with a jarring rasping sound', and according to Johannessen 'the concussion was so great that the people were almost thrown down.'[167]

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[164] 'Memoranda', *San Francisco Call,* 7 Oct. 1909, 17; 'An Island Wreck', *Evening Post* (Wellington), 8 Oct. 1909, 2; 'Ocean Queen Wreck', *The Star* (Sydney) 8 Oct. 1909, 5.
[165] 'Rapport de M.Garnier, Capitaine de Port et de M. Ferand, Capitaine au long cours concernant le naufrage du vapeur norvégien « Ocean Queen », à Makatea', n.d. 1, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[166] 'Captain Johannessen's Statement', 21 Sep. 1909, 1, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3.
[167] Sydney Arundel to Felician Magazine, 30 Nov. 1909, 8, PMB: 1227, Reel 2; 'Captain Johannessen's Statement', 21 Sep. 1909, 3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3.

From here, the safety boats and ladders were lowered and the ship evacuated on to the reef. Around fifty 'natives' already in the employ of the phosphate company were fetched for help but in the end, '[n]othing whatever of any value belonging to the ship was saved'.[168] The following seven hours must have been a painful time for Arundel, Johannessen and all those who were invested in the ship's fate, as they were stuck fruitlessly watching the *Ocean Queen* 'pounding herself to pieces' on the reef.[169] Then, 'at 8 in the evening the steamer, having pounded several holes in the sides and bottom, slid off the reef into the sea'.[170]

From here the recovery efforts of the ship's crew relied heavily on the help of locals, bringing to mind other celebrated acts of selfless bravery in the Pacific such as the daring rescue of wrecked sailors during the 1889 Apia hurricane by hundreds of Samoans, as retold by Robert Louis Stevenson.[171] A handful of onlookers, identified by the *Courier de Tahiti* as Pori, Teari [Tiare], Matu and Mahutu of Makatea, and Teata of Tautira in Tahiti, were responsible for alerting the outside world to the disaster and finding help as the island was not yet equipped with radio contact (figure 2.9).[172] After they 'toiled all night rowing to Tahiti' (John T. Arundel's daughter, Sydney Arundel, pointed out this voyage took three nights), the sailors were able to secure the services of two schooners to come to the rescue.[173] According to the *Pasadena Star,* 'the daring sailors rigged up and provisioned a small boat and promptly set out again for the high seas to intercept any possible vessels and get a rescue for the shipwrecked party left on the island'.[174] While this was taking place, Arundel, his family and the rest of the 'marooned party' were 'made sharers in the primitive life of the Islanders'.[175]

[168] 'Captain Johannessen's Statement', 21 Sep. 1909, 3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3.
[169] Arundel to Sir Everard im Thurn, 25 Jan. 1910, NAA: MP1174/1, 1094.
[170] 'Dazzle Natives, But Wreck Ship on Jagged Reef', *The San Francisco Call,* 10 Oct. 1909, 19.
[171] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (London: Cassell & Company, 1892), ch. 10. While it is doubtful whether Stevenson ever visited Makatea himself, he still wrote about the island after speaking to Wilmot in the late 1880s commenting on the problem of elephantiasis/filariasis among its inhabitants. See R.L. Stevenson, *In the South Seas: Being an Account of Experiences and Observations in the Marquesas, Paumotus and Gilbert Islands in the Course of Two Cruises, on the Yacht "Casco" (1888) and the Schooner "Equator" (1889)* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1900), 173, 179. For a more recent historical reconstruction of the 1889 hurricane, see Gregory Rosenthal, 'A Storm in Sāmoa: An Environmental Microhistory', *Journal of Theory and Practice* 21:1 (2017): 2–27.
[172] 'Arrival of the "Ocean Queen"', *Courier de Tahiti,* 23 Sep. 1909, 3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 25, folio 3. Other accounts have suggested that carrier pigeons were used.
[173] 'Dazzle Natives, But Wreck Ship on Jagged Reef', *The San Francisco Call,* 10 Oct. 1909, 19.
[174] 'Phosphate King Marooned on Island', *Pasadena Star,* 13 Jan. 1910.
[175] Ibid.

Figure 2.9: 'The Chiefs who offered to row to Tahiti'.
Source: Arundel Papers, NLA, MS5410, Box 16.

Yet, rather than relying on these heavily stylized, Robinson Crusoe-inspired newspaper accounts, our best source for the four days spent on Makatea comes from Arundel's eldest daughter Lilian in a despatch she wrote to the editor of London's St Felix School magazine, the *Felician,* where she recounted her story of the tumultuous voyage.[176] Here, there was no emphasis on 'squalid huts', or 'articles of gaudy color', but merely a short account of a hospitable reception, where the local chief gave up his house and the family were furnished with various gifts of 'cocoanuts, pigs etc'.[177]

For Lilian, the loss of the *Ocean Queen* felt like they 'had lost a home, a friend and many pleasant memories'.[178] Yet as usual, it is hard to find first-hand evidence that explains exactly how the phlegmatic Arundel felt about it all. In typical understated fashion, he described the action to Sir Everard im Thurn, with the following words:

[176] Lilian Arundel was born in New Zealand in 1883.
[177] 'Phosphate King and Two Daughters are Marooned', *Los Angeles Examiner,* 14 Jan. 1910; Sydney Arundel to Felician Magazine, 30 Nov. 1909, 8, PMB: 1227, Reel 2.
[178] Sydney Arundel to Felician Magazine, 30 Nov. 1909, 8, PMB: 1227, Reel 2.

> An accident occurred in the Engine Room causing her to stop and in about 20 minutes we were on the reef and about 7 hours afterwards she went down in very deep water. Fortunately no loss of life or accident of any kind occurred but you can well understand that it has been a very great shock to everybody, but everyone behaved particularly well including my daughters and their Aunt: we had 7 ladies on board altogether.[179]

Through the correspondence of Arundel's youngest daughter, Sydney,[180] we know that he was frustrated by the American reporting on the incident, 'supposed to have been sent by the rival French Company'.[181] But more importantly, through her we also know that Arundel suffered an attack on board the *Mariposa* on route to San Francisco involving dizziness and loss of memory, which Sydney feared might have been a stroke.[182]

Arundel cabled his resignation from the Pacific Phosphate Company to the London office while in San Francisco in late October. That the shock of the wreck prompted this decision, as well as a prolonged period of ill-health is certainly the line taken by Aimée Bright in her biography, but we have little evidence from the man himself. Bright detected a sign in his diary that suggested the man realized his departure from Tahiti in September would be his final goodbye: some of his colleagues had tried to cheer them on their farewell, but according to Arundel 'it was a little sad. Poor B. [Brander] said he felt he would soon have a big lump in his throat'.[183] Thus, the disaster meant he never made it back to Nauru and Banaba, his success stories. Instead, his 40-year Pacific career was thwarted on the limits of Makatea, the third, and more difficult phosphate island, just days after his 68th birthday.

Even though the ostensible purpose of the maiden trip was to fit 'his' phosphate islands – Nauru, Banaba and Makatea – with new moorings, Arundel invested a greater than usual amount of symbolic energy into the voyage. Although he felt it 'rather difficult to make up… [his] mind about this trip' earlier in the year, in the end, despite his age and the difficulty of the job at hand, the temptation to wind back the clock and make one last visit to the region was too strong. He felt it would 'to a certain extent crown my life's work in the Pacific'.[184] The fact that he took his family along with him is taken as a further sign by his biographer

[179] Arundel to Im Thurn, 24 Sep. 1909, NAA: MP1174/1, 1094.
[180] Sydney Arundel was born on Sydney Island in 1884.
[181] Sydney Arundel to Leonard, 10 Oct. 1909, PMB: 1227, Reel 2.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Bright, 'Biography of Arundel, John', Part 2, Chapter 5, 10-11, Papers of John Arundel, NLA: MS 8904.
[184] JTA to G.C. Ellis, 28 Jan. 1909, 4, PMB: 1175, Reel 8.

that he viewed this voyage as his last.[185] This surely caused the wreck to be all the more personally devastating. Whereas Arundel and his family apparently adored Banaba, it is safe to say after the events at Moumu that Makatea was not held with the same level of regard.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the importance of John T. Arundel to Makatea's history as a phosphate island. For someone who left such a vast written archive and played such a large role in the colonization of the Pacific, his name is not well known, especially in French Polynesia. Several writers have tried to write the biography of this 'idealistic and deeply religious, hard-headed man of business', but none have succeeded.[186] H.E. Maude, a former colonial administrator turned historian at the ANU, took up the project in the late 1950s and yet, despite the fact he 'felt an empathy towards him which I have never felt for anyone else', by the mid-1960s he had to concede that ill-health and the pressures of working in J.W. Davidson's new Pacific History department did not leave him enough time to devote to it.[187] Before Maude there was Aimée Bright, a journalist who Arundel supposedly thought highly of.[188] She completed a full manuscript in 1922 only to have Arundel's daughter object to it on the basis of style. Arundel's grandson John Aris found her prose 'often exasperating' and 'her digressions excessive', while Maude believed she lacked 'literary grace'.[189] Nonetheless her work, along with the sketch of a life written by the former LMS librarian, Irene Fletcher, did much to piece together a complicated life into a coherent and accurate narrative.[190]

Others have drawn extensively on the wealth of material left behind in the Arundel papers which were donated by the family to the ANU in 1960 (and transferred to the National Library of Australia in 1976). Ross Lamont, a historian who researched the history of the Pacific phosphate trade for his doctoral thesis in the 1970s, was hopeful that once he had

[185] Bright, 'Biography of Arundel', Part 2, Chapter 5, 8, Papers of John Arundel, NLA: MS 8904.
[186] H.E. Maude to John Aris, 4 Apr. 1988, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[187] Maude's correspondence with Sydney Aris [née Arundel] about the biography appears to have begun as early as 1947. Maude would pick up the project again in his retirement in the late-1980s, but by this time he felt, due to his advancing years, he was 'no longer equal to what would be an immense task involving several years of work… to do justice to Arundel's remarkable character and the many-faceted nature of his work'. See Maude to John Aris, 3 Mar. 1988, PMB: 1227, Reel 1. Maude admitted that in his lonely wandering across 'the uninhabited low atolls of the Central Pacific', he 'used to sense his [Arundel's] presence and felt that only he and I really understood the compelling attraction of these remote, lonely and minute islets in the immensity of the ocean'. See Maude to John Aris, 4 Apr. 1988, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[188] Maude to John Aris, 3 Mar. 1988, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[189] John Aris to Maude, 4 May 1988, PMB: 1227 Reel 1; Maude to John Aris, 3 Mar. 1988, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[190] I.M. Fletcher, 'John Thomas Arundel, 1841-1919', unpublished manuscript, 1960, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.

arranged all the material 'into a fat thesis' it would then 'be possible to unravel it all and write a publishable biography – now well overdue' of the man.[191] Unfortunately, he, like Maude, felt the pressure of teaching and researching at the same time too burdensome and never finished the project.[192] Arundel's life features prominently in the early part of *The Phosphateers*, and more recently Cushman uses the Arundel papers to recover the relationship between the man he calls the 'Anglo guano lord' – 'the world's most important guano producer of the late nineteenth century' – and his Niuean servant-cum-business partner, Mouga.[193]

It has not been my intention to write Arundel's biography in this chapter, but I have chosen to tell the history of the birth of the Makatean phosphate industry with Arundel as chief protagonist as a counter to a francophone historiography which underplays his role entirely. Arundel's claims to the deposits – contested as they were – and his pre-eminence in the industry at the time of discovery, helped ensure that the CFPO would carry a strong British flavour over its 60-year history. However, whereas all his would-be biographers have treated their subject in a favourable light, this chapter casts a darker shadow over the mining magnate who ran aground in more ways than one on Makatea. From the very first time he came across the island in 1870 and mistakenly found it lacking in mineral wealth, to the shipwreck in 1909, Makatea confounded the otherwise successful man.

As I have shown, the coming of the phosphate age on Makatea was not necessarily achieved through deception, but it relied on a specific set of circumstances which made the local population susceptible to the advances of the various men trying to make their fortune out of the island's resources. Even though there was the odd dissenting voice, most actors involved in this period shared a belief in the ideology of improvement or progress.[194] All actors, De Mézières and Marcadé perhaps excluded, wanted to see the colony (or themselves), reach its economic potential. The lack of dissent from Islanders themselves could have been the result of their misunderstanding the fundamental differences between the 19th-century 'guano age', where residual organic matter was scraped from the tops of uninhabited islands, and the new 20th-century 'phosphate age',

[191] Ross Lamont to John Aris, 17 May 1971, PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[192] Lamont has admitted 'it was the difficulty of including Makatea in the scope of my project that helped me towards abandoning it altogether', pers. comm., 3 May 2017.
[193] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers,* 3-131; Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 93.
[194] From the discovery of phosphate on Makatea, Arundel wanted the whole of the Tuamotu Archipelago surveyed within a 12-month period.

where whole islands came to be destroyed and 'unadulterated commercialism' was the order of the day.[195] What confused matters is that it was 'Aneru of the missionary spirit', the well-trusted trader who had so personified the Pacific guano age, who sat behind these fundamental new developments. His presence could well have lulled some into believing the new industry would be on a scale akin to the previous era.

On the other hand, money most certainly talked, and both Makatea and the wider colony were in a desperate financial state. The devout Mihiroa were excited about rebuilding their Sanito Church and the French Administration was keen to redress their debt and stave off the constant rumours that the colony was going to be sold to the British or Americans. We do not know whether Tiare received his overseas trip, or Hiti his French wife. But we do know that thanks to the mess that the government made of 19th-century land registration and the subsequent confusion over the early 20th-century contracting process, a high proportion of Makatea's *fatu fenua* came out of the deal with much less in their pockets than they had first imagined when Agassiz told them that their home was a treasured land. By 1917 the contracts signed originally were superseded by a new mining code which, as Newbury reminds us, contained no legally binding obligation for the CFPO to make royalty payments; they became 'a matter of company charity not written contract'.[196] This result, more than the sinking of the *Ocean Queen,* is the real tragedy of the story. As although the CFPO generally paid their royalties to landowners,[197] the lack of legal obligation meant that the supervision of this side of the business was always lax (and it also goes toward explaining why it took so long for the one franc per ton royalty rate to be adjusted to meet inflation).

In the shortterm, the wreck of the *Ocean Queen* and loss of mooring equipment set the company back up to four to six months, but by beating the challenge of De Mézières and his German-financed company,[198] the Anglo-French partnership between Arundel and the Pacific Phosphate Company and Goupil and Touze clearly gained the favour of the French administration which, as we have seen, had a vested interest in the industry's rapid

[195] *The Bulletin* (California), 25 Dec. 1919, in PMB: 1227, Reel 1.
[196] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 184.
[197] Some might find the use of the word 'generally' here overly charitable as there is no shortage of family histories that suggest certain landowners never received the royalties they felt they were due. See Danny Pittman, interview with Nicholas Hoare, 17 Aug. 2018.
[198] An agreement was struck between the two companies in May 1910, granting a seat on the board of the CFPO in return for the liquidation of De Mézières' company. See Hermann Voss and Alwin R. Dickinson to the Board of Directors, PPC, 'Report 17', 21 May 1910, 14, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647. The rival company's representative, Parisian banker J. de Bethmann, remained on the board until 1920.

development. In order to start delivering export receipts and the one franc per ton royalty, the new Governor, Adrien Bonhoure, extended the company's rights to land held in the public domain across the entire island which allowed the CFPO to begin mining their first parcel of land. The problem, however, was the land they chose to begin with, the Umara block in the north of the island, had been claimed and registered in 1891 and was thus not public domain at all.[199] To make matters worse, export receipts were nowhere near as forthcoming as the administration would have expected. As will be outlined in chapter four, competition with rival phosphate companies throughout the early decades limited the quantity of exports leaving the island and, in turn, limited the local administration's ability to raise export duties due to fears that rising costs would send them into financial ruin.[200] Economy also played a distinctive role in deciding the type of worker the company would try to introduce to the island, a matter taken up in the chapter that follows.

[199] Newbury, 'The Makatea Phosphate Concession', 182.
[200] Ibid., 184.

Chapter 3: Problems of the *main-d'œuvre*

Figure 3.1: Japanese Fete at Makatea, 1913.
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-157.

By the middle of 1911, and with the CFPO's capital reserves running dangerously low, concerns were expressed from the British side of the company that only 5,000 tons of phosphate had been produced at Makatea.[1] There were extenuating reasons. The loss of Arundel's *Ocean Queen* had delayed the installation of mooring equipment, and the 'continual rains' made drying the phosphate by natural means almost impossible. Moreover, 'the enormous difficulties' faced by the company in securing title to the phosphate deposits meant that the company's time and resources were constantly being diverted away from the more practical tasks of developing and embedding the island's necessary infrastructure.[2] However, at the head of this list justifying the lack of demonstrable progress was the 'want of labour'.[3] It is true that the company had managed to recruit almost 200 workers from Tahiti and its surrounds to construct the jetty and other early installations. Yet as the Australian engineer John M. Coane remarked after touring the island in April 1911: 'As far as I can learn, not a man on Makatea has had any experience anywhere in the working of phosphate, while the tradesmen… have mostly been drawn from Papeete and are not generally of a high class'.[4]

Estimating that 300 workers would be required to get operations to a satisfactory level, the company concluded that it was 'absolutely impossible to recruit half or even a quarter' of this number from within the colony.[5] Therefore, just as had been done on Banaba and Nauru – or at New Caledonia's nickel mines prior to that – management turned to Asia to fulfill their requirements.[6] Framed here as an inadequacy in the size of the pool of labour, it is also clear that some in the company judged the *quality* of labourer to be lacking as well, with the latter determined by a combination of reliability and price. For example, the directors of the CFPO's parent company, the Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC), would later report that local Polynesian 'labour was so unreliable and expensive that we had to resort to Japanese labour'.[7] As we will see, the problems arising from the decision to turn

[1] Herman Voss and Alwin Dickinson, 'Note Respecting La Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l'Oceanie', 27 Oct. 1911, 4, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[2] Ibid., 5.
[3] Ibid., 4.
[4] J.M. Coane to L. Bertrand, n.d., 12, attached to 'Note Respecting La Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l'Océanie', 27 Oct. 11, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[5] L. Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 4 Nov. 1909; J. Mesnier to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 14 Apr. 1910, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[6] Yann Bencivengo, 'L'immigration japonaise en Nouvelle-Calédonie: une illustration de l'affirmation du Japon dans le Pacifique', *JSO* 135 (2012): 216.
[7] Herman Voss and Alwin Dickinson, 'Note Respecting La Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l'Océanie', 27 Oct. 1911, 4, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647. Arundel had previously quipped in likely reference to the British colonial secretary's decision to uphold the 1889 ordinance about the illegality of recruiting Hong Kong

to Asia were numerous; yet the main complication was that the company's requests came just as a wave of anti-Asian fervour washed over the colony. Faced with these developments, the French administration found itself once again in an awkward bind, forced to weigh the large-scale economic development promised by the phosphate works against the more localized political concerns championed by a largely xenophobic business community.

Set against this backdrop of competing developmental priorities – far from unique in the early 20th-century colonial Pacific – this chapter outlines the CFPO's efforts to secure and manage a 'reliable' *main-d'œuvre* (labour force) in the decades prior to the Second World War. Focusing on the recruitment of Asian indentured or 'coolie' labour (as opposed to skilled labour), I describe the kinds of labour relations that were needed on the island to sustain such a large-scale, and long-term, industry, hitherto unseen in French Polynesia. These arrangements posed particular challenges to the colony, which after having attended to the challenge of land ownership in the late 19th century, then turned its attention to the twinned problems of immigration and labour in the first decades of the new century. Though never exactly singing from the same song sheet, as the biggest single industry in the colony, the needs of the CFPO often drove colonial policy by the time of the interwar period. The company's size, and economic might, meant that its priorities were almost always given a hearing, often at the expense of long-term developmental goals. By focusing on the CFPO's efforts to secure a reliable workforce, this chapter explores the intersections between company, state, civil society and migrant worker.

At the heart of this chapter is the tension between the desire to create productive, labouring classes out of colonized peoples and the more practical imperative of digging up massive quantities of phosphate rock. According to Maurice Besson, a leading public servant and thinker in the French colonial ministry during the interwar years, the colonial problem was about 'transforming districts that have more or less natural wealth into producing countries, whose steady and progressive evolution tends to become identical with the conditions of the economic life in the mother country'.[8] While individualizing land title and breaking up large holdings occupied one side of the coin, he regarded 'a definite labour policy' as being

labourers to places outside the British Empire, that thanks to 'Lord Elgin's action about China', they were restricted 'practically to Japanese'. See Arundel to Secretary, PPC, 'No.334', 1907, 2, PMB: 1175, Reel 6; Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905–1908* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 94–6.

[8] Maurice Besson, 'Labour Legislation in the French Colonies', *International Labour Review* 16 (1927): 487.

on the other.[9] Even if he believed the eventual goal was to bring the colonies into line with the laws and conditions of metropolitan France, he also thought that colonial labour legislation was 'a very delicate product' and, due to the reputed difference in civilizational attainment of France's various colonized peoples, its implementation required 'due prudence'.[10] In words that would have resonated with the 'guardians' at the League of Nations' Permanent Mandates Commission,[11] Besson cautioned against rolling out labour reforms too rapidly in some of the French colonies, at least until greater civilizational progress had been achieved.[12] Such thinking helped fuel the continual recruitment of Asian labourers at Makatea until these dominant paternalistic attitudes lost favour after the Second World War.

Ideas regarding the so-called civilizational readiness of Polynesians for work, forged through a combination of imperial and practical thinking and experience, coupled with an endemic lack of public funding for the faraway colony, meant that labour legislation was slow to be introduced and even slower to be enforced. The revolving door of colonial careerists in the role of governor discouraged the development of a consistent labour policy and gave undue scope to influential personalities and companies to bend policy to their needs. No one, the CFPO above all, appeared all that interested in motivating the Polynesian to work, especially not after a series of failed attempts in the industry's early years. The *indigénat,* a system created in 1881 to regulate and extract the labour of Indigenous populations across the French Empire, was not applied to anywhere near the same extent in French Polynesia as it was in New Caledonia, for example, where large sections of the Kanak population were forced to work on indentured contracts.[13] Rather than exert legislative or physical duress, administrators in the EFO hoped that Polynesians could be eventually nudged into waged work by less coercive means. Though less pronounced than in other parts of the Pacific, ideas about the Polynesians as a dying race did circulate from time to time (above all in the Marquesas which were hit hardest by the effects of colonization), but this was rarely used to justify the importation of workers.[14]

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 511.
[11] See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[12] The *International Labour Review* was established by the League of Nations' International Labour Organization in 1921.
[13] Isabelle Merle and Adrian Muckle, *L'indigénat: Genèses dans l'Empire français. Pratiques en Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: CNRS, 2019), 71.
[14] Revel to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 Jun. 1914, 1, ANOM: OCEA/66; Revel, 'Situation économique et commerciale', 6 Feb. 1922, 11, SPAA: 48W/954.

Since companies such as the CFPO held fast to their original views that the Polynesian would not work, and regulations about recruiting other Pacific Islanders were considerably tighter than in the 19th century, this left them no choice but to recruit the *main-d'œuvre* from further afield.

Responses to the recruiting issue ranged widely, with most, however, assuming pragmatic positions. Arundel, who had a reputation for being an honest and fair recruiter of Pacific Islanders, was one of the first to recognize the changing face of the industry: arranging for Japanese workers to be supplied to Banaba in 1907, and admitting to the French governor in early 1908 that Chinese labour would probably be required on Makatea.[15] Even though recruiting labour into the colony was not exactly unusual, the scale of the CFPO's demands was of a nature not seen since William Stewart's efforts to recruit Chinese workers for his cotton plantation in the 1860s and 1870s. In responding to a request from the leader of the Atiu Cook Islander community on Tahiti, who wondered whether his old boss might need 50 or 100 of his men for the new enterprise, Arundel replied that he would need many more than that and doubted whether the British consulate would condone recruiting such a large number.[16] On the other hand, some French officials appeared open to the idea of recruiting Asian labourers despite an earlier suspension of labour recruiting, and the local business community's fears about Asian migration in general.[17] Acting Governor Charlier did not object to Arundel's initial suggestion to import Chinese workers, provided 'very careful sanitary regulations' were put in place.[18] Others, like the colonial inspector Victor Fillon, thought it necessary to recruit from outside for the sake of the local agricultural industry which could not afford to have its workers enticed to Makatea.[19] Officials understood that the scarcity of workers meant that decisions about the phosphate industry would have wider ramifications throughout the colony.

[15] Arundel to Watanabe, 24 Jul. 1907, PMB: 1175, Reel 8; Arundel, 'Report 134', 6 Jan. 1908, 2, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[16] Arundel, 'Report 134', 6 Jan. 1908, 4, Balding Papers, Box 1.
[17] The Ministry of the Marine suspended recruitment from outside the colony in 1872 due fears of Peruvian labour traders, and the negative publicity brought to the industry following the passing of the British Pacific Islanders' Protection Act (1872), see Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 173.
[18] Known occasionally as *ma'i pake* (the Chinese sickness) in Hawai'i, it was widely (although erroneously) believed that leprosy was introduced to the Pacific by Chinese labourers. See Kerri A. Inglis, '*Nā hoa o ka pilikia* (Friends of Affliction): A Sense of Community in the Molokai Leprosy Settlement of 19th Century Hawai'i', *JPH* 52:3 (2017): 289n4; Raeburn Lange, 'Leprosy in the Cook Islands, 1890–1925', *JPH* 52:3 (2017): 305. Chinese labourers were also blamed for earlier outbreaks of dysentery, infantile paralysis and tuberculosis on Nauru. See Nancy Viviani, *Nauru: Phosphate and Political Progress* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1970), 37.
[19] The CFPO initially drew much of their labour from the Leeward Islands, Victor Fillon to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 31 Aug. 1909, 20, ANOM: OCEA/122.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to convey that while perhaps cheap in theory, Asian workers were not necessarily the reliable labour force the CFPO originally imagined. After describing early French colonial attitudes towards the presence of Chinese and other Asian migrants in general, I turn my attention to the experiences of the Japanese, Chinese and Indochinese indentured labourers who came to dig phosphate on Makatea on the premise of local labour shortages. As scholars have noted in other French imperial settings, the interwar period is rife with examples of labour unrest and other acts of resistance.[20] Phosphate islands were no exception, with Chinese riots taking place for various reasons on Christmas Island in 1919 and 1924/5, Banaba in 1925, and Nauru in 1926 and 1930.[21] In some cases, this radicalism and/or animosity was brought to Makatea by the workers themselves but in others, it was born or heightened on the island by the CFPO's failure to provide adequate living and working conditions. A particularly telling fact is the frequency with which new arrivals struck early into their contracts, which tends to suggest that conditions on the island fell short of what had been sold to them by the recruiting companies. Moreover, the prevailing assumption that assembling people of different backgrounds would automatically lead to conflict decreased the company's chances of finding a more lasting solution to the persistent labour difficulties it faced. While the Makatea experience for the majority of indentured labourers was but a brief and difficult sojourn, for others, it became a gateway to more permanent settlement in French Polynesia and eventual French naturalization. Seen from this perspective, we can identify how Makatea contributed towards the cosmopolitanism or *métissage* that so defines French Polynesian society today.[22]

The 'Chinese Question'

While it is often said today that one struggles to find a Polynesian without some hint of Chinese ancestry, such nonchalance about racial mixing was absent in previous eras.[23]

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[20] Erica J. Peters, 'Resistance, Rivalries, and Restaurants: Vietnamese Workers in Interwar France', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:1 (2007): 109–43; Stephen Pascoe, 'A "Weapon of the Weak": Electric Boycotts in the Arab Levant and the Global Contours of Interwar Anti-Imperialism', *Radical History Review* 134 (2019): 116–41.

[21] John Hunt, *Suffering through Strength: The Men who Made Christmas Island* (Canberra: John Hunt, 2011), 93–104, 114; Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 21, file 3; J.C. Woodmansey, 'History of Nauru Police Force', in Barrie Macdonald Papers, Archives New Zealand (hereinafter ANZ), AANF 897/4/c, BPC 24, R21948622.

[22] Cf. Anne-Christine Trémon, who has argued that the Chinese indentured labour experience on Makatea was the exception to the rule, and can thus be safely ignored in studies of the French Polynesian Chinese community. See Anne-Christine Trémon, 'From "Voluntary" to "Truly Voluntary" Associations: The Structure of the Chinese Community in French Polynesia, 1865–2005', *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 3:1 (2007): 29n11.

[23] By 1996, Jimmy Marc Ly spoke of the end of history for the Chinese community in French Polynesia, stating: 'Fortunately or unfortunately, it is now an integral part of French Polynesian history'. See Jimmy Marc Ly, *Hakka*

From initial qualms about recruiting Chinese to work on Stewart's cotton plantation to the artist Paul Gauguin's *fin-de-siècle* press campaigns, the so-called 'Chinese question' was a near constant in Tahitian colonial discourse. In 1911 the presence of some 975 Chinese in the colony (out of a population of 26,000 Polynesians and 2,150 French citizens) caused the editor of the colony's long-running socialist newspaper, *Le Libéral* (1906–18), to complain that for over 30 years the government had been turning a deaf ear to European cries of 'distress and despair' about what he labelled the *invasion chinoise*.[24] There had been grumblings from certain quarters over the original introduction of around 1000, mostly Hakka, men to the Atimaono cotton plantation in the mid-1860s, but these complaints were mainly limited to Stewart's competitors, frustrated that the planter gained a monopoly over cheap labour.[25] Yet, as the century wore on, and more and more free migrants arrived from Southern China (often via *Gao Gam San* or Old Gold Mountain [San Francisco]), anti-Chinese sentiment of the more virulent kind steadily increased to the point that, by the century's end, several influential colonial newspapers joined together to campaign openly against this so-called invasion.[26] While these anti-Chinese sentiments usually manifested publically in the form of concerns over hygiene (for example, as vectors of leprosy) or public morality (where opium and gambling were always an easy target), they were doubtlessly driven by deeper anxieties about the efficiency of Chinese businessmen whom *Libéral* editor Eugéne Brunschwig claimed outnumbered white shop owners by 50 to one in 1911.[27]

One prominent colonist who did not seem to mind the increasing Chinese presence was the CFPO's Auguste Goupil.[28] Believing that vested commercial interests were at the base of all the hysteria, Goupil swam against the tide of his fellow council members by defending the interests of the Chinese community and rejecting the idea of a poll tax modelled on the one already in place in New Zealand. His thesis, published in February 1899, argued that the new restrictive measures introduced in December 1898 ran counter to the principles

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en Polynésie (Papeete: Association Wen Fa, 1996), 111, cited in Trémon, 'From "Voluntary" to "Truly Voluntary" Associations', 1.

[24] Eugène Brunschwig, 'L'invasion chinoise: notre dernière forteresse', *Le Libéral,* 10 Jul. 1911, 1.

[25] Gérald Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti : de l'aversion à l'assimilation, 1865–1966* (Paris: Musée de l'Homme, 1967), 30.

[26] Robert Aldrich, *The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842–1940* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 166. The French artist Paul Gauguin was famously part of this group, publishing multiple anti-Chinese editorials in both his short-run journal *Le Sourire* (1899), and in the newspaper he edited, *Les Guêpes* (1900). See 'Toujours les Chinois', *Les Guêpes*, 12 Sep. 1900, cited in Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti,* 44; Margaret E. Burns, 'The Chinese Community in French Polynesia: Scholarly Sources of Understanding', *China Review International* 7:1 (2000): 31–2.

[27] Brunschwig, 'L'invasion Chinoise', 1.

[28] Goupil was a member of the Administrative Council from 1878–80, Colonial Advisor from 1881–85, Privy Councillor from 1887–98, and was elected General Counsel in 1889. See O'Reilly, *Tahitiens*, 223.

of the French Republic and more particularly to the 1885 Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin) signed to end the Sino-French War.[29] He pointed out that the number of business licences issued to Chinese *commerçants* had actually decreased since 1885 (from 73 to 63).[30] And, even then, he thought the presence of Chinese merchants stimulated the sluggish colonial economy, benefitting local consumers – white and Indigenous – in terms of choice, quality and price.[31] His arguments evidently found favour in Paris and the local *Conseil Général*'s decision to tax the Chinese was overturned in September 1899.[32]

Despite winning metropolitan favour with his arguments, Goupil's victory did little to stop the momentum of the anti-Chinese lobby in Pape'ete. On the back of a large public meeting, Gauguin printed the following inflammatory remarks in October 1900:

> The statistics present us with the imposing figure of 12 million Chinese operating in the Pacific, progressively appropriating for themselves all the business of Oceania. What will become of this famous invasion of Attila's hordes, whose own history keeps us in terror? … This yellow stain tainting our national pavilion makes me red in the face.[33]

Though the line was often blurred, it is worth emphasizing that the animosity was not so much directed at the first wave of migrants – that is, the time-expired Atimaono *huagong* or coolie labourers who overwhelmingly married into Polynesian families after the collapse of Stewart's plantation – but the second wave of more commercially minded migrants who arrived as free, single men in their hundreds from the 1890s onwards. Most worryingly, they were successful enough to be able to afford to bring over their wives and families.[34]

Of the c.5,000 Hakka and Cantonese migrants who arrived in the colony from the Pearl River Delta region between 1880 and 1930, around half came in the seven years leading

[29] Auguste Goupil, *Mémoire présenté à M. le Gouverneur des Établissements Français de l'Océanie par 50 patentés Chinois sur la taxe d'immatriculation des patentés Asiatiques* (Papeete: Imprimerie Léonce Brault, 1899), 16–7; Aldrich, *The French Presence in the South Pacific,* 166–7.
[30] In the same period, licenses given to non-Chinese business owners increased from 123 to 150, Goupil, *Mémoire,* 5–6.
[31] Ibid., 8–10.
[32] Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti*, 48; Margaret Willson, Clive Moore and Doug Munro, 'Asian Workers in the Pacific', in *Labour in the South Pacific,* ed. Clive Moore, Jacqueline Leckie and Doug Munro (Townsville: James Cook University of Northern Queensland, 1990), 94.
[33] *Les Guêpes,* 12 Oct. 1900, cited in Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti,* 49.
[34] Trémon, 'From "Voluntary" to "Truly Voluntary" Associations', 6.

up to the First World War.[35] At least 500 of these early-century arrivals were women.[36] Being shop-owners for the most part, they were migrants who conformed to the *huaqiao* or sojourner pattern which, according to Wang Gungwu's schema, would mean they had no interest in assimilating to the dominant culture and remained loyal to the Qing and later nationalist governments instead.[37] It was the *huaqiao* migrant who attracted the ire of Gauguin and his ilk, and it was they who Governor Léonce Jore had in mind when, in 1930, he attempted to define the problem in the following terms:

> in reason of their mode of living, their modest needs and their commercial methods and habits, the Chinese immigrant constitutes a dangerous – and too often victorious – competitor for the *Indigène* and more readily, the European or *assimilé* [*demi*]. This is what constitutes the Chinese question, of whose importance has never escaped the public powers.[38]

Even the colonial lobbyist, Pierre Mille, who argued for the interdiction of Chinese migration in a newspaper article titled *'l'invasion jaune à Tahiti'*, admitted that it would be 'impossible to do without' temporary bonded labour as 'without them, the entire agriculture industry would collapse'.[39]

With businessmen rather than labourers in mind, the Chinese question evolved to the point where migrants were tolerated provided their presence in the colony could be monitored. However logical this might have seemed in 1930, the distinction was much less evident in the first decade of the century when Goupil continued to defend the rights of the Chinese community, failing, as it turned out, to overturn the introduction of an annual sojourner tax on 'all male foreigners of continental Asian or African origin' in 1908.[40] Whereas historians have made much of Goupil's principled stand over the years, its self-interest at this moment, just as the CFPO was entering the market for Asian labour, needs to be

[35] Anne-Christine Trémon, 'Entre ideal et distanciation: la relation diasporique aux villages d'origine en Chine méridionale', *Diasporas: Circulations, migrations, histoire* 31 (2018): para. 8.
[36] Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti,* 50; Aldrich, *The French Presence in the South Pacific,* 167. Between 1907 and 1914, 2,512 Chinese arrived in the colony, see Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti*, 55.
[37] Wang Gungwu, 'Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective', in *Observing Change in Asia: Essays in Honour of J.A.C. Mackie*, ed. R.J. May and William J. O'Malley (Bathurst: Crawford House Press, 1989), 36–7. Cf. Keir Reeves and Benjamin Mountford who push back against the sojourning thesis in Australian history, Keir Reeves and Benjamin Mountford, 'Sojourning and Settling: Locating Chinese Australian History', *Australian Historical Studies* 42:11 (2011): 111–25. It was in fact a legal requirement for overseas Chinese to register and pledge their loyalty to the Chinese state.
[38] Jore to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 30 Aug. 1930, 1, ANOM: OCEA/125.
[39] Pierre Mille, 'L'invasion jaune à Tahiti', *Dépêche Coloniale,* 7 Mar. 1930, in ANOM: OCEA/125.
[40] Coppenrath, *Les Chinois de Tahiti*, 51.

underlined.[41] Nobody was better placed to realize the weakness of colonial legislation to differentiate between free and temporary groups than Goupil. He recognized the 1908 decree for what it was: a blunt instrument that would impose yet another cost on his fledgling mining company. With this ruling confirming that opinion throughout multiple levels of the political hierarchy had hardened, the interests of the phosphate industry must have been at the forefront of his mind. The CFPO's initial decision to furnish their *main-d'œuvre* with Japanese rather than Chinese nationals would not have been enough to ease his concerns.[42]

From the *invasion chinoise* to the *invasion asiatique*

The CFPO were in fact engaged in two great battles against the colonial administration throughout 1909–10. The first involved finding a way to import their machinery and equipment without paying exorbitant duties;[43] the second was about convincing the administration that recruiting Japanese workers, who they believed 'absolutely essential' to the progression of their work, would not become a political flashpoint within the colony.[44] As Governor Joseph François commented, with the chamber of commerce stirring up fears of an imminent '*invasion asiatique*', the CFPO had launched their request at 'a highly unfortunate moment'.[45]

For the majority of Pape'ete's European community, the popular slogan 'Chinese invasion' simply became an 'Asian invasion' once news reached them of the CFPO's plans in 1909.[46] Members of the colony's two administrative councils were busy stirring up fears that Tahiti would go the way of Hawai'i, whose administrators had been welcoming Japanese plantation workers in their thousands since 1885.[47] Yet whereas few members bothered to differentiate between the two nationalities, Governor François, who had spent five days on Makatea in August 1909, seemed particularly agitated by the possibility of a

[41] Pierre-Yves Toullelan ed., *Encyclopédie de la Polynésie: la France en Polynésie, 1842–1960* (Tahiti: Christian Gleizal, 1990), 100.
[42] Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 30 Jul. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[43] Records relating to this issue can be found at ANOM: OCEA/123.
[44] Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 4 Nov. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[45] François to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 Mar. 1910; M. le Ministre des Colonies to M. le Président du Conseil d'administration de la CFPO, 9 May 1910, ANOM: OCEA/123. According to the Governor, both the *Conseil privé* and the *Conseil d'administration* 'considered this invasion to be a real peril', see François to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 4 Sep. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[46] Bruno Saura, *Tinito: La communauté chinoise de Tahiti: installation, structuration, intégration* (Tahiti: Au vent des îles, 2002), 106.
[47] 'Meeting of the Conseil Privé and Conseil d'Administration', 21 Aug. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123. For more about the c. 200,000 *Issei* who migrated to Hawai'i between 1885 and 1924, see Yukiko Kimura, *Issei: Japanese Immigrants in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992).

future Japanese contingent containing government spies, something he believed was a danger wherever Japanese workers were present throughout the empire.[48] Repeated assurances by the company that no more than 300 workers were required did little to convince the Governor who expressed his concern about the intentions of so-called enterprising nations like Japan and the colony's lack of ability to defend itself; a concern heightened by the impending opening of the Panama Canal and the colony's newfound strategic importance as a result.[49]

To the members' annoyance, there was little the administration could do to stand in the company's way; François commented that 'they had no more ability to oppose the arrival of Japanese to the colony than British or Italians'.[50] The CFPO knew this, and despite not wishing to upset a vengeful legislature which could sting them with further duties, decided to continue negotiating with the Japanese emigration company, eventually informing Paris in November that 20 engineers were all but on the boat.[51] On the eve of their arrival in March 1910, a meeting was held between the CFPO and François at which the company representatives attempted to convince the sceptical Governor that a distinction needed to be made between allowing free Chinese to enter the colony, and the indentured labour they were proposing where repatriation clauses had been written into the contracts.[52] The Governor replied that he was required to wear two hats: even if he personally agreed with the company's rationale, and appreciated the negative repercussions for the colony if the CFPO absorbed the entirety of the local workforce, as Governor he was obliged to represent the opinion of the two councils, which evidently did not so readily differentiate between these different parts of the problem.[53] That said, in the absence of any formal regulation of labour recruitment, the company was legally free to do as it wished, and Japanese recruitment continued.

The fact that the PPC also succeeded in their attempts to convince the Colonial Office in 1910 that the recruitment of Japanese workers for Banaba was a necessity suggests that however politically unpopular Asian immigration may have been at this time, neither the

[48] 'Compte-Rendu de la visite faite au Gouverneur par MM. Touze et Bonnet, le 21 Mars 1910', 25 Mar. 1910, 2, ANOM: OCEA/123. François was Governor in Pondicherry prior to his Tahitian posting.
[49] François to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 22 Aug. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123. Many predicted Tahiti would become a major coaling station after the canal's opening, see 'Rapport de Mission de Monsieur l'ingénieur Volmat', pt. 1, 7, ANOM: 1TP/1166.
[50] 'Meeting of the Conseil Privé and Conseil d'Administration', 21 Aug. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[51] Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 4 Nov. 1909, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[52] 'Compte-rendu de la visite faite au gouverneur par MM. Touze & Bonnet, le 21 Mars 1910', 25 Mar. 1910, 2, ANOM: OCEA/123.
[53] Ibid., 3.

French nor British were willing to stand in the way of these increasingly powerful firms.[54] Faced with few alternatives, the argument of the phosphate industry was both simple and persuasive.[55] In expressing his company's desire to recruit 300 Japanese for Banaba, PPC secretary A.J. Reeves wrote:

> It would probably be difficult for anyone not thoroughly acquainted with the system on which the business of the Pacific Phosphate Company is conducted to appreciate the paramount importance – not to say the vital necessity – of a reserve of other than Polynesian labour being permanently kept in the service of the Company.[56]

Stressing the unique nature of the phosphate trade, he went on to write that 'the prosperity, if not the existence' of their company completely depended on 'the punctual execution' of their phosphate contracts and that this 'entirely rests on the security with which we can rely upon a permanently continuous supply of labour'. In making their request, the PPC were not necessarily criticizing the ability of Pacific Islanders to do the job ('We are perfectly satisfied with Kanaka labour'), but emphasized instead, like the CFPO, the shortage of workers to undertake it ('if we can only get enough of it').[57]

Still, at no point did the two companies seem willing to place their own recruiting practices or working conditions under the spotlight. Referring to the 'uncertain' supply of Pacific Island workers, Reeves reasoned:

> The success of a recruiting expedition can never beforehand be counted on with certainty. Sometimes when they are well off and plenty prevails in the islands, the natives are not unnaturally disinclined to leave their homes. At other times they may be influenced by some passing whim or superstition, and at others they are prejudiced by the persuasions of those unfriendly to the Company.[58]

[54] PPC (Melbourne) to PPC (London), 'General 797', 14 Sep. 1909, 2, PMB: 1207, Reel 13.
[55] The argument for indentured labour was succinctly framed by R.W. Robson of the *Pacific Islands Monthly:* 'If the land-owning islanders will not hire themselves out as labourers – and why should they? – then labourers must be provided from some other source'. See 'Indentured Labour in the Pacific', *PIM,* 24 Nov. 1936, 3.
[56] Reeves to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 7 Jun. 1910, 1, PMB: 1207, Reel 12.
[57] Ibid., 2.
[58] Ibid.

Put this way, the classic argument for indentured over free labour won the day. Whether it was Japanese labour for Makatea and Banaba, or Chinese labour for Nauru,[59] the fact that these workers came from afar under contracts of indenture simply offered the companies a level of control and security that they could not attain by employing local workers. In the case of Makatea, these decisions to recruit from abroad, rather than at home, delayed the colonial project of making wage labourers out of the Polynesian population. Though poorly timed politically, in the long run, the idea of temporary bonded labour, restricted to a single employer with repatriation clauses attached, proved much more palatable to the colony's commercial-settler class than continued waves of free, Chinese migration.

The Japanese Experiment

The initial test contingent of 21 Japanese men arrived at Makatea in March 1910 on what were standard five-year contracts. With no opposition to their arrival offered at Pape'ete – and the replacement of the sceptical Governor François by an eager-to-please Adrien Bonhoure in June 1910[60] – a further group of 250 were recruited for the following year after one more failed attempt to entice Polynesian workers to the island.[61] Recruiting in this period was facilitated through the *Tōyō Imin Gōshi Kaisha* or Oriental Emigration Company, which was chosen over the PPC's recruiting company, the *Nippon Shokumin Goshi Kaisha,* due to its more favourable terms.[62] Under its then name of *Nihon Yoshisa Imin Kaisha* (the Yoshisa Emigration Company)*,* the privately owned company had been sending rural Japanese nationals to the New Caledonian nickel mines since 1892, as well as to the Queensland sugar cane and Thursday Island pearling industries.[63] Difficulties encountered at New Caledonia appear to have brought about both a change of company name at the turn of the century, and an increased level of oversight by the Japanese government which would have implications for the Makatea labour trade.

[59] Japanese workers were never recruited for Nauru on account of both diplomatic tensions between Germany and Japan stemming from the Russo-Japanese war and the Japanese belief that Nauru was an unhealthy island.
[60] In September 1910, Bonhoure was reported as being 'well disposed towards, and eager to support' the company, which by this point could also count on the French colonial ministry for its support, 'Notes on the Board-Meeting held in Paris, 28 Sep. 1910', 2, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[61] A recruiting mission to the Austral Islands in February 1911 was largely unsuccessful, see [CFPO], 'Makatéa : Bilan socio-économique', 200. Colin Newbury erroneously dates the Japanese arrival to 1920. See Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 261.
[62] The PPC had hired Japanese mechanics through the *Toyo Imin Goshi Kaisha* in the past to less than satisfactory results, yet by 1910 they were negotiating with their emigration company to adopt the rates offered by the CFPO's company. See PPC to Mitsui & Co., 'No. 61', 18 Aug. 1910, PMB: 1207, Reel 13.
[63] Martin Dusinberre, 'Overseas Migration, 1868–1945', in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History,* ed. Sven Saaler and Christopher W.A. Szpilman (Routledge: Oxon and New York, 2018), 108; Henry Frei, 'Japan Discovers Australia: The Emergence of Australia in the Japanese World-View, 1540s–1900', *Monumenta Nipponica* 39:1 (1984): 78.

Little can be gleaned from the colonial archive about the Japanese experience on Makatea, but they were striking for higher wages as early as March 1912.[64] In this, the pattern differed little from the first contingent of 600 Japanese workers to arrive at Thio in New Caledonia who, according to Arundel, 'mutinied in a most disgraceful manner' and caused 'the authorities in the island a great deal of trouble'.[65] In reality, the conditions awaiting the workers were substandard and the measures taken by the nickel company to quiet the defiant workers were repressive.[66] Letters home outlining conditions encouraged the Japanese government to intervene and from this point onwards, officials were appointed to oversee the working conditions of Japanese labourers across the Pacific. That said, government oversight did not automatically lead to improved results for the mining companies. For example, three-quarters of the Japanese workers stopped work in 1901 at Thio, and on Banaba Japanese workers came seen as even less "tractable" and less "cost-efficient"' than Pacific Islanders. In 1919 the employers decided to have them replaced by Chinese workers instead of conceding the demand for a 40–50 per cent wage increase.[67]

On Makatea, the Japanese were split between skilled mechanics (*ouvriers*), and the numerically much larger group of unskilled coolies (*manœuvres*) who either carried out the physical labour at the phosphate diggings or acted as boatmen, transporting bags of phosphate from the port to the waiting ships. In the absence of documentary records, one can only speculate as to the immediate causes of the Japanese strike on Makatea. However, it is difficult to imagine a situation where the construction of their own barracks (figure 3.2) was written into their contracts.

Arriving at the island in these early days of industry must have been a rude shock. The physicality and length of the working day would have doubtless surprised too. According to island director Touze, the Japanese were 'not physically strong enough for heavy work', but engineer Coane thought any 'want of strength' had more to do with their being worked into the ground than any intrinsic shortcoming.[68] Working hours followed the French

[64] 'General No. 1062', 8 Mar. 1912, 4, PMB: 1207, Reel 14.
[65] Arundel to Sec. PPC (London), 'No. 315', 28 Sep. 1907, PMB: 1175, Reel 6. See, also, Bencivengo, 'L'immigration japonaise en Nouvelle-Calédonie', 219.
[66] Martin Dusinberre judged the conditions 'appalling', Dusinberre, 'Overseas Migration', 108.
[67] Willson, Moore and Munro, 'Asian Workers in the Pacific', 90–91. The PPC found the Japanese rate 'somewhat high as compared with the day wages of the Kanakas'. See Reeves to PPC (Melbourne), 1 Jan. 1909, PMB: 1207, Reel 11.
[68] Coane to Bertrand, n.d., 10, attached to Herman Voss and Alwin Dickinson, 'Note Respecting La Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l'Océanie', 27 Oct. 1911, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.

custom of starting at 6am and working through to a two-hour pause for 'breakfast' at 11am, before working a further four hours in the afternoon. Coane made the point that considering most workers were not French, it was unrealistic to expect five hours of physical work out of them before their first meal of the day.[69] Recruits for Pacific mining projects were usually drawn from agricultural regions in Japan, with companies thinking that farm work was a sufficient qualification for working in open cut mines. The emigration companies, however, sometimes resorted to students and shopkeepers who apparently struggled even more in their new environments.[70] Worse still, the CFPO found out that the emigration company had been recruiting workers 'from mining districts where there has been a good deal of labour agitation'.[71]

Secondary sources often refer to the population of Japanese remaining steady at between 250 and 300 workers until 1925, but there is evidence to suggest there were as many as 350 in 1912 and by 1919, there were only 85 workers left.[72] Skilled workers at this point received 125 to 150 francs per month plus a 10 per cent war bonus, while unskilled workers were paid one franc per ton, with a six ton per day expected output and the same percentage bonus.[73] At the end of the war, a further 18 Japanese were recruited and they instantly encouraged the rest of the group to stop work and demand a 50 per cent pay rise. Surprisingly, the CFPO agreed to this (management cited the poor exchange rate facing the workers), but it was obvious that this was only a temporary measure.[74] While some skilled workers, Uhashi Watanabe for example,[75] stayed on until the Second World War, from 1920 most of the *main d'œuvre*, by now both too expensive and difficult to recruit from Japan, was replaced by cheaper Chinese and Indochinese workers.

It is hard to know what to make of this early foray into labour recruitment on the island but a few glimpses of everyday life do come through among the pages of a collection of photo albums put together by an anglophone member of staff and held at Wellington's Alexander

[69] Ibid.
[70] Bencivengo, 'L'immigration japonaise en Nouvelle-Calédonie', 219.
[71] Reeves to PPC (Melbourne), 'Letter 1756', 31 Dec. 1919, 3, PMB: 1207, Reel 18.
[72] Albert Lebrun to M. le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires étrangères, 30 Sep. 1912, ANOM: OCEA/130; Bertrand to Dickinson, 28 Oct. 1919, 1, PMB: 1207, Reel 18.
[73] PPC (London) to PPC (Melbourne), 'Letter 1727', 9 Jul. 1919, 1, PMB: 1207, Reel 18.
[74] Bertrand to Dickinson, 28 Oct. 1919, 1, PMB: 1207, Reel 18.
[75] Watanabe started his life in Polynesia on Makatea before moving to Rapa to run a grocery store. He was imprisoned for the duration of the Second World War for being an enemy national despite no evidence to suggest that he was a spy. He settled in Rapa after the war and his large Japanese-Polynesian family have become prominent island citizens.

Turnbull Library.[76] With many of the individual stories from this time either lost to history or escaping the net of this particular historian, photos such as these fill in some of the lacunae emerging from an inanimate documentary record dominated by balance sheets and export tables. One of the outcomes of greater government involvement in the Japanese labour trade was the revival of touring entertainment troupes aimed at maintaining or, perhaps more accurately, improving morale.[77] Such a proposition was made to the PPC about a group visiting Banaba in 1908. Yet nothing seems to have materialized as the company's concerns over the costs of hosting them and the possible effects of 'having a number of men about the Island with nothing whatever to do in the daytime and the danger of their talking to their fellow countrymen while on duty and hindering them in their work' outweighed the benefits of raising the workers' spirits.[78]

While it is unclear whether the 1913 Japanese fete at Makatea (figures 3.1, 3.3–5) played host to a visiting troupe or merely involved marshalling the talents of those already stationed on the island, the fact that such an event was staged serves to soften some of the hard-edges of island-life as documented in figures 3.2 and 3.6. Although nothing can be said for certain at this stage, it is possible that the event resulted from the November 1911 visit to Tahiti by the Japanese consul at Honolulu, Osamu Nakamura where he is said to have left a meeting with Governor Bonhoure and Touze on good terms.[79] The governor was glad Nakamura could personally inquire about the conditions on Makatea, but was sure to remain as 'imprecise and vague' as possible in response to the visitor's questions about the colony's standing more generally such was the mistrust that existed between the two nations.[80] Later, there was a misunderstanding over the role of a former Japanese military doctor sent to Makatea who, because he did not hold a diploma from a French university, was disqualified from treating his countrymen.[81] These incidents can be taken as proof that despite the festive atmosphere on display below, the Japanese experiment was probably far from comfortable.

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[76] Though the provenance of the collection has yet to be ascertained, we know the albums came up for auction at Christies in December 1966, just months after the CFPO wound itself up. The five albums can be found at ATL: PA1-q-156; PA1-q-157; PA1-o-322; PA1-o-323; PA1-o-324.

[77] Japanese acrobatic and juggling troupes were commonplace in Australia and other New World locations as early as the 1860s. See D.C.S. Sissons, 'The Lady Rowena and the Eamont: The 19th Century', in *Bridging Australia and Japan, Vol. 1: The Writings of David Sissons, Historian, and Political Scientist,* ed. Arthur Stockwin and Keiko Tamura (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 91–4.

[78] A.H. Gaze to PPC (London), General no. 405, 29 Jan. 1908, 5–6, PMB: 1207, Reel 5.

[79] Ministere des Colonies, 'Visite d'un delégué du government Japonais à Tahiti (novembre 1911)', 12 Jan. 1912, ANOM: OCEA/130.

[80] Bonhoure to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 25 Nov. 1911, ANOM: OCEA/130.

[81] Lebrun to M. le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires étrangères, 30 Sep. 1912, ANOM: OCEA/130.

Figure 3.2: Houses for the Japanese (there is a fourth one to the right), Makatea, Jul. 1910. Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

Figure 3.3: Japanese Fete at Makatea, 1913. Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

Figure 3.4: Japanese Fete at Makatea, 1913. Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

Figure 3.5: Japanese Fete at Makatea, 1913. Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

Figure 3.6: Derailment of 30 October 1914, Makatea. Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-q-156.

Crise de la main-d'œuvre

The Great War changed attitudes in both the colony and across the Pacific phosphate industry in various ways. Physically, the war came to French Polynesia via Makatea where the German cargo steamer *Walküre* and its 40-strong crew were captured while collecting phosphate on 12 August 1914 and brought to Tahiti.[82] Moreover, with shipping routes heavily restricted and markets shrinking as the war developed, New Zealand became Makatea's only viable outlet. Yearly output declined from over 80,000 tons per year in 1913 to less than half of this from 1916 to 1919.[83] In terms of labour, the CFPO acknowledged that by the end of the war they were suffering from the worldwide '*crise de la main-d'œuvre*'.[84] In French Polynesia, the already limited pool of willing local workers had been reduced even further with over 1,000 young men (Polynesians and Europeans) conscripted to fight in Europe between January 1916 and June 1917.[85] This, in addition to the arrival of the Spanish influenza in November 1918 which resulted in 95 fatalities on

[82] This act, taken by the local navy some two weeks before war against Germany, was officially announced at Tahiti and led to the 22 September bombardment of Pape'ete by two German warships in retaliation. See 'Bombardment of Papeete', *Argus* (Melb., Vic.), 23 Oct. 1914, 6; Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 265–6; Michel Bailleul, 'La guerre 14–18 vue de Tahiti', *Archipol: Le Cahier des archives de la Polynésie* 5 (2002): 13.
[83] Henri to M. le ministre des colonies, 17 Sep. 1920, 11, ANOM: 1TP/759.
[84] CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire des Actionnaires du 15 Novembre 1920* (Paris: Morière, 1920), 3.
[85] Over 200 of these men died in action.

Makatea alone (and 22 per cent of the Indigenous population in general),[86] convinced former hard-liners in the chambers of commerce and agriculture that further immigration would be necessary to keep the colony's economy afloat.[87] In many respects, the effects of the war meant the question of the *main-d'œuvre* overshadowed that of the *question chinoise* in colonial politics and, instead of erecting further barriers to entry, the focus became one of regulating the flow of people.[88]

One of the first steps taken in tackling the labour crisis was the creation of a department of immigration (*Commissaire de l'immigration*), charged for the first time with developing pro-recruitment labour policy (while still balancing lingering concerns about *l'invasion asiatique*). A case can be made for the CFPO as instigator if not architect of the legislation, such was the company's involvement in its development and the form which the decree eventually took.[89] Paris-based company director, Léon Bertrand, for example, wrote to the colonial ministry in October 1919 about the difficulties the CFPO found itself in and the need to open labour recruitment in Indochina, such as had been permitted in New Caledonia.[90] Furthermore, a draft of the decree was sent to both Touze (now also the President of the Chamber of Commerce) and Bertrand for comment.[91] Reflecting the newfound influence of the CFPO, many of their suggestions were adopted, most importantly their recommendation to reduce the minimum monthly salary by a quarter for each category of worker.[92] Coincidental or not, the new labour decree of 24 February 1920, which would apply to all Asian, African or Pacific migrants (but not Europeans), was promulgated in the colony on May Day 1920.[93]

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[86] The Papeete municipal council put the number of mortalities at 30 per cent of the adult Indigenous population. See Le Conseil municipal de Papeete, n.d., 1, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[87] 'Voue exprimé par la Chambre d'Agriculture dans sa séance du 30 Sep. 1919', ANOM: 7AFFECO/29. The Chamber of Commerce agreed entirely with the Chamber of Agriculture's opinion. See Chambre de commerce to Tesseron, Sous-directeur des affaires d'Oceanie, Ministere des Colonies, 10 Dec. 1919, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[88] Complaints were heard in a March 1919 meeting of the Chambre d'Agriculture about the amount of work the Europeans were expected to do: 'Tahiti has never been a land of great culture, but even middle-brow cultural pursuits are impossible at the moment, such is the amount of work the colonist is expected to do with his own hands'. See 'Etablissements Français de l'Océanie', *Les Cahiers Coloniaux* 17 (1919): 10, in ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[89] In introducing the legislation, the Minister for Colonies mentioned the need to better manage the exploitation of the colony's phosphate deposits. See A. Sarraut, 'Rapport au Président de la République Française', 24 Feb. 1920, *JO,* 1 May 1920, 170, accessible at http://lexpol.cloud.pf/document.php?document=347548&deb=169&fin=179&titre=RMOpY3JldCBkdSAyNC8wMi8xOTIw (accessed 22 Nov. 2020).
[90] Bertrand to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 11 Oct. 1919, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[91] 'Note pour l'inspection générale des services économiques', 18 Dec. 1919, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[92] Bertrand to M. le Directeur du Service de l'Amérique et de l'Océanie, Ministère des Colonies, 22 Nov. 19, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[93] 'Décret règlementant l'immigration dans les Établissements français de l'Océanie', *JO,* 1 May 1920, 170, accessible at

With changes in industrial conditions in Japan meaning that men were no longer willing to engage at the rates the phosphate companies were willing to offer, and agreement that this meant Japanese had become too expensive to be 'profitably employed', both the CFPO and the newly formed British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC) expressed a preference for Chinese workers.[94] While this replacement happened progressively at Makatea, on Banaba the decision to recruit men from China precipitated the hasty removal of the remaining Japanese workers. According to the Colonial Secretary, 'in no case would it be advisable… to employ a mixed labour population of Chinese and Japanese', such was the fear that the presence of a multi-ethnic labour force would lead to conflict.[95] The situation on Makatea, on the other hand, was slightly different as a series of recruitment drives from 1920 meant that the *main-d'œuvre* in 1926 consisted of 287 Indochinese (36 per cent), 272 Chinese (34 per cent), 174 Polynesians (22 per cent), and 70 Japanese (nine per cent).[96] Add to this list the presence of 35 French, 10 'Czechoslovaks' (deserters from the group of Czech intellectuals who fled Europe and tried to set-up a phalanstery or *phalenstère*, first in Papenoo on Tahiti, then on Ra'iātea and later in the Marquesas),[97] eight Cook Islanders, one Swede, one Swiss, and a Norwegian, and it becomes easy to see why historians have been impressed by the island's cosmopolitan nature.[98] Yet while management on Makatea appeared more open to the possibility of a multi-ethnic workforce than on Banaba or Nauru, in practice they did their best to segregate workers on ethnic lines once on the island. This policy, as we will shortly see, had mixed results: no conflict of note ever occurred between the Japanese and Chinese, but there were enough outbreaks of tension between rival Chinese groups, and Asian and Polynesian workers, to suggest that the policy of ethnic segregation was not exactly a panacea for the island's labour problems.

Meanwhile, at the 1921 annual general meeting of the CFPO, the labour crisis was declared resolved thanks to the arrival of the first contingent of some 370 Chinese workers from Hong Kong in May 1920.[99] No mention, however, was made of their difficult induction

http://lexpol.cloud.pf/document.php?document=347548&deb=169&fin=179&titre=RMOpY3JldCBkdSAyNC8wMi8xOTIw (accessed 22 Nov. 2020).

[94] PPC (London) to PPC (Melbourne), 'Letter 1766', 11 Mar. 1920, 4, PMB: 1207, Reel 18; Pope, 'Chinese Coolie Labour for Nauru and Ocean Island', 9 Aug. 1920, NAA: A518, J118/6.

[95] Despatch from Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 19 Mar. 1920, in Pope, 'Chinese Coolie Labour for Nauru and Ocean Island', 22 May 1920, NAA: A518, J118/6.

[96] Danton, 'Makatea', 23.

[97] All attempts appear to have failed. See Mazellier, ed., *Le Mémorial Polynésien: vol. 5,* 242–51.

[98] Danton, 'Makatea', 24.

[99] CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire des Actionnaires du 2 Août 1921* (Paris: Imprimerie Morière, 1921), 1.

to island life. If we are to believe the colourful pen of the English schoolmaster-cum-literary enigma Robert Fletcher, who after a seven-year stint working within the New Hebridean Condominium found employment as a meteorologist for the CFPO on Makatea, the '400 odd Chows' (as he called them) made sure his life on the island was far from the 'exceedingly humdrum' experience he might have expected when arriving in June 1920. Writing to his friend and long-time correspondent Bohun Lynch towards the end of August, Fletcher recounted:

> I dam near got done in last Sunday through volunteering to go and try to pacify them, but managed to bluff my way out. The next day the swine broke into one of the stores, armed themselves with 18" knives and axes, hoisted a Chinese flag and defied us for a week. Fortunately a man-of-war[100] turned up at Papeete and got our wireless and hurried over. Twenty of the ringleaders have been arrested and sentenced to jail and deportation and for the moment there is calm. They set fire to the Laboratory the other night and it disappeared in about ½ an hour. Doubtless they will repeat that 'coup' before long with other buildings. I hope they won't choose my house.

To Fletcher, or Asterisk as he called himself in print, this was proof that 'man is vile even here and the wicked trouble'.[101] The presence of those he called 'Chows and Japs' were not the only ones to have spoiled the slice of Pacific paradise he thought he had finally found at Moumu: on the other side of the island, some five or six kilometres from the works, Fletcher felt the Frenchman, too, was 'just as vile' on the island 'as he is anywhere else'.[102]

His general misanthropy and exaggeration aside, Fletcher's eye-witness account nonetheless provides further proof of the pattern of recruited workers rebelling early into their time on the island. It is not clear what exactly caused the incident of 1–2 August to escalate into the scene described by Fletcher but the origins of the revolt can probably be traced to a dispute between two workers on the afternoon of 1 August: a Chinese man

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1921. The number of men making up the first contingent has been drawn from 'Shipping News', *Greymouth Evening Star,* 22 Jul. 1920, 7, but this should be treated with caution as it seems on the high side given later population figures. It is possible that some of these 370 were destined for Nauru and Banaba.

[100] The ship was called the *Aldébaran,* also the code name for the first nuclear test on Moruroa in July 1966.

[101] Asterisk, *Isles of Illusion,* 289–90.

[102] Fletcher wrote this to another friend, Edward Jacomb ('Man, i.e. Frenchman, is just as vile as he is anywhere else; I need not assure you of that'). See Jacomb diary, Vol. 5, part 1, chapter 4, in 'Part 9: 1920', W.E. Stober ed., *Isles of Disenchantment: The Fletcher/Jacomb Correspondence* (1991), 5, PMB: 1243, Reel 1. He was fired in 1923 for being a 'particularly caustic individual'. See W.E. Stober, 'Isles of Illusion: Letters from 'Asterisk' to 'Mowbray', *JPH* 39:3 (2004): 356.

named Ho-Kam and a Polynesian referred to in the records as Timi a Poo. No indication is given as to why the two men got into an altercation but whatever occurred between them resulted in the Tahitian slapping Ho-Kam in the face. Later that evening in retaliation, around 150 armed Chinese workers descended on the village of Temao, where Timi a Poo lived. They demanded that if by the following morning the Tahitian was not brought to justice, they would be left with no choice but to bring him to justice themselves. At seven the next morning, there were apparently 200 'menacing' looking Chinese surrounding the home of the perpetrator and others in the village. According to the French gendarme, Garet, by the 'wild looks' on their faces it was clear that they had come to extract their own penance. By announcing that Timi a Poo would be arrested, Garet managed to bring the situation under control. Still, he thought that 'the effect of a simple slap [spoke] volumes' about the tense situation on the island.[103]

Even though the 11 instigators (not 20 as Fletcher put it) of the riot were all sentenced to two-years' imprisonment, the behaviour of the Chinese contingent had left the European and Polynesian populations imploring the authorities 'to take urgent security measures'.[104] That the navy was needed to quell the situation points to the difficulties faced by the island's limited police force, consisting of one French gendarme and three poorly equipped Indigenous police (*mūto'i*).[105] While on the one hand this was an understandable response to the feeling of vulnerability, one could equally point to the failure of the company to create an environment where workers would not be driven to revolt.

As Barrie Macdonald has argued in the case of Banaba, where Chinese workers staged similar revolts in 1920 and 1925: 'Basic to the whole issue, was the presence of such large Gilbertese and Chinese communities in an environment that had few outlets for recreation'.[106] While much of the tension between groups on Banaba immediately stemmed from 'boisterous practical joking at the expense of the Chinese', Macdonald felt that the animosity ran deeper: 'to the Chinese, the Gilbertese were ignorant savages', whereas the Gilbertese 'bitterly resented the condescension of the Chinese and, quick to judge on physical attributes, scorned these puny men who might be skilled but who lacked

[103] Garet to Jocelyn Robert, 2 Aug. 1920, 2, ANOM: 1TP/759.
[104] Ibid.; Henri to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 17 Sep. 1920, 8, ANOM: 1TP/759.
[105] After his June 1920 visit, colonial inspector E. Henri recommended doubling the number of *mūto'i*, or better yet, adding another European gendarme. He thought the latter recommendation was an unlikely proposition however given the islands of the Marquesas were still crying out for a single European gendarme.
[106] Barrie Macdonald, *Cinderellas of Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001), 119.

strength'.[107] Moreover, on Banaba the Gilbertese men resented 'the Chinese habit of wandering ('spying')' through the Gilbertese compound, trying to seduce the Gilbertese women.[108] Similar things could be said for the developing dynamics on Makatea where animosity between groups of men was identified variously as a result of both the presence of women *and* the lack of women.

Opinions on whether the presence of women and families could be a force for good or ill were common on all Pacific phosphate islands and within other plantation or extractive industry sites. Some thought a lack of women posed a 'moral problem' and permitting women to the island would help when it came to recruiting better quality men, while others, like Albert Ellis on Banaba, thought Gilbertese women 'gave endless trouble' and that their number should be kept as low as possible.[109] In reference to women workers in New Caledonia, Dorothy Shineberg has pointed out that due to the greater range of tasks they could perform, and the lower rate they could be paid, women were generally an attractive proposition.[110] As far as the Japanese Government and emigration companies were concerned, phosphate islands were no place for Japanese women and their men had no need for them, yet Indochinese women were allowed on to Makatea, and even worked at the phosphate diggings where they averaged about four tons of phosphate per day.[111]

The decision to welcome Indochinese families to the island in 1925 was likely a result of the colonial inspector E. Henri's 1920 report into the rivalries developing between men on the island, an issue exacerbated, in his view, by there being so few women around.[112] However, reports about the Indochinese revolt of May 1927 revealed as a key source of tension many months of Polynesian advances towards the Indochinese women.[113] They were also identified for their role in the Chinese-led conflict of January and February 1927.[114] Years later, a poem by Cook Islander Jean Mason dedicated to a former

[107] Ibid., 120.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Dorothy Shineberg, *The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865–1930* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 111; PPC, 'Conference Minutes, March–April, 1911', 10, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[110] Shineberg, *The People Trade,* 107.
[111] 'Report by Mr. F.F. Christian on Visit to Makatea, October 1930', 7, The National Archives, Kew (hereinafter TNA), DO 140/527.
[112] Henri to Robert, 'Questions relatives à l'ile Makatea et aux phosphates', 31 Jul. 1920, 13, ANOM: 1TP/759. 287 Indochinese workers arrived in August 1925, see Newbury, *Tahiti Nui,* 276.
[113] Le Procureur de la République, Chef du Service Judiciaire to le Gouverneur des EFO, 20 Jun. 1927, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[114] The first case involved the wife of an Indochinese man who, after having been allegedly sold to a Chinese man for 700 francs, promptly left him for a hospital orderly. The second concerned an Indochinese woman being

phosphate worker, Teina, points to the enduring appeal of these women on an otherwise masculine island:

> He laboured in the sun in his youth – a handsome brown-skinned man. Watched Joe Louis flicks by night. He sang *Ou, ou, ou e, te vaine Anami*, in praise of Anamese women.[115]

It is a shame that no study was undertaken of women's work on the island until the 1960s.[116] While it is noticeable that Polynesian men featured prominently in the available accounts of inter-ethnic conflict, the role of the handful of Polynesian women on the island is virtually absent. Bouts of moral panic over the appearance of Polynesian sex workers or *les filles publiques* occurred from time to time; namely in 1937 when a commission was launched in response to fears over the spread of venereal disease among mine workers.[117] The island's doctor clarified that the clientele of these *femmes en carte* came almost entirely from the unskilled or *manœuvre* class, though nothing was said about the nationality of the workers. In curbing this risk to island productivity, Dr. Dupuy recommended that sex workers be required to register with the local administration and undergo frequent medical examinations.[118] The island's *chef du poste* went one step further, wanting to ban all women of 'low morals' from coming to the island.[119] It is striking, but unsurprising, that the only time women were mentioned in official dispatches was when they appeared in relation to men's (often less than exemplary) behaviour.

On such a masculine island, it is surprising that aside from repression by force, the sole strategy the CFPO appeared willing to exercise in relation to the management of the population was ethnic segregation and overwork (recreational pursuits such as organized sport or the cinema were yet to have been introduced). At the diggings, for instance, work was undertaken by gangs of 30, divided by race, or 'class' of labour (Chinese, Annamite, and Native), and overseen by a European overseer and his Japanese assistant. Chinese gangs would work in shifts from 6:00am to 9:00am and then for several more hours in the

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spotted inside the sleeping quarters of several different Chinese men. See Le Procureur de la République, Chef du Service Judiciaire to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 15 Feb. 1927, ANOM: OCEA/124.

[115] Jean Mason, 'Teina', in *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English: Whetu Moana II*, ed. Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), 126.

[116] Louis Molet's *Le travail féminin* is a short 15-page report on women's employment during his visit to the island.

[117] The *chef du poste* referred to two women in their twenties in his 1937 report, one from Tahiti and the other from Nukuhiva in the Marquesas. See Le Chef du Poste Administratif de Makatea to M. le Gouverneur, 30 Mar. 1937, SPAA: 48W/2025.

[118] One of these clients was required to spend 30 days in hospital due to an acute case of gonorrhoea, see E. Dupuy to M. le Médecin-Chef du Service de Santé des EFO, 22 Mar. 1937, 1, SPAA: 48W/2025.

[119] Le Chef du Poste Administratif de Makatea to M. le Gouverneur, 30 Mar. 1937, SPAA: 48W/2025.

afternoon whereas Indochinese and Polynesian gangs would work standard eight-hour days. Indochinese women, who made up only one gang of workers, would work on their own, away from the other men. After daily targets were met, workers would board the locomotive to return to their various locations scattered across the island. The Chinese and the Indochinese dwellings were over a kilometre apart, but some Indochinese shared a mixed location with Polynesian workers. The Japanese-made barracks were judged 'very roughly constructed', and thus were rarely filled to their capacity of 48 owing to the preference of many workers to dwell in their own so-called 'semi-native shacks' outside the barracks for privacy. Vietnamese families almost always chose the latter option to the point that a visiting BPC official commented that 'a collection of tumble down looking shacks occupy most of the available space in the location area'.[120]

Though not quite judged a crisis by the visitor, the conditions nonetheless left a lot to be desired. Crises can come in multiple forms, and though company management was seemingly more preoccupied with crises of supply, their lack of attention to the growing tensions on the island meant that by 1927, they were grappling with problems of a more alarming sort, ultimately bringing into question the CFPO's ability to manage the island alone.

1927, Year of Revolt

For historians of modern China, 1927 is more well-known for being the year that Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) and the nationalist KMT (Guomindang) seized Shanghai, the Paris of the Orient, in an anti-Communist coup.[121] In the history of Makatea, 1927 is a landmark year too due to 2 worker revolts in January and May.[122] The first involved only Chinese workers while the second principally concerned the Indochinese and Polynesian populations. The spectre of Bolshevism, though obviously a stronger influence in Shanghai, was evident on Makatea where officials worried about the effect of the 'turbulent and impulsive' Chinese on the Indochinese mentality.[123] Governor Solari, for example, expressed his concern about the possibility of Chinese Bolshevism rubbing off on the Indochinese workers and the effect this might have on their return to French Indochina.[124]

[120] 'Report by Mr. F.F. Christian on Visit to Makatea, October 1930', 4, TNA: DO 140/527.
[121] Frederic Wakeman, Jr., 'Licensing Leisure: The Chinese Nationalists' Attempt to Regulate Shanghai, 1927–49', *Journal of Asian Studies* 54:1 (1995): 19–20.
[122] A french warship usually stationed in the Pacific was diverted to Shanghai in response to the tensions.
[123] Directeur du Conseiller d'État, 'Note Pour la Direction des Services Militaires', 21 Apr. 1927, 2, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[124] Solari to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 19 Feb. 1927, 7, ANOM: OCEA/124.

Indeed, cognizant of 'Communist propaganda' spreading throughout the 'Far East', the administration was on alert for any acts of 'a revolutionary character' that could 'provoke agitation or trouble' in the territory and advised that any measure be taken 'without delay' for 'the necessary repression and expulsion' of these elements.[125]

As tempting as it might be to draw further historical parallels with the ideological conflicts in China itself, the threat of Communism on Makatea was probably more imagined than real. While more generalized revolutionary currents surely played a part in anticolonial and worker uprisings across the colonial world, there is no evidence to suggest that the Chinese on Makatea, the majority of whom hailed from the province of Guangdong, were guided by any Communist impulse. As a French official commented at the time, 'it is difficult for the European to penetrate the mind of the Chinese, to understand the diverse reactions that finally create an explosion of trouble'.[126] This may be true, but for all the time spent worrying about managing tensions between workers of different nationalities, it seems that the company and the government could have been more attuned to cleavages within national groups themselves. The search for an explanation for the violence of 1927 requires a closer examination of who was being recruited to the island and how they were managed after their arrival.

Among the Chinese population of 266 on Makatea in 1927 were both Hakka and Cantonese-speakers, known as Punti (or Bendi in Mandarin). These were two groups that shared a history of animosity dating from the great southern migrations into Guangdong by the Hakka as far back as the Song and Yuan dynasties of the early second millennium CE.[127] As one contemporary French report correctly stated: in Guangdong 'the Poun-Thi [Punti] were considered the aboriginal people, while the Ah-Ka [Hakka] were the foreign invaders'.[128] Literally translatable as 'guest people' or 'strangers' (*Kejia* in Mandarin), the Hakka were often defined in opposition to the Punti, the original Han inhabitants of region (some early 20th-century scholars even doubted they were truly Chinese).[129] Hakka

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[125] Unknown author, 'Troubles et menée révolutionnaire', [c.1927–8], ANOM: 7AFFECO/29. The French were alarmed to hear of the 1925 conflict on Banaba as it came at the same time as trouble on Makatea between the Chinese and Polynesian workers. See M. le Ministre des Colonies to Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Étrangeres, 14 Dec. 1925, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29; M. le Ministre des Colonies to Touze, 14 Dec. 1925, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[126] Meneault to Solari, 15 Feb. 1927, 3, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[127] Myron L. Cohen, 'The Hakka or "Guest People": Dialect as a Sociocultural Variable in Southeast China', in *Guest People: Hakka Identity in China and Abroad,* ed. Nicole Constable (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 42–3.
[128] Meneault to Solari, 15 Feb. 1927, 4, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[129] Nicole Constable, 'What Does it Mean to be Hakka?', in *Guest People: Hakka Identity in China and Abroad,* ed. Nicole Constable (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 12, 14.

migrations continued into the Qing period (1644–1912) and conflict between the two groups peaked on account of their spread into the heartlands of the province. With the Taiping rebellion of 1850 to 1864 placing further pressure on regional resources, some say the Hakka-Punti land wars directly following caused up to one million casualties.[130] The deep scars from this violent history carried over to Makatea and can be identified as lying at the heart of events in early 1927.

These tensions did not exist at first given the original contingent recruited in 1920 was entirely Hakka. It was only once most of these men were repatriated, and replaced by Punti, that the troubles began for the 50 or so Hakka who decided to remain.[131] While scuffles relating to gambling debts were relatively common in the lead up to 1927, the January clash was evidently more tribal in origin as was proven by the cry among the Punti camp to attack their Hakka 'enemies'.[132] The violence began on the morning of 30 January, a Sunday, when a Punti man – identified by his immigration number, 484, and not by his name – was latched upon by a group of Hakka while exiting the CFPO office with pay cheque in hand. Archival records do not reveal the immediate cause of the attack but noticing what was happening, the Punti sounded the gong and armed with whatever weapons they could get their hands on, launched a series of reprisals on the Hakka camp at Temao. These skirmishes were eventually broken up by the two white officials and members of company management and the injured quickly taken to hospital. With no reason officially recorded, other than a statement to suggest that he was the one responsible for all the trouble, the attacked man was placed under arrest. This led to five days of intense protests by over 100 Punti workers, who demanded his release. Feeling vulnerable and powerless to respond if the island fell into disorder once again due to the protests, the CFPO sent an urgent request for help on the night of 3 February, after which a 27-man strong detachment was sent from Tahiti, arriving at Makatea on the 5th to make further arrests and re-establish order. Remaining on the island until 11 February, the detachment made 17 arrests on their final day, taking the offenders away with them to Pape'ete.

[130] Mary S. Erbaugh, 'The Hakka Paradox in the People's Republic of China: Exile, Eminence, and Public Silence' in *Guest People: Hakka Identity in China and Abroad,* ed. Nicole Constable (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 212.
[131] Meneault to Solari, 15 Feb. 1927, 4, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[132] Ibid.

For the white staff not directly involved in the troubles, the efficient show of force by the arriving detachment was further proof that Makatea needed a permanent military or police presence stationed on the island. Twice now had the Chinese rebelled violently, and twice they had been successfully put down by a superior show of arms. Even though it would be costly and take police resources away from Tahiti, Governor Solari petitioned the colonial minister for his permission to further equip the island, reminding him of Makatea's importance to the colony's future, suggesting that its protection was the equivalent to protecting the colony as a whole.[133] In response, a semi-permanent contingent of 12 to 15 soldiers was installed.[134] The President of the Tahitian branch of the Guomindang (KMT), Ji Paleon, was also sent to Makatea to try and calm the tension between the two groups.[135] But with further violence erupting towards the end of May, this time involving the previously quiet Indochinese and Polynesian workers, it is questionable whether the increased military presence was as effective as claimed.

The second round of violence commenced on 29 May when the sleeping military attachment was woken by the sound of a 200-strong party of armed and organized Indochinese workers (reputedly led by an ex-military general) descending on the Tahitian camp, situated immediately beside the freshly established military post.[136] Scrambling for their clothes and their weapons, all but one of the soldiers managed to escape to higher ground before the attacking party arrived for their weapons.[137] While hoping to keep the attackers at bay with their bayonets, an excited soldier let off a gun-shot which resulted in a more frenzied scuffle between the parties, by this point including a large number of Polynesians. More shots were fired, and though the attackers were eventually driven off, this occurred at the expense of four Indochinese lives, with a further 11 seriously injured. Repercussions were even swifter this time around; 14 Indochinese were sentenced to two years' prison time and a permanent gendarmerie was established on the island. Being the second outburst of violence in six months, the official response was that these 'conflicts produced between workers of different races, habits and languages unquestionably demonstrate the need to install a police force at Makatea capable of maintaining order'.[138]

[133] Solari to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 19 Feb. 1927, 8, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[134] Directeur du Conseiller d'État, 'Note Pour la Direction des Services Militaires', 21 April 1927, 3, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[135] Solari to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 24 May 1930, ANOM: OCEA/120.
[136] 'Rapport du Lieutenant Obrecht, Commandant le Détachement de Tahiti sur la conduite du Caporal Le Guen au cours des incidents qui se sont déroulés à Makatea le 29 Mai, 1927', 2 Jun. 1927, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124; 'Rapport du Lieutenant Obrecht, charge de l'enquête sur les incidents qui se sont passés à Makatea le 29 Mai 1927', 5 Jun. 1927, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[137] The slowest of the lot received blows to the head and body with a baton and knife.
[138] M. le Ministre des Colonies to Solari, 30 Jul. 1927, 2, ANOM: OCEA/124.

Again, little recourse appears to have been had to understanding or acting on the root of the problems; according to the Governor, such incidents were 'inevitable' on an island with such ethnic and cultural diversity and a more imposing military or police presence (ideally, 75 men) would have dissuaded the Indochinese from agitating as they did.[139] According to the CFPO's Touze, incidents such as these had the air of inevitability with 'workers of different races, habits and languages'.[140]

The immediate causes of the attack can be traced to the 'overly familiar' advances of two young Tahitian men towards the wives of the Indochinese men the night before the attack.[141] It also appears that Polynesian workers had been harassing the Indochinese, both men and women, for months on account of their frustration at being rejected romantically by Indochinese women, who preferred the island's Asian men. Reported as being of 'friendly disposition' for the most part, the island's Polynesian workers were nonetheless known to 'exploit and abuse the physical weakness' of their Indochinese counterparts.[142] In this, very little differed from the situation on Banaba identified earlier by Barrie Macdonald. While acceding to the CFPO's requests for further military muscle, some within the administration wanted the company to accept more responsibility for preventing these kinds of incidents from occurring. Given the incident caused the Indochinese administration to refuse to continue to send workers to Makatea, it was surely in the company's best interests to make the island a more hospitable place. With the French naval and military budget stretched to its limit, the old methods of segregation and extra policing were no longer enough.

Was it Slavery?

Much to the CFPO's and the French Polynesian government's chagrin, the Governor of Indochina refused to restart the labour trade until he had confirmation that conditions on the island had improved.[143] Even with guarantees that the CFPO had cleaned up their act, the Governor was not so sure they would be able to find the necessary recruits, such was the poor esteem in which Makatea was held in the South East Asian colony.[144] For the CFPO's part, they thought these allegations were overblown, and while admitting that the

[139] Solari to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 30 Jun. 1927, 2, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[140] Touze to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 13 Jun. 1927, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[141] Le Procureur de la République, Chef du Service Judiciaire to Solari, 20 Jun. 1927, 3, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[142] Ibid., 1.
[143] Direction des Affaires, Ministère des Colonies to M. le Directeur, CFPO, 4. Jun. 1928, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[144] Le Gouverneur General de l'Indochine to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 25 Jun. 1928, 2, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.

events of 1927 were unfortunate, they were claimed to be aberrations in an otherwise sound record of management.[145] While the CFPO's perspective has since been accepted by later historians, the 1938 testimony of a former CFPO employee, G. André, who claimed that 'absolute and total slavery' existed on the island, invites us to take a further look at these respective claims.[146]

According to André, who wrote to the minister of colonies from his home in southern France, his two years on the island between March 1936 and July 1938 revealed to him instances of 'unimaginable abuse' that would make the conditions of the ancient French Guiana penal convicts seem enviable in comparison.[147] His catalogue of abuses included overwork, inadequate meals, 'camps infested with vermin', and an oversupply of cheap wine, enthusiastically consumed by the Polynesian population – women and children included – Saturday through Monday. Where we have seen that Japanese workers were expected to extract an individual amount of six tons per day, André said that the foreman demanded 11 tons per day out of the Indochinese. Stuck on the island for five years, he said the workers were 'at the absolute mercy' of company management and were required to 'fold to all their every caprice'. By the time of repatriation, the workers were in the most 'ignoble condition' and had been 'reduced to the lowest degree of psychological misery'.[148]

André claimed he could support his allegations with a 'voluminous dossier' containing confidential documentation proving that the company's Parisian directors were privy to these abuses of power. His evidence did not just concern working conditions, but also instances where the company needlessly destroyed certain parcels of land and proof of the sums of money that passed hands to make sure these activities remained hushed. At his most incriminating, the Frenchman claimed he could 'unveil the mystic policies' of the CFPO and divulge the exact amount they paid to have a delegate favourable to their enterprise installed at the Conseil supérieur des Colonies.[149] André alleged that when he tried to draw attention to the CFPO abuse of power at Tahiti, he was told by a colonial official that the company was 'too powerful for the local administration to do anything about it'.[150]

[145] Touze to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 29 Jun. 1928, 2, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29; Touze to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 1 Jul. 1929, 2, ANOM: 7AFFECO/29.
[146] André to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 27 Jul. 1938, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., 2.
[149] Ibid., 3.
[150] Ibid.

Having caught the attention of the colonial ministry, Governor Frédéric Chasteney de Gery was asked to give his side of the story. He largely refuted André's allegations over the course of a five-page letter. The Governor's case began strongly; for example, André was wrong to claim that the Indochinese were not protected by any labour regulation, pointing out that their conditions were administered under the 1920 labour immigration decree and that their pay of 90 francs per month was perfectly in line with the minimum amounts stipulated in the revised decree of 1930 (this amount having increased since 1920). However, regarding André's more 'fantastic' claims against the company's behaviour, the Governor attempted to tarnish the employee's character, labelling him an 'embittered' former employee who had left his former job in the French Polynesian administration for a higher salary at Makatea, only to find the work on the island not to his liking.[151] Overall, despite identifying several inconsistencies in André's story, the Governor failed fully to account for the possible differences between what the company or government formally stipulated and what was allowed to occur on the island in reality. The standards the Governor used to measure the treatment of workers (for instance, only one death and three early repatriations due to ineptitude in the past five years) were hardly applicable to the kinds of conditions André was exposing.

In seeking to explain how conditions could deteriorate to such an extent described by the employee, we should not discount the influence of the Great Depression which hit Makatea incredibly hard at the beginning of the decade, ultimately forcing the CFPO to halt further recruitment. From a population of over 1000 in 1930, by 1934 the company had only a little over 150 workers on their books. The untimely economic downturn would have affected the company's ability invest in the maintenance of the island's facilities. However, by the end of the decade the market had picked up again and there were 170 Polynesians, 139 Indochinese, eight Chinese and 13 Japanese working on the island. The trend towards attracting more local workers had begun, with Polynesians – governed by a different labour regime again – making up the greatest demographic category for the first time and changing the face of labour relations on the island (arguably for the better).[152]

André's testimony was not the only accusation of slavery to befall the island. A decade later, the New Zealand poet and trade unionist, R.A.K. Mason, famously criticized Peter Fraser's Labour Government for selling Cook Islands Maori workers, that is New Zealand

[151] Chastenet de Gery to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 25 Nov. 1938, 5, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[152] This trend would only continue in the post-war era (see chapter 6).

subjects or British citizens, into slavery during the Second World War.[153] Prior to this, the custom for Chinese recruits was to wait until they arrived at Makatea to sign their contracts because such agreements had been deemed illegal in Hong Kong ever since the abolition of the Indian indentured labour trade in 1917.[154]

Yet, despite these allegations, I do not think we are ready to make a judgement on the level of coercion on the island from the available evidence. Nor do I think, as Victoria Stead has recently argued, that trying to have the trade defined as slavery or not is entirely useful. Like Stead has noted in relation to the 19th-century Pacific Island labour trade:

> For all the scholarly merit of debates around whether the Pacific labour trade constituted slavery, the danger in these debates is that they slip into a particular mode of legalistic technicality, and of contestation around terminology and definitional criteria, that can miss the lived substance and experience of what people are talking about when they invoke the language of slavery.[155]

It seems apparent that when somebody like André used the language of slavery, he was invoking this register in order to draw the attention of the Parisian authorities after being ignored in Tahiti. The conditions for some were evidently *slave-like* and, as Shineberg has argued elsewhere, at the worst periods of the company's reign labourers were 'given a status little better than slaves'.[156] However, we would need the testimonies of the workers themselves to make a better judgement. Voices of the workers are frustratingly difficult to come by in the archival record, but perhaps through their acts, interpreted at the time as reactions to discrete events, we can instead see the expressions of groups who felt if not enslaved then at least exploited and deceived by the conditions confronting them on the island. The isolation of the phosphate island, both physically and bureaucratically, allowed conditions to deteriorate to such a point that violence was the natural reaction.

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[153] 'Have New Zealand Subjects Been Sold into Slavery?', *Challenge*, Aug. 1945, 6. Frank Bateson titled the chapter in his memoir detailing his role in the labour trade as 'Slave Labour', see Frank M. Bateson, *Paradise Beckons* (Waikanae: Heritage Press, 1989), 85–94.

[154] Meneault to Solari, 15 Feb. 1927, 6, ANOM: OCEA/124.

[155] Victoria Stead, 'Money Trees, Development Dreams and Colonial Legacies in Contemporary Pasifika Horticultural Labour', in *Labour Lines and Colonial Power: Indigenous and Pacific Islander Labour Mobility in Australia*, ed. Victoria Stead and Jon Altman (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 136.

[156] In saying so, Shineberg was responding to Clive Moore who objected to such a statement appearing in a Queensland textbook, see Shineberg, *The People Trade,* 237.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a new interpretation of the early labour history of the island, contesting the popular narrative that portrays Makatea as a functional 'melting pot' of multiple nationalities. Whereas other historians have left the story at changing demographics and the rise and fall in productivity, I have attempted to explain some of the more nefarious social forces influencing events on the island and have chosen to focus, as one official described it, on the 'incidents which have repeated themselves year after year in a periodic fashion'.[157] Though initial anxieties about introducing Asian labourers waned over time as colonists realized that Makatea could be a world apart from Tahiti, experiences on the island show that the experiment was not entirely a successful one.

Several patterns of behaviour emerged over the three decades prior to the Second World War. First, workers rebelled early into their contracts; second, violent outbursts were rapidly quelled by military and police intervention from Tahiti; and third, there was a consistent failure to recognize that problems most likely stemmed from the concentration of young, single men with few recreational outlets. The images of a Japanese cultural event in 1913 (figures 3.1, 3.3–5) demonstrate that efforts were made to cater for the needs of different groups of workers brought to the island, but these were all too few and far between. It was not until after the Second World War that serious attention was given to providing regular entertainment such as the cinema, sports and, probably most important of all, a greater willingness to welcome women and children to the island. Unsurprisingly, these innovations came once the era of temporary labour recruitment gave way to longer term, local employment.

The French administration was clearly still coming to terms with its so-called *mission civilisatrice* over this period. While the focus in this chapter has not been on the Polynesian population, it is obvious that their interests, or what the French thought were their interests, were driving many of the decisions taken. Anxieties over the introduction of Japanese workers were linked to ideas about the industrious Japanese taking over as they had done in Hawai'i, while opposition to the Chinese in the 1920s, although similar to earlier commercial fears, had an extra sting in the tail due to their potential Communist links and their close proximity to a population of supposedly impressionistic Indochinese. As French

[157] Le Procureur de la République, Chef du Service Judiciaire to le Gouverneur des EFO, 15 Feb. 1927, 1, ANOM: OCEA/124.

subjects, the Indochinese were treated differently, and extra efforts were made to protect them from the Chinese. Dedicated legislation was drafted to protect their interests, and from 1925 onwards an agreement was made between France's three Pacific colonies to work together on the question of recruiting labour from the colony.[158] Taken together, these developments remind us that Makatea did not operate in a vacuum; its fate was also tied to fluctuations in French imperial and global attitudes towards labour and colonial management.

Lastly, in all these developments there did not appear to be any great initiative on the part of the CFPO or the French administration to make changes unless their hand was forced. Perhaps this is best summarized as a reflection of Maurice Besson's precautionary approach to developing colonial labour policy and the idea that a phosphate island was not the type of environment to inculcate a greater number of supposedly work-shy Polynesians. This is despite the Frenchman's 1927 predictions 'that the future of modern colonisation is based, far more than is sometimes thought, on this process of progressive adaptation which aims at bringing the native populations into effective partnership in the worldwide campaign for social progress'.[159]

The riots on Makatea that very year tend to suggest that the island was far from being at the vanguard of modern colonial statecraft; for the moment, the phosphate island was defined by unequal, slave-like labour relations. Even if the violent outbursts could be traced to other causes, there was very little adaptation to be observed by the company. This is because as much as the men of the CFPO were frustrated by the sporadic attempts of workers to take matters into their own hands, for as long as the administration would continue to support them by rushing over to put these disturbances down, the status quo was allowed to continue. We must look to the post-Second World War era, when the government felt obliged to take the side of the Polynesian-dominated *main-d'œuvre*, for real change to occur. However, for now we must turn our attention to the development of the Makatea phosphate industry in its global business context, for changes in the world fertilizer market played just as large a role in the island's transformation as fluctuations in the labour market.

[158] Besson, 'Labour Legislation in the French Colonies', 500.
[159] Ibid.

Chapter 4: Markets, Monopolies, and the Elusive Open Door

Figure 4.1: The jetty from the top of the inclined railway looking out to sea [Temao], with the *Cholita* to the right, September 1909.
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, PA1-p-156.

The transformation of Makatea into a phosphate island was a complicated process involving much more than the discovery of exploitable deposits. The previous two chapters have shown that the industry could never have started without the acquiescence of the island's landowners, nor would it have developed very far without the efforts of workers, the majority of whom were initially imported from Japan, China and French Indochina. With chapter three having made the case for the importance of supply-side factors, we must now take into consideration the demand-side of the industry, and, in particular, the fluctuations in the global market(s) for phosphate rock (being the raw material) and superphosphate fertilizer (the manufactured product), as well as Makatea's marginal position in relation to the rest of the industry in the Pacific.

If we return to 1911, we can see that the Pacific phosphate industry shaped as an exciting new prospect for European capital. In a 31-page pamphlet destined for German investors, business reporter Georg Haller confidently predicted that phosphate would be to agriculture as coal was to the industrial world.[1] Of the Pacific's deposits, he concluded that in spite of teething concerns over labour and transportation costs, 'it is unquestionable that the South Sea Phosphate … will acquire an importance in the world market which will grow from year to year'.[2] Haller stopped short of predicting soaring dividends, suggesting instead that business success would depend on the policies pursued by the various boards of directors. However, with a growing consensus among agricultural experts across the globe that phosphorus was the key to plant growth – and superphosphate the most effective mode of application – there was little to suggest that this nascent industry would do anything other than grow rapidly and profitably.[3]

However, like the island's early labour history, the business history of the CFPO prior to the Second World War encourages us to re-examine and reinterpret narratives of progress or 'defying the odds' that are often attached to the company's legacy. By focusing more squarely on the nature of competition in the Pacific phosphate trade, revealed in correspondence between the French directors and their mostly anglophone competitors, this chapter seeks to explain why many of the early predictions about Makatea's future

[1] Georg Haller, *The South Sea Phosphate Companies: For the Information of Germans Interested Therein* (Mannheim, 1911), 5, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1643, File 164C.
[2] Ibid., 30.
[3] T.K. Royal, 'The Phosphate Manufacturing Industry in New Zealand', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1967, 30–1; Dana Cordell, Jan-Olaf Drangert and Stuart White, 'The Story of Phosphorus: Global Food Security and Food for Thought', *Global Environmental Change* 19 (2009): 292–3.

had to be eventually scaled back, as a combination of economic and political factors detrimentally affected demand and constrained the company's ability to grow.

Though the situation would change drastically with the outbreak of war in 1914, the industry initially developed along decidedly private, commercial lines with little to no regard for nationality or protectionist policies such as imperial preference. Aside from the British-owned Christmas Island Phosphate Company which had operated in the Indian Ocean since the 1890s, the major companies venturing in the Pacific were the Pacific Phosphate Company (Nauru and Banaba), the Bremen-based Sudsee Phosphat Gesellschaft (German South Sea Phosphate Company) which had rights to the deposits on Angaur, and the CFPO that managed the Makatea deposits (though, as we have seen, not without significant input from the Pacific Phosphate Company as majority shareholders).[4]

The pre-war years of the Pacific phosphate trade were marked by sporadic conferences and behind-the-scenes lobbying to split the Pacific's principal markets of Australia, New Zealand, and Japan between them.[5] Given freight was such a significant cost of production and determinant of price, it might have made business sense to divide the market based on a rough geographic basis such as Christmas Island to Western Australia, Banaba and Nauru to Australia's eastern and southern seaboards, Makatea to New Zealand and Hawai'i, with Angaur – along with everybody else's excess supply – going to Japan. Yet at the height of the second industrial revolution (c.1870–1914), with European business incursions into the Pacific Islands multiplying by the day, the business environment was never going to be as *gentil* as that. The Pacific-based companies were not only pitted against each other but against phosphate and other fertilizer producers from further afield in the contest to secure contracts with what was a growing but still limited pool of manufacturers (figure 4.2).[6]

[4] For a gloss of each company, see Haller, *The South Sea Phosphate Companies,* 8–28.
[5] Phosphate was shipped to Europe in these early years, but this was more out of necessity than desire. As Balding wrote: 'it is to the markets bordering on the Pacific Ocean that we must first look for the profitable disposal of our output at all times'. Balding to Leverhulme, 4 Mar. 1916, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[6] Whereas a handful of phosphate fertilizer manufacturers were created in Australia from the 1860s, in New Zealand, the first phosphate manufacturing plant was established at Burnside, Dunedin by Kempthorne Prosser & Co. in 1882 while a second opened in Auckland in 1887.

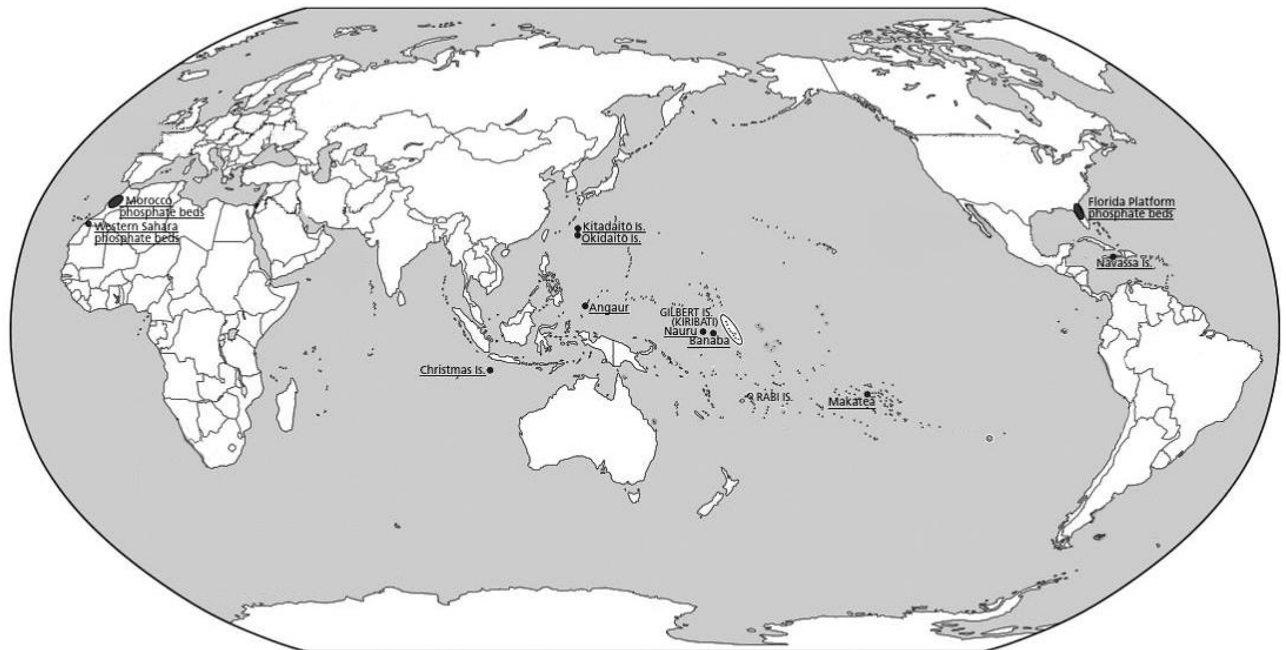

Figure 4.2: World map showing the location of phosphate deposits in the Pacific and beyond.
Source: Adapted from Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, 46. (see appendix 2.)

This chapter thus examines the economic and political challenges faced by the CFPO in selling its product on the open market – first, against more established competitors, and later, against a state-backed competitor with monopolistic advantages. I argue that in examining this archive from the French, rather than the British (or Australasian) point of view, new insights can be gained into the awarding of the League of Nations Mandate for Nauru to the British Empire, the drafting of the Nauru Island Agreement, and the standing of the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC), a 'strange three-Government enterprise' armed with a mandate to provide the Australasian farmer with the cheapest possible superphosphate fertilizer.[7]

Set against this context, I show how the CFPO was forced to act strategically to carve out its own share of the market. That the CFPO eventually enlisted the help of France's diplomatic corps, and one of its leading legal minds, to fight for this cause is a telling indication of just how important the phosphate industry became for the French colony and, by virtue of their own governments' responses, settler-colonial nation-building in Australia and New Zealand too. As will be demonstrated, the League of Nations' guiding principles

[7] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 180–1.

of free trade or the 'open door' sat uneasily with an industry that was, from the beginning, inherently monopolistic at island level and deceptively oligopolistic at the level of the company. The BPC's post-Great War entrance did more than just upset the market. It effectively closed the door on smaller companies such as the CFPO that relied on cartel-like conditions, and not national or imperial protectionism, to prosper and grow.

Figure 4.3: The original CFPO office at Moumu, December 1909.
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library: PA1-q-157.

Teething Problems

To understand why the CFPO acted the way it did throughout the interwar period one first needs to understand that it and the predecessor to the BPC, the Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC), were practically joined at the hip until the end of the First World War. According to the PPC's managing director, and later British Phosphate Commissioner, Alwin Dickinson, after all the difficulties faced by the CFPO in its early years, it was the PPC that 'took it in hand and kept the Company going'.[8] For the English of the PPC, they

[8] 'Notes on Meeting Held in Room 110 at 10 a.m. on Wednesday 23rd May 1923', 2, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4.

felt that because they held a 51 per cent share of the company (with the remaining 49 per cent split thinly among individual shareholders), the CFPO was British in all but name.[9] Moreover, if it were not for the stringencies of French company law, it is doubtful that the firm's headquarters and board of directors would even have been in Paris.[10] Naturally, the French directors would have thought differently; at least two of them, Léon Bertrand and Jules Mesnier, were leading members of the pro-French colonial lobby group, Comité de l'Océanie française (COF), and, to them, the fate of the CFPO would have been intimately tied to the *mise en valeur* of the French colony.[11] Yet the PPC tended to view the CFPO as nothing more than its French subsidiary offering lower grade phosphate but providing convenient insurance in the event that things went awry on Nauru and Banaba, or if the 'ticklish' phosphate trade became 'upset' due to external factors beyond their control.[12]

In practice, the PPC assumed the role of selling agent over these early years with the task of finding a share of the Australasian market for the Makatea product. However, in a market obsessed by quality, this was not always straightforward because even though Makatea's phosphate was classified as high-grade (83 per cent), it was of a slightly inferior quality to Nauru's (85 per cent) and Banaba's (86–89 per cent), putting it at the lower end of the high-grade group. As the PPC guaranteed a minimum of 80 per cent phosphate for their buyers, they ran a greater risk of slipping below that threshold with Makatea phosphate than with the rock from Banaba and Nauru.[13] Despite frequent assurances from the PPC that the Makatea product was only slightly inferior, it was not uncommon for buyers to decline offers of Makatea phosphate. Western Australian fertilizer manufacturers, for example, much preferred phosphate from Banaba over Makatea, and would only take the latter at lower prices.[14]

[9] Hermann Voss and Alwin R. Dickinson, 'Observations and Recommendations with Regard to our Contracts with the Australian and Japanese Buyers', 25 Oct. 1911, 9, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[10] French law required that 75 per cent of the directorship and management be French nationals.
[11] Bertrand, for example, was elected as a director of the COF in May 1909. See 'Comité de l'Océanie française', *Le Mois colonial et maritime: Organe de l'Action colonial* 76 (June 1909): 583. For more on the COF, see Robert Aldrich, 'Le Lobby Colonial de l'Océanie Française', in *La France et le Pacifique,* ed. Paul de Deckker and Pierre-Yves Toullelan (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1990), 147–54. Albert Saurraut's *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises* (Payot: Paris, 1923) became a guiding text for all colonial developers across the French Empire.
[12] 'Notes on Meeting Held in Room 110 at 10 a.m. on Wednesday 23rd May 1923', 1, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4.
[13] Reeves to Gaze, 'General Letter no. 1381', 15 Jan. 1915, 2, PMB: 1207, Reel 15.
[14] Gaze to Reeves, 'General letter to London no. 1302', 24 Feb. 1915, 2, PMB: 1207, Reel 15.

From the perspective of the CFPO's managing director, Léon Bertrand, this 'suppression of all competition' led to 'mutual advantage for both Companies'.[15] Indeed, the PPC's directors were wary of the potential for the French, if they did not keep them on side, to commit 'hari-kari' and 'become a thorn in the sides' of their own company by undercutting the Australian market.[16] 'They will either sell in Australia as competitors or in conjunction with us', wrote directors Herman Voss and Dickinson. Their point was that to maintain friendly relations with the French, they would need to secure an even greater share of the Australian market so that they could sell sufficient Nauruan and Banaban phosphate to reach scale while still allowing a further third of their supply to come from Makatea.[17] Such a strategy, however, could only be pursued at the expense of their Christmas Island and German competitors.

Whereas both the Christmas Island and Angaur companies were viewed as competition by the Anglo-French bloc, most of their animosity was reserved for the Germans.[18] Referred to in the dispatches of the PPC as the Bremen syndicate, it was these men, we must remember, who partly financed De Mézières' rear-guard challenge on the Makatea deposits in 1909, and it was they who quickly undercut the PPC in Western Australia.[19] Representatives of the three companies failed to come to an equitable agreement during a September 1910 conference in Cologne and, by early 1911, competition for the Australasian and Japanese markets had 'become very severe'.[20] Business might no longer have been about fighting over concessions along the Pacific phosphate frontier, but the race to consolidate market share as companies normalized their operations and formalized supply chains from island to farm was no less competitive. In the end, difficulties faced by the German company at Angaur restricted it to only small export quantities, but the Christmas Island Phosphate Company, whose product was on a par with Banaba, remained a strong competitor in the Australian market.[21]

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[15] L. Bertrand to BPC, 8 Jan. 1921, 2, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4.
[16] 'Notes on Meeting Held in Room 110 at 10 a.m. on Wednesday 23rd May 1923', 2, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4.
[17] Voss and Dickinson, 'Observations and Recommendations with Regard to our Contracts with the Australian and Japanese Buyers', 9, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[18] Or at least the German-based company, remembering that a good proportion of the PPC's board and shareholders were German.
[19] The Bremen company sold their phosphate at 38s/8d. per ton compared to the PPC's bare minimum of 42s/4d. per ton (and even then, the PPC could only go that low by covering their losses via sales to the eastern states). See Voss and Dickinson, 'Observations and Recommendations with Regard to Our Contracts with the Australian and Japanese Buyers', 5, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[20] Otto Thiemer to Lever, 27 Feb. 1911, 1, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1643, File 164C.
[21] Voss and Dickinson to Lord Balfour, 3 Jun. 1912, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647, File TT3783.

While the creation of phosphate-fuelled agricultural economies in Australia and New Zealand has been well-documented in recent times,[22] less is known about the way the industry intersected with the spectacular growth of the Japanese economy over the Meiji restoration and into the 20th century whereby rates of phosphate fertilizer application rose from an estimated 3.6 kilograms per hectare in the 1880s to 113.4 kilograms per hectare in the late 1960s.[23] Briefly put, we know from Arundel’s story that Japanese farmers and manufacturers were much quicker to adopt scientific agriculture or ‘New Farming’ techniques than their counterparts in Australasia who could still rely on ‘slash-and-burn’ methods. His diaries from the late 1880s and 1890s refer to numerous agriculture-themed lectures where the value of phosphates for rice production was expounded, while the growth in the nation’s superphosphate manufacturing plants, starting with the Tokyo Artificial Fertilizer Company in 1888, was a further manifestation of their demand.[24] Following their victory over the Russians in 1905, the Japanese economy experienced an ‘agricultural boom’ with farmers turning to chemical fertilizers over more traditional fishmeal fertilizer in even greater numbers.[25] In 1909 the nation imported just 70,000 tons of phosphate rock per year, but just four years later this amount had increased to 327,000.[26]

The firms of the Pacific industry were clearly motivated to meet this demand and scrambled to get ahead of more established low-grade phosphate companies exporting much larger quantities from Egypt, Florida, Gafsa and Algeria in securing lucrative contracts with Japanese buyers such as the *zaibatsu,* Mitsui.[27] Arundel had already curried favour with the Japanese during a 1902 business trip[28] but even then, the men of the PPC were

[22] Most recently by Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 110.
[23] Keizo Tsuchiya, *Productivity and Technological Progress in Japanese Agriculture* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1976), 218. James Nakamura has said that ‘almost universal acceptance has been accorded to the general proposition that Japan’s industrialization during the Meiji era was heavily dependent on the rapid growth of agricultural production’. See James I. Nakamura, *Agricultural Production and the Economic Development of Japan, 1873–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 140.
[24] Bright, ‘Biography of Arundel, John’, Part 2, Book 4, Chapter 1, 7, Papers of John Arundel, NLA: MS 8904; Yujiro Hayami*, A Century of Agricultural Growth in Japan: Its Relevance to Asian Development* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 56.
[25] Toshihiro Higuchi, ‘Japan as an Organic Empire: Commercial Fertilizers, Nitrogen Supply, and Japan’s Core-Peripheral Relationship’, in Bruce L. Batten and Philip C. Brown, ed. *Environment and Society in the Japanese Islands: From Prehistory to the Present* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015), 148.
[26] ‘Encl: Japanese Imports of Phosphate, Table 1’, 31 Jul. 1917, PMB: 1207, Reel 17.
[27] Yuichi Hayashi, ‘The Transition to Monopoly Capitalism: World War I to the Great Depression’, in *Agriculture in the Modernization of Japan, 1850–2000,* ed. Shuzo Teruoka, trans. Sarah Ham Akamine (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008), 110.
[28] Arundel would write: ‘I feel sure however that a great deal of the future prosperity of the Company depended on my being in Japan just when I was… and any saving that I might have effected will have been considerably

worried about competition from Angaur and Christmas Island, in Angaur's case much closer geographically to Japan than Nauru, Banaba and most certainly Makatea in eastern Oceania.[29] The PPC might have held a lucrative contract with Mitsui, but because it was required to supply at least 50,000 tons per annum to fulfil it, while also maintaining a minimum of 63,500 tons per year to Australia, the company was determined to keep Makatea afloat and thus available to make up any shortfall in supply from Banaba and Nauru.[30]

To ensure the economic viability of the CFPO at Makatea, the PPC had wanted to direct the majority of its phosphate to New Zealand where manufacturers had been preferring Malden and Seychelles Islands guano over Banaban phosphate on account of the latter's apparent 'lumpiness'.[31] In contrast to Australia, New Zealand farmers, especially those in the South Island, were accustomed to applying raw phosphate as opposed to superphosphate. While this suited Makatea in theory, in practice grinding the rock proved difficult.[32] Thus, after failing to attract a New Zealand buyer, its original cargos went to Honolulu (1,318 tons), San Francisco (467 tons), and Europe (around 4000 tons split between Calais, London and Nantes).[33] By 1913 they had landed a contract guaranteeing a minimum of 10,000 tons per year to Japan and by 1915, the PPC's 'vigorous efforts… to introduce and push the sale of Makatea phosphate in New Zealand' finally paid off, with the CFPO quickly becoming the Dominion's largest supplier.[34]

Despite the PPC's efforts to prop up the faltering company, Mesnier's hope, expressed in 1910, 'that some satisfactory arrangement about the division of sales would be made with other Phosphate Mines and that prices would improve' had not exactly come true.[35] The PPC always felt that once the CFPO began producing over 100,000 tons a year, then they

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outbalanced by my having succeeded, as I hope I have, in laying the foundations of a large and perpetual business with Japan'. See Arundel to Stanmore, 10 Dec. 1902, 2, John T. Arundel Correspondence, PMB: 493.

[29] Voss and Dickinson, 'Observations and Recommendations with Regard to our Contracts with the Australian and Japanese Buyers', 9, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.

[30] Ibid., 1, 4.

[31] Secretary, PPC, 'General 887', 5 Aug. 1910, 4, Letters to and From J.T. Arundel, PMB: 1207, Reel 13.

[32] Albert F. Ellis to PPC (Melbourne), 4 Jan. 1915, 1, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.

[33] 'Translation of Annual Report of the Board of Directors to be Submitted to the General Meeting of 3 Nov. 1911', Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.

[34] PPC Enclosures, 'Table 2: Japanese Imports of Phosphate', 31 Jul. 1917, PMB: 1207, Reel 17; PPC, 'General 889', 12 Aug. 1910, PMB: 1207, Reel 13. Any reduction in the grade of phosphate was made up for by the fact that manufacturers found the rock much easier to grind than phosphate from elsewhere, see A.F. Ellis to Reeves, 17 May 1915, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.

[35] Herman Voss, 'Board Meeting of the CFPO on 18 Aug. 1910', 3, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.

could start to ‘receive a fair share of the demand in all countries’.[36] However, it would take the CFPO until 1925 to reach this target and by then the industry had been turned on its head by the arrival of the British Phosphate Commissioners. Though production had steadily risen since exports began in 1910 – peaking at 85,000 tons produced and 75,000 exported in 1913 – war so undermined business that the CFPO evidently found it expedient to stop posting production figures in their annual shareholder reports.[37]

The Great War and the ‘Battle for Nauru’[38]

Despite perhaps not having the same visceral immediacy as the Second World War, the global hostilities of 1914–18 still left an indelible mark on the phosphate industry. Firstly, as noted above, war undermined the CFPO’s business model as compromised supply lines led to soaring freight costs. As Dickinson’s brother-in-law, A.J. King, pointed out, ‘with the European market closed all phosphate companies are eager for Colonial business’.[39] New Zealand and Hawai‘i became the French company’s only practical outlets, yet since the CFPO decided to honour its pre-war contracts, the negotiated sale price no longer covered the cost of freight, causing heavy losses.[40] By 1916 the CFPO’s exports had dropped to just 35,000 tons, and their profit margins for 1914 and 1915 were just ₤474 and ₤1,954 respectively, causing Bernard Balding, the PPC representative on the board of the CFPO, to write that ‘while the war is on we must be thankful if we can manage to live through’.[41]

Secondly, and more consequential in the long term, the outbreak of war led to the swift collapse of Germany’s Pacific Empire.[42] The Japanese navy occupied Angaur on behalf of the allies on 9 October 1914[43] and, after already destroying the island’s wireless station

[36] Hermann Voss and Alwin R. Dickinson, ‘Notes respecting la Compagnie Française des Phosphates de l’Océanie’, 27 Oct. 1911, 6, Leverhulme Papers, AJCP, Reel M1647.
[37] The company’s annual report for 1914 was the last time production and export figures were listed, see CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire des Actionnaires du 2 Juillet 1914* (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1914).
[38] The ‘battle for Nauru’ is Hermann Hiery’s term. See Hermann Joseph Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1995), 119.
[39] King to Ellis, 12 Nov. 1914, 2, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.
[40] Bertrand to BPC, 8 Jan. 1921, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4. Makatea became New Zealand’s largest supplier during the war years, exporting the following amounts, 1914: 0; 1915: 4300 tons; 1916: 24,457 tons; 1917: 12,210 tons; 1918: 26,162 tons; 1919: 22,311 tons. See ‘Total Importation in Tons of Phosphatic Fertilisers into New Zealand’, 5 Aug. 1919, PMB: 1207, Reel 18. Several shipments were made to Australia, for example 7,000 tons to Melbourne in 1914 and 4,000 in 1916.
[41] Balding to Lever, 22 Sep. 1916, 3, Balding Papers, Box 2. Fortunately, the Tahitian administration responded to their plight by keeping duties down. See Newbury, ‘The Makatea Phosphate Concession’, 184.
[42] See Hiery, *The Neglected War.*
[43] David Purcell, ‘The Economics of Exploitation: The Japanese in the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall Islands, 1915–1940’, *JPH* 11:3 (1976): 190. The Australians had initially wanted Angaur too but were forbidden by the

on 9 September, an Australian expeditionary force beat the Japanese to the punch by occupying Nauru on 6 November.[44] With Nauru secured from Germany, the PPC could continue trading for the duration of the War, albeit on a restricted scale due to a temporary Japanese embargo on PPC phosphate (in part, a retaliation against the prohibition on Japanese workers landing in Australian ports), coal and waterside strikes, in addition to the already mentioned 'precarious' wartime shipping position, all of which affected the PPC's, and, by extension, the CFPO's bottom lines.[45]

Though one might gain the impression from the staid internal correspondence that it was largely a case of business as usual for the PPC throughout the war years, significant political manoeuvring took place towards the end of the war to ensure that the resource would continue to serve the post-war interests of the British Empire.[46] According to Maslyn Williams, there was an assumption early on, however wishful, that the wartime arrangements for Germany's Pacific colonies were only temporary.[47] In other words, just because Australia happened to administer Nauru during the war, this did not mean that their military administration would progress into a civil administration, nor were the Japanese guaranteed Germany's colonies north of the equator. Concerned about what might happen to their 99-year lease (issued by the German Imperial Government in 1901), and the detrimental effects of a 'whites only' labour policy, the London-based management of the PPC clung to this hope as it did not want any colonial government taking over the island's post-war administration.[48] Only once it became clear that Germany was out of the picture did the company throw its weight behind a British imperial (rather than colonial) claim, as it was presumed that only this would protect the company's interests.[49]

United Kingdom out of respect for the Japanese who had arrived there first. See Stewart Firth, 'German Labour Policy in Nauru and Angaur, 1906–14', *JPH* 13:1 (1978): 50.

[44] A Japanese cruiser and troopship arrived at Nauru soon after. See Viviani, *Nauru,* 41. For an account of the events leading up to the capture of Nauru, see Alfred E. Stephen to W.H. Kelly, 'Re The Capture of Nauru', 25 Nov. 1933, in A.E. Stephen Papers, Mitchell Library, NSW, MLMSS 524.

[45] See the correspondence flowing between the Melbourne and London offices of the PPC for 1916–18 in PMB: 1207, Reel 17.

[46] The PPC moved equally quickly to conceal the German nature of their company. See, for example, the discussions in Balding to Lever, 22 Dec. 1915; Balding to Lever, 29 Jan. 1916, Balding Papers, Box 2.

[47] 'Note on the Japan/Nauru Connection', Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 20, file 1.

[48] Hence the wartime understanding 'that the less published about our Islands, the better'. See Ellis to the Secretary, PPC (London), 20 Nov. 1916, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.

[49] 'Extract of the minutes of the Pacific Phosphate Company Ltd. dated 23 November 1915', Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 20, file 1.

The PPC had been aware for a number of years that both the Australian and New Zealand Governments were 'hungering for Phosphate islands'.[50] In private meetings, New Zealand Prime Minister Bill Massey told the representatives of the PPC 'that he was fully sensible of the importance of the phosphate industry to New Zealand', and expressed his appreciation for the favourable prices New Zealand and Australia had been receiving from the company in comparison with European buyers.[51] Yet this sensitivity to the PPC's position was no guarantee he, nor his Australian counterpart Billy Hughes, would not try to nationalize, or at least remove, the interest from private hands at the war's end.[52] Both went to Paris in 1919 with war spoils on their mind. If Massey, who was under pressure from his rural constituents adamant that they were paying too much for fertilizer, was 'determined to secure access to Nauruan phosphate',[53] then Hughes, although late to the party, became nigh on possessed.[54] In the words of CFPO director and PPC shareholder Bernard Balding, Hughes was 'determined to make a "scoop" if he can at our [PPC] expense, so as to revive his waning popularity at home, and provide for himself a pleasant welcome on his return'.[55] His subsequent efforts at the Paris Peace Conference to stake Australia's claims to the island were legendary.[56]

There were, however, two interrelated, and often conflated, issues at play: the League of Nations mandate for Nauru, and the ownership of the rights to Nauru's phosphate deposits hitherto held by the PPC. Once it became clear that annexation was off the table, Hughes's claim to administering Nauru and controlling the phosphate industry rested on the basis that since it was the Australian Commonwealth that picked up the wartime bill, it was the Australian people who deserved to reap future profits.[57] He could also make the case that

[50] Balding to Lever, 22 Dec. 1915, Balding Papers, Box 2. In protest against rising prices, a group of Auckland farmers resolved to pressure the Government 'to acquire one or more of the phosphate islands in the Pacific, and supply the ground phosphate to farmers in New Zealand at cost price'. See 'Phosphate Islands', *New Zealand Herald*, 28 May 1915, 9.
[51] Balding to Leverhulme, 27 Jul. 1918, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[52] There was some discussion throughout the war years in New Zealand about the Government purchasing an island for itself. See Ellis to Reeves, 4 Jun. 1915, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.
[53] The President of the New Zealand Board of Agriculture told Ellis in January 1915 that New Zealand farmers were paying too much for their phosphate. See Albert F. Ellis 'Report on Visit to Wellington to Attend Meeting of the Board of Agriculture', 3 Feb 1915, 1, PMB: 1206, Reel 16; Barrie Macdonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate* (Palmerston North: Massey University Occasional Publication no. 7, 1982), 5.
[54] W.J. Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris: The Birth of Australian Diplomacy* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson and the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1978), 100.
[55] Balding to Leverhulme, 5 Jul. 1919, Balding Papers, Box 2. For a description of Hughes, see Macdonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate,* 5.
[56] Hudson has described Hughes' arguments in May 1919 as being at kindergarten level. See W.J. Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris,* 30.
[57] Viviani, *Nauru*, 42

a precedent had been set by the granting of mandates for the German territories of New Guinea, Western Samoa and Southwest Africa to the settler dominions in closest proximity to them. Yet, whereas many of Germany's former colonies were entrusted to the mandatories under the guise of the 'white man's burden' – or the 'sacred trust of civilization' to use the League's own terminology – the phosphate deposits meant Nauru was always going to be different. As *The Times* would point out in mid-1919, 'Nauru has been to our colonial experts what Teschen [and its rich coalfields] was to Mr. Lloyd George. It was a discovery. … even the Imperial Government became aware of the fact that there must be something about Nauru'.[58] Despite Hughes's assertions that New Zealand and the United Kingdom had no valid claims to the island,[59] the economic importance of Nauru to the Empire was evidently too great for it to be given to Australia alone. After an unsuccessful eleventh hour threat to abstain from signing the Peace Treaty, Hughes eventually had no choice but to agree to a British Empire mandate under tri-partite control in May 1919 (albeit to be administered by Australia for the first five years).[60]

Hughes's estimate of ₤3,000,000 for the PPC's interests in Nauru did not exactly reflect, at least to the PPC's thinking, the 'many score of millions pounds' that a young Keith Murdoch (Hughes' press agent), had been busy trumpeting to the papers as to the island's worth.[61] According to the PPC shareholder and occasional director, William Lever (by this point Lord Leverhulme), 'the growing knowledge of the value of phosphates within the British Empire ensures an enormous demand at a very high price for many years to come'.[62] Thus, he and Balding modestly put the valuation at ₤4,500,000. ₤3,500,000 was eventually settled on, and after a 'somewhat heated' hotel-room discussion between Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Milner, Hughes and Massey on the night of 27 June, a deal over Nauru – and Banaba once it was realized there was no chance of competing against the much larger 'non-profit-making government corporation at Nauru' – was struck.[63]

[58] 'Nauru', *The Times,* 6 June 1919, in Balding to Leverhulme, 11 Jun. 1919, 2, Balding Papers, Box 2. For more on the Teschen/Tešín dispute, see Marcel Jesenský, *The Slovak-Polish Border, 1918–1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[59] Hughes to Lord Milner, 3 May 1919, reproduced in Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris,* 101.
[60] Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris,* 30–1.
[61] Balding to Leverhulme, 25 Aug. 1919, 1, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[62] Leverhulme to Balding, 8 Jul. 1919, 2, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[63] A 'somewhat heated discussion' were Milner's exact words. See Milner Diary for 1919 cited in Macdonald, *Massey's Imperialism and the Politics of Phosphate*, 9–10.

Mandate or Monopoly?[64]

Drafted by Australian Attorney-General Robert Garran and signed on 2 July 1919, the Nauru Island Agreement (henceforth the Nauru agreement), arranged for the entirety of the PPC's interests on Nauru and Banaba to be bought by the Governments of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The agreement was designed so that the share of the proceeds was proportional to the amount each Government contributed towards the purchase. This meant that the United Kingdom and Australia were owed 42 per cent each and New Zealand the remaining 16 per cent. In practice, from very early on the United Kingdom looked for supplies closer to home, so their 42 per cent share of the output was either given to Australia or New Zealand or sold to other, 'outside' markets such as Japan.[65]

While not receiving its share of the spoils in phosphate, the UK did however ensure it took a 42 per cent share of any profit that came by way of these outside sales. As Australian Commissioner Sir William Dunk (1960–72) would say in a 1982 interview: 'the UK Commissioners were never at any time interested in anything other than making the phosphate operation pay'.[66] Despite article 11 of the agreement stipulating that the price of phosphate for the three countries should only be as high as to cover costs, it also said that 'any phosphates not required by the three Governments may be sold by the Commissioners at the best price obtainable'.[67] Given the UK's preference for fertilizer from elsewhere, this meant that everything produced in excess of Australia and New Zealand's requirements could be sold on the 'open market' in Japan. These provisions in the Nauru agreement became a point of contention among the commissioners with the UK commissioner, Dickinson (1920–30), eager to see business continue along the PPC's well-established commercial lines, the Australian commissioner, Harold B. Pope (1920–6), wanting sales limited to the parties to the agreement, and the New Zealand commissioner, Albert Ellis (1920–51), falling somewhere between the two.[68]

[64] 'Mandate or Monopoly: Violating the League, Nauru Agreement Criticised', *World* (Hobart), 19 Jun. 1920, 5.
[65] After the first five years of the BPC's existence, the split of phosphate sales worked out to: Australia 81.2 per cent, New Zealand 16.8 per cent, UK 2.0 per cent. See Pope to PM's Department, Australia, 30 Oct. 1924, 2, NAA, A518 B112/6/3, pt. 1.
[66] 'Notes on a Conversation with Sir William Dunk', 24 Jul. 1982, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 13, folder 86.
[67] The Nauru Island Agreement Act 1919 was finally assented to by the three governments on 28 October 1919.
[68] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 180–1.

Importantly, whereas Banaba's phosphate deposits were a last-minute inclusion into the Nauru agreement, nothing was said about the PPC's 51 per cent share in the Makatea business. Rather than being bought by the three governments, these interests were siphoned off into a newly created firm called the Anglo-French Phosphate Company, managed by PPC director, liquidator and UK representative on the BPC, Sir Alwin Dickinson and his brother-in-law, A.J. King.[69] The French, alongside many others, would soon have plenty to say about the legality of the Nauru agreement in relation to the League of Nations mandate, but the immediate effect of the BPC's creation was that its mandate to provide Australian and New Zealand farmers with cost price fertilizer meant the CFPO could no longer compete in the Australasian market on price. Compounding the company's post-war dilemma was that freights for Europe and Japan had not yet returned to pre-war levels, and the BPC, subsidized by the three governments, decided to sell their excess phosphate to Japan at slightly below market prices causing the CFPO problems in this market too.[70]

Even though the Nauru agreement might have theoretically addressed the growing political problem of rising superphosphate prices in Australia and New Zealand, its terms were not universally well received.[71] A faction of British politicians – above all, former Liberal Prime Minister and leader of the opposition, H.H. Asquith, and League of Nations architect and defender Robert Cecil – opposed the agreement at the time of its passage through the House of Commons.[72] In Asquith's terms, the agreement was 'illegal in its origin, unequal in its operation; it is opposed in all respects to all of the letter and the spirit of the Covenant of the League of Nations'.[73] Meanwhile Cecil thought the state-owned monopoly 'set a fatal example', making it virtually impossible for the United Kingdom 'to insist on the open door' in their dealings elsewhere.[74] Under the title 'A Malodorous Mandate', the *Auckland Star* called for an investigation into the new arrangement 'in the interests of morality, the League

[69] The Anglo-French Phosphate Company Ltd. was formed in December 1921 to take over the control of the 13,073 shares the PPC had in the CFPO, and to act as selling agents for Makatea phosphate. See Alwin R. Dickinson, 'Record of Proceedings, Final Meeting of the Shareholders of the Pacific Phosphate Company Limited, 6 Aug. 1925', 6-7, in Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 27, folio 14.

[70] Dickinson to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 3 Feb. 1921, 1, ANZ, G1 268, 1921/630, R24549202.

[71] Nicholas Hoare, 'New Zealand's "Critics of Empire": Domestic Opposition to New Zealand's Pacific Empire, 1883–1948', MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2014, 33–4.

[72] The act was passed on 16 June 1920 with a vote of 217 for and 77 against.

[73] Asquith, Speech to the House of Commons, 16 Jun. 1920, cited in Barrie Macdonald, *In Pursuit of the Sacred Trust: Trusteeship and Independence in Nauru* (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1988), 16–17.

[74] 'The Nauru Agreement: Opposition in the Commons, "Open Door" Advocates Displeased', *Age* (Melb.), 19 Jun. 1920, 10.

of Nations, the good name of the Empire, and the natives themselves', who had been kept largely in the dark regarding developments.[75] As I will soon show, such criticisms failed to recognize the difference between the regulations for C-class mandates (of which Nauru was one), and A- and B-class mandates, where the principle of the 'open door' was required for all industries operating within them.[76] In other words, even though the monopoly contravened the free-trading principles of the League, it was not necessarily illegal for C-class mandates which were designed to assume the laws and regulations of their mandatory powers (though they fell short of annexation because sovereignty did not lie with them). It should not come as any surprise that such nuance was not appreciated at this early stage in the League's development, and even though the news made it into the French press, it would take a number of years for the CFPO and other relevant stakeholders to revive the 'open door' argument in the face of continued difficult trading.[77] The rest of this chapter seeks to explain the reasons for these difficulties and the efforts the company made in its attempt to combat the dominance of the BPC.

Post-War Woes and the 1926 Australian Royal Commission

Without prior knowledge of the workings of the Pacific phosphate industry, one could be forgiven for expecting the 1920s to have been a prosperous time for the CFPO, such was the level of growth in agricultural production in Australia and New Zealand. With rural-backed political parties in power for the majority of the decade, the post-war period witnessed an acceleration of pre-war developments: increased rates of settlement, land clearing, and the consolidation of the small-scale yeoman ideal on the back of soldier settlement and other schemes to place the smallholder on the land in both Dominions.[78] In Australia, lands once classified as marginal and unfit for wheat growing in arid or semi-arid zones like the Mallee, were deemed ripe for agricultural settlement and were exploited through favourable government leases, and the creation of railways.[79] In New Zealand the 1921 recession might have dampened initial hopes for a 'new dawn', but its effects were

[75] 'A Malodorous Mandate', *Auckland Star*, 19 Jun. 1920, 6; Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers,* 138–9.
[76] Class A mandates were granted to the former Ottoman provinces in the Middle East, while Class B mandates were the former German colonies of Central Africa.
[77] Maxime Serpeille, 'Appel à la Société des Nations: La Grande Misère de l'ile Nauru', *L'œuvre,* 13 Jun. 1920, 4; 'Les anglais rachètent l'ile Nauru', *Le Radical de Marseille*, 18 Jun. 1920, in NAA (Melb.): R140, Box 2.
[78] Tom Brooking, '"Yeotopia" Found … But? The Yeoman Ideal that Underpinned New Zealand Agricultural Practice into the Early Twenty-First Century, with American and Australian Comparisons', *Agricultural History* 93:1 (2019): 78.
[79] Katie Holmes and Kylie Mirmohamadi, 'All Aboard for Modernity: The Better Farming Train', *Agricultural History* 91:2 (2017): 220.

soon overcome by advancements in agricultural science and the rigorous adoption of rock phosphate or superphosphate to fuel their 'grasslands revolution'.[80]

Yet, writing about Makatea's fortunes in November 1923, Balding disclosed that 'business is as difficult as I have ever known it'. Admitting that a dividend was 'not yet in sight', he nonetheless remained hopeful 'that, by pegging away, we shall make a success of Makatea' – albeit with a liberal dose of patience.[81] To be fair, the dip in fortunes could not all be put down to heightened competition from the BPC; environmental challenges also played their part. The 1923 Great Kantō earthquake and subsequent Tokyo and Yokohama fires, for example, led to the cancellation of Japanese contracts,[82] and a tidal wave which hit Makatea on 23 January 1920 wiped out the jetty at Port Temao, killing the island's chief-engineer and one other in the process.[83] Nevertheless, incidents such as these would have had less effect on the bottom line if the CFPO had been able to maintain a steady stream of exports to its former Australasian markets, now denied to them by the BPC's dominance.

Since as early as January 1921, the CFPO was petitioning the BPC to accept several cargoes of Makatea phosphate per year for New Zealand.[84] Citing a pre-war history of suppressed competition and 'reciprocal assistance in the execution of contracts during the periods of difficulty at the mines', the CFPO hoped that such an understanding could continue with the newly formed BPC.[85] If a suitable arrangement could not be found for either New Zealand or Australia, Bertrand threatened to challenge the commissioners in the Japanese market, which would, in his view, 'bring about a considerable reduction in price, on which account both our exploitations would suffer'.[86] Whereas Dickinson, the UK Commissioner, adopted a magnanimous attitude toward the CFPO's request (he was,

[80] Tom Brooking and Paul Star, 'Remaking the Grasslands: The 1920s and 1930s', in *Seeds of Empire: The Environmental Transformation of New Zealand,* ed. Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 179–88.
[81] Balding to Leverhulme, 3 Nov. 1923, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Gouverneur des EFO to Ministère des Colonies, 26 Jan. 1920, ANOM: OCEA/104; *Le Feï,* 9 Feb. 1920; 'Hurricane Swept: Makatea Island Devastated', *Daily Telegraph* (Syd.)*,* 25 Mar. 1920, in NAA (Melb.): R140, Box 2.
[84] As selling agent for the CFPO, Dickinson's nephew, A.J. King, was also making the case for Makatea. See King to Gaze, 7 Apr. 1921, NAA (Melb.): R40, 1–37.
[85] Bertrand to the BPC, 8 Jan. 1921, 1, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4 (the letter is also available at ANZ, G1 268, 1921/630, R24549202).
[86] Ibid. A market sharing proposal was also offered where phosphate from the two companies would be sold through the same agent in Japan on a progressive scale favouring supply from Banaba and Nauru for shipments up to 30,000 tons and Makatea for orders of 30,000 and over.

after all, a director of the CFPO until 1917 and the creator of the Anglo-French company), Australian Commissioner Harold B. Pope was adamant that the BPC's role was to serve nobody but the farmers of the three nations involved.[87] In response to continued requests from the CFPO, Pope, who was hand-picked by Prime Minister Hughes to look after Australian interests, would argue that the Nauru agreement 'does not suit Makatea, but that island is not and should not be any concern of ours'.[88]

It was over the issue of external markets and Dickinson's involvement in the Makatea business that the famous cleavage between the UK and Australian commissioners, which eventually led to a 1926 Royal Commission, began.[89] Pope, an outsider from the beginning within the PPC–BPC old boys' network, suspected that Dickinson's shareholdings in the Anglo-French company created an unacceptable conflict of interest. Dickinson, on the other hand, continued believing – as he had during the days of the PPC – that the CFPO needed to be kept onside in the event that the BPC could not fulfil its contracts. As he put it: 'No one can foresee when we may have epidemics, tidal waves, or other disasters or difficulties and in such events, Makatea would be a useful fallback'.[90] According to Dickinson, therefore, it was in the interests of the Australasian farmer to have Makatea phosphate available to them if needs warranted (as was the case in 1926 when continued bad weather caused 21,000 tons of phosphate to be purchased from Makatea).[91] Pope, however, did not accept this rationalization, and was convinced that the sole reason Dickinson was propping up Makatea was to further the business interests of himself and his family.[92]

Despite being judged harshly by Maslyn Williams and Barrie Macdonald for his parochialism, Pope's rationale for leaving Makatea alone was not completely without merit.[93] Given the paucity of viable alternative markets available to the CFPO, he would have known that the BPC could afford to play tough with the French in good business conditions, and still count on them as a fallback if the Australians ran into trouble at Nauru

[87] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 182.
[88] Pope to Captain Ainsworth, 31 Jul. 1924, 2–3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 29, folio 2.
[89] For further papers relating to the Royal Commission, see NAA, CP368/6, 1/4.
[90] Dickinson, 'Meeting at Australia House', 23 May 1923, in 'Extracts from the Royal Commission Transcript', 31, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 30, folio 11.
[91] Gaze, 'Memo. For Board of Commissioners, no. 85', 14 Apr. 1926, 5, NAA (Melb.): R40, 64–95.
[92] Pope to Secretary, PM's Department, 17 Mar. 1923, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 29, folio 2.
[93] For discussion on Pope's role in the BPC, see Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers,* 178–86.

and Banaba.[94] Unlike his fellow commissioners, Pope's distance from the inner circle of the PPC before the War meant he felt no loyalty to the CFPO and Makatea, and his literal interpretation of the Nauru agreement, coupled with the duty he felt was owed to the Australian taxpayer, clearly trumped the broader, commercial mindedness of the London-based Dickinson. Even if Dickinson's views were taken into account, Pope questioned the commercial sense in keeping the Makatea industry alive, pointing out that: 'Makatea although established 16 years, has never paid a dividend'; it had been mismanaged to the point where it was like 'a nice large baby', carried by the PPC until the war and now expected to be carried by the BPC as before.[95] He thus insisted that shipments from Makatea should be entertained only 'when the total output from Nauru and Ocean Island [Banaba] was insufficient to satisfy the requirements of the three countries'.[96]

This attitude was largely shared by the New Zealanders. In 1922 its Department of Agriculture was 'strongly against' the BPC coming to an arrangement with the French company, stating that although 'there is no feeling of antagonism towards the Company', it was figured that 'in order to get the best possible results from Nauru and Ocean Islands, their full output must be secured'.[97] With maximum production estimated to be at 430,000 tons per year, it was not until 1923/24 that scale was reached.[98] Prior to this certain members of the BPC were worried that if the UK and New Zealand were to demand their full quotas (42 and 16 per cent respectively), they would find themselves in a 'very awkward position' of not being able to meet Australian requirements.[99] However, since the UK preferred to import its phosphate from North Africa and the USA, this embarrassment never eventuated. Failing to recognize the potential danger of a retaliatory competitor, the emboldened Pope argued that since Australasian demand sat at around 300,000 tons per year, and the BPC could ship up to 400,000 tons per year from Nauru and Ocean Island, it was illogical to take shipments from Makatea. Moreover, as Japan only needed roughly 60,000 tons for 1922/23, this market could also be met by Nauru and Banaba without

[94] This will be demonstrated most starkly during the Second World War, see chapter five.
[95] Pope, 'Record of interview between the Prime Minister; the Attorney General; the Minister for Defence; and the Australian Commissioner, British Phosphate Commission, at Commonwealth Offices, Melbourne, 29 Jan. 1926', 6, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 30, vol. 8.
[96] Ellis to Pope, 8 Mar. 1922, 2, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 29, folio 2.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Balding to Lever, 29 Mar. 1921, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[99] As of 1921, the demand for NSW, Victoria and Queensland alone sat at around 200,000 tons per year or 50 per cent of the total output of Nauru and Banaba. See Gaze, 'Memo for the Commissioners, no.12', 5 Apr. 1921, NAA (Melb.): R40 1–37.

making any allowance for Makatea.[100] From Pope's perspective, the CFPO ought to have been grateful that the BPC had left them the Hawaiian market.

Though Pope's and Ellis's position might have temporarily won out over their more esteemed British colleague, the CFPO did not take the BPC's unwillingness to cooperate lying down.[101] Soon after receiving the news that an arrangement could not be entered into, the CFPO's British selling agent A.J. King launched an aggressive campaign to undercut the BPC's contracts with Australian and New Zealand buyers for the 1922/23 financial year.[102] In New Zealand, manufacturers readily took up the Makatea offer not just on account of the lower price, but as a protest against growing government interference in the industry since the Department of Agriculture began handling sales after the war.[103] Despite the BPC's mandate to provide Australian and New Zealand farmers with high grade phosphate at low prices, customers in both countries were annoyed that prices had not considerably dropped, a fact many attributed to the lack of competition in the market. That the New Zealand government reacted to the CFPO's tactics by contemplating a complete ban on sales from sources outside of Nauru and Banaba would have done even less to endear it to local manufacturers.[104] The price offered was evidently an unsustainable one for the CFPO, but the company's actions had the effect of forcing the BPC into lowering its prices to an equally unsustainable level and thus gave the CFPO greater bargaining power when it came to the next round of negotiations.[105]

The CFPO's position strengthened to the point that by 1924, the BPC's general manager, the long-serving Alfred Harold Gaze, was recommending an agreement be reached with the CFPO to avoid encountering a similar price war.[106] A deal guaranteeing a minimum purchase of 20,000 to 30,000 tons per year (albeit on the proviso that the CFPO did not make their own sales), gave the CFPO the kind of security needed to issue its first ever dividend the following year.[107] More promising still for Makatea, as the decade wore on,

[100] Gaze, 'Notes upon Discussions with Commissioners during Visit of Mr. A.F. Ellis to Melbourne, 25 Jan. to 10 Feb., 1922', 2, NAA (Melb.): R134 Book 14, 429862.
[101] Ibid., 3.
[102] Offering 42/- per ton as opposed to the BPC's 46/- per ton, see Gaze, 'Memo for the Commissioners, no. 49', 11 Apr. 1923, 4, NAA (Melb.): R 40 38–63.
[103] Ibid., 6.
[104] G.M. to D.A. Aiken, 3 Apr. 1922, Wellington City Council Archives (hereinafter WCCA): AF080-4 (2). With thanks to Judy Bennett for bringing these files to my attention.
[105] G.M. to M.D., 'Phosphate', 9 May 1922, WCCA: AF080-4 (3).
[106] Gaze, 'Memo for the Commissioners, no. 59', 11 Jan. 1924, 4, NAA (Melb.): R 40 38–63.
[107] CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire des Actionnaires* (Paris: M. Grandchamp, 1925), 2.

output from Nauru and Banaba could not keep up with growing Australasian demand.[108] From 1925 to 1930, the BPC was required to purchase ever greater amounts of 'outside phosphate' to keep their Australasian clients happy. Dickinson's warnings of poor weather came true, and in 1926 35,000 tons of Makatea phosphate were bought alongside equal quantities of Christmas Island, Florida and Morocco rock.[109] As Dickinson wrote:

> The position now is that Australia and New Zealand are in need of Makatea phosphate but adequate supplies of it cannot be obtained and a much higher price has now to be paid … than would have been paid had a timely working arrangement been made. Now the only possibility of obtaining Makatea phosphate is in competition with other countries … which are ready to pay high prices for it.[110]

It was little wonder then that Pope, who still clung to his earlier parochial views, found himself ostracized by the other commissioners until the 1926 Royal Commission found that 'harmony between commissioners … cannot … be established so long as Mr Pope remains as Australian Commissioner'.[111]

Pope's dismissal was not necessarily cause for celebration by the CFPO. With Pope out of the picture, the CFPO was now more likely to be able to sell to Australia and New Zealand. However, the BPC was also now free to move beyond the Australasian market and sell for profit in the Japanese market in order to cover the losses incurred in Australia and New Zealand by selling at cost price. Fortunately for the Pacific industry as a whole, demand for superphosphate was at the high point of the economic cycle in the second half of the decade, which the CFPO were able to exploit via contracts with the BPC. The Australian Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce, who succeeded Hughes in early 1923, had launched his 'men, money and markets' campaign, even boasting that Australia had 'the best climate, generally a fertile soil, and the richest productivity in the world'.[112] The Better Farming Train was winding its way through rural Victoria, with its expert lecturers encouraging farmers to buy as much superphosphate as possible to help 'deliver the promise of a wheat-based civilization to Australia's dry interiors'.[113] Wheat production,

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[108] Dickinson, 'Note Regarding Outside Phosphate Business, etc.', 10 Jun. 1930, 1, TNA: T 161/453/3.
[109] Gaze, 'Memo for the Commissioners, no. 85', 14 Apr. 1926, 5, NAA (Melb.): R 40 64–95.
[110] Dickinson, 'Memorandum regarding Makatea', Oct. 1926, NAA (Melb.): R 99.
[111] 'Result of Royal Commission', Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 30, folio 13.
[112] S.M. Bruce, speech at Narrabri, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Aug. 1928, in David Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce: Australian Internationalist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 38.
[113] Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 103–6; Holmes and Mirmohamadi, 'All Aboard for Modernity', 221, 226.

moreover, was at its peak in South Australia, with about 85–90 per cent of it being sown with superphosphate fertilizer (in comparison to just 27 per cent in 1900).[114] A similar transformation took place in Western Australia where superphosphate was judged a necessary remedy for the region's sandy and ironstone gravelly soils.[115] Across the continent, the total amount of land under agriculture had quadrupled from over 2 million to close to 9 million hectares between 1890 and 1930.[116] Similar figures could be repeated for New Zealand's grasslands, where farmers were buoyed by the seemingly 'limitless' potential of the post-war butter, mutton and wool prospects due to the state-sponsored, yield-boosting 'scientific turn' in agriculture.[117] And in Japan, the agricultural boom had spread into Manchuria where, following the Japanese occupation of various zones of Manchuria after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and the Russo-Japanese War a decade later, the extent of cultivated land quickly grew from 8 million to 13 million hectares between 1908 and 1930.[118]

That these surges in agriculture and economic production in Australia, New Zealand and Japan were being propelled by preferential phosphate imports from mandated territories which, at least in theory, belonged to all members of the League of Nations under a sacred trust of civilization, must have been particularly galling for the French, not to mention those who retained their faith in the League's founding principles. While the Great Depression would moderate these upward trends somewhat, it would take the arrival of the Second World War to change fundamentally what were, by the turn of the decade, well-established market conditions. The CFPO would continue to push for concessions from their old senior partner throughout the 1930s, drilling further into the legality of the Nauru agreement, though the parochial line established by Harold Pope in the early 1920s proved especially hard to crack in the aftermath of the global downturn.

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[114] Ted Henzell, *Australian Agriculture: Its History and Challenges* (Collingwood, Vic.: CSIRO, 2007), 16–7.
[115] G.H. Burvill, 'Superphosphate and Trace Elements', in *Agriculture in Western Australia: 150 Years of Development and Achievement, 1829–1979,* ed. G.H. Burvill (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1979), 106.
[116] Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers: A History of Australians Shaping their Environment,* 2nd ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 135.
[117] Brooking and Star, 'Remaking the Grasslands: the 1920s and 1930s', 178–9; Brooking, '"Yeotopia" Found … But?', 78–9.
[118] Higuchi, 'Japan as an Organic Empire', 152.

The Depression and *l'affaire des phosphates*

Just as the CFPO began the 1920s on an uneven footing thanks to lingering wartime economic difficulties, the October 1929 Wall Street crash and resulting depression meant the 1930s also began in an environment of disruption.[119] A rare three-year period of 'prosperity' from 1928 to 1930 meant the company felt the effects of the global downturn 'less acutely' than European-based industries.[120] By 1932, however, exports had considerably decreased and the company was forced to react by reducing costs and trying to stimulate growth by other means.[121] As shown in the previous chapter this meant, among other things, a freeze on recruiting workers, but it also led to a renewed campaign to re-enter markets closed to the company since the Depression hit.[122] In identifying the BPC as the obstacle, the lines of attack were similar yet in contrast to the 1920s, when correspondence remained between directors. The 1930s campaign was launched at the diplomatic level via a 1934 letter to the Dominions Office from the French Ambassador to London, Charles Corbin.[123]

While obviously written against the backdrop of the Depression, Corbin's note was also more specifically addressing the decision pushed by the Australian and New Zealand representatives on the BPC in 1929 to phase out the purchase of so-called 'outside phosphate' from places such as Makatea, Christmas Island and Morocco.[124] According to Williams and Macdonald, the BPC had taken a simple business decision as their earlier contracts with Makatea had expired and it was evident that Australasian demand had

[119] To use the effect of the Depression on Australian consumption as an example, fertilizer application on all crops dropped from 902,079 tons in 1930 to 614,221 tons in 1931. See Edgars Dunsdorfs, *The Australian Wheat-Growing Industry, 1788–1948* (Melbourne: The University Press, 1956), 277.
[120] J. Nicault, 'CFPO', Jul. 1943, AN, OCEA/114.
[121] A reduction of around 50 per cent between 1930 and 1931 according to one company estimate. See CFPO, 'Note au sujet de la Compagnie Francaise des Phosphates de l'Oceanie', 25 Mar. 1933, 2, ANOM: OCEA/124. See, also, the 1931 and 1932 annual general meetings of the CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire du 21 Octobre 1931* (Paris: M. Grandchamp, 1931); *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire du 19 Octobre 1932* (Paris: M. Grandchamp, 1932).
[122] CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire du 25 Octobre 1934* (Paris: M. Grandchamp, 1934). Touze also lobbied the French colonial ministry for a reduction, see Touze to M. le Ministre des Colonies, 10 Jun. 1932, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[123] Copies of the French ambassador's letter can be found enclosed in J.H. Thomas to PM, Australia, 9 May 1934, NAA, A518, J112/6/3; NAA (Melb.): R99, Makatea; BDIC, Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/1; Annex 75, in International Court of Justice, *Certain Phosphate Lands in Nauru (Nauru v Australia), Memorial of the Republic of Nauru,* Vol. 4, April 1990.
[124] See correspondence contained in 'Purchase of outside phosphates (Makatea, etc)', NAA: A518, J112/6/3; Gaze, 'Memorandum for the Commissioners, no. 108', 24 Dec. 1930, 3, NAA (Melb.): R40 106–115. Makatea exports to Australia fell from 106,419 tons in 1929 to 34,626 in 1933. See 'Statement Shewing [sic] the Additional Cost of Makatea Phosphate Shipped to Australia and New Zealand Compared with the Average Price of Nauru and Ocean Island Phosphate', 26 Jul. 1934, NAA (Melb.): R99, Makatea.

decreased to a level that could be covered by the output from Nauru and Banaba alone (which, in Nauru's case, had increased from a Depression-induced low of 240,855 tons in 1930/31 to 436,100 tons in 1932/33).[125] However, to the French, this 'abnormal situation' had more to do with the BPC selling phosphate 'under conditions which are not in any way commercial', and to the perception that the BPC was 'a privileged institution' in terms of favourable tax conditions and 'its position vis-à-vis Australian and New Zealand buyers'.[126] Importantly, the diplomat argued that 'such a state of affairs' (in other words, 'an indirect subsidy… at the expense of the mandated territory'), 'was evidently not anticipated by the countries which conferred the mandate over Nauru'. The letter ended with the veiled threat that if 'an amicable agreement' could not be reached – in this case they suggested 20 per cent of Australia and New Zealand's requirements – 'the French Government would have [the] possibility, though with the utmost reluctance, to bring the matter to the notice of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations'.[127]

Even though Williams and Macdonald dismissed the affair as little more than a bump in the road for the BPC, our interest in this letter and the wider French critique of the Nauru agreement should not be diminished. From the CFPO's perspective, the arguments mobilized against the BPC perfectly summarize the French company's unenviable position. Moreover, the affair can be seen as a predecessor to the case the Nauruans first brought against Australia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the late 1980s.[128] Whereas the Nauruan case would result in a $107 million out-of-court settlement, the lack of traction in the 1930s reflects the stark differences between the colonial and post-colonial eras. As Susan Pedersen comments, 'that the Nauruans … would haul Australia before the International Court of Justice … was, in an era of empire, unimaginable'.[129] The BPC were secure in their legal standing as the legitimate inheritors of the Pacific Phosphate Company's 99-year lease and in their supposed moral standing as material benefactors to the Nauruans. For the CFPO, however, the letter reflected more than two decades' worth of frustration at being forced to survive on the margins of the industry, with only three

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[125] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 269; 'Shipments of Phosphate from Nauru & Ocean Is. by the British Phosphate Commissioners', TNA: DO 140/572.
[126] Corbin to Foreign Office, 25 Apr. 1934, NAA: A518, J112/6/3.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ramon E. Reyes Jr., '*Nauru v. Australia:* The International Fiduciary Duty and the Settlement of Nauru's Claims for Rehabilitation', *New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law* 16:1–2 (1996): 19–22.
[129] Pedersen, *The Guardians,* 76.

moderately prosperous years to show for it. Moreover, taken from the perspective of modern international law, the argument sits well within the bounds of the conclusions reached by Christopher Weeramantry in the Commission of Inquiry on the Rehabilitation of Phosphate Lands in Nauru and was included as one of the annexes to the Nauruan case.[130] That the letter was based on a 24-page legal opinion by one of France's top international lawyers, the future President of the ICJ (1949–52) Jules Basdevant,[131] suggests its origins could have been deeper than the result of somebody in the French Government having spoken to the disaffected Dickinson or King, as suggested by historians Williams and Macdonald.[132]

In 1934 Basdevant was the chief legal advisor to the French foreign ministry, splitting his time between Paris and Geneva. Prior to this post, he held the chair in international law at *la faculté de droit* in Paris (1922) and in 1918-19 he was involved in the creation of the League of Nations.[133] In representing the CFPO, Basdevant argued that the Nauru agreement contravened the 'open-door' principles enshrined in the League of Nations covenant. For the lawyer, *'l'affaire des phosphates'*, as he termed it, came down to two interrelated questions: Was the monopoly that the three Governments operated over Nauru compatible with the regulations and principles of the Covenant of the League of Nations? In other words, were the mandatory powers administering Nauru in a disinterested manner? And was the practice of selling Nauruan phosphate at cost price to the three nations compatible with the regulations and principles of the Covenant as well? That is, were they adhering to the principle of the open-door?[134] By profiting directly from their mandate, he charged the mandatory powers with failing to operate in a disinterested manner, and by effectively subsidizing the BPC to sell their product at cost price, he charged the partner governments with unfair trading.

[130] For a summary, see Weeramantry, *Nauru.*
[131] Jules Basdevant, 'Note sur quelques questions juridiques relatives à l'exploitation des phosphates de Nauru', 6 Jan. 1934, Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/2.
[132] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 269. Upon his retirement in 1930, Dickinson had unsuccessfully argued that he was owed £9,000 for his role in selling phosphate to international markets, see Dickinson to Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), 23 Apr. 1930, TNA: T 161/453/3.
[133] He is perhaps most well-known for being the first leading public servant to resign from the Vichy government, tending his resignation in May 1941 after the Vichy government gave the Nazis permission to use French aerodromes in Syria. See C. Chaumont, 'Préface', in *Hommage d'une generation de juristes au Président Basdevant* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1960), xvi–xvii.
[134] Basdevant, 'Note sur quelques questions juridiques relatives à l'exploitation des phosphates de Nauru', 6 Jan. 1934, 8, Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/2.

Figure 4.4: Jules Basdevant as French legal adviser at the San Francisco Conference, 25 Apr. 1945.
Source: UN Multimedia, Photo #178654.

While many have focused on the way the agreement contravened the idea of a 'sacred trust', created to compel mandatory powers to administer their mandates in the 'interests of the indigenous population' (art. 22), here I am more concerned with the agreement's relationship to the principle of the 'open door' as conceived at the time. As Patricia Clavin has argued, insofar as the League of Nations was concerned with international economics at the time of its founding, it was in 'the promotion of free trade'.[135] The third of Wilson's 14 points, moreover, was 'the removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance'.[136] The rationale for the promotion of free trade – in Glenda Sluga's terms, the capitalist assumption that 'the free flow of trade and commerce brought prosperity and peace to everyone' – has less force one hundred

[135] Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013), 1.
[136] Michael Patrick Cullinane and Alex Goodall, *The Open Door Era: United States Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 70.

years on.[137] However, given the general rise in protectionism across in the globe in the decades leading up to the Great War, one can more easily understand Wilson's preoccupation, especially given the US's long-standing policy goal, formulated most notably by John Hay in relation to China, of open access to the world's markets.[138] If Wilson had had his way, the open-door principle would have applied to all mandates equally, yet Lloyd George's last-minute compromise, while pleasing the Dominions, meant the conditions for C-class mandates more closely resembled old-fashioned annexation than the principles of new internationalism driving the formulation of the A- and B-class mandates.[139]

Grappling with the fact that that the 'open door' principle only ever technically applied to the latter class of mandate, Basdevant cited multiple examples of where statesmen and academics had nevertheless referred to the policy of disinterestedness being essential to the administration of a mandate, regardless of its class. For example, the Belgian statesman, Henri Rolin, wrote in 1927 that: 'The word *disinterestedness* does not figure in the Covenant nor in the mandatory agreements, however it plays an absolutely considerable role today, appearing, one could say, as the new institution's most recognisable trait'.[140] In a similar vein, D.F.W. Van Rees, the Dutch member of the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) who, according to Lord Lugard, wrote the 'authoritative text on mandate law',[141] was cited as having argued that 'in accepting the mandate, the mandatory power thus renounces any *material* advantages that come to itself *exclusively*'.[142] Moreover, behind this argument was the assumption that there was ample room within the PMC for evolution; that is, for the introduction of new conventions or principles in relation to how the mandatory system would work and the possibility of bringing C-class mandates into the international, 'open door' fold. Writing in 1930, Benjamin Gerig, a student of leading PMC member William E. Rappard, felt that change

[137] Glenda Sluga, 'Remembering 1919: International Organizations and the Future of International Order', *International Affairs* 95:1 (2019): 34.
[138] Cullinane and Goodall, *The Open Door Era,* 70.
[139] Benjamin Gerig, *The Open Door and the Mandates System* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), 96–7, 100–01.
[140] Henri Rolin, 'La pratique des mandats internationaux', Recueil des Cours de l'Académie de Droit international XIX (1927): 594, cited in Basdevant, 'Note sur quelques questions juridiques relatives à l'exploitation des phosphates de Nauru', 6 Jan. 1934, 11, Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/2. Emphasis added by Basdevant.
[141] Susan Pedersen credited Van Rees with establishing the 'norm of non-sovereignty' among mandatory powers. See Pedersen, *The Guardians,* 207.
[142] D.F.W. Van Rees, *Les Mandats internationaux*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Rousseau, 1927–28), 185–87 cited in Basdevant, 'Note sur quelques questions juridiques relatives à l'exploitation des phosphates de Nauru', 6 Jan. 1934, 12, Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/2. Emphasis added by Basdevant.

would be even more likely once the US finally ratified the system.[143] Thus we see Basdevant, though being careful not to throw all his weight behind the case, placing emphasis on the principle of 'disinterestedness' and recommending pressure be put on Australia and the British Empire's record at the PMC.[144]

Unfortunately for the CFPO, the effectiveness of diplomatic pressure along these lines was limited. As we now know, any belief in the PMC's capcity to force the issue on the 'open door' would have required an overestimation of its ability to scale back pre-war imperial arrangements.[145] While the British Empire's administration of Nauru was discussed at the PMC, the sporadic questioning of the mandatory power's fidelity to the 'sacred trust' never went very far, such was the Australians' ability to suppress all record of Nauruan discontent.[146] Moreover, given the PMC was not particularly effective at enforcing 'open-door' policies over B-class mandates such as the Anglo-Persian Oil concessions in Iraq, it would have been well nigh impossible to implement such control over C-class mandates.[147] Even Dickinson, the most liberal of all those involved in the BPC, pointed out the monopoly over Nauruan phosphate was hardly unique:

> …in the case of Angaur – an ex-German phosphate island mandated to Japan – I understand that Japan has prohibited the shipment of phosphate at any price to any country other than Japan. … I therefore do not see how any of the Allies can complain – regarding the action of the three partner countries in dealing with the phosphate deposits in Nauru.[148]

'So far as the working of these [Nauruan] deposits is concerned', he added, 'there could be no question of the "open door"'.[149]

For all these reasons, the Dominions Office, with the assent of the Australian and New Zealand governments, had little difficulty in dismissing the French ambassador's charge, arguing that 'the operations of the British Phosphate Commission have resulted in nothing

[143] Gerig mistakenly considered that this would be forthcoming, see Gerig, *The Open Door*, 101.
[144] Basdevant, 'Note sur la procedure à suivre dans l'affaire des phosphates', Fonds Basdevant, F 1830/52 bis, 19/2.
[145] Pedersen, *The Guardians,* 259.
[146] Ibid., 76.
[147] Gerig, *The Open Door*, 181–91.
[148] Dickinson, 'Meeting at Australia House', 23 May 1923, in 'Extracts from the Royal Commission Transcript', 32, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 30, folio 11.
[149] 'Notes on Meeting Held in Room 110 at 10 a.m. on Wednesday 23rd May 1923', 6, NAA: CP368/6, 1/4.

but benefit to the inhabitants [of Nauru]', and that the 'suggestion that the terms of the Mandate have been disregarded either in their general intention or in any particular Article' was unfounded.[150] This would not be the last time representatives from the three governments heard about Makatea from their French counterparts, with the issue of quotas raising its head during trade negotiations between France and Australia in 1936, and France and New Zealand in 1938.[151] However, these discussions were notably conducted along more traditional and less threatening diplomatic lines.

Conclusion

There is a temptation to imagine that the CFPO's constant lobbying for a percentage of the Australasian market meant that market conditions and company relations remained relatively static over the three decades in the lead up to 1939. They did not. First, as Lord Leverhulme observed prior to the creation of the BPC, the events of the First World War created a 'more restricted' global market. Leverhulme mentioned the activity of the Americans in protecting Florida phosphate for their domestic market, and also France which had placed restrictions on the amount of Algerian phosphate that could be exported.[152] According to the Sunlight-soap magnate, this protectionist tendency, coupled with the aforementioned growing global demand, could only mean higher prices (at least for the Pacific producers) 'for many years to come'.[153] Second, the discovery of the enormous Moroccan phosphate beds in 1920 suddenly alleviated much of this upward price pressure by increasing global supply.[154] Emerging as the new global powerhouse throughout the 1920s, the Office chérifien des phosphates (OCP) reacted to the Great Depression and constant 'competition and price-cutting' by encouraging greater cooperation among producers, establishing a cartel which, from 1933, would fix prices among all suppliers to Europe. The Pacific companies were originally reluctant to join yet after further protests from the CFPO and the Christmas Island Phosphate company about

[150] Thomas to PM, Australia, 'Memorandum', 4 Aug. 1934, NAA: A518, J112/6/3.
[151] 'Negotiations with France: Rough notes on discussion at Canberra, 4 Feb. 1936', NAA: AA1963/77, 118/B/4; Jean Trémoulet, Consul General of France to W.M. Hughes, Minister for External Affairs, 14 January 1939, NAA: A518 J112/6/3.
[152] Leverhulme to Balding, 8 July 1919; Balding to Leverhulme, 8 Apr. 1919, 2, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[153] Leverhulme to Balding, 8 July 1919, 2, Balding Papers, Box 2.
[154] 'Phosphates Find in Morocco', 1 May 1920, *The Register* (Adelaide), in NAA (Melb.): R140, Box 2.

the BPC’s behaviour, the OCP managed to bring the Pacific companies to agreement over Europe and Japan.[155]

For the CFPO, the OCP’s entrance into the market, as an even bigger player than the BPC, levelled the playing field somewhat, with the arrangement securing for the company one third of the Pacific’s European business and a larger quota than the BPC for Japan on account of it being the CFPO’s principal market and only ‘an incidental’ market for the BPC.[156] Thus, the CFPO ended the 1930s moving further away from its ‘natural’ market in New Zealand, and closer to Japan. Yet even then, the advent of the Sino-Japanese War caused the French to start yet another campaign for access to Australia or New Zealand, rehashing the old line that France was also a ‘principal member’ of the League of Nations which had gifted the British Empire the mandate for Nauru.[157] Like his predecessor, the new UK representative on the BPC, Arthur Gaye, was personally inclined to accept the proposal. He thought that it would be a ‘warmly appreciated’ gesture, and he thus reminded Gaze of ‘the importance of maintaining and strengthening the friendly relations between the British Empire and France, especially in the present state of the world’.[158]

While the deteriorating state of international relations and its effect on the industry is a thread to be picked up in the following chapter, for now we must put the CFPO’s struggles into perspective. We need to be wary that we do not overstate the CFPO’s difficulties for, as Michel Panoff has written, the CFPO were still ‘the most powerful firm in the colony’, and the local families associated with it (Goupil, Sigogne, Touze) were significant players in the colonial politics of the pre-autonomy era prior to the Second World War.[159] From 1914 to 1939 shipments increased from 75,000 tons per year to 170,627 per year, and from 1916 the company’s capital increased from 11 million francs to 37.5 million francs in 1937.[160] A big part of this expansion, though not a focus of discussion here, was that the CFPO also controlled the French Polynesian crude oil industry due to the fact that charters would arrive at Tahiti with barrel loads of oil, before moving on to Makatea to collect

[155] Gaze, ‘Memorandum for the Commissioners, No. 118’, 4 Dec. 1935, 2, NAA (Melb.): R40, 116–118; Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 263. In 1930 the OCP had grown to an annual tonnage of 1,779,008 compared to the CFPO’s 186,000, see ‘Tableau comparative des expeditions annuelles…’, 1932, ANOM: OCEA/124.
[156] Gaze, ‘Memorandum for the Commissioners, No. 118’, 4 Dec. 1935, 2, NAA (Melb.): R 40, 116–118
[157] Note of an interview between Touze and Gaye, 27 Oct. 1938, 2, TNA: DO 35/590/6.
[158] Gaye to Gaze, 18 Nov. 1938, TNA: DO 35/590/6.
[159] Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse,* 213. Signone and Touze were Goupil’s son-in-laws.
[160] ‘Shipments’, NAA (Melb.): R99, Makatea.

phosphate. However, since phosphate rock was one of the colony's two principal exports, it was relied on by the administration for maintaining the balance of payments and supplying foreign currency. This gave the directors a certain degree of power in negotiations with the local administration, but the temptation to enforce large duties on the company to bolster the administration's coffers was also ever present.

If the relationship between the CFPO and the French Polynesian administrator was complicated, the relationship with the BPC was a lot more straightforward. The CFPO remained the poor cousins within the Pacific phosphate industry for the majority of the period. In comparison with the CFPO's modest growth over the period, the BPC went from exporting 300,000 tons per year before the First World War to over one million tons before the outbreak of the Second World War. Much of this could be put down to the Nauru agreement and, as Maslyn Williams put it, 'the legitimacy of setting up a nationalized and monopolistic industry in a territory subject to development according to the high humanistic principles of the League of Nations Mandate system'.[161] But there were also more fundamental reasons that put Makatea at a competitive disadvantage. For one, the deposit was many times smaller than that of Nauru. Secondly, the product from Makatea was of a lower grade than at Nauru and Banaba, or even Christmas. As Arundel once said: I 'presume M. Bertrand does not wish the sales of Makatea phosphate pressed in Australia to interfere with our own [PPC], although eighty per cent of phosphate, 1-1/2 per cent of iron and alumina, and 5 per cent moisture would hardly be a very formidable opposition'.[162]

Indeed, however formidable the CFPO and the Makatea may have been in French Polynesian terms, on the scale of the Pacific industry, Makatea never broke out of its role as the 'Third Phosphate Island'. Meanwhile, on a global scale, it was a very minor player.[163] What modified this situation was when the Pacific's first two islands became caught up in a new round of global hostilities after 1939, and suddenly Makatea assumed the kind of importance that its directors had always hoped for.

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[161] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 138.
[162] Arundel to Gaze, 'No.45', 7 Sep. 1910, PMB: 1206, Reel 16.
[163] J.P. Shortall, 'Makatea – The Third Phosphate Island', *PIM,* Jan. 1952, 65–66.

Chapter 5: War and the ‘Third Phosphate Island’

Figure 5.1: German Shelling of Nauru, 27 December 1940.
Source: NAA, MP1174/1, 1122.

War came to the Pacific before the infamous 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. German merchantmen had begun their assault on the Pacific phosphate industry almost exactly one year before by targeting five phosphate vessels off the coasts of Nauru and Banaba over a three-day period (6–8 December) in 1940. While these attacks did much to unnerve the European population of the two islands, more dramatic still was the German bombardment of Nauru on 27 December (Figure 5.1). Sailing so close to the shore as to fool its inhabitants into thinking they could have been politely returning the crew captured during the earlier December raid, the Germans instead let loose a series of shells targeting the island's oil plant and key phosphate installations.[1] This attack not only marked December 1940 as 'the blackest month' in Nauru's recorded history, but announced, in rather emphatic fashion, that the Pacific's phosphate resources were set to be a factor in the unfolding world war.[2]

In French Oceania, the colony was at first too preoccupied 'with internal political intrigue' to care all that deeply about threats to its own valuable phosphate deposits.[3] Much has been written about the supposedly swift *ralliement* to De Gaulle by the citizens of France's Pacific colonies.[4] However, from June to November 1940 – and a good portion of 1941 too – the European and *demi* population at Pape'ete was anything but united in their support for the little-known, London-based General. Much like the situation in metropolitan France, the capitulation gave rise to a variety of political positions in Pape'ete, perhaps most obviously defined by a split between the so-called '*jeunes hommes en colère*' who supported the Free French under the banner of the Comité France Libre, and the Comité des Français d'Océanie who pledged their loyalty to Maréchal Pétain and his Vichy Government.[5] Makatea was not immune to the politics of the occupation, either. Certain

[1] 'Diary of Mrs V Tothill', 13, NAA: MP1174/1, 1122.
[2] 'How Nauru Took the Shelling', *PIM*, Feb 1941, 35; 'Phosphate as War Factor: Great Value of Pacific Fields', *PIM,* Dec. 1940, 31.
[3] C.H. Archer, 'Defence of Tahiti and Makatea', 20 Dec. 1941, ANZ, N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[4] Jean-Marc Regnault and Ismet Kurtovitch, 'Les ralliements du Pacifique en 1940: Entre légende gaulliste, enjeux stratégiques mondiaux et rivalités Londres/Vichy', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 49:4 (2002): 71–90. For more general overviews, see Mazellier, ed., *Le Mémorial Polynésien, vol. 6*, 19–125; Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific Since 1940*, 1–32.
[5] Mazellier, ed., *Le Mémorial Polynésien, vol. 6,* 46.

island managers were singled out for their pro-Vichy views and, as the war went on, they struggled with the growing British presence on and around the island.[6]

All of this self-absorption left Makatea vulnerable to being occupied itself, as both Nauru and Banaba eventually were by the Japanese in early 1942. Indeed, as one journalist would comment several years after the war, ‘One of the great mysteries of the Pacific war was why no enemy action was ever taken against this most valuable and vulnerable target’.[7] One possible response to this puzzle is that once France’s Pacific colonies pledged allegiance to De Gaulle in London, responsibility for their defence was delegated to Britain’s Pacific Dominions. In theory, Australia would assume responsibility for New Caledonian affairs (and their nickel mines), while New Zealand would control matters in French Oceania (and their phosphate mine).[8] The entire region would eventually come under American command, but for several months before either Japan or the US officially entered the war, fundamental questions about defending the Eastern Pacific were being dealt with by New Zealand policymakers and military personnel on behalf of the British Empire and its wartime allies.

For the historian, the War opens new perspectives from which to approach Makatea’s development as a phosphate island. From little more than an afterthought in 1938, by 1942 Makatea had become, in the words of the BPC General Manager, Alfred Harold Gaze, ‘the most important source of phosphate supply for Australia and New Zealand’.[9] Yet, while the events of the war years undoubtedly gave the struggling industry a new lease on life, it also opened the industry to an unprecedented level of scrutiny. Suddenly the famously shadowy industry was forced to open its books to BPC officials and welcome tours of inspection from a variety of actors, all concerned about the island’s ability to provide enough phosphate rock in Nauru and Banaba’s absence. As Judy Bennett has argued, to a greater extent than in peacetime ‘the war revealed the interconnections that Pacific islands, even atolls such as Nauru, had with the great land masses and their peoples’.[10]

[6] After temporarily moving to Marseille, the CFPO’s business was eventually handled entirely by A.J. King and the Anglo-French Phosphate Company from London until 1945.
[7] Shortall, ‘Makatea: The Third Phosphate Island’, 66.
[8] Australia’s wartime experience in New Caledonia is covered in John Lawrey, *The Cross of Lorraine in the South Pacific: Australia and the Free French Movement, 1940–1942* (Canberra: Journal of Pacific History, 1982). No such text exists for New Zealand’s involvement with French Polynesia.
[9] BPC, ‘Notes re Makatea’, 23 Mar. 1945, NAA: R100, 50.
[10] Judith A. Bennett, *Natives and Exotics: World War II and Environment in the Southern Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 131.

Yet whereas from Bennett's perspective, the Second World War was the occasion on which Nauru became the 'Cinderella' of the Pacific, from another perspective, and, indeed, from the perspective of those people who had a stake in the Pacific phosphate industry, it was the war which finally gave Makatea, the so-called 'third phosphate island', its moment in the limelight.[11]

This chapter builds on themes already introduced throughout this thesis to underscore the extent to which Makatea's fate as a phosphate island was intrinsically linked to the vagaries of the world around it. At no point was this more apparent than during the Second World War when we see an intensification of the demands already placed on the island, namely the need to secure a reliable *main-d'œuvre* (more difficult than ever during the War), the need to maintain a certain level of production (also difficult due to a higher than usual degree of political intrigue), and the same old need to secure willing markets to receive this output.

As we shall see, with the Japanese occupation of Nauru, Banaba and Christmas Island, this latter imperative eased considerably as Australia and New Zealand had little other choice. If anything, the events of the Second World War reveal just how much Australia and New Zealand took the Pacific phosphate islands for granted. Referring several decades later to New Zealand's experience during the War, Minister of Agriculture and future deputy Prime Minister, Brian Talboys, wrote: 'When this supply was cut at the source… New Zealand was reminded sharply and unpleasantly of her reliance on Nauru and Ocean Islands'.[12]

To a certain extent, the wartime histories of the Pacific's phosphate islands have already been told,[13] as has the matter of Australasia's wartime fertilizer shortage.[14] However, what has not been properly explained is that it was phosphate from Makatea, above all, which filled the void. As journalist James P. Shortall wrote soon after the war's end: 'certainly no

[11] Shortall, 'Makatea: The Third Phosphate Island', 65.
[12] 'Introductory Message' by B.E. Talboys in Thomas Grace Tyrer, *Nauru and Ocean Islands Story* (Wellington: Hutcheson, Bowman and Stewart, 1962), 4.
[13] Macdonald, *Cinderellas of the Empire,* 143–66; Viviani, *Nauru,* 77–87; Ellis, 'New Zealand Farms and the "Phosphate Islands"', 60–4; Jemima Garrett, *Island Exiles* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1996).
[14] J.G. Crawford et al., *Wartime Agriculture in Australia and New Zealand, 1939–50* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1954); S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy, 1942–45* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1977), 498-501; J.V.T. Baker, *The New Zealand People at War: War Economy* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1965), 195–7.

island in all the broad Pacific was of more commercial importance to the war effort of Australia or New Zealand, or less known to the man in the street, than Makatea.'[15] This chapter therefore seeks to emphasize the island's place within the rapidly changing world order, proving once again that belying its size and its position in an archipelago sometimes defined as being the farthest inhabited region from a continental landmass, Makatea was far from a peripheral concern. After first emphasizing why the Pacific's phosphate islands loomed as targets for the Japanese Empire, I then alternate between focusing on the efforts made by New Zealand's Peter Fraser and Australia's wartime prime ministers to address their wartime fertilizer shortages and how developments on Makatea affected the island's ability to come to their rescue.

Originally devised as a temporary wartime measure to resolve the island's labour shortage, the Cook Islands–Makatea labour scheme (hastily and somewhat reluctantly cobbled together by the New Zealand Government in concert with the BPC, CFPO and the Free French colonial authorities over several months in mid to late 1942) forms the final subject of this chapter. What began as a temporary expedient soon evolved into a 13-year long programme directly involving 2,906 Cook Islands Māori, or approximately 20 per cent of all Cook Island males between the ages of 18 and 30. The effects of the scheme were such that geographer Peter Curson has labelled the Makatea experience as the most significant 'dislodging factor' in the eventual transition to the large-scale Cook Island migration to New Zealand which, to some observers, defines the post-colonial fate of the territory.[16]

Phosphate as War Factor

In early December 1940 the *Pacific Islands Monthly (PIM),* seemingly anticipating the German attacks at Nauru, reminded its readers that 'it is important to consider the phosphate industry of the Pacific' as a factor in the war slowly unfolding around them.[17] Admitting that the Pacific's phosphate islands had little military value, the magazine nevertheless suggested that people bear in mind that 'three great agricultural countries' – Australia, New Zealand and Japan – depended on these supplies and that, if war were

[15] James P. Shortall, 'The Phosphate Isle of Makatea', *The Mirror,* April 1946, 6.
[16] Curson, 'The Migration of Cook Islanders to New Zealand', 25. See also Rosemary Anderson, 'The Origins of Cook Island Migration to New Zealand, 1920–1950', MA thesis, University of Otago, 2014; I.G. Bertram and R.F. Watters, 'The MIRAB Process: Earlier Analyses in Context', *Pacific Viewpoint* 27: 1 (1986): 47–59.
[17] 'Phosphate as War Factor', *PIM,* Dec. 1940, 31.

ever declared between Britain and Japan, 'the two great phosphate islands of Nauru and Ocean Island, only a few hundred miles from the Japanese Mandated Territories, would be in a very exposed position'.[18] Notwithstanding the *PIM* and several other cautionary voices, it appears that it took the 'gentlemanly' visit by the German raiders (as BPC schoolteacher and nurse, Bridget Tothill, described it) for allied decision makers to wake up to the fact the Japanese Empire may have had designs on the Pacific's phosphate islands.[19]

Although nominally launched by Nazi forces, the December 1940 shelling of Nauru and the earlier attacks on phosphate ships should be interpreted as strategic manoeuvres made in concert with Germany's phosphate-hungry Japanese allies. In the first instance, not all the German raiders were particularly German, since two of them were the *Tokyo Maru* and the *Manyo Maru* and, according to witnesses, it took until the final moments for the Japanese insignia adorning the ships to be covered by the German naval ensign.[20] More to the point, in terms of both geography and economy, the Japanese had more reason to target the British phosphate islands than the Germans did. The fact that Japanese manufacturers were still importing phosphate from the Pacific until October 1940 was hardly an alibi; it must be remembered that the price they were paying for 'British' phosphate was at least 30 per cent higher than the two other great agricultural nations to their south.[21] In terms of the Makatea product, a *PIM* correspondent noted that Tokyo had for some time 'resented the fact that the Japanese were forced to make business for the French and English in order to obtain Makatea's phosphate'.[22] Stuck in the minds of some Japanese must have been the fact they had only narrowly missed out on occupying Nauru for themselves in the early days of the Great War. Had the Australians not beaten them to the punch by just three days, they could have been enjoying such plentiful, and cheap, access to the island's resources as the Australasian Dominions were.[23]

[18] Ibid.
[19] The *PIM* believed New Zealand and Australian authorities were culpable for these attacks owing to their carelessness about protecting shipping information, see 'How Were Raiders Helped?', *PIM*, April 1941, 51. This became the subject of a 1941 New Zealand Royal Commission inquiry which nonetheless cleared authorities of any wrongdoing.
[20] G.W. Dillon, 'My Impressions as a Prisoner Aboard the "Manyo Maru" and the "Tokyo Maru"', in Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 14, folder 95.
[21] Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 273.
[22] 'Tahiti Has Some Jap Prisoners', *PIM*, Oct. 1942, 16.
[23] 'By-Passed Phosphate Islands', *PIM*, Mar. 1945, 21.

Historians have been quick to identify increasing Japanese demand for various natural resources as the main driver of their expansion out of their so-called Malthusian trap, but attention to fertilizers, arguably the most important factor in the production of food, has been sorely lacking.[24] Gregory Cushman's recent portrayal of 'when the Japanese came to dinner', where he points out that the archipelagic nation's rapid industrialization was driven by the same kind of scientific application of phosphate fertilizers as in Australia and New Zealand, is a welcome exception.[25] Here Cushman describes, although all too briefly, how Malthusian-inspired fears of overpopulation and the inability to feed a growing population placed a premium on fertilizer-usage and access to phosphate deposits. As the *PIM* articulated in 1940, the Japanese agricultural industry 'was dependent upon good, regular supplies of phosphate'.[26]

In the lead-up to the war, the Japanese were the second largest consumers of Pacific phosphate and, according to environmental historian William M. Tsutsui, Japan was 'one of the world's most intensive users of chemical fertilizers' more generally.[27] Older Japanese farmers may have been slow to realize the benefits of high-grade Pacific phosphate, but the younger generation quickly saw its cost-saving potential.[28] By 1936 the traditional practice of fertilizing crops with soy bean cake had been almost completely overtaken by the application of more efficient chemical fertilizers.[29] The problem for Japan lay in the fact that the 100,000 tons per year of rock phosphate they received from the island of Angaur fell well short of their yearly demand of approximately one million tons (the same amount, incidentally, as Australia and New Zealand were consuming).[30] That the difference had to be obtained at market prices from islands such as Nauru, Banaba, Makatea and Christmas, whereas Australia and New Zealand were receiving their supplies at cost price, must have irked the rising power.

[24] See, for example, Jonathan Marshall, *To Have and Have Not: Southeast Asian Raw Materials and the Origins of the Pacific War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
[25] Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World,* 205–42.
[26] 'Phosphate as War Factor, *PIM*, Dec. 1940, 31.
[27] William M. Tsutsui, 'Landscapes in the Dark Valley: Toward an Environmental History of Wartime Japan', *Environmental History* 8:2 (2003): 301; Burleigh to Imai, 4 Mar. 1936, NAA: R156, 85. See, also, 'Phosphates in Japan: A Big Importer', *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (Qld.)*,* 6 Dec. 1930, 5.
[28] 'Confidential Report on Phosphate Market in Japan', Mar. 1936, 8, NAA: R156, 85.
[29] Ibid., 11.
[30] Australia and New Zealand's combined phosphate consumption for 1937–38 was 999,701 tons, see H. Gaze, 'Memorandum for Australian Fertiliser Manufacturers for Annual Conference', 1 May 1940, 3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 2.

Despite attempts to downplay the effects on production, the German/Japanese attacks of late-December 1940 caused extensive damage to phosphate operations on Nauru.[31] That damage was extensive enough for some to worry about the downstream effects on Australia's and New Zealand's primary sectors more generally. Fortunately for the industry, such fears did not come to immediate fruition as the BPC could draw on a large supply of reserves slowly built up over the interwar period decade, with the option of drawing more heavily on Banaba's stocks in the interim as well.[32]

Morale apparently remained high on Nauru despite the drama. One inhabitant defiantly proclaimed that whatever was thrown at them, 'Nauru can take it!'[33] With the benefit of hindsight, we know the events of 1940 were only a taste of what was to come. Life on Nauru and neighbouring Banaba was to plunge into further disarray as the *PIM*'s predictions about phosphate as a factor in the war came true.

The Pearl Harbor bombings were almost immediately followed by similar attacks on the two islands. Banaba was hit first, and further assaults on Nauru followed, sporadically hit by at least eight Japanese planes over a three-day period. Miraculously no lives were lost in these initial bombardments, as, like the December 1940 attacks, the targets appeared to be wholly strategic. The majority of white women and children (103 of them) had already been evacuated to Australia, lessening the chance of casualties, but in response to this latest round of destruction, the remaining 226 European men and women, plus 597 Chinese, were evacuated in February 1942 to the relative safety of Malekula Bay in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu).[34] From here the Chinese evacuees were transferred to the wolfram mines in Central Australia where they soon discovered they could earn a much higher wage (and hence could not be enticed back to the phosphate fields when the opportunity arose).[35]

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[31] Bott to Gaze, 'Enemy Raiders', 2 Jan. 1941, 9–11, in Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 4.
[32] Gaze, 'Memorandum for Australian Fertiliser Manufacturers', 30 Dec. 1940, NAA: A518, K112/6/3, pt. 1; 'Pacific Phosphate', *PIM*, Jan. 1941, 56.
[33] 'How Nauru Took the Shelling', *PIM*, Feb. 1941, 35.
[34] The evacuees were whisked off by the French ship, the *Triomphant* - 'the fastest destroyer then afloat' – itself a refugee from the Battle of Dunkirk. See 'Diary of Mrs V Tothill', 20, NAA: MP1174/1, 1122.
[35] Wendy Rankine, 'From Nauru to Nowhere… Pacific Island Chinese Evacuee Workers in Central Australian Wolfram Mines, 1942–43', in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific: Proceedings of an International Public Conference Held at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, 8–10 October 1993,* ed. Paul Macgregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), 152–8.

Importantly, with most phosphate employees now successfully evacuated, the company could begin the planned destruction of the works to prevent the Japanese from using them. Gaze proudly states in his unpublished company history of the war years that Japan never got an ounce of phosphate out of either Nauru or Banaba.[36] The Japanese did, however, get their fair share of blood and some of the tales regarding their treatment of those Islanders, Chinese and a small number of Europeans (11 in total) left to 'wither on the vine' are truly harrowing.[37] Such inconvenient facts did not make Gaze's history, the manager only mentioning that the eventual Japanese occupation on August 1942 happened before a rescue mission for the remaining inhabitants could be safely organized.[38]

The Defence of Makatea

Despite being over three thousand miles to the east of Japan's south-seas empire, Makatea was, in many ways, just as exposed to an attack as Nauru and Banaba were. According to a British consulate report from May 1940, 'no form of defence' existed at Makatea 'other than an elephant shot-gun of unknown calibre, owned by the sergeant of police'.[39] By December 1940, the *PIM* reported:

> There is no information as to what has been going on there since the collapse of France; and, if the French Empire is not restored, the future of Makatea is bound to be the subject of a diplomatic headache or two, in the future.[40]

Nominal defence plans were being drawn up, but these struggled to move past the abstract given the level of uncertainty in the colony. Whereas Nauru and Banaba were primarily under threat from Japan alone, France's ambiguous wartime status meant an attack on Makatea could have originated from various ports throughout the French Empire or even from within the colony itself. For much of 1940 and 1941, the biggest fear was an attack

[36] Gaze, '1940–1947: A Survey of Seven Eventful Years', 2, NAA (Melb.): R133, NN. Less brazenly, Albert Ellis, who believed Allied bombing arrived just as the Japanese were to commence shipping, said it was 'doubtful whether a ton of phosphate was shipped'. See Ellis, 'New Zealand Farms and the Phosphate Islands', 63.
[37] 'Wither on the vine' is attributed to US Admiral C. Nimitz and is cited in Bennett, *Natives and Exotics,* 122. 400 Nauruans and 149 Gilbert Islanders were left on Nauru, along with 185 Chinese who apparently could not fit into the warship. Meanwhile, on Banaba, an even larger figure was left behind: 500 Banabans and 800 Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders. Although recognising the traumatic experiences of many during the War, Katerina Teaiwa also suggests the Japanese occupation can be interpreted in multiple ways, arguing, for example, that there are 'stories within families that gave more humane pictures' of the Japanese. See Teaiwa, 'Tirawata Irouia', 55.
[38] Gaze, 'Three Years of War: Their Effects Upon the Work of the Commission', 4, NAA (Melb.): R133, NN.
[39] British Consul (Papeete), 'Notes on the Defence of Tahiti and Makatea', 15 May 1940, 2, TNA: FO 687/21.
[40] 'Phosphate as War Factor', *PIM,* Dec. 1940, 31.

emanating from Vichy-aligned Indochina.[41] Reflecting the two-pronged nature of the perceived threat, just days before the Pearl Harbor attack, the New Zealand prime minister was seeking further information about not only the 'nature of duties' done by Japanese on the island but also about those Frenchmen 'with pro-Vichy leanings', of which there were several.[42]

By the end of 1940 New Zealand's interests in French Oceania had developed to the point where they financed and had a major say in most affairs related to the colony's defence. While the EFO were willing to cover their own internal budget, New Zealand agreed to provide financial aid to cover expenses normally met by Paris (such as military aid) and in early 1941 sent a special representative, R.T.G. Patrick, to keep an eye on expenditure and other political developments.[43] Notwithstanding Japan's global emergence, the imperial nation's close association with Makatea as its largest customer in the years preceding the War must have given New Zealand cause for concern. For instance, in early 1941 the harbourmaster at Makatea (Captain Russell), who had been feeding intelligence reports to the British Consul at Tahiti throughout the year, explained how 'uneasy' he felt in regard to 'the sudden influx of Japanese boats' loading phosphate at the island.[44] Not only were they increasing in number but they were apparently crewed by 'naval men who do a good deal of heel-clicking and saluting.' Russell even had it on authority that Japanese ships normally destined for Nauru instead detoured to Makatea at the time of the German attack.[45]

It is fair to say that Russell's sense of unease was not an isolated case, and unsurprisingly the Pearl Harbor attacks saw the colony spring into action as suspicions were quickly acted upon. The French Governor immediately placed all Japanese on Makatea under house arrest.[46] These eight men had the misfortune of being the first of their countrymen to have been captured in the Pacific.[47] And in keeping with the *PIM*'s conspiratorial tone, the conservative-leaning magazine sensationalized this affair, suggesting there was

[41] The officers of the *Ville d'Amiens,* in port during September 1940 were pro-Vichy, for example.
[42] Prime Minister (NZ) to British Consul (Papeete), 6 Dec. 1941, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-07.
[43] Patrick's file as New Zealand Government Representative is accessible at ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-16.
[44] Edmonds to Intelligence (Wellington), 14 Jan. 1941, ANZ: N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Cameron to Foreign Office and Prime Minister (NZ), 7 Dec. 1941, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-07.
[47] 'Tahiti Has Some Jap Prisoners', *PIM*, Oct. 1942, 16.

something nefarious behind the fact that 'eight unusually intelligent Japanese were found "working" on Makatea' – especially as most of them were working as domestic servants for company officials. The journalist believed they must have been serving 'purposes similar to those of their brothers who posed as fishermen along the California Coast, Hawaii, New Caledonia, Australia, and Vancouver'.[48] However, according to information gathered by Captain G.J. Godwin of the BPC ship *Trienza* in June 1942, the four Japanese engineers employed at the phosphate works 'were first class men' and the French were not at all afraid of sabotage.[49] Of those interned on Motu Uta off Tahiti, the genial Uhashi Watanabe being one of them, apparently all were released as soon as the authorities realized their harmlessness.[50]

It was probably immaterial whether the Japanese threat was real or not, such was the difficulty involved in properly defending the island with the colony's strained resources during the first years of the War. In response to the December 1940 attacks on Nauru, the French Governor wrote that 'the theoretical defence of Makatea would necessitate artillery equipment which is lacking to us' as well as aeroplane capabilities which were also unavailable.[51] British Consul Ernest Edmonds believed French Oceania's one seaplane would only 'hold together for three months longer' and judged discipline among the army and navy to be 'at a low ebb'. He recounted how 'one bomb was dropped for practice on the reef the other day. It missed its mark, but the harvest of dead fish was considerable'.[52] On the other hand, Makatea's famous cliffs provided only limited access to the phosphate installations which gave the island some natural defence advantages, but this only instilled in the French Governor enough confidence to say that they could, in all probability, manage to stop 'a temporary landing attempted by small forces'.[53]

Constant political changes on Tahiti throughout 1940 were equally affecting Makatea's defensive preparations.[54] Governor Chastenet de Géry, supposedly 'the most cultured,

[48] Ibid.
[49] 'Extract from Letter from G.J. Godwin to A. Harold Gaze', 19 Jun. 1942, 2, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 6.
[50] Yosihiko Sinoto with Hiroshi Aramata, *Curve of the Hook: An Archaeologist in Polynesia*, trans. Frank Stewart and Madoka Nagadō (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 175.
[51] Governor of French Oceania to British Consul, Papeete (trans.), 13 Jan. 1941, ANZ: N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[52] Edmonds to Intelligence (Wellington), 14 Jan. 1941, ANZ: N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[53] Governor of French Oceania to British Consul, Papeete (trans.), 13 Jan. 1941, ANZ: N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[54] De Curton to Prime Minister (NZ), 14 Mar. 1941, 3, TNA: FO 687/21.

able and gentlemanly Frenchman on the island', allowed the pro-Vichy *Comité des Français d'Océanie* to proclaim their '*programme d'action*' against what they perceived to be the Bolshevik, *métèque*, and Chinese threat.[55] However, after a snap plebiscite which saw 5,564 people vote in favour of De Gaulle and only 18 pledge their support to Pétain, Governor de Géry's Government was deposed and on 4 September 1940, a provisional government led by four leading Gaullistes was set up in its place.[56] Although carrying a strong mandate to begin with, it did not take long for 'subterranean murmuring' to start spreading among the population about the rough-house tactics of these Tahitian-born, largely self-made men. Thus, as early as January 1941, the British consul was informing New Zealand that the 'initial zeal for the de Gaulle movement has declined' and, moreover, that there was 'no apparent affection for Great Britain'.[57]

Being placed under New Zealand naval command left a bad taste in the mouth of many of Tahiti's colonial elite. They did not like New Zealand's special representative R.T.G. Patrick meddling in their finances (which, according to a local bank manager, were at the point where debt had risen from 12,835,000 francs in 1935 to 27,560,000 francs in 1939 due to 'careless expenditure, an unnecessarily large number of employees and a general lax control'),[58] and could not understand why New Zealand insisted dictating the manner in which their funds were to be distributed (rather than just providing the money unconditionally).[59] In November 1940 the local government even requested to be administered by Australia so that the colony could 'retain its traditional relationship with New Caledonia'.[60] In the same month, to New Zealand's credit, Prime Minister Fraser confirmed that they would (at last) 'admit to New Zealand the products of French Oceania on the same terms as British products', and 'endeavour to protect the Makatea phosphate trade if necessary'.[61] However, this concession was not enough to satisfy the local French who feared that New Zealand might take permanent control of them such as they did with

[55] Comité des Français d'Océanie, 'Programme d'action', 12 Aug. 1940, TNA: FO 687/21.
[56] 'Proclamation du Gouvernement provisoire de Tahiti', *Bulletin de Presse,* 4 Sep. 1940, TNA: FO 687/21.
[57] Edmonds to Fraser, 13 Jan. 1941, 2, TNA: FO 687/21. At the same time, the *PIM* reported that 'all elements sympathetic to the Vichy Government' had been eliminated, and that throughout the administration there was 'an undivided loyalty to the de Gaulle Government and to the alliance of the British Empire'. See 'Tahiti Quiet', *PIM,* Feb. 1941, 7.
[58] Berendsen to Prime Minister (NZ), 20 Sep. 1940, 10, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-14.
[59] Edmonds to Prime Minister (NZ), 16 Nov. 1940, 2, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-16.
[60] Edmonds to Prime Minister (Australia) and Prime Minister (New Zealand), 18 Nov 1940, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-16.
[61] Prime Minister (NZ), 'Inward Telegram', 12 Nov 1940, 2, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-16.

German Sāmoa after the Great War.[62] During his short stint as Governor in 1941, Richard Brunot declared New Zealand’s representative persona non grata due to his daily political reports.[63]

For some, all that was needed to fix the hole in the colony’s budget and say *au revoir* to New Zealand’s interference was to convince the CFPO to keep more of their profits inside the colony rather than sending them directly to their metropolitan shareholders. This line of argument failed to make an impression on visiting New Zealand civil servant Carl Berendsen, who quickly learned that as important as the phosphate trade may have been to New Zealand and Australia, for the well-being of ordinary Mā’ohi, it was the copra industry that mattered, and this had completely bottomed-out due to the lack of viable markets. Said to have been on a mission to stop the administration siding with the Vichy government, in September 1940 Berendsen commented that ‘even if all the phosphate funds were to be returned to Tahiti this would not bring the money into the hands of the small consumer and that the only crop which has this effect is copra about which the whole economic situation revolves’.[64] New Zealand was thus destined to play a critical role in the colony’s wartime preparations until the arrival of the United States military machine. Both costly and politically inconvenient, the trade-off was of course continued access to Makatea’s deposits which, by 1942, would become the only source of Pacific phosphate not under Japanese control.

Australasian Shortages

If the copra industry was fundamental to the lives of ordinary men and women in French Oceania, then the same could be said about agriculture for the Australasian Dominions. Both economies relied on exporting primary produce to Britain, and production was disproportionately tied to the ability of farmers to grow large amounts of grass for livestock (in the case of New Zealand) or wheat for cereals (as was primarily the case in Australia). As we have seen, underpinning this 20th-century ‘agricultural revolution’ was the liberal application of artificial fertilizers, superphosphate in particular.[65] Following the 1940

[62] New Zealand’s maladministration of Sāmoa and the Cook Islands was one of the reasons why Governors Mansard and de Curton wanted to cease their relationship with New Zealand. See ‘Consular Report Upon Certain Aspects of the Change of Administration in this Consular District’, 13 Jan. 1941, TNA: FO 687/21.
[63] Acting Prime Minister (NZ) to Archer, 29 Aug. 1941, 1, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-13.
[64] Berendsen to Prime Minister (NZ), 20 Sep. 1940, 9, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-14.
[65] cf. Brooking and Star, ‘Remaking the Grasslands’, 179.

German bombardment, the importance of Nauruan phosphate was underscored by a West Australian reporter who wrote: 'One thing alone has made possible the vast expansion of Australia's wheat lands, the growth of pastures for our dairy herds, sheep and fat lambs, our potato and fruit crops' – Nauruan phosphate.[66] The loss of Nauru, and then Banaba, had the potential to throw Australasian food production into disarray. Judy Bennett judged, correctly enough, that 'Phosphate was a more vital mineral than gold to the Australians in the war'.[67]

Sources of 'Outside Phosphate'	Quantities handled from 1 Jan. 1941 to 30 Jun. 1945 (Tons)
Makatea	740,715
Kosseir (El Qoseir, Egypt)	591,621
Bona (Annaba, Algeria)	225,057
Safaga (Egypt)	148,508
Florida (USA)	127,255
Christmas Island	94,224
Morocco	80,537
Total	2,007,917

Table 1: Quantities of Outside Phosphate purchased by the BPC during the Second World War.
Source: British Phosphate Commissioners, Confidential Report, 14 Jan. 1946, TNA: DO 140/71.

[66] Moonda, 'A Vital Island', *West Australian,* 31 Dec. 1941, 6. Western Australia alone applied approximately 500,000 tons of superphosphate per annum, see 'Phosphate Industry and War', *PIM*, Jul. 1941, 19.
[67] Bennett, *Natives and Exotics,* 121.

While it would be unfair to claim that the BPC or the Australasian Dominions were completely unprepared for the loss of Nauru and Banaba, if it were not for Makatea they would have had a crisis on their hands. As it was, farmers were already disgruntled by increased prices caused by the December 1940 attacks and the greater risks posed to shipping thereafter. The BPC had set aside reserves, but these were only ever going to last 12–14 months, so phosphate needed to be found from elsewhere if pre-war levels of agriculture production were to be maintained. Hence the BPC ‘scoured the world’ to negotiate contracts for Egyptian, North African and Florida phosphate to complement that which was available from Makatea (table 1, Christmas Island was captured by the Japanese in March 1942).[68] Yet before arrangements were struck with these so-called ‘outside phosphate’ companies, domestic rationing schemes had to be introduced (figure 5.2).

Under New Zealand’s rationing system (first mooted in the *Phosphatic Fertilizer Control Notice*, 1941, and eventually formalized in the *Fertilizer Control Order,* 1942), farmers were limited to just 40 per cent of their normal phosphate intake.[69] This could be partially supplemented by other lower quality fertilizers such as serpentine or basic slag, as well as various mixtures of superphosphate and substances such as lime. The scheme was tougher than in Australia, and some in the agriculture industry thought it should only have been reduced to 70 per cent.[70] In Australia, so that the pressure on farmers was lessened at first, the Commonwealth Government implemented a 25/- per ton subsidy on superphosphate sales from the start of July 1941.[71] However, the Government also used this announcement to foreshadow the real possibility of rationing ‘in the near future’.[72] It did so in two steps; first, for the year ending 30 June 1941, sales were capped at the amount sold in the previous year, and second, for the year ending 30 June 1942, supplies were restricted to 70 per cent of the amount used in 1940. This 70 per cent ration applied for domestic manufacturers while customers (farmers) were restricted to 60 per cent which

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[68] Crawford *et al. Wartime Agriculture in Australia and New Zealand, 1939-50* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1954), 109; ‘Pacific Phosphate – Australasia’s Vital Need’, *PIM*, Apr. 1944, 7. Serious attempts were made to discover sources from within the Australian continent too.

[69] ‘Extract from the *New Zealand Journal of Agriculture*: Fertiliser Rationing’, 15 Aug. 1941, NAA (Melb.): R100, 40.

[70] ‘Extract from the *New Zealand Herald*: Fertiliser Rationing Minister Questioned’, 20 Sep. 1941, NAA (Melb.): R100, 40.

[71] J.F. Murphy to Gaze, 1 Aug. 1941, 1, NAA (Melb.): R100, 40.

[72] Ibid., 2.

created a 10 per cent buffer known as a 'contingencies pool', allowing the state to distribute phosphate to those they deemed 'special cases' needing supplementary rations.[73]

In effect, this buffer was used to bolster so-called priority crops.[74] And because the Commonwealth prioritized certain industries, rationing affected some states more than others. The Commonwealth Government placed greater value on certain vegetables, crops and dairy. Because of this wheat farmers in South Australia tended to receive less superphosphate than their neighbours.[75] South Australian cereal growers complained they were only receiving 50 per cent of the required amount of superphosphate fertilizer. To make matters worse, this cut was coming at planting time when the application of fertilizers was especially needed.[76] Wheat production was deliberately reduced across the country throughout 1942, and in Western Australia the crops failed due to infestation.[77] Studies of the effect of a 40 per cent reduction in superphosphate application were carried out by state government researchers in Victoria and they believed it would lead to a mere eight per cent reduction in the wheat yield for the first year. More alarmingly, however, was their prediction that if rationing were to continue for longer than two or three years, then they could be facing something like a 50 per cent reduction in overall yield. But it was not just wheat in which they were concerned, for they also expected potato crops to be reduced by 10 per cent, pastures for sheep and lamb by 15 per cent, and vegetable crops by some 25 per cent.[78] Queensland provides a fitting illustration, where sugar cane yields fell from 22 tons to 15 tons per acre due to a lack of fertilizer.[79] Farmers in New Zealand were also feeling the strain, expected, as Nancy Taylor states, 'to produce more with less labour, less fertiliser, less petrol and with prices which seemed inadequate against rising costs'.[80]

If we were to listen to the voices of the agricultural industry, the effect of rationing and the fertilizer shortage were not just going to be felt among antipodeans, but at an international level too. In 1942 the organ of the South Australian Department of Agriculture talked about

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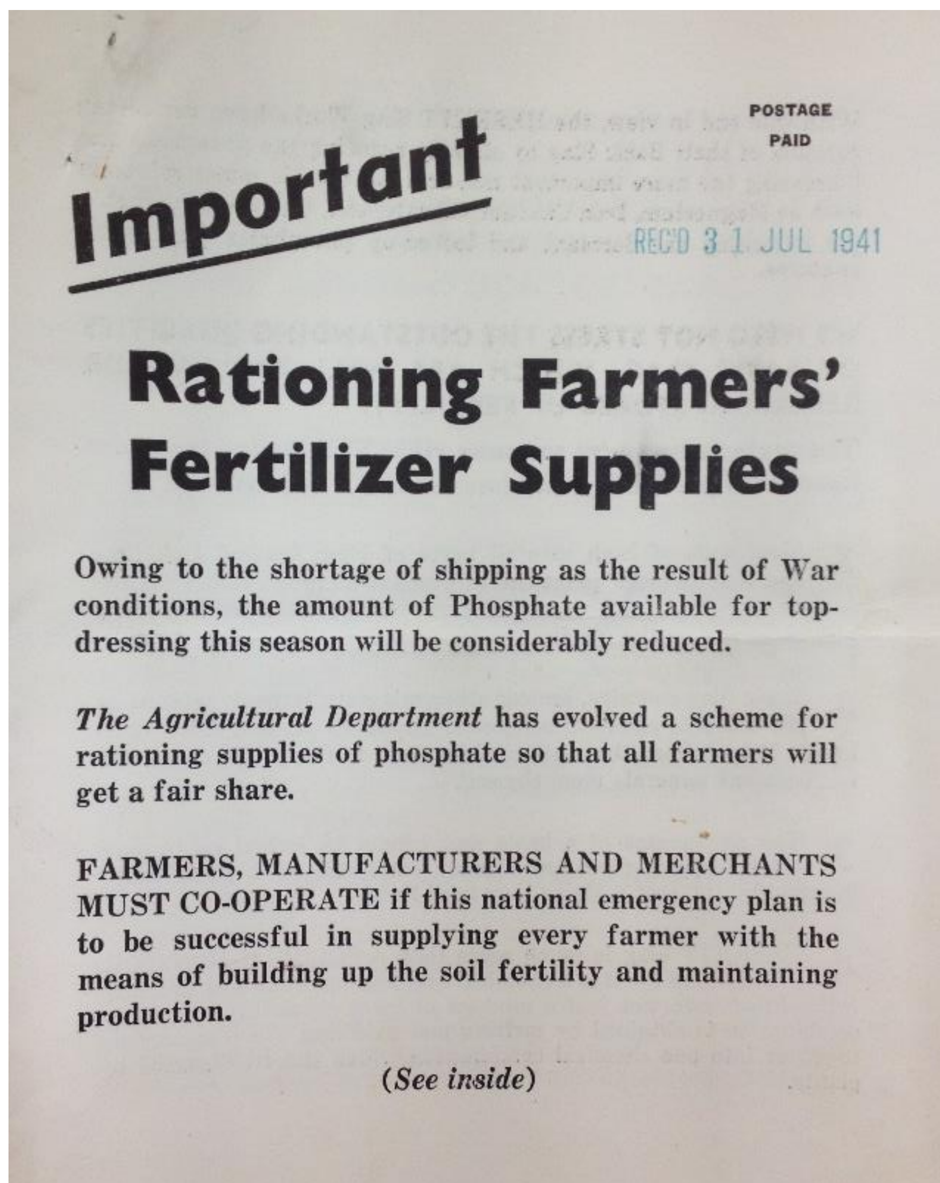
[73] 'Superphosphate Rationing', 23 Dec. 1941, 1, NAA (Melb.): R100, 39,
[74] In June 1942, the Australian Agricultural Council agreed that priority would be given to potatoes, vegetables, vegetable seeds, blue peas, navy beans, berry fruits, flax, cotton and tobacco.
[75] 'S.A. Fares Worse for Superphosphates', *Herald,* 19 Aug. 1942, in NAA (Melb.): R100, 39.
[76] 'Extract from the Journal of the Department of Agriculture of South Australia: Drastic Cut in Superphosphate Supplies', June 1942, NAA (Melb.): R100, 39.
[77] 'Extract from the Age, Melbourne: Restriction of Wheat Acreage', 16 Feb. 1942, NAA (Melb.): R100, 40.
[78] 'Extract from the Herald, Melbourne: Rationing of Super will affect Crops', 4 Feb. 1942, NAA (Melb.): R100, 40.
[79] Janice Wegner, 'Hinchinbrook Shire during World War Two', *Lectures on North Queensland History* 4 (1984): 217.
[80] Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front, Vol. II* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1986), 814.

Australia's responsibility to produce 'sufficient foodstuffs for our American visitors, local military units, and the civilian population', all the while endeavouring 'to supply some of the agricultural products urgently needed by the United Kingdom'.[81] In 1943 Australia's Minister for External Affairs, H.V. Evatt, speculated about the 'danger that the degree to which our agriculture is dependent on this fertiliser is not fully appreciated in London and Washington'.[82] 'The incontrovertible fact', according to Evatt, was that 'Australia has been set a huge task in the production of foodstuffs for United Kingdom and Allied services. Australian farmers are being urged to produce what is required but they must have the tools and materials for the job. … the provision of adequate supplies of superphosphate means the difference between success and failure'.[83] By 1944, amidst reports of 'diminished food production' in both Australia and New Zealand, the matter was reported as of 'supreme importance' because since food was 'a munition of war', it concerned 'all the United Nations'.[84]

[81] 'Extract from the Journal of the Department of Agriculture of South Australia: Drastic Cut in Superphosphate Supplies', June 1942, NAA (Melb.): R100, 39.
[82] Minister for External Affairs (Canberra) to Minister for External Affairs (Wellington), 20 Oct. 1943, ANZ: EA1 893, 104/6/21, pt. 1, R18873015.
[83] Ibid.
[84] 'Pacific Phosphate – Australasia's Vital Need', *PIM*, Apr. 1944, 7.


Owing to the shortage of shipping as the result of War conditions, the amount of Phosphate available for top-dressing this season will be considerably reduced.

The Agricultural Department has evolved a scheme for rationing supplies of phosphate so that all farmers will get a fair share.

FARMERS, MANUFACTURERS AND MERCHANTS MUST CO-OPERATE if this national emergency plan is to be successful in supplying every farmer with the means of building up the soil fertility and maintaining production.

(See inside)

Figure 5.2: New Zealand Department of Agriculture Rationing Flier, 1941.
Source: NAA (Melb.): R100 40.

With industry representatives quick to deploy adjectives such as 'serious', 'urgent', 'critical', 'drastic' and 'severe' to describe the situation, there are hints – but only hints – that superphosphate shortages caused farmers to look for alternative ways to fertilize their soil, and that even in some isolated cases they found that a lack of fertilizer did not affect yields as drastically as they might have thought. In Western Australia, farmers discovered that places with a residual load of superphosphate in the soils were hit nowhere near as hard by rationing.[85] Meanwhile, after scouring international literature for phosphate substitutes, trials, though often unsuccessful, were made with all manner of materials (both

[85] 'Extract from the Leader: Restricted Use of Superphosphate', 7 Jan. 1942, NAA (Melb.): R100, 39.

organic and chemical).[86] Nancy Viviani has suggested that because the overall situation was mitigated by 'previous fertilizing and good rainfall', the effect of rationing may not have been 'as bad as the Japanese had hoped'.[87] Now, this cannot all be put down to reasons of ingenuity. For example, she identifies a sharp drop in superphosphate sales between 1940–1 and 1942–3 (from 979,000 tons to 477,000 tons) but charts an upward trajectory from the next year until 1944–5, recorded 827,000 tons. Where did this extra supply come from?

The Most Important Source

At any other moment in the mine's history, such a swift transformation from the also-ran status of 'third phosphate island' to Australia and New Zealand's principal supplier would have been unthinkable for those involved in the Makatea business. As late as May 1940, the BPC were rebuffing French diplomatic requests for a 15 per cent share in the Australasian market and advising the Australian government that there was no case to be made for buying the Polynesian product.[88] However, the events of World War Two wiped away two decades' worth of animosity between the two companies. With Japan entering the war on the side of the Axis, Australia and New Zealand were without a supplier and Makatea was without a customer. A mutually beneficial arrangement was reached where the BPC would handle the marketing of Makatea's phosphate for their long-sought after Australasian market. As convenient as this sounds on paper, we should guard against the impression that all of Australia and New Zealand's problems were fixed by Makatea's availability. Inefficiencies on the island and in freighting meant that monthly tonnage did not amount to more than 20,000. Moreover, the yearly quantities delivered to Australia and New Zealand still fell well short of the pre-war level of imports (table 2).

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[86] In New Zealand this included mussels, Peruvian guano, seaweed and wood ash, see (respectively) ANZ: AAFZ W5704 412 Box 363, Ag. 77/6/160, R22658439; AAFZ W1954 7174 Box 14, 60815, R19006034; AAFZ W5704 412 Box 364, Ag. 77/6/81, R22658446; AAFZ W1713 Box 8, Ag. 77/6/54, R18839030.
[87] Viviani, *Nauru,* 86.
[88] Clive McPherson to Prime Minister's Department (Canberra), 3 May 1940, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 2; Tremoulet to Gullett, 25 Jan. 1940, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 2.

	Australia (tons)	New Zealand (tons)	Total (tons)
1941/42	33,986	92,808	126,794
1942/43	52,583	120,049	172,632
1943/44	62,234	129,039	191,273
1944/45	100,000*	150,000*	218,544
1945/46	40,200	192,000	232,200

Table 2: Yearly Quantities of Makatea Phosphate for Australia and New Zealand during the War.
Source: BPC – Memoranda and general information circulated, NAA: A518, B112/6/1 pt. 3.
* These were estimates made by the BPC in June 1944. The total figure is the real quantity, with much less Makatea phosphate going to Australia than predicted.

Many of the inefficiencies on Makatea itself can be traced to island politics, where relations between the CFPO and the colonial administration on Tahiti were at breaking point. The problems stemmed from events in late 1941 when the Governor received permission to 'sequestrate' the CFPO 'if and when he judged necessary'.[89] While he insisted this power would not influence the way the company operated (it would have given the Governor complete control, however), it was a rather blunt instrument to have at one's disposal, and unsurprisingly caused a lot of animosity between the two sides.

There were two principal reasons for the government to want control over the industry. The first was fiscal and the second political. Quite apart from being 'mentally unstable' and suffering from periodic memory loss, Flavien Pierson, the company director since 1933, was a suspected fascist.[90] Another culprit was Léon Bourgeois, the chief-engineer, who was the most suspect of all the CFPO management. He was described as 'pro-Nazi', 'openly anti-de Gaulle to all and sundry', and the 'worst of the lot of Frenchmen on the island'. The author of this intelligence report believed that he was expendable, and that 'anyone with some engineering experience could do the job'. Worse still, Bourgeois was suspected of being 'corrupt over company materials', and his removal was strongly

[89] British Consul to Prime Minister (NZ), n.d., ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-07.
[90] Ibid.; British Consul, 'Memo on Interview with Madame Pierson', 13 Nov. 1941; British Consul to Foreign Office, 15 Nov. 1941, ATL: UK Consulate (Tahiti), MS-Papers-6232-07.

recommended.[91] Governor Orselli went as far as seizing Bourgeois’ radio after it was discovered he had been in secret communication with fellow Pétainists in Saigon. In conversation with the captain of a British phosphate vessel, Bourgeois admitted that only Pierson’s replacement, Marcel Prive, and two others in the CFPO’s employ, supported De Gaulle while the rest, although remaining quiet because De Gaulle was paying their wages, supported Pétain.[92]

In fact, it seemed that almost everyone on Makatea had a cloud hanging over them. Even Captain Russell who had been providing frequent and highly valued intelligence reports to Wellington, Canberra and London, was charged with having a ‘queer accent’, and ‘an un-English way of expressing himself in correspondence’. The British consul did not like the way he would say ‘dat’ instead of ‘that’ and what made him more doubtful was his ‘slightly foreign appearance’ – they thought it could possibly be Scandinavian or even Russian – and the fact he had recently ‘been in many queer places’ such as Dairen, Odessa and Japan. Thankfully, in his defence was ‘his stock of yarns’ which appeared to ‘preclude the possibility of his sense of humour being other than Tyneside and Scots’, and the rest of his strange correspondence was put down to his ‘North Country origin’.[93]

Aside from the harbourmaster’s letters, the BPC were kept well abreast of events on Makatea through regular reports from the captain of the *Trienza* who would recount his impressions of the island gleaned during his short visits to collect phosphate. In January 1943, Godwin felt ‘the whole place lacked energy and the will to work, to an alarming extent’.[94] He told the story of how he entered into a shouting match with Prive, the director, who though not a Nazi-sympathizer was nonetheless suffering from a bad case of nerves and growing increasingly ‘dictatorial and offensive in his manner towards his staff’.[95] The fight was over Prive’s decision to stop loading work at midnight on Saturday so to avoid having to pay his workers Sunday rates. While his order might have saved the CFPO the equivalent of £140, the extra day at the island cost Godwin far more as the daily cost of running a phosphate vessel during the war was estimated to be between £500 and £700

[91] ‘Notes on Opinions Expressed by Captain Russell’, n.d., 2, TNA: FO 687/22.
[92] Even Prive was initially a Pétain man.
[93] ‘Notes on Opinions Expressed by Captain Russell’, n.d., 2, TNA: FO 687/22.
[94] Godwin to Gaze, 28 Jan. 1943, 5, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 3.
[95] Ibid., 3.

per day.[96] To Godwin's attempts at reconciliation, Prive apparently shouted at him down the phone to the effect 'that he was having his weekend, just the same as in England', before hanging up on the captain.[97]

Still, such anti-British sentiment or 'Anglophobia' (which included a distrust of New Zealand) was said to have been less pronounced on Makatea than at Pape'ete.[98] For example, embarrassed that maybe he had revealed too much about his political leanings to his British guest one night over dinner, Bourgeois added that 'we are not against England, only for France'.[99] Aiden Gooding, the *chef de l'extraction*, and one of only two men of definite Free French sensibility, confirmed that while there was 'a Vichy element at Makatea' this should not be confused with an anti-British sensibility. He said they preferred to 'have a leg in each camp' so as to be on the right side of history whomever won the war.[100]

The problem for the BPC in their task of supplying Australia and New Zealand with fertilizer was that all this intrigue continued to put a hand brake on production. The problem became so acute that chief engineer, H.V. Bott, was sent to investigate the problem in October 1943. Although not speaking with any great certainty, Bott believed many of the problems could be traced to the bad blood that lingered from earlier Government attempts at taking over Makatea. He also suggested that the CFPO did not help matters with Pape'ete when they decided to cede most of the wartime management to British board members A.J. King and Bernard Balding in London rather than to their French directors who were temporarily based in Marseille.[101]

That said, the close relationship between King and Balding (by this point the managing director and director of the Anglo-French Phosphate Company) and the BPC helped more than hindered the trade. Despite all the difficulties, the CFPO were not so foolish as to squander the opportunity to dominate the wartime market, especially as this is what they had been wanting for over 20 years. The company was even able to use its leverage to force the BPC to sign longer-term contracts that stretched well into the post-war era. The

[96] Gaze, 'Memorandum for New Zealand Fertiliser Manufacturers for Annual Conference', 26 May 1943, 1, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 3.
[97] Godwin to Gaze, 28 Jan. 1943, 3, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 3.
[98] C.H. Archer, 'Defence of Tahiti and Makatea', 20 Dec. 1941, ANZ: N2 33, 020/14/17, R22042287.
[99] Godwin to Gaze, 19 Jun. 1942, 1, ANZ: EA1 585, 86/24/1, pt. 1, R18871602.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Bott to Gaze, 12 Nov. 1943, 9, TNA: DO 140/574.

American forces, who descended on the colony *en masse* from the beginning of 1942, tended to keep their noses out of the everyday politics of the phosphate business but their presence helped facilitate the trade through safeguarding shipping lines.

What the American presence did not do, however, was encourage Polynesian workers to sign up for the island. Rather, their presence stimulated the copra market to the point where Mā’ohi could earn more money preparing copra at home than travelling to Makatea, causing labour shortages to plague the CFPO once again. The American impact on the local labour market led to a deal being struck with New Zealand to recruit Cook Islands Maori workers – at that point British subjects – for the island instead.

Enter the ***Rarotongiens***

In May 1942 New Zealand’s Prime Minister Peter Fraser was warned to expect a decline in imports in the coming months unless 60 workers could be found for the island.[102] As usual, workers were initially sought from surrounding islands, but ‘the bonanza of American spending’ (as Williams and Macdonald put it) made it even more difficult than usual to draw Mā’ohi to the island.[103] Increased copra and vanilla prices caused New Zealand’s special representative to Tahiti, R.T.G. Patrick, to telegram Prime Minister Fraser that ‘natives lack all incentive to leave islands and to engage for work at Makatea’.[104] To make matters worse, the CFPO then lost the services of at least 40 more Polynesian labourers from the surrounding Tuamotu atolls who refused to renew their contracts.[105] By June, the number of men required to keep operations running had risen to 80.

Given New Zealand had become Makatea’s largest market since wartime restrictions on trading with Japan had come into force, it was suddenly charged with finding replacement workers. However, Cook Islanders were not the Prime Minister’s first choice. All attempts to recruit men from Tahiti, equally benefiting from the American presence, failed.

[102] Patrick to Fraser, 7 May 1942, ANZ: EA1 997, 104/306/8, R18873299.
[103]Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers,* 328.
[104] The price of copra had risen by 700 per cent. See Patrick to Fraser, 7 May 1942, ANZ: EA1 997, 104/306/8, R18873299.
[105] Polynesian obstinateness was the official line, but an investigation into the state of affairs on Makatea by Captain G.J. Godwin in June 1942 seemed to imply that these workers would have stayed on had the CFPO manager, Prive, not been so stubborn in his refusal to entertain their requests for a slight pay rise. See Godwin to Gaze, 19 Jun. 1942, 4, ANZ: EA1 585, 86/24/1, pt. 1, R18871602.

Gilbertese or i-Kiribati were deemed too troublesome.[106] Meanwhile the idea of using evacuated Chinese workers from Nauru and Banaba was scrapped after it was pointed out that they had already been relocated to work on the wolfram (tungsten) mines in central Australia at significantly higher pay rates.[107] Besides, Chinese men were thought unsuitable for the difficult loading work required. In this context, Rarotongans (that is, Cook Islands Maori from a range of islands) or *Rarotongiens,* as they were labelled by the French, loomed large as the most suitable replacement workers in the eyes of the BPC and Wellington-based officials.[108]

It is likely that the existence of a longer history of Cook Islanders working on the island played some part in the decision to recruit from the New Zealand colony. In 1910, for example, 22 people from the northern atoll of Manihiki were recruited by the CFPO on two year contracts.[109] Meanwhile, in the aftermath of a 1914 hurricane which left many Māori 'anxious to go abroad to earn money', the New Zealand administration assented to sending a further 48 men from both Manihiki and the neighbouring Rakahanga.[110] While the threadbare archive makes it difficult to glean all that much about the experiences of Cook Island workers during this period, we know this group of 48 were the last such recruits for some time.[111] As Curson notes, 'economic depression, war and a decline in shipping services in this part of the Pacific brought about an almost complete cessation of labour recruiting' from about 1915 until the Second World War.[112]

Even with Government approval, there was still the matter of an American spending 'bonanza' in the Cook Islands itself. According to the ageing, and ailing, Resident Commissioner Hugh Fraser Ayson,[113] the CFPO's rate of three pounds per month fell short of the amount the Americans were offering Cook Islanders on Aitutaki and Penrhyn. He believed a rate of four pounds per month, the standard rate of pay for unskilled labour in

[106] 'Cables Exchanged between U.K. Commissioner, London and the General Manager, Melbourne: Makatea', May–June 1942, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 35, folder 6.
[107] Jacquemin to King, 29 May 1942; Fraser to Patrick, 4 Jun. 1942, ANZ: EA1 997, 104/306/8, R18873299.
[108] There is no written evidence for this decision being taken earlier than 7 May 1942.
[109] Touze to Richards, 11 Mar. 1914, TNA: FO 687/16.
[110] Ibid; 'Cook and Other Islands', *Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, A.-3, 1915, 6.
[111] In a 1936 census there were two residents of the Cook Islands who registered their place of birth as being in Makatea, one on Manihiki and the other on Rarotonga, which, if we are to assume that only men were recruited in this early period, seems to suggest at least a couple of these recruits formed sexual relationships with locals or other migrants to the island. See 'Cook Islands Census of 30 April 1936: Analysis of Origin – Birthplace', ANZ, IT1 W2439 130, 111/8/2, pt. 1, R14640372.
[112] Curson, 'The Migration of Cook Islanders to New Zealand', 16.
[113] Ayson served two terms as Resident Commissioner, 1923–37 and 1938–43.

the group, would be sufficient to motivate the Islanders to enlist.[114] After a month of communication between New Zealand officials in Wellington, Rarotonga, and Pape'ete, as well as the British Consul at Pape'ete, BPC and stubborn CFPO management, the four pound rate was agreed, a tax on foreign workers was waived, and the recruitment scheme was officially commenced.[115]

Still, Ayson, who began his tenure in the aftermath of the 'social dislocation' that occurred immediately following the return of Maori servicemen from the Great War, remained sceptical about the project's prospects.[116] The shaky signature on official documents, however, bears witness to the formerly authoritarian Resident Commissioner's growing inability to conduct the roles expected of him, such was the state of his deteriorating health. With leading Rarotongan businessman W.P. Browne remarking that 'the island is without a head', it is perhaps unwise to give much weight to Ayson's opinion.[117] He was certainly in no position to appreciate the degree to which Cook Islands men felt affronted by New Zealand's 'polite evasions' of their offers of wartime service; 'polite evasions that now say quite plainly *we do not want you*' read the text of a 1941 petition signed by some 5,000 Cook Islanders asking the New Zealand Government for the 'opportunity of serving on terms of equality with the pakeha and our blood relations, the Maoris of New Zealand' like they did during the Great War.[118]

This widespread Cook Islands Maori desire to contribute to the war effort played into the hands of the New Zealand Government, which was able to present the Makatea scheme as a viable alternative to serving on the frontlines. Wellington considered the work 'a contribution to the war effort of the first importance', and therefore hoped their call would be met with 'an immediate response'.[119] As it turned out, Ayson's doubts were completely unfounded and once applications for the job had closed in August 1942, he was able to

[114] To compare, some of the Chinese phosphate workers relocated to the wolfram mines in central Australia were receiving five times this rate at 20 pounds per month. See Ayson to the Secretary of the Cook Islands Department, 30 Jun. 1942, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[115] Patrick to Fraser, 27 Jul. 1942, ANZ: EA1 997, 104/306/8, R18873299;
[116] Ayson was notably against the idea of sending Cook Islands 'girls' to New Zealand also. See Ayson to Secretary, Cook Islands Department, 26 Jan. 1942, ANZ: IT1 664, IT 121/6, pt. 1, R17963920.
[117] W.P. Browne, 'Cause for Complaints', 6 Jul. 1943, ANZ: IT1 567, IT 101/3/4, pt. 1, R17963402; Ron Crocombe. 'Ayson, Hugh Fraser', first published in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 4, 1998. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand,* http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4a27/ayson-hugh-fraser (accessed 24 Nov. 2017).
[118] Petition by W.P. Browne to New Zealand Government, 1941, in Dick Scott, *Years of the Pooh-Bah: A Cook Islands History* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 224.
[119] Island Territories to Resident Commissioner, 1 Sep. 1943, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.

report to Wellington that there would be 'no difficulty' in obtaining the requisite numbers from Rarotonga alone.[120] Thus, the scheme was inaugurated in late-December when the CFPO schooner, the *Oiseau des Iles*, set off for Makatea with the initial contingent of 85 Rarotongans on board ready to serve out their 12-month contracts.

Accompanying the men on this first journey, and all subsequent journeys until his surprise death in 1951, was the CFPO's recruiting agent, Aiden Gooding. A 'tall, well-built man with a genial sense of humour and a love of a good party', Gooding was indispensable to the scheme's success.[121] His good nature endeared him to the Rarotongan workers while his facility in English helped smooth over much of the lingering awkwardness between New Zealand officials and CFPO management.[122] The New Zealand administration believed he always dealt 'sympathetically with any representations made to him on behalf of the labourers', and in years to come labour inspector Montgomery would herald him as having 'the esteem and goodwill of all labour employed'.[123] He also appears to have formed a close working relationship with his two counterparts on the Rarotongan side: manager at A.B. Donald's trading store, the famed New Zealand astronomer Frank Bateson, and his head clerk, the 'shrewd' and 'far-sighted' Piri Maoate who, by Bateson's estimation, was the man who got people on to the boats.[124]

First impressions of the Rarotongan workers on Makatea were positive; they were digging on average double the standard rate of phosphate per day, after all. Despite privately commenting on their inexperience, the CFPO's Marcel Prive told Ayson that 'our new labourers have made an excellent impression on me and seem quite at home on Makatea'.[125] He assured Ayson the Rarotongans would be 'treated well, so that when the time of their departure arrives they may leave us with regret'.[126] Despite some hints of dissatisfaction from the Rarotongans themselves, the BPC chief engineer, W.V. Bott, who

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[120] Resident Commissioner to Cook Islands Department, 22 Aug. 1942, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[121] Bateson, *Paradise Beckons*, 86.
[122] According to reports, Gooding 'was born at Papeete of American parents and therefore was only French on account of being born at Papeete'. His ability to operate in multiple worlds was thought to have been aided by the suspicion that he had 'a touch of colour'. See Godwin to Gaze, 19 Jun. 1942, ANZ: EA1 585, 86/24/1, pt. 1, R18871602.
[123] McKay to Resident Commissioner, 14 May, 1945; Montgomery, 'Report on Cook Island Labour at Makatea, Part 2', 8, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[124] Bateson, *Paradise Beckons,* 88.
[125] Godwin to Gaze, 28 Jan. 1943, 1, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 3; Prive to Ayson, 15 Jan. 1943, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[126] Prive to Ayson, 15 Jan. 1943, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.

visited the island in September 1943, believed them 'to be reasonably contented'.[127] Unfortunately, such a positive state of affairs was destined to be short-lived, and 1944 would throw up a new series of difficulties.

An Atmosphere of Friction

Visiting Melbourne in May 1944, Captain Godwin informed the BPC that 'an atmosphere of friction still prevails at Makatea'.[128] While this doubtless had just as much to do with disintegrating managerial relationships as disgruntled manual workers, the latter must have also added to the tense atmosphere. Despite a seemingly trouble-free start to the labour scheme, it did not take long for conditions to grate and visible unrest to rear its head among the Cook Islanders.

Reality certainly started to set in once the second, third and fourth gangs reached the island. In the eyes of the CFPO management, the class of November 1943, dominated by 60 recruits from the island of Atiu, appeared to have been particularly troublesome. The experienced Sir Albert Ellis had already warned against recruiting workers from Atiu such was their reputation for trouble from earlier years, but the colonial administration did not want to be seen favouring certain islands over others.[129] On 16 January, just two months into their indenture, they apparently refused to carry out their loading duties and asked for their contracts to be terminated on account of their rations containing 'too much pork and rice'.[130]

The root of the problem was deeper than dissatisfaction with their diet, and tensions were inflamed by miscommunication over multiple languages. At the heart of the problem were Cook Islander protests against the lack of coverage in the event of injury on the job. As conditions then stood, workers would not be paid if they were out of work, even if the injury was through no fault of their own.[131] To try and convince the workers to return to their posts, William Tailby, by now occupying the position of Acting Resident Commissioner,

[127] However, Bott did inform management of a general request for a more varied diet, see Bott to Gaze, 18 Nov. 1943, 9, TNA: DO 140/574.
[128] Gaze to Gaye, 17 May 1944, 4, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 6.
[129] Foss Shanahan to External Affairs, 9 Jun. 1942; McKay to Acting Minister of Island Territories, 7 Jul. 1944, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[130] British Consul (Papeete) to Resident Commissioner, 22 Jan. 1944, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[131] Tailby to CFPO, 18 Mar. 1944, Maslyn Williams Papers, NLA: MS 3936, Box 33, folder 6.

attempted to appeal to the men's sense of pride, honour and familial and patriotic duty. The following message was relayed to the men:

> New Zealand Government regards work in which you are engaged as of utmost importance to the war effort and termination of your contract now would help the enemy. Honour of Atiu and of Cook Islands is in your hands and Prime Minister and Government of New Zealand are confident that you will uphold the good name which your fathers and relations made during last war and do your utmost to defeat the enemy.[132]

Allegations of mistreatment continued to plague the labour scheme in the years to come, with New Zealand poet and trade unionist R.A.K. Mason eventually describing the affair as 'the worst labour scandal in New Zealand history'.[133] However New Zealand's Island Territories department was quick to stress the fact that Cook Islanders signed up on a voluntary basis. They also pointed out that the rate of pay was similar to, if not better than, that received for unskilled work in the colony, and more to the point, there was a war on. According to the New Zealand Department of Island Territories' Acting Secretary McKay, 'The conditions of the men at Makatea are more to be compared with, say those of soldiers in the British Army. It is possible that the Cook Islanders may be the better paid'.[134] Debating the merits of the scheme is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth reiterating what a curious quirk of Empire it was that had underfed Cook Islanders digging phosphate rock on a French island to fertilize New Zealand's fields to feed British and American troops. As far as agrarian interpretations of the war go, this is a story that deserves to be wider known.

Conclusion

It was not only the ability to secure phosphate for the Allies that aided the war effort, but it was also its denial to the enemy. The destruction of the phosphate plants on Nauru and Banaba taken with sporadic American shelling of the islands and their continued defence

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[132] Resident Commissioner to British Consul (Papeete), 24 Jan. 1944, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.

[133] [R.A.K. Mason], *Frontier Forsaken: An Outline History of the Cook Islands* (Auckland: Challenge, 1947), 81. The first allegation of serious misconduct appeared in the New Zealand Communist Party's weekly, *People's Voice* on 5 July 1944. See 'Indentured Labourers Made to Sweat for Phosphate Trust: N.Z. Official Condones Virtual Slavery', *People's Voice,* 5 Jul. 1944, in ATL: Herbert Roth Papers: Cook Islands labour matters, 94-106-19/02.

[134] McKay to Acting Minister of Island Territories, 7 Jul. 1944, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.

of Makatea all contributed to the point made in the *PIM* at the end of 1943 that the Japanese 'must be desperately short of phosphates'.[135] As Tsutsui has shown, these fertilizer shortages meant that more and more Japanese turned to nightsoil to fertilize their fields. However, due to wartime pressures to produce quickly and the fact that an entire generation of Japanese had lost the knack of applying organic fertilizers, their nightsoil was not composted properly and thus was alive with harmful bacteria that spread into waterways and into households, bringing diseases that only compounded the wartime trauma for ordinary Japanese citizens.[136]

On the other hand, while still suffering from its own fertilizer shortage, by gaining access to Makatea's deposits Australia and New Zealand managed to avoid a similar fate. They maintained the ability to keep producing food, often at higher than normal rates, which helped sustain allied troops in both the European and Pacific theatres of war. Australia, for example, is said to have 'supplied more food per head of population to the Allied larder than did any other country'.[137] Foul-tasting dehydrated mutton for British emergency rations was one of the Australian specialties, whereas in New Zealand it was butter and cheese, energy food.[138] Rationing local consumption was one way to achieve the ambitious targets set for them, while technological and scientific innovation was another; yet, as was the case prior to the war, central to the whole endeavour was the input of fertilizers. As New Zealand reminded London in 1943, 'New Zealand and Australia are the only purchasers of Makatea phosphates which are an essential element in the production of foodstuffs being supplied to the United Kingdom and on reciprocal aid or reverse lend lease terms to the United States forces in the Pacific'.[139]

Still, the fact they arrested their shortage did not necessarily mean the two nations managed to escape perverse environmental or economic outcomes. In the immediate short-term, reductions in the rate of application saw parts of both countries experience crop failure and soil deterioration. Meanwhile, for the longer term, one might point out that by avoiding a wartime crisis, the orthodoxy of using chemical fertilizers in agricultural

[135] 'Japanese Urgently Need Phosphates', *PIM*, Dec. 1943, 9. See, Takekazu Ogura, ed., *Agricultural development in Modern Japan* (Tokyo: Fuji Publishing, 1966), 378.
[136] Tsutsui, 'Landscapes in the Dark Valley', 301.
[137] D.P. Mellor, *The Role of Science and Industry: Australia in the War of 1939–1945* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1958), 609–10, cited in Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 444.
[138] Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 97–9.
[139] External Affairs (Wellington) to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 9 Sep. 1943, 2, TNA: FO 687/22.

science was allowed to continue. If anything, because phosphate and fertilizer consumption were seen as such an important factor in the winning of the war, the path-dependency which began in the interwar period was further entrenched. As post-war institutions such as the Empire Fertiliser Committee in London and the Combined Food Board in Washington were developed to govern the distribution of chemical fertilizers across the world, the global-scientific consensus only accelerated.[140] By 1946 discussions had already begun at the International Emergency Food Council's Fertilizer Committee about recommencing the shipment of Makatea phosphate to help the Japanese rebuild.[141]

Finally, writing towards the end of the war against the backdrop of the most severe drought the continent had faced since the beginning of the century, Australian war correspondent Winston Turner believed that 'the richest gift which the Allies could make to Australian farmers would be the restoration of the phosphate industry of Nauru and Ocean Island'.[142] By 1945 the effects of the drought along with three to four years of phosphate rationing on Australasian food production were said to have been 'serious'.[143] And Turner was worried that the 'urgent needs of the farmers upon the food front' seemed to have been overlooked by post-war planners in Washington and London, who, if he had his way, would have been shouting – as loudly as Billy Hughes had been in 1919 – for the immediate re-occupation of Nauru and Banaba.

This is, to a certain degree, another way of saying that the outcome of the Second World War, a resounding victory for the technocratic improvers of the world, also sealed the fate for the phosphate islands of the Pacific. As Katerina Teaiwa argues, the destruction of these island habitats, these native lands, was seen as but a small price to pay for the supposed benefit of greater humankind.[144] For Makatea, the events of the war moved Makatea from the margins of regional trade to a much more significant role. The war intensified the transformation of Makatea into a 'phosphate island' by integrating it more fully into Australasian markets and it set the island on its path for the eventual depletion of

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[140] 'Memorandum for Australian Fertiliser Manufacturers for Conference at Melbourne, 18 July 1945', NAA: A518, B112/6/1/ pt. 4.
[141] See W.G. Finn, US Member, Committee on Fertilizers to J.U. Garside, Australian Embassy, Washington 15 Oct. 1946, ANZ: EA1 893, 104/6/21, pt. 1, R18873015.
[142] 'By-passed Phosphate Islands', *PIM,* Mar. 1945, 21.
[143] Agricultural production had dropped to 27 per cent below pre-war levels. See Bruce R. Davidson, *European Farming in Australia: An Economic History of Australian Farming* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1981), 331.
[144] Teaiwa, 'Ruining Pacific Islands', 374–91.

its mineable deposits in the 1960s. The long-term contracts signed with the BPC towards the end of the war and the post-war global consensus to rehabilitate the Japanese economy encouraged the CFPO to maximise production. Politically, the war exposed a whole series of festering problems within the island’s administration that company management would be forced to address in the following decades. However, despite the great upheaval of the war and its revolutionary effect on so much of the colonial Pacific, in typical Makatea fashion, change came to the island at its own pace and it did not always come about willingly. The following chapter will describe the difficulties faced by the mining company as it was forced to modernize in a fast-decolonizing world.

Chapter 6: Problems of a Polynesian *main-d’œuvre*

Figure 6.1: *Extraction du phosphate*, c.1952.
Source: Bernard Villaret, *Océanie* (1955).

This study commenced with fragments of the pre-mining Polynesian history of Makatea and then the focus shifted towards outsiders and their particular trials and tribulations. We have seen how various forces came to bear on, and contribute to, a place busily transforming from a 'Polynesian island' into a 'phosphate island'. Earlier attention was paid to the Japanese, Chinese and Indochinese (or 'Annamite') workers who were progressively brought to the island to work on indentured contracts in place of the Polynesian worker because it was argued at the time, they could not be found in sufficient numbers. This preference for Asian labour, while at times troublesome for the company, lent Makatea its cosmopolitan flavour, setting it apart from most other islands in the territory, with the exception of Tahiti. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that local Polynesians were denied the chance to work on the island: various recruiting ventures were attempted over the years.[1] However, since industrial demand for phosphate constantly outstripped local labour supply, and management lacked any incentive to invest in the development of a locally drawn workforce, the island became dislocated from the rest of the territory: not at all dissimilar to the way an extraterritorial port city tends to follow global as opposed to local rhythms.[2]

By way of contrast, this chapter seeks to describe the post-World War Two '*océanisation*' or localization of the *main-d'œuvre*.[3] Above all, I examine the forces which led to the transformation of a multi-ethnic workforce into a predominantly Polynesian workforce (nevertheless with workers hailing from multiple islands and island groups within French Polynesia), and thus the reintegration of the island into the changing political and social currents of the rest of the territory. On one level, I argue that post-war movements for Indigenous recognition on Tahiti reached Makatea where a concentration of Polynesian workers ensured that the isolation of the phosphate industry and the *petit* fiefdom of the

[1] While the percentage of French Polynesian workers within the *main-d'oeuvre* on Makatea grew in the years leading up to the Second World War, the size of their contingent never came close to approximating the demographics in the rest of the colony. For roughly a decade before the arrival of Cook Islands' workers (1934–42), French Polynesians were the largest ethnic contingent on the island. See Danton, 'Makatea', 26.
[2] For a recent overview of the place of port cities in global labour histories, see the introduction to a special issue of the same name, Pepijn Brandon, Niklas Frykman and Pernille Røge, 'Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Port Cities (Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries)', *International Review of Social History* 64:S27 (2019): 1–18.
[3] *L'océanisation des cadres* was a policy shaped by Pouvana'a a O'opa and the pro-autonomy RDPT, championing the replacement of metropolitan French by French Polynesians in positions of consequence in the public service and elsewhere in the economy. It still carries much salience in French Polynesian politics today.

CFPO could no longer continue.[4] On the other, I posit that changes in French imperial policy in the post-war moment both encouraged these feelings of worker solidarity and acts of mobilization and placed further pressure on the CFPO to 'modernize' its practices. As Frederick Cooper puts it, at the same time as Keynesian economic reforms won favour in metropolitan centres, these ideas also spread across the imperial world where there was a realization

> that leaving investment and decision-making to private capital had failed to produce vigorous economic growth, and that leaving wages and working to the mercies of the labor market had failed to produce a labor force sufficiently stable, healthy, orderly, and predictable to bring about peaceful progress.[5]

Hence during the post-war moment on Makatea, we can observe a clear shift in labour policy from what Maurice Besson earlier termed a 'very delicate product' that required 'due prudence' to the development of a modern framework that was no longer readily distinguishable from its metropolitan equivalent.[6]

In this respect, French Polynesia was little different from the rest of the colonial Pacific where World War Two had a profound effect on relations between the colonial classes and their colonized populations.[7] As much as they would have liked to, the CFPO could not hide from the 'wind of change' generated by the likes of Pouvana'a a O'opa and other returned servicemen on Tahiti Nui. Not yet calling for independence, they were nonetheless demanding a much greater Polynesian presence in the day-to-day management of the EFO.[8] As I demonstrate below, a shift in French imperial mentality during the Fourth Republic and a raft of ensuing local legislative changes – above all, the

[4] Visiting colonial inspector Robert Lassalle-Séré put it thus: 'On this island where almost nothing exists outside of the phosphate exploitation, the company representative has always had an eminent place, relegating the administration's *chef du poste* to the background'. See Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le reglement du conflit du travail survenu à Makatea du 10 au 19 Juillet 1947', 27 Jul. 1947, 10, AN: OCEA/114.
[5] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 384.
[6] See chapter 3.
[7] Hugh Laracy, 'World War Two', in *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century,* ed. K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste and Brij V. Lal (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 161–6.
[8] As the political scientist Adria K. Lawrence would argue, Pouvana'a and company were mobilizing for political equality rather than making nationalist demands. See Adria K. Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 91.

introduction of the 1947 *code du travail* – encouraged local employment over foreign and enticed more Polynesians into regular, waged work.[9]

Yet, as the title of this chapter suggests, local hiring or '*l'Océanisation*' of Makatea's *main-d'œuvre* did not occur seamlessly, nor did it happen overnight. As Governor Jean-Camille Haumant would observe midway through 1946, the CFPO had been encountering some '*petites difficultés de main-d'œuvre*' (and this was his opinion *before* an outbreak of industrial strife in 1947).[10] These difficulties would last for almost a decade post-war as the value of labour was the subject of (often fierce) negotiations between workers, capitalists and the territory's political classes. In general, this chapter posits the change in attitude brought about by Polynesian politicians such as Pouvana'a a O'opa and his long-time deputy, Jean-Baptiste Céran-Jérusalémy – two of the grand figures of mid-20th century French Polynesian political history – against the reluctance of CFPO's management to give way to such demands. While policy directives from Paris and Tahiti might have been necessary for the development of the territory, they were not exactly in the best interests of management on Makatea nor their Parisian shareholders who were principally concerned with improving the company's bottom line.[11] In this way, we can interpret this episode as a battle between those who wanted to maintain the pre-war status quo and an increasingly large group of modernizers who believed in the promises of General De Gaulle and the newly instituted Fourth Republic.

As we will see, French colonial reformers, influenced at the time by nationalist and working-class movements from West Africa to Indochina, were eager to implement changes across the empire. As Cooper has stated,

> French colonial thinking in February 1946 was not what it was in December 1945, and that reflects the persistence of a labor movement. That movement's strength was not so much an implacable opposition to everything that smacked of French colonialism, but instead an engagement with it – the molding of postwar French

[9] 'French Colonial Bill of Rights', Jun. 1946, *PIM,* 46.
[10] Jean-Camille Haumant, 'Situation et Perspectives Économiques en Océanie Française', 6 Jul. 1946, 1-2, SPAA: 48W/991.
[11] See, for example, the company's lukewarm response to the implementation of the empire-wide *code du travail* in 1954, CFPO, *Assemblée Générale Ordinaire du 29 Juillet 1955* (Paris: M. Grandchamp, 1955), 4.

> rhetoric into a language of claims, plunging into the details of French models of labor agreements in order to claim their benefits for colonized people.[12]

Here, I therefore suggest that while post-war Makatea did not become a hotbed of Polynesian nationalism or autonomy, it did become a site, by virtue of the number of workers the company came to employ, where Polynesian claims to French citizenship and equal treatment were worked out.[13] In other words, prior to the war, whether foreign or local, workers were seen as being little more than an amorphous group of colonial subjects, tied together by the common bond of an indentured contract. After the war, French Polynesian workers, emboldened by the climate of modernization and reform, demanded to be seen as the equals of French workers who enjoyed the full benefits of a metropolitan citizenship and a much greater share of the fruits of their labour. Bearing in mind the relative size and thus importance of the Makatea phosphate works in comparison to the rest of the French Polynesian economy, this chapter demonstrates how attitudes shifted in regard to Polynesian labour by charting the key legislative changes in the territory and the complications that arose in implementing them. The final section will attempt to describe the results of the policy shift by offering a snapshot of the social world of the island in the 1950s and 1960s as its phosphate deposits moved closer to exhaustion.

The Nature of Work

Ben Finney's early analyses of French Polynesian attitudes to work have laid to rest many of the old stereotypes of the Tahitian as a 'lazy' or 'unreliable' worker.[14] 'Anyone familiar with how Tahitians work for themselves, or for other Tahitians, knows they are capable of sustained and conscientious work', wrote Finney.[15] It was not that 'labor for pay does not attract the Tahitian', as one American geographer argued, but more that *certain* labour for pay was deemed more attractive than others.[16] According to Finney, the young Polynesian

[12] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 213.
[13] Here, using French Morocco as a case study, Adria K. Lawrence argues that the development of nationalist anti-colonialism is not the only, or natural, response to colonial rule. See Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, xi–xv.
[14] 'European employers often say, for example, that Tahitian workers are not punctual, that they work in spurts, and that they tend to loaf when left without supervision'. See Ben R. Finney, *Tahiti: Polynesian Peasants and Proletarians,* 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007 [1965]), 66. See also Ben Finney, 'Money Work, Fast Money and Prize Money: Aspects of the Tahitian Labour Commitment', in Nancy J. Pollock and Ron Crocombe (eds.) *French Polynesia: A Book of Selected Readings* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, 1988), 197.
[15] Finney, 'Money Work, Fast Money and Prize Money', 197.
[16] Glenn Cunningham, 'Manufacturing in Tahiti', *California Geographer* 7 (1966): 22.

men he met in the early 1960s were attracted to 'money work' or *'ohipa moni* (which yields 'fast money' or *moni ói ói*) over 'farming work' or *'ohipa fa'a'apu* (which, due to the longer cycles of cash-crop harvests, tends to yield 'slow money' or *moni taere*). He outlined that it was this 'fast money' that facilitated conspicuous consumption of things such as motorcycle time payments, imported foodstuffs and beer.[17]

Figure 6.2: At the Diggings (*les travaux*).
Source: Molet, 1962 coll., Tahiti Heritage

The difference between European and Polynesian conceptions of work therefore lay not in any inherent inclination (or disinclination) but in outlook, with the Polynesian tending to classify work in terms of tasks completed rather than hours spent; that is, a preference for 'prize work' over 'shift work'.[18] Good employers, Finney added, understood this distinction and adapted their work environments to match. We can see this playing out in respect to Makatea where overseers worked hard to instil a competitive ethos at the diggings. According to the French geographer François Doumenge who visited the island in the early 1960s, the incentive system, which covered at least half of Makatea's workforce, '[fit] nicely

[17] Finney, *Tahiti*, 67.
[18] Finney, *Tahiti,* 66–7.

with the characters of the Islanders who love to work in teams generally consisting of others from the same island as them and who have a collective attitude to work and have a taste for competition'.[19] The idea is reflected in historic video footage from the diggings: sun-drenched, smiling Islanders, working bare-footed and bare-chested, expertly navigating themselves across latticework fields of precariously laid planks while balancing their wheelbarrows filled with soft, crumbly phosphate rock (figure 6.2).[20]

However, as we know from chapter three, such a sanitized version of work on Makatea is clearly only half the story. On an unchanging diet of black tea, dry, weevil and worm laden bread, boiled rice, and tinned meat,[21] during the 1940s workers pushed through nine-hour days, six-day weeks, with between four to eight tons of rock raised on average per worker each day.[22] At the end of the day, each labourer shared sleeping quarters with 45 other men, with very little access to water, and the ability to buy beer restricted to weekends.[23] There is little wonder that New Zealander Dr Fred Dawson, the medical official responsible for inspecting workers on their return to the Cook Islands, found the health of so many of the 1945 gang to be 'below par and under-nourished'.[24] For his part, while finding the camp accommodation passable, French doctor Vrignaud was worried about the lack of fresh fruit, meat and vegetables, and deplored the fact that workers from surrounding islands arrived without medical inspection, thus potentially carrying contagious diseases.[25]

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[19] Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', 58.
[20] See *Tahiti d'antan: Makatea, l'île phosphate* (Tahiti: Images d'Océanie, 2008), accessible at https://youtu.be/3rx7forNaPg (accessed 11 Dec. 2020). A more realistic and altogether sober presentation is conveyed in Monod, *Makatea: les gardiens de l'île*.
[21] The following testimony from a Cook Islands worker captures the monotony of the diet:
Q: At Makatea what did you have for your breakfast?
A: Black tea, dry bread.
Q: What did you have for your dinner?
A: Black tea, dry bread, boiled rice, tinned meat.
Q: What did you have for your tea?
A: Black tea, dry bread.
Q: In the year that you were at Makatea, did you have any variation from this diet?
A: No.
Testimony of Takatainga Tepuretu in 'Report of a Meeting Held at the Home of Makea Takau Ariki (Mrs. Love) on 18th April, 1945', 3, ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[22] To be precise, Gooding's productivity figures by ethnicity read: Chinese, 7.9 tons; Annamites; 5.8 tons; Tahitians, 6.6 tons, Outer Island Cook Islanders, 4.6 tons; Rarotongans, 4.4 tons, whereas visiting BPC official Bott recorded in 1943 an average of: Chinese 10 tons; Annamites 7.5 to 8.5; Rarotongans 5.5 to 7 tons; and Tahitians 5 to 6 tons. See Bott to Gaze, 12 Nov. 1943, 2, TNA: DO 140/574. For Gooding's figures, see 'État de production, de présences, des heures supplémentaires et rendement des tacherons de décembre 1944 à novembre 1945', SPAA: Fonds Aiden Gooding.
[23] Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 65.
[24] Testimony of Takatainga Tepuretu in 'Report of a Meeting Held at the Home of Makea Takau Ariki (Mrs. Love) on 18th April, 1945', 3, in ANZ: IT1 582, IT 102/4/16, pt. 2, R17963475.
[25] Le Chef de la circonscription administrative des Tuamotu et Gambier to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 22 Oct. 1943, 3, SPAA: 48W/1974.

Pace Doumenge, there were also grumblings about work practice at the diggings themselves. Rurutu Islanders had been criticizing the way productivity was measured since at least 1943, judging the bonus system for extracting more than three tons a day to be unfairly designed and inaccurately quantified.[26] According to one French official, after achieving their three-ton minimum in the morning, many workers would return in the afternoon to extract one or two extra tons at a leisurely tempo for the rate of two francs per extra ton. The company, however, would come down hard on those who were not working at maximum capacity and routinely subtracted one or two hours from the salary of the men who worked slower in the afternoons.[27] Two years later, the same Rurutu Islanders would go on strike alongside a contingent of Tahitians and win a wage increase from 720 francs (£4.10.0) to 1020 (£6.7.6) francs per month.[28] A visiting BPC official mentioned that the 1945 strike had been the culmination of 'a great deal of discontent among French Oceania labourers',[29] many of whom shared the grievance that their salaries did not match the rising cost of living.[30]

While it is tempting to blame this initial wave of discontent on deteriorating wartime conditions, the fact that the 1945 strike was just the first move in a series of industrial actions tends to suggest there were larger issues at play. The scene certainly developed quickly after the war. Increased demand from Australia and New Zealand – who as well as still being without Nauruan and Banaban phosphate,[31] could no longer rely on North African rock due to renewed European demand – meant that management sought to increase the size of their workforce from 566 to 750.[32] Instead of meeting this shortfall with Asian or Cook Island labour as they might have done in the past, in a move more pragmatic than anything else, the CFPO sought to recruit local workers on 12-month contracts. To convince Governor Haumant that this was a good idea, CFPO assistant-director Raymond Meunier reminded him that 'the interests of the colony are one in the same as the interests

[26] The rate was 2 francs per ton over the minimum daily rate plus 5 francs per hour of overtime. See Bott to Gaze, 12 Nov. 1943, 2, TNA: DO 140/574.
[27] Le Chef de la circonscription administrative des Tuamotu et Gambier to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 22 Oct. 1943, 2, SPAA: 48W/1974. One assumes this was because the company was wary that workers would work deliberately slow to earn a five-franc bonus for every extra hour work above 9 hours.
[28] Slightly less than the 1250 fr. (£7.16.3) they were arguing for but substantially more than the 575 to 690 fr. paid to the more efficient Vietnamese. See 'Report on Visit to Makatea by Mr. F.F. Christian, August, 1945', 1 & Appendix A, TNA: DO 140/580.
[29] Ibid., 1.
[30] Le Chef de la circonscription administrative des Tuamotu et Gambier to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 22 Oct. 1943, SPAA: 48W/1974.
[31] Shipments from Nauru and Banaba did not recommence until the end of July 1946.
[32] Meunier to Haumant, 5 Feb. 1946, 1, SPAA: 48W/1974.

of the CFPO'. His rationale was that getting more of the Indigenous population into steady work would translate 'to an atmosphere of calm and confidence that the administration of the colony could benefit from'.[33] Unhappily for Meunier, such Calvinist attitudes to work clearly overlooked the potential for working-class mobilization within such a concentrated group. In just 18 months' time he would be forced to leave the island to restore the peace. Yet to understand the events of July 1947 on Makatea, we first need to consider changes in the colonial capital.

The Makings of the 'Tahitian 20th Century'

The Second World War was a tremendous harbinger of change for both Pacific peoples and the governments that administered them.[34] Whereas League of Nations mandates such as Nauru quickly transformed into United Nations (UN) Trust Territories with the carrot of self-determination dangling in front of them, one of the first moves of the newly instituted French Fourth Republic was the creation of the Union française (French Union): a rearrangement of the old French Empire into what Robert Aldrich has called a 'semantic, even euphemistic' overnight transformation of France's colonies into 'overseas territories'.[35] Under this new arrangement the old colonies (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion) became overseas departments (DOMs), while the rest of France's colonial possessions – the EFO included – became overseas territories (TOMs), each still to be administered by an all-powerful governor.[36]

The promise was of greater decentralization and autonomy in the territories, yet many would come to feel that the system – often (inaccurately) portrayed as the French response to the British Commonwealth – fell frustratingly short of the mark.[37] In the case of French Polynesia, those critical of the changes would bemoan that governors were appointed by the *métropole* and that the assembly could not discuss political matters. But by providing a representative platform and an elected deputy in the French Parliament, these democratic reforms gave the likes of Pouvana'a greater opportunity to agitate for even

[33] Meunier to Haumant, 24 Jan. 1946, SPAA: 48W/1974.
[34] Toullelan and Gille, *Le Mariage Franco-Tahitien*, 113.
[35] Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940*, 74.
[36] Ibid., 66–7.
[37] Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* rev. ed. (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin Books, 1986 [1977]), 26; Lorenz Gonschor, 'Law as a Tool of Oppression and Liberation: Institutional Histories and Perspectives on Political Independence in Hawai'i, Tahiti Nui/French Polynesia and Rapa Nui', MA thesis, University of Hawai'i, 2008, 113.

more profound change.[38] Also important was that French Polynesians now enjoyed full citizenship rights, having at least theoretically thrown off the kind of second-class treatment normally reserved for colonial subjects.[39] In keeping with the 1944 Brazzaville Declaration, a circular was sent to all French colonial governors in late 1945 asking 'that we cease to give the impression of believing ourselves superior to any kind of indigenous race'.[40] This was enshrined throughout France's overseas territories through the constitution of the Fourth Republic and the 1946 *Loi Lamine Guèye* which made all former colonial subjects 'citizens'.[41]

According to Bruno Saura, this 'new era' brought economic, political and then cultural change to French Polynesia – it was as if the 20th century began in 1945.[42] One clear manifestation of this change in attitude was the 'veritable "*floraison*"' of unions on Tahiti from 1946 onwards.[43] As the Pape'ete correspondent for the *Pacific Islands Monthly* would put it: 'One of the last places on earth to adopt the principle of Organised Labour, Tahiti is, now, proceeding in this undertaking with thoroughness and despatch'.[44] Commentary attached to the 1946 census mentioned that despite not making any real appearance since the promulgation of an 1884 French law enabling them, multiple unions had begun to appear since the middle of that year, with public servants issuing a word of warning about the dangers of what they called an 'epidemic of unionism' escalating any further.[45] This 'epidemic' was constituted by the emergence of 14 separate unions coming together under the umbrella of the Union des Syndicats Tahitiens (UST), itself affiliated to the French communist-led Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT).[46]

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[38] Lorenz Gonschor, '*Mai te hau Roma ra te huru*: The Illusion of "Autonomy" and the Ongoing Struggle for Decolonization in French Polynesia', *Contemporary Pacific* 25:2 (2013): 264.
[39] Yet at the same time entrenching French law throughout the colony, see Gonschor, 'Law as a Tool of Oppression and Liberation', 112.
[40] Circular of Minister of Colonies, 20 Oct. 1945, 17G 15, AS, cited in Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 38.
[41] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 105. For more on the making of the 1946 law named after the Senegalese deputy Lamine Guèye, see Cooper, *Colonialism in Question,* 215–8.
[42] Bruno Saura, *Tahiti Mā'ohi: Culture, identité, religion et nationalisme en Polynésie française* (Tahiti: Au Vent des iles, 2008), 56.
[43] Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 21 Feb 1948, 2, SPAA: 48W/961.
[44] 'Organised Trade Unions for Tahiti', *PIM,* Jul. 1947, 73.
[45] 'Recensements', SPAA: 48W/987.
[46] By 30 May 1947, there were reports of 26 registered trade unions. See 'Organised Trade Unions for Tahiti', *PIM,* Jul. 1947, 73.

The UST newspaper, the *Bulletin de l'Union des Syndicats Tahitiens,*[47] declared that more than a simple change of name from 'colony' to 'overseas territory' was needed for workers to believe that the old colonial system had been reformed. Editor Aimé Pambrun, who was also secretary general of the UST and director of the Government's publishing press, argued that workers – that is, 'all the producers of the social riches of the EFO' – wished for the 'French Union [to] become a community of free, equal and fraternal men … established on democratic principles and not a camouflaged caricature of the colonial empire'.[48] The fact that the administration allowed the union newspaper to be printed at the Government press – or, indeed, that the man operating the printing press was the territory's leading unionist – could well have been a sign that the administration was not quite as anti-union as it seemed. But the events of 1947 would make it clear that not everyone was comfortable with the 'end' of Empire and the accelerated pace of change in the territory.

Tahiti for the Tahitians

Among the 'considerable unrest' observed in Tahiti by BPC employee J.A. Bissett on his December 1947 inspection, was 'a movement of "Tahiti for Tahitians"'.[49] Like the Sāmoa mo Sāmoa movement of the 1920s and 1930s, this movement coalesced around a larger-than-life figure of mixed descent.[50] Born in 1895, Pouvana'a, known simply as *metua* (father), was descended from a long-line of Huahine chiefs on his Chinese-Tahitian mother's side. A carpenter by trade, his light skin and bright blue eyes caused no end of speculation as to his origins, but the existence of a Danish whaler deep in his father's genealogy was the most likely explanation.[51] However, unlike Ta'isi O.F. Nelson in Sāmoa, Pouvana'a did not belong to the *demi*, or mixed-descent, class in Tahiti.[52] He did not, in the first place, speak enough French and despite being one of the colony's most decorated war veterans, his politics were much too radical for Pape'ete's conservative *demi* elites. On the other hand, he found greater favour with rural and working-class Polynesians, and could count on the support of the Polynesian-dominated Protestant Church. Despite co-

[47] The newspaper was launched in September 1947.
[48] UST, 'Aux travailleurs syndiqués des EFO et aux Membres du SAOF', *Bulletin de l'Union des Syndicats Tahitiens,* 15 Sep. 1947, 1, in SPAA: 48W/1621.
[49] Bissett to Gaze, 23 Dec. 47, 9, TNA: DO 140/594.
[50] See O'Brien, *Tautai.*
[51] John C. Dorrance, 'The Pouvanaa Movement and Political Development in Post-War French Polynesia', unpublished manuscript, University of Hawai'i, 1966, 11; O'Reilly and Teissier, *Tahitiens*, 466; Bruno Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa: Père de la culture politique tahitienne* (Papeete: Au vent des îles, 1997), 43–9.
[52] The mixed-descent community, literally half-caste or *afakasi* in Samoan.

founding the Tahitian committee of de Gaulle's *France libre*, he found himself briefly imprisoned later in the war for criticizing the government's handling of food supply. His daring escape by canoe only added to his prestige in the eyes of many and established the platform for his entry into politics once the 1946 constitutional reforms enabled the formation of political parties.[53]

Created in February 1947, the political movement known as the Comité Pouvanaa aimed to overturn 'all the injustices of the colonial system', cleverly mobilizing the support of recently returned serviceman (l'Union des Volontaires) dissatisfied with the slow pace of progress in the territory and, above all, the lack of job opportunities awaiting them on their return.[54] Hence it was the 52-year old Pouvana'a himself who famously led the June 1947 waterfront protest against the arrival of the *Ville d'Amiens,* an old French merchant ship carrying three metropolitan bureaucrats accused of taking up posts that should have been reserved for Tahitians.[55] The affair, labelled the '22 June rebellion' by visiting colonial inspector Robert Lassalle-Séré,[56] saw over a thousand returned soldiers defy the colonial administration for six days through their occupation of the waterfront, effectively obstructing the three *fonctionnaires* from setting foot on land. Under pressure from Lassalle-Séré, a 'state of siege' was declared and the three public servants were quietly taken to shore late one night under the shadow of darkness; and French machine guns.[57] Pouvana'a was eventually arrested alongside the other leaders of the movement but the blow to French prestige had already been made. In Patrick O'Reilly's words, 'for a number of days, a veritable atmosphere of revolution blew throughout Papeete'.[58]

The affair of the *Ville d'Amiens* is justly cited today as the beginning of the nationalist or autonomist movement on Tahiti,[59] but the unions too were busy fomenting their own brand of anticolonial discord among the colonial and capitalist classes in the months leading up to the affair. Waterside workers struck on 25 March, leading to a backlash by the French

[53] Paul de Deckker, 'France', in *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century,* ed. K.R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste and Brij V. Lal (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 262–3.
[54] Toullelan and Gille, *Le mariage Franco-Tahitien,* 126.
[55] O'Reilly, *Tahitiens*, 466.
[56] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre à Makatea', 2, AN: OCEA/114.
[57] Dorrance, 'The Pouvanaa Movement and Political Development in Post-War French Polynesia', 16; Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign*, 24.
[58] O'Reilly, *Tahitiens,* 466.
[59] Panoff, *Tahiti Metisse*, 221.

army.[60] And in May, the union movement eventually gained the right to a 48-hour week (28 years after it was introduced in Paris).[61] A *Commission paritaire* (or select committee) was launched in Pape'ete just a week before the rebellion to investigate the matter of salaries and other working conditions on Makatea (16–27 June). Over a series of seven meetings between members of the administration, CFPO management and union representatives, Makatea salaries and work conditions were, in theory, brought into line with those on Tahiti, which represented a 20 per cent salary increase.[62] These developments, set against the backdrop of the rebellion unfolding on the Pape'ete waterfront, were also precipitated by union unrest, in this case a phosphate workers' strike and subsequent management lock-out on 14 and 15 June respectively.[63] While addressing these immediate issues that were causing the deadlock at Makatea, the *Commission paritaire* was nevertheless wary of implementing even more drastic changes on the island that they would then be obligated to follow on Tahiti. The second half of this chapter will take a closer look at how the results of this commitee played out on Makatea over the immediate and longer terms.

Conflits du travail

An important member of the *Commission paritaire* was the electrician and secretary-general of the UST-affiliated Union Intersyndicale des Travailleurs de Makatea*,* Max Bernière, a *demi* of French, Tahitian and Martinique ancestry.[64] After concluding talks in Pape'ete, Bernière is likely to have returned to Makatea with his head held high.[65] Assistant-director Meunier had accepted, albeit grudgingly, the majority of the union's claims. Some of the more extreme demands, such as the nationalization of the mine, had not been discussed, but the electrician had gotten the better of Meunier and his CFPO

[60] Saura believes this strike effectively foreshadowed the larger events that would follow. See *Pouvanaa a Oopa,* 223n5. Also see, 'Rapport à Mr. Le Gouverneur sur l'activité du service de l'inspection du travail dans les Établissements Français de l'Océanie, Aout 1947 – Septembre 1948', 2, SPAA: 48W/961.
[61] Governor Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 21 Feb. 1948, 2, SPAA: 48W/961.
[62] For minutes of these meetings, see SPAA: 48W/1724.
[63] Telegram from la France d'outre-mer to Governor, Papeete, 22 Jun. 1947, SPAA: 48W/1724.
[64] Labelled a 'half-caste' by the visiting BPC official, J.H. Bissett. See Bissett to Gaze, 'No.434', 23 Dec. 1947, 5, TNA: DO 140/594.
[65] Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 66.

colleagues.[66] On top of having to deal with increased royalty payments to landowners, they were now required to pay their workers fair rates.[67]

By all accounts a difficult man at the best of times,[68] Meunier must have formed his own conclusions because on the morning of 10 July he made a beeline for the power plant where Bernière worked to write on the blackboard that the arranged bonus for working nights and Sundays would not apply to mechanics. Insistent that this was an abrogation of their rights, the mechanics at the power plant downed tools and despite Meunier's threats of imprisonment, cut the island's electricity supply by jamming the circuit-breaker of one of the generators.[69]

Instead of deferring to Meunier or his wife as usual, the ageing and forgetful mining director, Pierson, who had returned to his post after the war, suddenly sprang into action and ordered the arrest of the electricians.[70] In a move highly reminiscent of responses to uprisings in previous decades, an urgent telegram was sent to the Governor requesting that no measure be spared to 're-establish order' on the island.[71] In the meantime Pierson summoned Bernière to his office where, in a heated exchange, he repeatedly accused the electrician of inciting sabotage. The nonchalant Bernière, who had already raised the ire of the director by greeting him with one foot resting on the office chair, steadfastly rejected this accusation, insisting that the electricians acted of their own accord. The meeting came to an end with Pierson's cry of '*foutez le camp*' (bugger off) and with that, the electrician was fired.[72]

That night, members of the Union Intersyndicale des Travailleurs de Makatea convened in the school grounds to discuss the morning's events, as Makatea's dissident groups still do to this day. With Bernière insisting he was unfairly dismissed, union members decided to call a general strike for the following day, and each subsequent day until their secretary

[66] A. Pambrun to Président de la Commission Paritaire, 14 Jun. 1947, 2, SPAA: 48W/1724.
[67] H. Tomasini, 'Note sur les royalties payées par la C.F.P.O', 6 Nov. 1951, Unilever Archives, Port Sunlight (hereinafter UA): GB1752.UAC: 1/2/4/17/65.
[68] A BPC employee described him as 'quiet' and 'cold', and though he was 'a good technical man', he was apparently 'not an executive'. See Bissett to Gaze, 23 Dec. 1947, 2, TNA: DO 140/594.
[69] Viremouneix, *Makatea,* 66; 'Rapport de M. Hugonnet, chef de la centrale électrique', 14 Jul. 1947, AN: OCEA/114.
[70] Pierson, who aside from a stint in the United States during the Second World War, had been working on Makatea since 1926 was widely known to be counting down the days to his retirement on Tahiti. See Bissett to Gaze, 23 Dec. 1947, 2, TNA: DO 140/594.
[71] Viremouneix, *Makatea,* 66.
[72] Max Bernière, 'N° 1 rapport sur les incidents de la centrale', 15 Jul. 1947, AN: OCEA/114.

was reinstated.[73] Several hundred metres away at most, the management of the CFPO convened for a meeting of their own at Pierson's house where he argued, without dissension, for a second island-wide lock-out. Only the local island administrator, Jean Viremouneix, had the courage to question Pierson's confident assertion that the Governor would support them by sending as many armed reinforcements as needed.[74]

The next morning, Viremouneix received a distressed phone call from Pierson's wife, Madame Pierson, to inform them of the tangle they now found themselves in ('*nous sommes dans de beaux draps*').[75] As Viremouneix had hinted the night before, the Governor had no intention of sending troops to the island and Pierson was now at a loss for what to do. The bureaucrat suggested he himself meet with the union representatives with whom he got on well to try and reach a solution. However, by now it had become clear that the workers would not budge until their leader was reinstated, and Pierson and Meunier would not back-down until Bernière, 'the *bête noire* of the management', left the island.[76] The Governor's response might not have been to send in the troops, but he did decide to send Lassalle-Séré, the hard-nosed inspector-general for colonies who had just dealt with the *Ville d'Amiens* affair, to quell any problems on Makatea before they spread to Tahiti.[77]

Like many in the colonial inspectorate, Robert Lassalle-Séré was an ex-military man who had been serving the colonial ministry since the early 1930s. After taking a hand in the creation of the South Pacific Commission in Noumea, he arrived in Tahiti in March 1947 for what was meant to be a one-year tour of inspection. Furnished with considerable powers, the unravelling drama on Makatea was exactly the kind of reason he was summoned to the colony in the first place. He has since received criticism from Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson for the way he handled the *Ville d'Amiens* affair, and he was certainly no friend of Pouvana'a, but his actions on Makatea (including his agitation for an increase in the royalty paid to landowners) suggest he was more than a colonial caricature.[78] On the afternoon of 17 July he arrived on the island alongside Georges

[73] 'Assemblee Generale, CGT Makatea', 10 Jul. 1947; 'Assemblee Generale, CGT Makatea', 12 Jul. 1947, AN: OCEA/114.
[74] He also questioned the wisdom of a lock-out when it seemed the trouble lay at the feet of three electricians at most, and work could continue at the diggings without the electricity supply. See Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 67–8.
[75] Ibid., 68.
[76] Ibid.; Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le reglement du conflit du travail', 27 Jul. 1947, 3, AN: OCEA/114.
[77] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre à Makatea', 1, AN: OCEA/114.
[78] Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign,* 23–4; Mazellier, ed., *Mémorial Polynésien: vol. 6*, 257.

Ahnne, the administrator of the Tuamotu-Gambier, and Aussel, visiting from the CFPO's Parisian head-office. The men soon got to work collecting individual testimonies, holding meetings, and, in Lassalle-Séré's case, adroitly avoiding dinner invitations from company management in an effort to maintain an image of impartiality.[79]

One of Lassalle-Séré's first decisions was thus to visit Bernière, whom he was keen to see reinstated in order to get work started again, cautioning workers nonetheless about further strikes, likening them to war: 'the last but most serious resort'.[80] With a little extra convincing from the *mūto'i farāni* (French police agent) Viremouneix, Lassalle-Séré got his way, Bernière was reinstated, and the workers agreed to call off their strike.[81] Unable to handle this affront to their pride, Pierson and Meunier left for Pape'ete with Aussel taking over in the interim.[82] Although it was interpreted by many as the permanent resignation of the two directors, a message the next morning made it clear both men had only intended their withdrawal to be temporary. At this news, Bernière tried to have work stopped once again, but this time cooler heads prevailed and, fearing more agitation would come off badly, the UST's Pambrun on Tahiti refused to lend Bernière his support. The strike was officially called off.[83]

According to Lassalle-Séré, two measures were needed to assure the peace on Makatea: the first was a change of management personnel; and the second was the installation of a small police force under the guidance of the local administrator and not company management, who, he believed, would abuse such power.[84] He considered that these kinds of conflicts would continue at Makatea if the CFPO did not appoint 'a less authoritarian Director', but he also thought the workers needed 'a balanced union representative, capable of presenting and discussing the workers' demands in a calm manner, without immediately resorting to strike action'.[85] He felt that Makatea's problems could be traced to Meunier's arrival, arguing that his 'impulsivity, authoritarianism, and desire to improve output at all costs and to the detriment of the legitimate interests of the

[79] Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 70.
[80] '*Le dernier recours mais le plus mauvais*', Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le règlement du conflit du travail', 27 Jul. 1947, 4, AN: OCEA/114.
[81] Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 72–3.
[82] Lassalle-Séré to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 22 Sep. 1947, 3, AN: OCEA/114.
[83] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le règlement du conflit du travail', 27 Jul. 1947, 4–5, AN: OCEA/114.
[84] Ibid., 15.
[85] Robert Lassalle-Séré to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 22 Sep. 1947, 3, AN: OCEA/114.

workers' had produced 'regrettable consequences'.[86] Meunier had come to the island from a career working in the North African phosphate mines, so he was 'inexperienced in handling Pacific Islanders' and as one report had put it, 'his manner towards them was unsmiling, almost surly'.[87] The engineer had taken advantage of Pierson's frailty to exert an outsized influence on the company's direction and, if it were not for the 'capable' Madame Pierson, who was praised for reining in Meunier's more exuberant ideas, it is doubtless that he would have gone even further.[88]

While in general, Lassalle-Séré blamed CFPO management for 'not giving a second thought to the living conditions of their workers' (which he thought was demonstrated by their inability to deal with the union representatives), he still criticized the ascendancy of Bernière over the workers on the island. He warned that the unionist, too, had an authoritarian streak no less troublesome than Meunier's, with an 'intransigence, susceptibility, and an innate distrust which always made his dealings with the management difficult'.[89] He could think of many delegates in the UST who would be better suited to the task on Makatea than Bernière but as the electrician was a favourite of UST's principal delegate to the *Commission paritaire* and long-time militant unionist, Étienne Davio, Lassalle-Séré could not see him being stripped of his position.[90] Moreover, the administration was hand-tied, as they could not intervene to dismiss him without seeming to have taken the side of the management.[91]

The difference between the administration's response to this crisis and how it had reacted to the unrest of the 1920s could not have been starker. Granted, it was only facing a strike on this occasion and not an armed revolt but in preferring to send a negotiator over a show of force, the emphasis was clearly placed on neutralizing the situation as efficiently as possible. The fact that the workers in question this time were French citizens rather than foreign subjects is far from immaterial. Comparisons might be made with the situation in French West Africa, where the railway strike of 1947–8 was also handled with great

[86] Ibid., 4.
[87] Bissett to Gaze, 'No. 434', 23 Dec. 1947, 2, TNA: DO 140/594.
[88] Viremouneix, *Makatea*, 67. Bissett, the BPC inspector, nonetheless worried about the influence Madame Pierson wielded over her husband and questioned 'how the native mind reacts to it'. See Bissett to Gaze, 'No. 434', 23 Dec. 1947, 2, TNA: DO 140/594.
[89] Robert Lassalle-Séré to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 22 Sep. 1947, 4, AN: OCEA/114.
[90] According to Lassalle-Séré, Davio wielded a strong influence on the Tahitian union movement.
[91] Lassalle-Séré to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 22 Sep. 1947, 5, AN: OCEA/114.

caution: we can see here a growing tendency towards conciliation.[92] As Cooper argues in this case, 'having committed themselves to an industrial relations model of labor control, the colonial regime found it hard to go back to old-style colonialist methods'.[93] Like in Africa, the rebellion on Tahiti had evidently awakened the administration to the changing climate in the territory, and it naturally hoped to avoid fighting on too many fronts. Most significant as an indication of a new approach to dealing with conflict between the company and its workers is how for the second time in as many weeks, the administration failed to take the side of the company, deciding instead to double-down on its efforts to curtail its power. Lassalle-Séré may have quickly returned to Pape'ete after dealing with the crisis immediately at hand, but his long-term influence on Makatea had only just begun to be felt.

The *Code du Travail*

Lassalle-Séré filed two further reports following his visit to Makatea: one on the role of the local administrative post including a recommendation for greater royalty payments to landowners, and the other a wide-ranging critique of the conditions of the *main-d'œuvre*.[94] The latter was destined for the desk of Jean Lalanne, the recently appointed labour inspector with a proven record of implementing labour reforms in French Indochina, and now summoned to Tahiti to do more of the same.[95] Armed with Lassalle-Séré's damning appraisal of the CFPO's activities, Lalanne was able to push ahead with his long overdue agenda, implementing a *conseil du travail* in September 1947 and *code du travail* in October 1947 (though it would not reach Makatea until the early months of 1948). As Lalanne noted, 'whereas the majority of territories in the French Union had been affected by a generous programme of social reform since 1936', until 1947 the EFO, still governed by laws dating to 1920 and 1924, had enjoyed no such equivalent.[96] Yet, without the July strike and Lassalle-Séré's intervention, these reforms may not have been forthcoming.

Lassalle-Séré was most concerned about the conditions in place for French Polynesian workers, noting there was nothing to protect them from workplace accidents. In general,

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[92] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question,* 223.
[93] Ibid., 224.
[94] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le poste administratif de Makatea', 7 Aug. 1947, 1–9, AN: OCEA/114; Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre à Makatea', 4 Aug. 1947, 1–24, AN: OCEA/114.
[95] Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 21 Feb. 1948, 3, SPAA: 48W/961.
[96] 'Rapport à M. le Gouverneur sur l'activité du service de l'inspection du travail dans les Établissements Français de l'Océanie, Aout 1947 – Septembre 1948', 1, SPAA: 48W/961.

he thought 'the local regulations do not even assure as much protection to French citizens as to foreign immigrants'.[97] Workers from the Cook Islands, for example, were the most looked-after because of the close eye kept on them by the British Consul to Tahiti, while the Indochinese were regulated by their own immigration department.[98] Workers hired from metropolitan France were protected by French jurisprudence owing to the fact that the CFPO had its headquarters in Paris.[99] For French Polynesians, however, there was no protection, and they were subject to 'draconian' conditions where they were 'required to obey all orders given to them' by their superiors at risk of a fine, while the company could cancel their contract at any time and was required to pay for only eight days of work.[100] In the event of accident or illness outside the fault of the employee, the company was only required to pay either four days of full-pay or seven days of half-pay before they were allowed to terminate the contract.[101]

Lassalle-Séré believed that the agreements reached at the *Commission paritaire* should have been reason enough to bring a long period of calm to Makatea but unfortunately management had 'the regrettable idea to modify the work arrangements by their own authority'.[102] The CFPO made a lot of their decision to raise salaries, but as Lassalle-Séré pointed out, 'it is abusive to speak of the sacrifices taken and the spirit of conciliation entered into in relation to the rise in salaries' when they were long overdue and only agreed to under pressure from workers.[103] He thought it hypocritical that management justified the dilapidated state of workers' lodgings by saying there was a lack of materials available to them when management housing appeared to be equipped with all the comforts that one could possibly wish for on a Pacific island.[104] Finally, he concluded that 'a *code du travail* must be enacted which will set working conditions for ordinary workers and employees on the one hand, and accommodated and fed workers on the other'.[105] Lassalle-Séré recommended that certain provisional solutions could be found while waiting for the *code du travail* to appear, such as the drawing up of new contracts for the different types of

[97] Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre', 4 Aug. 1947, 2, AN: OCEA/114.
[98] Ibid., 3.
[99] Ibid., 6.
[100] Ibid., 6–7.
[101] Ibid., 7.
[102] Ibid., 10.
[103] Ibid., 11.
[104] Ibid., 15.
[105] Ibid., 24.

worker as agreed to during the *Commission paritaire*. These, he hoped, would be in line with the contracts that appeared for workers in other French territories.[106]

In drafting the new *code du travail*, New Caledonia was identified as the most relevant comparison where it was found that workers there, on average, received between five to seven francs more per hour than their Tahitian counterparts, and enjoyed a 45-hour working week as opposed to the 48-hour week in the EFO.[107] Anticipating opposition from French Polynesia's capitalist class, Governor Maestracci declared that they were not proposing anything 'sensational', rather that they were only bringing their regulations into line with those in New Caledonia. Nevertheless, he realized that any change, no matter how reasonable it might seem to outsiders, would appear hostile to 'the majority of the territory's employers who, isolated in the Pacific throughout the hostilities, are not able to fully realise the modern social evolution and new obligations that are incumbent on them'.[108]

After the code was released finally on 17 October 1947, the UST newspaper described the changes as a 'complete transformation of the conditions of work'.[109] Lalanne himself visited Makatea in January to make sure the changes were being observed.[110] Pierson, in his position as local director since 1933, finally took his retirement in February 1949, and Bernière was soon replaced at the head of the Makatea workers' union by Raymond Hérault (also known as Hopuare), another of Davio's men who had represented the UST during earlier negotiations with the CFPO and was later described as 'violently anti-metropolitan'.[111] Pouvana'a continued to gain popularity on Tahiti with his socialist political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique des Populations Tahitiennes (RDPT), actively campaigning against the 'scandalous profits' made by companies like the CFPO.[112] He visited Makatea in July 1950 for the purposes of creating a branch of the Comité Pouvanaa

[106] Ibid.
[107] Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 24 Sep. 1948, ANOM: AFFPOL/389. My thanks to Adrian Muckle for alerting me to this series of records.
[108] Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 24 Sep. 1948, ANOM: AFFPOL/389. During the 1948 negotiations, the employers' representative thought that to give way to the 'irrational demands' of the workers would lead 'just as surely to the ruin of the territory as a *cataclysme atmosphérique*'. See Le Représentant des employeurs au Conseil du Travail et de la Main d'Oeuvre to M. le Procureur de la République, 1 Jun. 1948, 4, ANOM: AFFPOL/389.
[109] 'Conseil du travail et de la main-d'œuvre', 7 Nov. 1947, 2, SPAA: 48W/1621.
[110] Raymond Herault to Président du Conseil du Travail et de la main-d'œuvre, 6 Feb. 1948, SPAA: 48W/961.
[111] Marcel Richet, 'Rapport du Chef du Poste administratif de Makatea sur les élections du 18 janvier 1953', 19 Jan. 1953, 2, SPAA: 48W/1212.
[112] Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa*, 247.

which quickly gained 300 registered members.[113] But in the lead up to the 1951 elections, he fell out of favour with the rank and file on Makatea who were persuaded to side with the rival UDSR party, Governor René Petitbon's Catholic bulwark against Pouvana'a's supposed anti-Christian socialism.[114] As one of the strongest of the Christian (Catholic) unions, the Union Intersyndicale des Travailleurs de Makatea, fell into line.[115]

Despite this brief opposition to Pouvana'a on Makatea and elsewhere in the Catholic-dominated Tuamotu Archipelago, his party continued to enjoy support on Tahiti and it would not take long before the RDPT found favour once again on the island (though not without compromise). Pouvana'a's long-time deputy, Jean-Baptiste Céran-Jérusalémy (known as Céran), a more conservative unionist *demi*, became counsellor for Makatea via the list in 1952 and held his seat throughout the decade by cutting deals with the phosphate company and promising there would not be any increases in export duties.[116] Elected president of the representative assembly in March 1953, he would revisit his electorate in April 1954, reporting:

> There are still close to 240 foreign workers employed at Makatea by the CFPO. It is a good thing that next year, that is to say in one year's time, this workforce will be completely gone, above all at this time where many of Papeete's enterprises are letting people go. This is a French territory, and the work should go to the people of this territory.[117]

The changing demographics on Makatea thus lend weight to Finney's argument that by the late 1950s, the balance in French Polynesia changed from 'peasant occupations to wage employment'.[118]

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[113] Chef de poste administratif to M. le Gouverneur des EFO, 11 July 1950; Chef de poste administratif to M. le chef des affaires politiques, 1 Sep. 1950, SPAA: 48W/845.

[114] It must be remembered that Pouvana'a was a protestant pastor. The UDSR came out of the Union populaire océanienne (UPO), both parties being the right-wing forerunners of Gaston Flosse's Tahoera'a Huiraatira party.

[115] Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa,* 249.

[116] Céran's open support for the CFPO would eventually cost him within the party. See Adloff and Thompson, *The French Pacific Islands,* 40, 43, 49n.

[117] 'Tournée officielle faite par le député Pouvanaa a Oopa et le conseiller de l'Union française J.B. Çeran-Jerusalemy, dans les îles de Tahiti, Moorea et Makatea', 1 Jun. 1954, SPAA: 48W/1396.

[118] Finney, 'Money Work, Fast Money and Prize Money', 195.

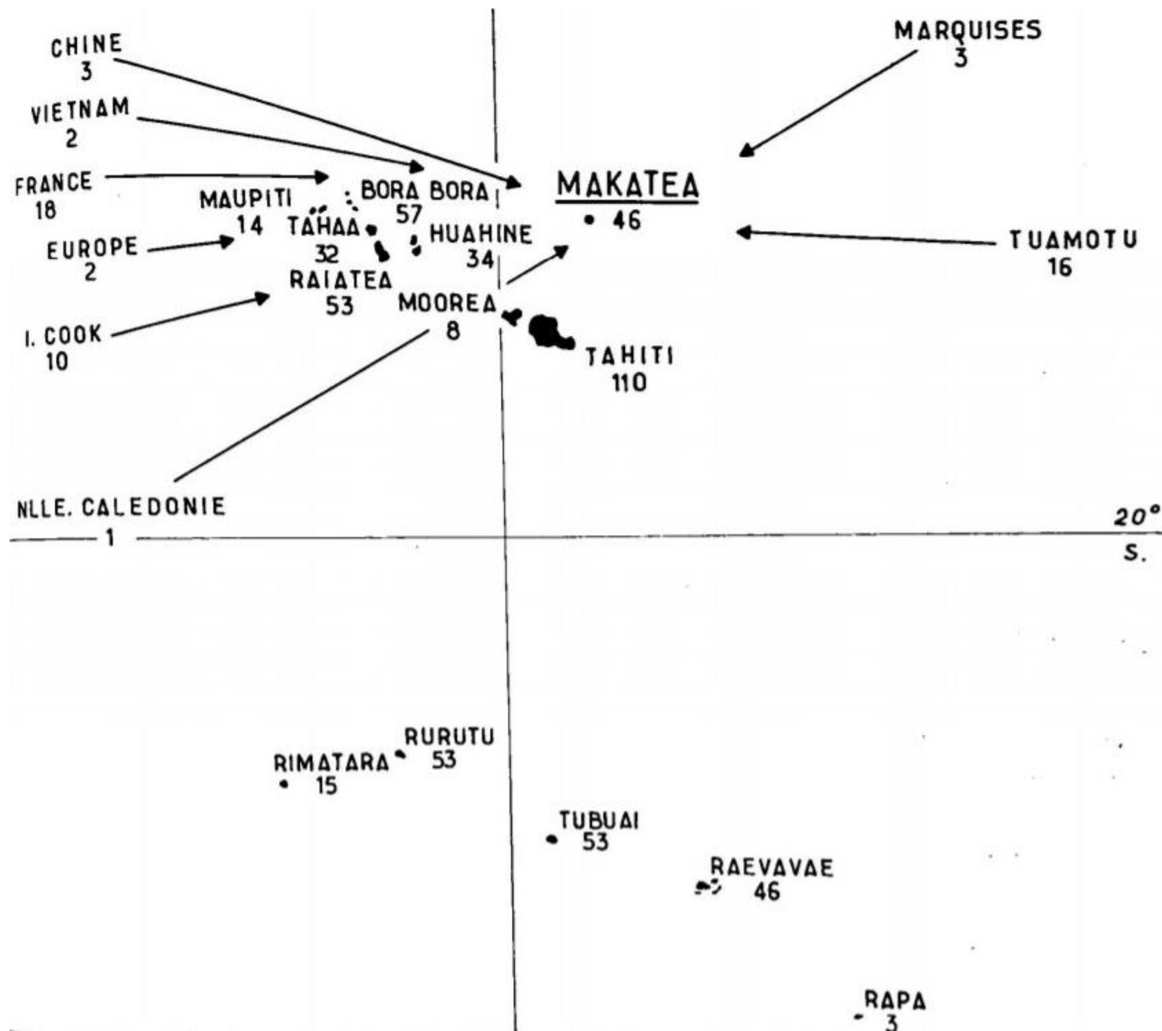

Figure 6.3: Numbers and Origins of Workers on Makatea in 1964.
Source: Doumenge, *L'Homme dans le Pacifique Sud,* 459.

By the 1960s there were very few foreigners indeed (figure 6.3),[119] and while only a handful of Polynesians took up managerial positions, the departure of the foreign workforce allowed a greater number of Polynesians to assume the better-paying positions once filled by skilled Japanese or Chinese workers.[120] The fact that Céran, once seen as the heir to Pouvana'a's anti-colonial throne, had thrown in his lot with the CFPO might also provide an indication of how far the company had developed in the post-war decades.

[119] By 1958 there were only 95 foreigners residing on Makatea, and most were Chinese shopkeepers with only a fraction of this number employed by the CFPO. See Pequignot to Capitaine Commandant l'Escadron de la Polynésie Française, 9 May 1958, SPAA: 48W/1214.
[120] By 1965 there were 90 Polynesians classified as *ouvriers* or skilled workers (plus 16 Polynesians of mixed Asian or European descent) compared to the 350 unskilled *manœuvres.* See Doumenge, *L'homme dans le Pacifique Sud,* 461.

The Changing Nature of the Island

The changing nature of the workforce was not the only significant development on the island in the post-war period. Phosphate continued to be exported in significant quantities; exclusively to Australia and New Zealand at first, and then to Japan once more from 1950 onwards (as well as sending smaller amounts to markets as disparate as India and Honolulu).[121] The often-criticized loading problem that plagued visiting ship captains was finally solved in 1954 with the construction of a revolving cantilever and conveyor belt system that enabled up to 550 tons of phosphate to be loaded per hour (figure 6.4).[122]

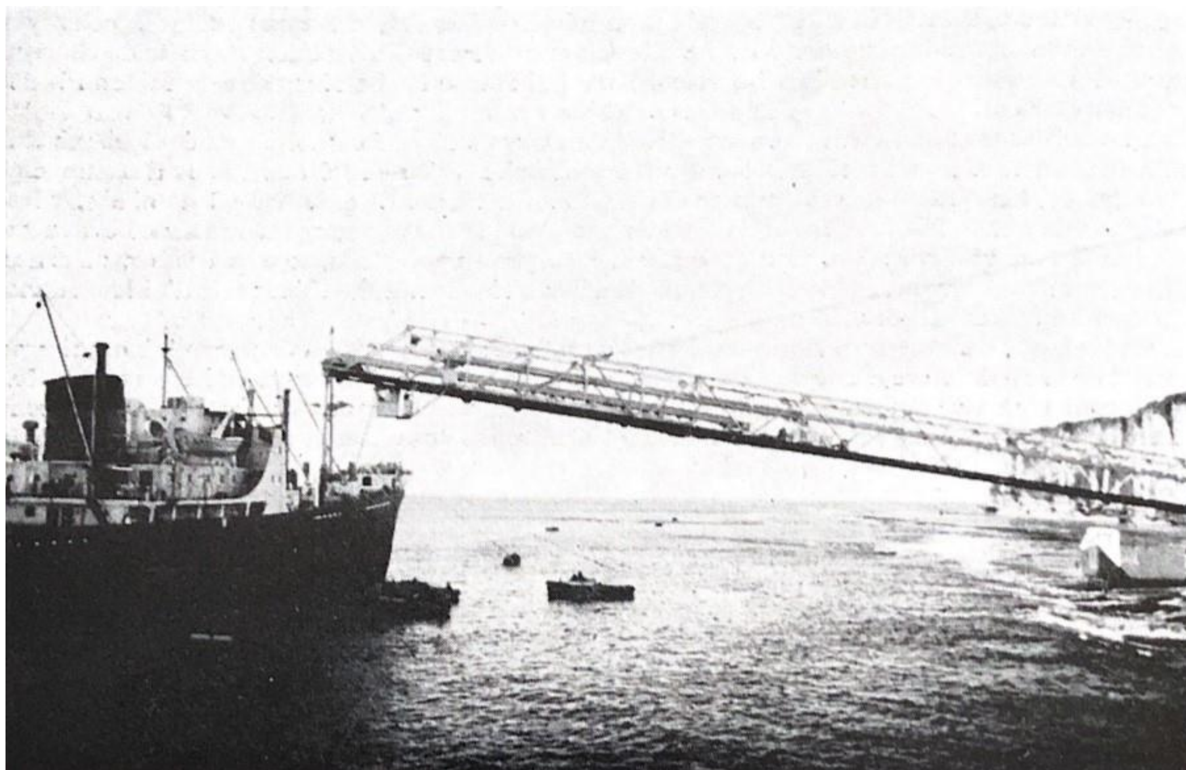

Figure 6.4: Cantilever in action, October 1962.
Source: Doumenge, *L'Homme dans le Pacifique Sud*, 454.

Technological innovations such as these were a typical response by French companies to increased labour costs and an entirely logical consequence of the wider push for colonial modernity in the post-war decades.[123] On Makatea, this meant less energy was required manually to load the small boats used for ferrying the phosphate to the *phosphatiers*, and

[121] Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', 59. Between 1951–60, 20,000 tons per year went to India and 9,000 tons per year went to Honolulu.
[122] 'Primitive Methods to Load Fertiliser', *Age* (Melb.), 30 Mar. 1948, 5.
[123] 'One of the happy consequences of the code is that the massive and unnecessary use of workers with mediocre output and low pay becomes impossible and that the employer finds himself obligated to make an effort of intelligence and rationalization'. Pierre Chauleur, *Le regime du travail dans les territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Paris: Encyclopedie d'outre-mer, 1956), 21, cited and translated in Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 321.

more could be expended directly into mining even larger and deeper areas of the island. For the rest of the decade, the CFPO broke new records for yearly output, increasing production to meet growing Japanese demand from 304,616 tons in 1957 to a peak of 376,108 tons in 1960.[124]

Though beset with internal problems in the immediate post-war period, by not having its infrastructure much affected by the events of war the CFPO was in a good position to contribute to the post-war reconstruction. With world hunger identified as one of the most pressing issues by organizations such as the Combined Food Board in Washington, the fair allocation of fertilizers played a large role in addressing the issue, especially in Japan where it did not take long to revive the old *zaibatsu* and rebuild or create new superphosphate manufacturing plants. Instead of continuing to import cumbersome food supplies to solve the former belligerent's 'calorific crisis', the American occupying forces decided that it would be more efficient to import phosphate rock so that the Japanese could return to manufacturing their own fertilizers and growing food for themselves.[125] As Christopher Michael Aldous has recently illustrated, while exploiting Angaur phosphate, now in American hands, seemed a logical move, it was easier said than done as the island had to be rebuilt and political complications quickly arose between the American occupying forces in Japan and those based on Guam.[126] To save money it was proposed to send Japanese to the island to undertake the mining, but the Palauans on Angaur were deeply opposed to their reintroduction as were the Commonwealth occupying powers, who were also hostile to the idea of supplying phosphate from Nauru and Banaba once they were up and running. Hundreds of Japanese were sent to the island but in the face of continued protests from the Islanders on Angaur (who were also fearful of the effects of renewed mining on their taro crops), and other diplomatic and economic considerations emerging

[124] Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', 59. The application of phosphate fertilizers on Japanese rice fields doubled over the course of the 1950s, but experienced its greatest proportional increase (from 5.3 kgs applied per 10 acres to 6.6) between 1957 and 1960. See Ogura, ed., *Agricultural Development in Modern Japan*, 386.
[125] Christopher Michael Aldous, 'Replenishing the Soil: Food, Fertiliser and Soil Science in Occupied Japan (1945–52)', *Environment and History* (2020): 17–9. For Japan's post-war 'calorific crisis', see Mark Metzler, 'Japan's Postwar Social Metabolic Crisis', in *The Economic and Business History of Occupied Japan: New Perspectives,* ed. Thomas French (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 31.
[126] Aldous, 'Replenishing the Soil', 21–2. An emergency shipment to Japan from Makatea was begrudgingly agreed upon in 1946 while Angaur was still being organized.

from the region's evolution into a UN Trust Territory, the Americans decided to halt mining at the end of 1949.[127]

Being far less entangled in the politics surrounding these developments than their state-owned counterparts, the CFPO was able to step into the breach and, much to the company's benefit, after its New Zealand and Australian contracts finished in 1950, Makatea became Japan's most reliable source of Pacific phosphate rock. As Mirko Lamer has highlighted, it did not take long for Japan's post-war consumption of fertilizers to outstrip pre-war rates and by 1957 there were up to three Japanese ships arriving per month at Makatea.[128] What the Japanese did not anticipate at this point was that their crews would be endangered by the launch of Britain's thermonuclear testing programme on Kirimati (or Christmas) Island in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony (modern day Kiribati), in May 1957.[129] Though the British did not believe them, according to the Japanese, the return leg for phosphate ships coming from Makatea ran directly into the nuclear danger area and they requested compensation for the time lost by having to deviate from their normal route and the costs of equipping their crews with Geiger counters and vinyl raincoats.[130] This complaint made up only one part of a suite of Japanese claims against Britain's nuclear plans, but it put Makatea back under the global spotlight and can now be judged as a precursor to the nuclear fallout-inspired fears in French Polynesia beginning in the following decade.

While left to bear witness to more and more of their island being shipped way to faraway fields, landowners also stood to benefit (at least materially) from these post-war colonial reforms. From January 1948, the rate of royalty paid to landowners was finally increased from the 'derisory' level of one franc per ton (unchanged despite inflation and the devaluation of the franc since 1908), to a rate of three francs per ton alongside continued

[127] Ibid., 22; David Hanlon, *Remaking Micronesia: Discourses over Development in a Pacific Territory, 1944–1982* (Honululu: University of Hawai'i Press), 71. The best description of the situation on Angaur during these years can be found in the memoir of Cecilia Hendricks Wahl, *Number One Pacific Island* (Bloomington, Indiana: Woodcrest Publishing, 2000), 110–22.
[128] Lamer, *The World Fertilizer Economy,* 554–5. With large shipments from Idaho and Florida alongside smaller amounts from Angaur and the Daitō Isalnds, total Japanese phosphate imports reached pre-war levels in 1947. See Gaze, 'Memorandum for Australian Fertiliser Manufacturers for Annual Conference at Phosphate House, Melbourne', 18 May. 1948, 7, NAA: A518, B112/6/1, pt. 4.
[129] Known as Operation Grapple, the British made nine thermonuclear tests on Kirimati between May 1957 and September 1958.
[130] The records for these diplomatic exchanges can be found at TNA: FO 371/129257.

one-off payments for the loss of each fruit-bearing tree.[131] However, unlike on Nauru, where the BPC were pressured to provide mechanisms to ensure that Nauruan royalties would not go to waste, no scheme was ever developed to pool royalties among landholders or to set funds aside for the post-mining era on Makatea. Instead, the already small royalty income was divided unequally among landowning families. Though hard to identify in demographic data that does not often refer to the island's original population, it is likely that a number of Makateans supplemented any income they received from royalties by working for the company.[132] The question of the place of local – as in Indigenous Mihiroa – workers within the island's internal economy is indeed a difficult one. Whereas some historians have recently advanced the argument that local women were comparatively more important in colonial environments dominated by transitory male populations (such as a port city) due to their ability to mediate and maintain relations over time, there is no easily available evidence to suggest that this was the case on Makatea.[133]

What we do know is that with higher wages and family allocations, the island became less male-dominated and more welcoming to families as local recruitment increased from within the territory.[134] Gone by the 1950s and 1960s were the days of the island resembling what James Belich might have labelled a kind of Pacific Islands 'crew culture'; that is, a preponderance of itinerant, overwhelmingly non-married, workers: often hostile to one another, sporadically violent and, above all, 'male and misogynist'.[135] In its place was an island that more closely conformed to the gendered divisions of labour synonymous with 'modern' mid-20th century societies, no doubt still carrying elements of misogyny but nevertheless a place where Polynesian families could, and were, formed, babies could be born and reared under state-of-the-art medical care, and children had ready access to French education. This, in the minds of many colonial modernizers, represented considerable progress. Still demonstrably lower than on other islands, the proportion of young people under the age of 14 increased from 31.7 per cent of the total population in

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[131] Robert Lassalle-Séré described the level of royalty as 'derisory' in both his 'Rapport sur le reglement du conflit du travail', 27 Jul. 1947, 14 and 'Rapport sur l'emploi de la main-d'œuvre', 4 Aug. 1947, 24, AN: OCEA/114.
[132] This was certainly the case for Louela Vairaaroa, a former CFPO employee born in 1940, who I interviewed on Makatea in 2018. Others continued preparing copra for a living.
[133] Brandon, Frykman and Røge, 'Free and Unfree Labor in Atlantic and Indian Ocean Port Cities', 9.
[134] Doumenge, 'L'ile de Makatea et ses problèmes', 58.
[135] James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders, from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1996), 434. See, also, James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 319–24.

1936 to 39.6 per cent of the total in 1946.[136] While comparisons are difficult to make for the later period due to differing data sets, we do however know that by the 1960s the percentage of inhabitants under 20 years old was just under 50 per cent.[137] Moreover, the number of adult women reached an equilibrium of roughly one woman for every two men.[138]

Though far from perfect, such demographic data became more freely available once social scientists began arriving at the island from the 1960s onwards, interested in studying both the existing population and to start preparing for what would happen to the island after the mine's closure. One of these researchers was the ORSTOM sociologist, Louis Molet, who published a 16-page pamphlet on women's work among the 750 adult women on the island in 1962 for the French colonial research agency.[139] The impression he gives is a world apart from reports about the outbreak of venereal disease and the problem of sex workers on the island during the 1930s.[140] While pointing out that many women were in paid, regular work, Molet nonetheless conveyed the impression that most worked by choice rather than need.[141] The social function of work is stressed above all else and among those women officially '*sans profession*', a high proportion of Polynesian women kept busy through a combination of quilting *tīfaifai* (patchwork bed covers or quilts) which could be sold for up to 1200 francs, going fishing and occupying the house in unpaid domestic labour and child care roles.

It should not surprise to see differences in attitudes to work between ethnicities on the island. Only four out of the 20-odd European women were in paid work, occupying the positions of CFPO secretary, social worker, post-office assistant, and primary-school teacher. The others, we are left to presume, remained busy with unpaid domestic work similar to their Polynesian counterparts (except perhaps those like the harbourmaster's wife, Mrs Mudge, the only British woman on the island during the 1940s, who 'left everything to the Tahitian houseboy').[142] In comparison, around 35 of the 50 or so Chinese

[136] C. Valenziani, 'Enquête démographique en Océanie française', *Population* 4:1 (1949): 97.
[137] Molet, *Travail Féminin*, 2.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Office de la recherche scientifique et technique outre-mer (today known as the IRD, Institut de recherche pour le développement).
[140] See chapter 3.
[141] Molet, *Travail Féminin*, 14.
[142] 'It is considered infra dig to do any housework in Makatea', recounted Mudge on her return to Brisbane after two years on Makatea. See 'Islands Visitors', *Telegraph* (Bris.), 19 Dec. 1947, 4.

women were employed in formal work as shopkeepers, seamstresses and domestic helpers. The majority of female workers, however, were classified by Molet under the umbrella term of 'Tahitians', meaning in this case French Polynesian. Their occupations ranged from laundry women and street vendors through teachers, accounting assistants, midwives and nurses. A typical day, according to Molet, went from 5 am to 8 or 9 in the evening, except for cinema nights or church which would run a little later. The women would often have brief moments of liberty after finishing their chores in the afternoon, which would allow time to 'fuss about, chat, and sometimes play cards'.[143]

Aside from church-going and the cinema (the latter was said to have declined in popularity by the 1960s), sport seemed to be the island's most popular pastime. According to one observation: 'On Makatea, sport is truly the number one activity, and attracts the entire population', with football (soccer) being the most popular of them all.[144] Football, volleyball and basketball matches provided the rare opportunity of bringing people from different sections of the island together on the same plain. Following a military visit in October 1961 it was observed by the leader of the troop that 'despite the difference in living conditions between the pure French (most of them the management of the CFPO) and the Indigenous population, the general impression is that there is a very good feeling between one and the other'.[145] Without wishing to overstate the level of harmony on the island – for instance, stray dogs were often identified as a danger, phosphate dust caused respiratory issues for many and Chinese shopkeepers were regularly targeted for breaches of hygiene standards – by the late 1950s and 1960s the complexion of the 'phosphate island' had clearly changed.[146]

[143] Molet, *Travail Féminin,* 4.
[144] Captain Le Nauff to Le Chef de Bataillon, 'Annexe III', 16 Oct. 1961, SPAA: 48W/1215. In 1960 a team representing Makatea won the inter-island football championship. See Gilain to Le Chef de la Circonscription Administrative des Iles du Vent, 15 Nov. 1960, SPAA: 48W/1215.
[145] The Captain put much of the good feeling on the island down to the influence of a handful of Polynesian middle-managers working for the CFPO, all returned servicemen, who held significant influence over the Polynesian workers. He thought their role was important because the *tāvana*'s authority was tenuous on account of his 'wishy-washy' personality. See Captain Le Nauff to Le Chef de Bataillon, 'Annexe III', 16 Oct. 1961, SPAA: 48W/1215.
[146] Gilain to Le Chef de la Circonscription Administrative des Iles du Vent, 28 Nov. 1960, SPAA: 48W/1215. In December 1960 a decision was made by the local administration and the CFPO to slaughter the island's stray dogs. The cost of ammunition was paid for by the CFPO. See Gilain to Le Chef de la Circonscription Administrative des Iles du Vent, 22 Dec. 1960, SPAA: 48W/1215. The corrosive effect of phosphate dust on the health of the island's inhabitants was underlined to me by Danny Pittman who cited this as the reason for her family's premature departure from the island. See Danny Pittman, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 17 Aug. 2018.

Perhaps the most compelling sign of the island's modernization was it being chosen as the site for a 1959 Franco-Australian feature film titled *L'Ambitieuse* in French and *The Restless and the Damned* (or *The Dispossessed*) in English. The film, which was shot on Tahiti and Makatea in late 1958, was supposed to have been co-directed by Lee Robinson and Yves Allégret, but the Australian handed control to the Frenchman after only a few days of filming. The plot revolves around the overly ambitious leading lady, played by Andréa Parisy (figure 6.5), who tricks her surly husband, the director of Capricornia Mining Corporation, out of his stake in the manganese mine on Makatunga, after finding out she has been cheated on.[147]

Figure 6.5: Andréa Parisy, *l'ambitieuse* (still from the 1959 film).
Source: OzMovies.com.au

Perhaps inspired by the life of Madame Pierson, who, we can recall, basically ran the CFPO in place of her failing husband during the 1940s, the film was widely panned in France and failed to attract theatrical release in the UK and the US. It was the last film produced by the famed Chips Rafferty and Lee Robinson production team and despite a copy existing at the Australian National Film and Sound Archive, it was never released in

[147] The film is officially said to have been adapted from the François Ponthier novel, *Manganese* (1956).

Australia.[148] While most of the screen time is taken up by the plotting of the mainly white cast, the island itself is more than a neutral backdrop and the footage of everyday life and the 1958 visit of the Governor has real documentary value. The fact that the CFPO were willing to allow the crew onto the island to shine light on to it also speaks volumes about how far company management had come since the days of Pierson and Meunier.[149]

Conclusion

The CFPO itself produced an article in 1959 titled a 'Socio-economic account of half a century of experience'. Here, the company concluded that:

> The principal interest of the Makatea experience, at a social level, is to have shown, contrary to pervasive and widespread beliefs, that it is possible to train Polynesians for technical pursuits and keep them in regular, disciplined work.[150]

While this is certainly one way to summarize the part played by the CFPO in French Polynesia's post-war development (and one that a series of French historians have taken at face value), it obviously fails to take into account the role of the unions and colonial reformers such as Lassalle-Séré and Lalanne in accelerating the rate of change on the island. Only by homing in on what I have been calling the post-war moment, are we able to discern more fully the interrelationship between all three parties who played a role in Makatea's development: workers, company and state. The unique social conditions created by post-war decolonial politics recalibrated relations between parties and put them on a more even footing than ever before. As Cooper argues, 1946 'was remarkable for overturning long-established axioms of French colonial policy'.[151] The creation of the Union française, though far from a decolonial institution, nonetheless set in motion an entire raft of ideological changes within the colonial ministry that would give workers a greater voice.

On Makatea, it was the opening of negotiations between the company management and union officials, and the fact that the parties were placed on a more even footing, that

[148] Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film, 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production* (Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 297; Bob Larkins, *Chips: The Life and Films of Chips Rafferty* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986), 119–20.
[149] Jean Perrin is another who made a series of documentary films recording everyday scenes on Makatea between 1953–7.
[150] [CFPO], 'Makatéa: Bilan social-économique', 210.
[151] Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 215.

revolutionized labour relations on the island. Despite the efforts of the Tahitian administration to avoid this happening, the fact that the CFPO was the largest single employer in the colony meant that changes on Makatea had a powerful ripple effect throughout the colony. Victories on Makatea giving workers the same rights as white Frenchmen gave impetus to Pouvana'a's efforts on Tahiti to achieve political equality. Cooper's words, although made in reference to French West Africa, apply equally to French Polynesia:

> Once the possibility of universal standards for labor was extended from metropoles to colonies – with the colonial regimes willing participants in this discourse – there was no obvious point at which claims to equivalence or equality should stop.[152]

Where French Polynesian colonial history differs dramatically from its French West African equivalent is that Pouvana'a's growing demands for autonomy did eventually reach a point where the French state felt obligated to intervene to put an end to the RDPT's movement. A majority vote to stay within the French community in De Gaulle's 1958 empire-wide independence referendum provided the local administration with the pretext to clamp down on the Pouvana'a movement. And with tensions running high in the colony after the vote, Pouvana'a was accused of a plot to burn down Pape'ete and exiled to France for 15 years with his party finally banned from standing for election in 1963. As Adria K. Lawrence argues in relation to other imperial settings, despite initially opening the door, it was ultimately 'the French who could not live up to their promises of political equality'.[153]

Whereas the story of Pouvana'a and the independence movement has become legendary in French Polynesia and its growing nationalist historiography, few today are aware of the achievements of the labour movement that found its voice on, and in relation to, Makatea, and the role it played in the story of the colony's development.[154] Much more than being a moral tale about how Polynesians can be put to work, the Makatea experience might instead be used to demonstrate the limits of colonialism and modern colonial rule, and the role of labour resistance in defining those limits. As we move towards the end of the mine and the conclusion of this study, it bears keeping in mind that Makatea's transformation

[152] Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society,* 385.
[153] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism,* 20.
[154] Jean-Marc Regnault once made the point that the history of the EFO from 1945 to 1958, aside from the rise of the RDPT party, is not well known. See Jean-Marc Regnault, 'Les crises de l'année 1952 dans les Établissements française de l'Océanie', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 81:305 (1994): 455.

into a phosphate island was not just an economic proposition but rather intimately tied to the political contours of the colony and wider French Empire.

These changes mean that Makatea's status and identity as a 'phosphate island' became less dependent or beholden to the whims of the regional phosphate market, as we saw in the previous chapters, and more reliant on local labour migrations, anticolonial and other political movements, as well as post-war political transformations across the French Empire. The trappings of a 'phosphate island' were of course still there, but they had become moderated thanks to the worker-led jolt of 1947 and its subsequent reforms. As was noted by the Governor at the time who was in broad agreement with the reforming impulse brought by Lassalle-Séré, company management had become increasingly out of step with the changing world around them.[155] Doubtless, the replacement of Pierson and Meunier ushered in a new generation of French managers, people like Hubert Mulliez who helped modernize the island, but we should not discount the effect that a confident and unionized *main-d'œuvre* had on bringing about reform. While this chapter has shown that the belated and self-congratulatory claims of the CFPO and their role in French Polynesia's history fall well short of this period's real political and social importance, the conclusion of this thesis will endeavour to put these developments into their wider historical context and describe what becomes of a 'phosphate island' once the deposits that created it were judged to be exhausted.

Like the fate of the French Union and De Gaulle's Fourth Republic which came to an end in 1958, the tragic arc of this story is of course that just as conditions appeared to have ameliorated by the mid-1950s to suggest a long and prosperous future for the mine – that is, the problem of management was solved, workers were signing up in large numbers, and demand for the product was booming – the deposits of which the entire operation was built upon were fast depleting and forecasted for exhaustion sometime in the following decade.[156]

For the CFPO, faced with a rising tax burden, there was no incentive to stick around and stretch out the duration of the mine for longer than necessary. The company's goal became to dig as much as possible in as short a time as possible, leaving behind any layers of

[155] Maestracci to M. le Ministre de la France d'outre-mer, 24 Sep. 1948, ANOM: AFFPOL/389.
[156] In 1956 there were reportedly two-and-a-half million tons left. See Sec. External Affairs, NZ to Director-General of Agriculture, 27 Jun. 1956, ANZ: T1 250, 40/72/6, R15421317.

phosphate that were uneconomical to mine. However, as the mine inched closer to its end, it was noticeable that requests for the exhumation and repatriation of Mā'ohi workers who died on Makatea to their home islands increased in frequency.[157] It is striking, then, that unlike the residual phosphate rock and, as we will shortly see, the majority of the mining infrastructure that were left behind, the remains of many of the workers who were so instrumental in the transformation of the island (to the point that they literally gave their life for the job), were relocated along with the last of the living workers in what we might interpret as evidence for the unravelling of the 'phosphate island' and its ultimate impermanence.

Figure 6.6: Locals on their way to or from Port Temao, Makatea 1959.
Source: Collection Paris Match, Jack Garofalo.

157 See the Makatea Chef du Poste correspondence files from 1960 onwards at SPAA: 48W/1215–7.

Conclusion: The Makatea Project

MAKATEA:

C'EST FINI

Les installations portuaires.

Figure 7.1: Port installations.
Source: *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 21 Oct. 1966.

'*Makatea: c'est fini*' announced the local newspaper *La Dépêche de Tahiti* on the morning of 21 October 1966.[1] The previous day, the *Oiseau des îles II* had undertaken its final flight between Makatea and Tahiti, taking with it the loyal *chef des services administratifs,* Hubert Mulliez, one of the new breed of CFPO officials, who officially became the 'last to leave' the island.[2] 'This evening, there will be nobody left on the island of phosphate', read the subtitle, except, that is, for the six 'fishing' families who would remain, a detail in even smaller print several pages into the newspaper. For these six families – 62 men, women and children in total – the mining project that had dominated the landscape for close to six decades had come to an end.[3] Yet despite the initial shock of the mine's closure, with phosphate ostensibly out of the way, we know that this finally created room for new projects to begin. Led by Viritua Viritua, these six landowning families became the literal guardians of the island, carving out new identities for themselves on an island all but stripped of its former industrial or commercial utility overnight.[4]

I write 'all but' because the company took with them only the items of most value for their new manganese mining project at Forari on the eastern coast of Efate in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu).[5] Everything else was left to the French Polynesian government for 'the total of one franc symbolic'.[6] A young Gaston Flosse had already led a preliminary mission to Makatea in September 1966 where the remnant material was valued in the order of 23,000,000 francs.[7] And while this 'donation' was met with gratitude at the time, no mining company could get away with such a move today.[8] Two salvaging missions were organized for later that year aimed at recuperating various left-behind pieces of equipment

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[1] 'Makatea: c'est fini', *La Dépêche de Tahiti,* 21 Oct. 1966, 1.
[2] 'Hubert Mulliez, témoin de l'aventure des phosphates', *La Dépêche du Fenua,* 15 Jan. 1999, 27.
[3] G. Pujol, 'Liste des personnes ayant manifesté leur intention de rester à Makatea après la cessation des activités de la CFPO', 23 Sep. 1966, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[4] Monod, *Makatea: Les Gardiens de l'île*. Louis Molet was correct to predict that out of the 35 land-owning families present on Makatea during his visit, the majority would also vacate the island once mining ended, see Louis Molet, *Le Départ de Makatea*, 15.
[5] The CFPO won a concession to the mineral deposits at Forari in 1958. See CFPO, 'Gisement de Manganese de Forari', 8 Apr. 1959, 2, AN: OCEA/114. The mine ran from July 1961 until 1979 (with a two-year temporary closure in the late-60s). See Robert Langdon, 'Setback for New Manganese Mine in the New Hebrides', *PIM,* Feb. 1963, 43; Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific since 1940*, 206.
[6] 'Hubert Mulliez, témoin de l'aventure des phosphates', *La Dépêche du Fenua,* 15 Jan. 1999, 27; G. Georges-Picot to Sicurani, 12 Sep. 1966, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[7] Pujol to Sicurani, 4 Oct. 1966, 7, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[8] Deanna Kemp, John Owen and Nick Bainton, 'World-First Mining Standard Must Protect People and Hold Powerful Companies to Account', *The Conversation,* 18 Aug. 2020, https://theconversation.com/world-first-mining-standard-must-protect-people-and-hold-powerful-companies-to-account-144285 (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).

for repurposing elsewhere in the territory.[9] Much of the CFPO's *central electrique* (power plant) was taken to be used for illuminating Tahiti's burgeoning second city, Taravao, as well as the aerodrome at Rangiroa, while the core of Tony Bambridge's cinema on Makatea was transported to become the famous Rex in Pape'ete. That said, the majority of the company's asbestos-filled buildings and installations were left exactly as they were, destined already to become relics of a former age.

Though salvaging as much of value as possible for the benefit of the territory was clearly the major priority in the months following the mine's closure, a limited amount of discussion did take place about what would become of Makatea itself. High on the list of possibilities proposed by the territorial government was an idea to install a prison.[10] For the new *tāvana* Viritua Viritua, this was inadmissible. His staunch opposition consolidated his position as the island's post-mining leader. Hostility to the penitentiary project gave the guardians a common goal in the years that followed; not that they particularly needed one, because for these families the abandoned phosphate island became their paradise. They moved into the abandoned homes of the management and made the most out of what little was left for them.[11] They were content to make a living off the copra trade and knew that with fewer people on the island, the over-hunted *kaveu* (coconut crab) would finally have the chance to repopulate. The little they asked of the government was a teacher to educate their children, and a nurse to tend the sick. To ensure they were not completely abandoned, they also asked to be supplied with radio communications and a regular maritime service via the *Marie-Stella*.[12] From the discussions I have had with those who remember this period on the island, it is recalled as a bountiful rather than desolate time, and the possibility of viewing the end of mining in a positive rather than negative light is a thread which demands further historical exploration.[13]

This latter, more optimistic narrative of revival competes with other, more influential stories in the collective memory of those who might not have stayed on the island but moved on

[9] Pujol to Sicurani, 21 Nov. 1966, SPAA: 48W/1565; Chef de la Circonscription administrative des Tuamotu-Gambier to Sicurani, 28 Oct. 1966, SPAA: 48W/1565; Beslu, 'Makatea soixante années d'aventure', 34. It quickly became evident that not everybody on these missions appeared to have the interests of the territory at heart, and despite the presence of military to guard against this type of behaviour, looting by workers was still a factor. See Pujol to Sicurani, 25 Nov. 1966, 1, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[10] Pujol to Sicurani, 23 Sep. 1966, 1, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[11] Reretini Viritua, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 22 Sep. 2018.
[12] Pujol to Sicurani, 23 Sep. 1966, 1–2, SPAA: 48W/1565.
[13] See, for example, the positive description of *kaveu* hunting on the island in the 1980s found in Gilles et PB, 'Makatea: à la pêche au kaveu', *Les nouvelles de Tahiti,* 19 Feb. 1988.

to have joined the Tahitian working and middle classes. For these people, the company's sudden departure was more like a betrayal and the lack of any substitute industry is still seen as a cruel abandonment. Such an attitude is encouraged by French writing from the time that mourned the loss of the territory's largest industry. French geographer André Guilcher viewed the mine's closure with 'a deep melancholy', believing it represented 'an ideal industry for French Polynesia'.[14] Journalist Michel Anglade, writing in March 1966, declared the island was in the midst of 'its last chapter of a beautiful adventure where the epilogue is going to be sad and regrettable'.[15] Doumenge too, expressed his concern that Makatea ran 'the risk joining the long list of ghost mining towns'. Several years prior to the closure, he would write:

> It is not without a tug at the heartstrings that one contemplates from the cliff tops, high above the installations loading phosphate ships below, or while roaming many of the pleasant paths of Vaitepaua, that all these beautiful scenes will soon be deserted and left to slowly corrode by rust and mould.[16]

Just three years after the mine's closure, *La Dépêche de Tahiti* ran a front-page article claiming the island had been abandoned, and the maintenance of the train left to the pigs (figure 7.2).[17]

Doumenge, like others writing in the lead up to 1966, was far from optimistic about the island's ability to reinvent itself.[18] He doubted the viability of tourism given the lack of swimming beaches, maritime connections and safe mooring facilities but was more sanguine about the possibility of establishing a fishing base for Japanese tuna liners.[19] Above all, he criticized the territory's lack of foresight in preparing for the mine's closure. In comparison with Nauru, where the BPC and partner governments had created multiple funds to prepare the Nauruan people for the eventual depletion of their phosphate

[14] André Guilcher, review of *L'Homme dans le Pacifique Sud* by François Doumenge, *Annales de Géographie* 76:418 (1967): 750.
[15] 'From one day to the next at Makatea, the industrious island, life will cease completely. What is still, during the eve of departure, a buzzing hive of activity will become all of a sudden a ghost town, a ghost port, a ghost factory', Anglade, 'Makatea: l'île des phosphates à la veille de la fin', 5.
[16] Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', 63.
[17] 'Makatea, An 3: 3 ans après l'abandon de l'ile des phosphates, les cochons entretiennent les rails du petit train', *La Dépêche de Tahiti,* 30 Jul. 1969, 1.
[18] Molet, *Le départ de Makatea*, 15.
[19] Parallels can be drawn here with the proposed Chinese base at Hao, see Anne-Marie Brady, 'Trouble in Paradise: A Chinese Occupation in Tahiti', *The Diplomat,* 20 Apr. 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/trouble-in-paradise-a-chinese-occupation-in-tahiti/ (accessed 25 Nov. 2020).

deposits, the French Polynesian administration had not done anything, even though they had known the mine was at risk of depletion far earlier than at Nauru.[20] According to Doumenge, had the territorial government implemented a similar fund to the Nauruan administration over the 13 years since 1950, there would have been over 18 million Pacific francs (out of a total of 893 million collected from the Company in taxes) available for rehabilitation at the mine's end.[21]

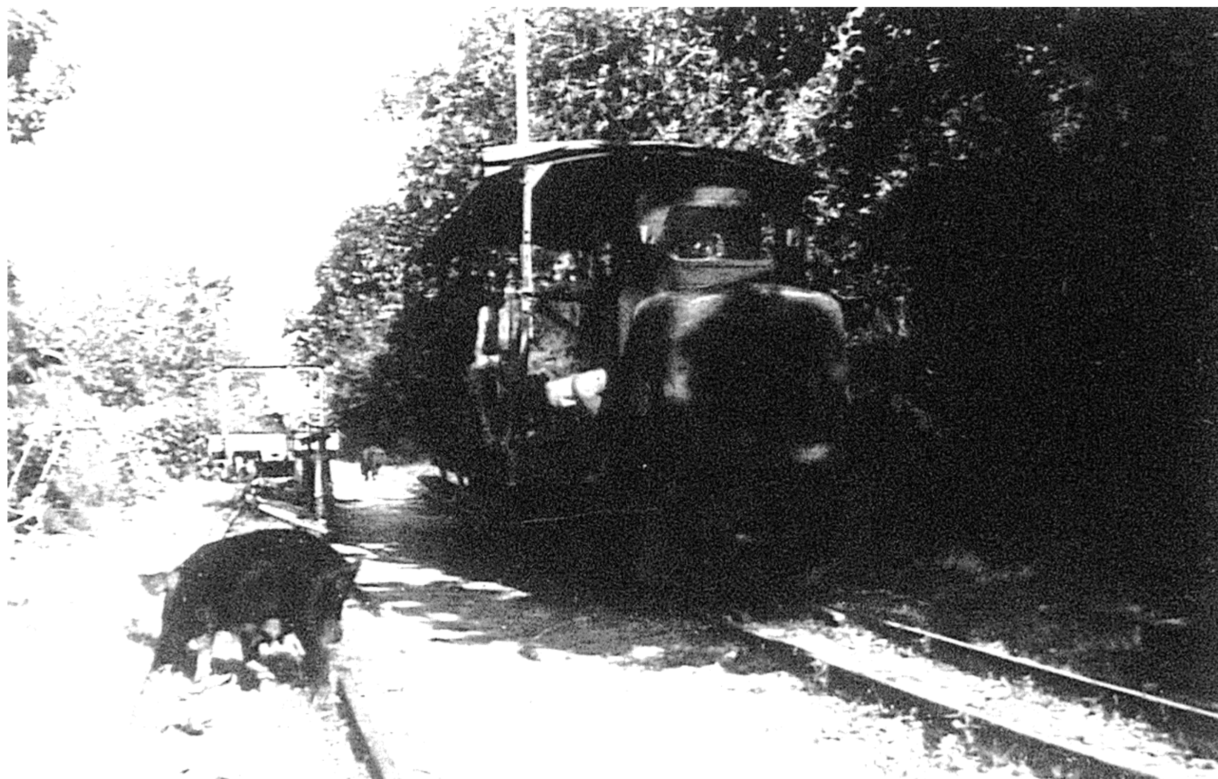

Figure 7.2: The island's pigs now in charge of maintaining the tracks of the *petit train*.
Source: *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, 30 Jul. 1969.

Aside from somehow making the Australian record on Nauru appear enlightened, Doumenge's argument reminds us that despite often being framed as a bolt out of the blue, the CFPO's departure was a long time in the making. According to the archival record, at least, there was nothing particularly sudden about the mine's exhaustion. Post-war forecasts of the mine's depletion proved entirely accurate and from at least 1964 one can observe a range of signs – from permissions given to shopkeepers to demolish their businesses to the decision not to replace the members of the district council who left the island following the June 1965 death of long-serving *tāvana* Teieie Taura'atua – pointing

[20] Doumenge, 'L'île de Makatea et ses problèmes', 63–4.
[21] Ibid., 64.

towards the mine's imminent closure.[22] The company also made no secret about their plans to reorientate their operations towards the New Hebridean manganese deposits, but this was more of an outcome of than a reason for their decision.[23]

The most plausible explanation for the departure comes down to the company finding itself under increasing regulatory pressure from the French Polynesian Territorial Assembly. As mentioned, the rise in royalties paid to landowners from 1947 onwards was one thing, but taxes were another. From as early as 1950 the CFPO had complained about export duties apparently being set at six times the rate of those paid by the French North African phosphate companies.[24] And by the late 1950s, the RDPT's programme of fiscal reform caused the CFPO to face taxes of up to 25 per cent on exports. Although it is unclear whether the company ever had to pay a cent in company tax since 1908, this new burden, they argued, put them under the least favourable conditions of any company in the French *outre-mer*.[25] The CFPO's decision suggests that the closure of a mine had just as much to do with politics and economics as with geology,[26] and in this case it became clear that the changes introduced by Pouvana'a's RPDT party to rebalance the Polynesian economy discouraged the French company from prolonging their departure any longer than necessary.[27]

These types of changes, while not at all unique to French Polynesia, were enough for the *Pacific Islands Monthly* later to suppose that the Frenchmen of the CFPO 'must frequently heave a sigh of relief' that they were no longer in the industry:

[22] See the correspondence for 1964 and 1965 in SPAA: 48W/1217.
[23] The CFPO also made enquiries into mining phosphate on the French island Juan de Nova in the Mozambique Channel between Madagascar and Mozambique. See A. Marelle, 'Compte rendu d'entretien relative à l'île Juan de Nova', 9 Apr. 1962, AN: OCEA/115.
[24] Dubois, 'Note très succincte sur les exploitations de la CFPO en Océanie', 9 May 1950, UA: GB1752.UAC/1/2/4/17/55.
[25] Marelle, 'Note additionnelle au chapitre II, B, 9 du rapport 757/IM du 16 mai 1958 relatif à Polynésie Française', 12 Jun. 1958, AN: OCEA/114; F. Villa to Secrétaire Commercial, Ambassade de Grande Bretagne, 8 Sep. 1958, AN: OCEA/114. When discussing tax in French Polynesia, it pays to remember that income tax was only introduced into the territory in 1994–5. Previous attempts by Pouvana'a and the RDPT to introduce such a tax in 1958 were met by waves of middle-class outrage, including from the CFPO. See Chardin to M. le Directeur des Affaires Economiques et du Plan, Ministère de la France d'outre-mer, 16 Apr. 1958, AN: OCEA/115.
[26] For an industry analysis of the various reasons why mines close, see David Laurence, 'Optimisation of the Mine Closure Process', *Journal of Cleaner Production* 14 (2006): 286–8.
[27] Chardin to M. le Directeur des Affaires Economiques et du Plan, Ministère de la France d'outre-mer, 16 Apr. 1958, AN: OCEA/115; Chardin to M. le Gouverneur de la Polynésie française, 5 Mar. 1960, AN: OCEA/115; Lenhardt to M. le Ministre d'Etat chargé des territoires d'outre-mer, 23 Jan. 1961, AN: OCEA/115.

> The fact is that exploiting – and you can put your own interpretation on that word – a Pacific phosphate island is not what it used to be. Gone are the fine old carefree days when it was just a matter of lugging the phosphate out and shipping it away; when the happy-go-lucky local inhabitants were content with a 6d a ton royalty you paid them, plus compensation for any trees you destroyed. The time has now come when the locals – having woken up to the immense value of their islands' deposits are demanding, at every opportunity, that they be paid a fair price for their phosphate.[28]

Pouvana'a and his fellow autonomists certainly came to appreciate the value of Makatea phosphate towards the final decades of the mine. What is striking is that as opposed to the Nauruans and Banabans who both took their former colonial masters to court for damages incurred throughout the mining years, no such equivalent case has been forthcoming in French Polynesia.[29] One can speculate as to why this may have been the case, and the fact that the CFPO was a private company (as opposed to the state-owned multinational BPC) is surely not immaterial.[30] When asked this question, most of those who I talked to expressed their resignation that there was nobody or no trace of the company left to sue.[31] However, central to any justification must be the fact that the damage inflicted on Makatea was completely eclipsed by the effect of 193 nuclear tests conducted over a thousand kilometres further along the archipelago from 1966 until 1996.[32]

Announced publicly by Charles de Gaulle on 3 January 1963,[33] the decision to move France's nuclear testing site from the Algerian Sahara to French Polynesia (the Centre d'expérimentation du Pacifique, CEP) undoubtedly played a role in the CFPO's departure

[28] 'Tropicalities', *PIM,* May 1967, 37.
[29] While mining of Nauru's primary deposits continued until 2006, the mine was transferred into the hands of the Nauruans soon after 1968 as part of their self-determination negotiations. Similarly, mining on Banaba ended in 1980 not long after the formal decolonization of the Gilbert and Ellice Island colony. See Williams and Macdonald, *The Phosphateers*, 522.
[30] Theo Guilloux, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 25 Jul. 2018.
[31] Though one could inquire into Unilever's status as heritor of the Anglo-French Phosphate Company, and the Franco-Belgian industrial group, Suez, who were large shareholders of the CFPO towards the end of the mine.
[32] Writing in the early 1980s, Bengt Danielsson would say that 'political life in the territory has been dominated, if not paralyzed, by the bomb', see Bengt Danielsson, 'French Polynesia: Nuclear Colony', in *Politics in Polynesia,* vol. 2 (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1983), 204.
[33] According to those, such as the historian Jean-Marc Regnault and a large quantity of Mā'ohi, who push the '*complot nucléaire'* theory about the arrest of Pouvana'a being made to pave the way for the implementation of the CEP, the idea for shifting locations had been circulating within De Gaulle's inner circle since at least 1957. For a critique of Regnault and this popular idea, see Bruno Saura, *Histoire et mémoire des temps coloniaux en Polynésie française* (Papeete: Au Vent des îles, 2015), 277–95.

from Makatea. Though the documentary evidence is scarce, very few believe that the CFPO closing shop in the same year that nuclear testing began was mere coincidence. Current French deputy Moetai Brotherson, for example, believes the French were worried that radiation from the testing sites would be picked up inadvertently by anti-nuclear governments via the phosphate rock imported from Makatea.[34] Less conjecturally, thousands of workers were needed to construct both the new airports at Faa'a and Hao and the two nuclear testing centres on Moruroa and Fangataufa. Who better to call on for this task than the well-drilled Makatean workforce?

Without overstating the point, here I want to suggest that the *bombe* and the *pelle* might have had more in common than the French literature has hitherto been willing to admit. Such a view might see the 'success' of the Makatea mining project as paving the way for the implementation of the larger nuclear project. Not only did mining create a viable pool of wage labourers, but it also acted as a precedent for isolated environmental destruction in exchange for territorial economic development. Just as nobody had a problem with sacrificing Makatea for the good of the French Polynesian economy, it followed that the atolls of Morurua and Fangafautu were expendable also. The problem only came later, once the unprecedented scale of environmental and medical damage from the tests began to be realized, and people understood that the fallout could not be limited to the testing sites. The Mā'ohi artist Henri Hiro has come closest to explaining this by pointing out that though 'nuclear testing contaminated everything' – the fish, the environment, and Polynesian concepts of family and education – the rot in fact started much earlier, with mining on Makatea that began 'to erode social values' and drain 'the life forces of the island'.[35]

While agreeing with Hiro, one of the aims of this thesis has been to argue that the effects of the mining epoch go beyond just 'draining the life forces' of a single island. Because the Pacific phosphate industry was truly global in scale, and Makatean phosphate rock, like Banaban or Nauruan, was exported to so many locations, the environmental effects at both ends of the supply chain need to be considered. The over-production of artificial

[34] Moetai Brotherson, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 29 Jul. 2018. See, also, Theo Guilloux, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 25 Jul. 2018.
[35] Rai a Mai, Henri Hiro and Jean Yamasaki Toyama, 'The Source: An Interview with Henri Hiro', *Manoa* 17:2 (2005): 79. Hiro also identified the early 1960s production of the *Mutiny on the Bounty* on Tahiti which brought 'with it a wave of easy money', further corroding Polynesian society in his eyes. For the influence of the *Mutiny on the Bounty* production, see Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard,* 77–8.

fertilizers and the over-fertilization of agricultural land over the 20th century has had many adverse environmental and social effects.[36] Above all, phosphorus runoff and leaching from the over-application or misapplication of phosphorus-based fertilizers on to soils has led to the eutrophication or nutrient pollution of waterways and oceans, literally draining the life forces of marine organisms, and creating dead zones through a lack of oxygen.[37] Eutrophication can and has, in the worst cases, led to toxic algal blooms, which has some researchers fearing major anoxic events with the ability to wipe out entire marine ecosystems in lakes and seas adjacent to areas of high phosphorus run-off if the planetary boundaries for phosphorus are not respected.[38] Well-known American cases include the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico at the end of the Mississippi river or Chesapeake Bay,[39] but closer to home the Great Barrier Reef is perhaps the most high-profile victim of intensive agriculture and fertilizer runoff (as well as a site for guano and phosphate mining itself).[40]

Climate change, too, is both a product of the overuse of phosphate fertilizer and a contributor to the environmental degradation caused by an overabundance of phosphorus on the land. In the UK, for example, increased levels of rainfall are predicted to exacerbate the effects of phosphorus run-off by up to 30 per cent by 2050 unless drastic changes are made to the way farms are managed.[41] Meanwhile, Dana Cordell has identified the transport costs involved in the phosphate trade as being a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions.[42] Since the consumption of synthetic nitrogen fertilizers has outstripped the consumption of phosphate fertilizers by roughly 300 per cent since the 1960s when consumption figures for the two were relatively even,[43] it is the former that

[36] J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 25–6; Jason McKenney, ‘Artificial Fertility: The Environmental Costs of Industrial Fertilizers’, in *The Fatal Harvest Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture,* ed. Andrew Kimbrell (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2002), 121–9.
[37] Murray R. Hart, Bert F. Quin, and M. Long Nguyen, ‘Phosphorus Runoff from Agricultural Land and Direct Fertilizer Effects: A Review’, *Journal of Environmental Quality* 33 (2004): 1954–72.
[38] Dana Cordell, Andrea Turner and Joanne Chong, ‘The Hidden Cost of Phosphate Fertilizers: Mapping Multi-Stakeholder Supply Chain Risks and Impacts from Mine to Fork’, *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27:3 (2015): 334; Johan Rockström et al., ‘Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity’, *Ecology and Society* 14:2 (2009): 32; McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun,* 136–7.
[39] McKenney, ‘Artificial Fertility’, 126.
[40] Ben Daley and Peter Griggs, ‘Mining the Reefs and Cays: Coral, Guano and Rock Phosphate Extraction in the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, 1844–1940’, *Environment and History* 12:4 (2006): 401.
[41] M.C. Ockenden et al., ‘Major Agricultural Changes Required to Mitigate Phosphorus Losses under Climate Change’, *Nature Communications* 8:161 (2017): 5–6.
[42] Cordell, Turner and Chong, ‘The Hidden Cost of Phosphate Fertilizers’, 334
[43] Bahar Celikkol Erbas and Ebru Guven Solakoglu, ‘In the Presence of Climate Change, the Use of Fertilizers and the Effect of Income on Agricultural Emissions’, *Sustainability* 9:11 (2017): 5.

has worn the majority of criticism for its contribution to climate change.[44] The Haber-Bosch method of producing nitrogen fertilizer may be one of the marvels of modern science, fuelling the second Green Revolution that lay behind the 20th century's Great Acceleration,[45] but it is also an incredibly energy-intensive process, with roughly five per cent of the world's natural gas resource going towards fertilizer production.[46] After initial gains in soil fertility, crop yields have progressively declined despite the 'soaring application of inorganic fertilizer' fundamental to the modern agricultural system.[47]

There are promising signs that farmers in Australia and New Zealand are reducing their reliance on artificial fertilizers, but much of the environmental damage inflicted over the 20th century by these sectors is now irreparable.[48] With just over 11 million tons of phosphate mined from the island across the 60 years of the industry, one might ask what Makatea has to do with the effects of an industry that now trades up to 30 million tons of phosphate per year?[49] It is true that Makatea's footprint was miniscule in comparison with the contribution from the world's major deposits in North Africa and Florida, but this thesis has shown that the CFPO was a key supplier of high-grade phosphate rock for the Japanese, Australian and New Zealand agricultural sectors, intervening on numerous occasions to keep a struggling sector afloat. The success of fertilizer application by the Allied powers during the Second World War precluded the search for more sustainable alternatives in the following decades, leading to the gradual depletion of the world's accessible phosphate resources and present speculation about when the planet will reach 'peak phosphorus'.[50] One of the world's largest remaining phosphate deposits is situated on disputed land in the Western Sahara, and despite worldwide campaigns against the

[44] Greenpeace New Zealand have been running a campaign since 2018 calling on the New Zealand Government to ban the use of chemical nitrogen fertilizer. See Gen Toop, 'Greenpeace Calls for Ban on Chemical Nitrogen Fertiliser', *Greenpeace,* 14 Nov. 2018, https://www.greenpeace.org/new-zealand/press-release/greenpeace-calls-for-ban-on-chemical-nitrogen-fertiliser/ (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).
[45] Edward Melillo has made a convincing case for the Peruvian and Chilean guano and sodium nitrate trade leading to the first Green Revolution. See Edward D. Melillo, 'The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade', *American Historical Review* 117:4 (2012): 1028–60.
[46] J.R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 39.
[47] Tony Weis, 'The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10:3 (2010): 320.
[48] Rubel Biswas Chowdhury, Graham A. Moore and Anthony J. Weatherley, 'A Multi-Year Phosphorus Flow Analysis of a Key Agricultural Region in Australia to Identify Options for Sustainable Management', *Agricultural Systems* 161 (2018): 58.
[49] Cordell, Turner and Chong, 'The Hidden Cost of Phosphate Fertilizers', 334.
[50] 'Are We Excessively Phosphate Minded?', *Weekly Times* (Melb.), 18 Apr. 1945, 9. For discussion on peak phosphorus, see Tina-Simone S. Neset and Dana Cordell, 'Global Phosphorus Scarcity: Identifying Synergies for a Sustainable Future', *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture* 92:1 (2012): 2–6.

continued trading in this so-called ‘blood phosphate’, New Zealand remains a key market for the controversial product.[51] Pitched so often by the agriculture industry as the way to feed the world, industrial-scale agriculture has not solved world hunger.[52] And society’s drive for ever-increasing crop yields has led to both social and political conflict and the prevalence of chemical fertilizers and dangerous organic phosphorus insecticides as first described by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring.*[53]

The type of apocalyptic future brought on by overproduction and environmental ruin so feared by environmentalist thinkers such as Carson is described by German science-fiction writer Dirk C. Fleck in his 2008 novel, *The Tahiti Project.* Set in 2022, the developed world has descended into chaos, with multi-national corporations having taken the place of democratically elected governments and environmental activists being persecuted beyond all reason. Having chosen to segregate themselves from the chaos around them, Tahiti is the exception to the rule, pursuing a successful ecological revolution based on self-sufficiency and 100 per cent renewable energy. Led by Omai, the idealized Polynesian hero,[54] the Tahiti project is not only a reaction to the chaos around them but a response to the environmental vandalism they themselves experienced. Flying over Makatea, Omai recounts: ‘We first understood what the term environmental pollution means as a result of what happened on Makatea … The phosphate extraction left behind traces of devastation unheard of until that point in Polynesia’.[55] Yet far from being the source of a history lesson, Makatea quickly moves to the heart of the action, reimagined in the novel to be the centrepiece of an American and Chinese plot to mine the rare minerals, molybdenum and tellurium.[56] Eventually, Omai leads a peaceful flotilla of Polynesian *va’a* (canoes) to successfully defend the island from Global Oil, the multinational company which, as a result, is forced to abandon its mining project on the island and surrounding seabed.

Fleck’s tale might be clichéd and clunky in its English translation, but the man himself is a leading proponent of the German equilibrist movement who, through their organization

[51] Charlie Mitchell, ‘NZ Can’t Shake its Dangerous Addiction to West Saharan Phosphate’, *Stuff,* 12 Sep. 2018, https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/106331828/nz-cant-shake-its-dangerous-addiction-to-west-saharan-phosphate (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).
[52] Eric Holt-Giménez et al., ‘We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People … And Still Can’t End Hunger’, *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* 36:6 (2012): 595.
[53] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 27.
[54] For a recent representation of the man, see Kate Fullagar, *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist: Three Lives in an Age of Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020).
[55] Dirk C. Fleck, *The Tahiti Project,* trans. (2008), 119.
[56] Ibid., 116.

Equilibrismus, seek sustainable solutions to global problems.[57] Why this is of interest is because Fleck and Equilibrismus have plans, alongside a group of Tahitian activists, to turn Makatea into a living laboratory, an ecologically focused campus where students would learn environmental lessons from the past and draw from the island to help create a more sustainable future of the kind carved out by Omai in the *Tahiti Project*.[58] To be fair, this project has many detractors, and has little chance of success in the current fiscal and political climate, but why it appeals is that it offers one way out of the resource curse narrative that has stalked phosphate islands across history. It also provides an alternative to the controversial re-mining project offered by the Australian mining engineer and entrepreneur Colin Randall and his company, *Avenir Makatea*.

In the pipeline for over a decade, the re-mining project – initially born out of Randall's search for a location to store the fly ash produced by his partners in the Japanese coal business[59] – has been inching closer to reality ever since its initial rejection by former French Polynesian president, Oscar Temaru, in 2011. Now directed by Huahine businessman Étienne (Steve) Faaeva, the company's prospects received a major boost with the November 2019 passing of a revised mining code that sets the parameters for future mining activity in the territory.[60] Accused of 'greenwashing' by Moetai Brotherson,[61] *Avenir Makatea* has nonetheless evolved their business plan over the years to gain favour with Édouard Fritch's popular Government and the individual landowning families who they are required to secure leases from. In late 2016, the company held a four-day exhibition at the Presidency titled *Makatea: Passé, Present, Avenir* (Makatea: Past, Present, Future) where Randall tried to explain the merits of the project and, over a series of information-heavy presentations, gave the public the opportunity to engage and respond (figure 7.3).[62] Framed as a public relations exercise, the exhibition gave impetus to the anti-mining

[57] Antonia Mehnert, 'Climate Change Futures and the Imagination of the Global in *Maeva!* by Dirk C. Fleck', *Ecozon@* 3:2 (2012): 30.
[58] Roti Make, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018.
[59] Luc Ollivier, 'Les dés sont-ils déjà jetés?' *Tahiti Pacifique,* 11 Aug. 2017, 21.
[60] Walter Zweifel, 'Phosphate Mining on French Polynesia's Makatea Step Closer', *Radio New Zealand,* 14 Nov. 2019, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/403244/phosphate-mining-on-french-polynesia-s-makatea-step-closer (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).
[61] Walter Zweifel, 'New French Polynesia Law Clears Way for Phosphate Mining', *Radio New Zealand,* 14 Nov. 2019, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/2018722077/new-french-polynesia-law-clears-way-for-phosphate-mining (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).
[62] Coralie Cochin, 'Le retour du phosphate cristallise les passions en Polynésie', *Demain en Nouvelle-Calédonie,* 1 Dec. 2016, https://www.dnc.nc/le-retour-du-phosphate-cristallise-les-passions-en-polynesie/ (accessed 30 Oct. 2020); Nicholas Hoare, 'The Debate over Phosphate for Makatea' *Monsoon Project,* 10 Feb. 2017, https://www.themonsoonproject.org/the-debate-over-phosphate-for-makatea/ (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).

factions who used the increased media attention to stage demonstrations outside and also, once they were eventually allowed entry, inside the event. The debates that took place inside the Presidency across the four days were often heated and revealed a clear demarcation between pro- and anti-mining groups who are equally as passionate about the future of the island. It was here where Randall repeatedly said that if the Islanders did not want his project, he would pack up and leave.

Figure 7.3: 'Non', defaced advertising poster for the 2016 Avenir Makatea exhibition, Pape'ete.
Source: N. Hoare, 2016.

Since the 2016 exhibition, Randall has been splitting his time between Australia and French Polynesia, patiently refining the project and meeting with landowners who are now spread across the many islands which make up the territory. In a series of 2017 interviews,

he admitted he had already sunk AUD $3,000,000 of his own money into the project.[63] A massive coup for the company came in December 2017 when it gained OMRI organic certification for the product which, following the worldwide success of the 2016 Disney movie, *Moana*, will be marketed internationally as Moana Phosphate and will carry the highly coveted 'made in *fenua*' label.[64] This certification means the company will be able to sell the 100 per cent natural rock phosphate to organic farmers in San Francisco for many times the commodity price.

Despite the fact that Randall has stepped down from running the day-to-day operations of the company, for the septuagenarian, Makatea is his legacy project: one widely circulated rumour is that when he dies he hopes his ashes can be spread from the edge of one of Makatea's cliffs. A vexillologist, early in the project he worked with the *tāvana* to design a new flag for the island,[65] and since then he has used state-of-the art mining equipment to explore the island's unique marine archaeology.[66] One day, he hopes to find the wreck of Arundel's *Ocean Queen*.

Comparisons between the two 'phosphateers', though a century apart, are apt. Both came to Makatea hoping to crown their respective mining careers with one final project yet both ran into enormous difficulties on reaching the island. Whereas Arundel came to Tahiti with a glowing reputation, the 'Australian', as he is so-often labelled, has suffered in the public domain because of Australia's legacy of mining on Nauru, its continued obsession with coal mining, and its historic treatment of its own Indigenous people. One of the most striking protest signs from recent times carries the words: 'We are not Aborigine!', a claim intended to convey the fact that the Makateans will not allow their lands to be exploited as has occurred in Australia (figure 7.4). On Facebook, photos of the mined-out 'Topside' lunarscape on Nauru are constantly shared as a warning about what could happen to Makatea if the miners get their way and articles about the proposed Adani coal mine or

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[63] Orianne Obrize, 'Quatre questions à l'investisseur australien Colin Randall', *La Dépêche de Tahiti,* 24 Jul. 2017, https://actu.fr/polynesie-francaise/papeete_98735/quatre-questions-a-linvestisseur-australien-colin-randall_27913647.html (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).

[64] For a summary of the controversy that plagued the release of the film *Moana,* see Mirose Paia and Marie Salaün, 'Quand Disney déchaîne les passions: retour sur la controverse autour de *Moana', JSO* 148:1 (2019): 85–96.

[65] Colin Randall, 'Flagging the White Rock – Makatea', *Crux Australis* 27/1:109 (2014): 48–9; Mireille Loubet, 'Développement minier de Makatea: l'approche "personnelle" du maire délégué ?', *Tahiti Infos,* 19 Oct. 2012, https://www.tahiti-infos.com/Developpement-minier-de-Makatea-l-approche-personnelle-du-maire-delegue_a59150.html (accessed 30 Oct. 2020).

[66] Colin Randall, 'Maritime Archaeology on Makatea Island', *Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Newsletter* 37:4 (2018): 9–10.

Rio Tinto's destruction of 46,000-year-old sites in Western Australia's Juukan Gorge are held up for trenchant criticism. To Randall's credit, he is aware of this reputation and it is surely one of the reasons why he, the former head of Allegiance Coal with over 40 years of experience in the Australian coal-mining industry, has taken a backseat to a Polynesian businessman and church leader.[67]

Figure 7.4: (L-R) Elizabeth Poroi, Hinanui David, Jacky Ioane, Elie Poroi and Sylvanna Tupuhuna Nordman on Makatea, 2015.
Source: Te Fatu Fenua no Makatea.

Another way the company has tried to tackle their image problem in recent years is by framing the project in terms of rehabilitation rather than extraction. Whereas the media and anti-mining groups have tried to frame the debate in terms of a choice between mining or sustainable development, those in favour of the mine believe that the project has the ability to do both.[68] Rehabilitation is the terminology favoured by the *tāvana* who has backed the

[67] Randall is also in the process of setting up a Mission to Seafarers in Pape'ete to provide aid for migrant fishers while in port.
[68] AFP, 'Makatea, l'ile polynésienne qui hésite entre phosphate et écotourisme', *Le Courrier Australien,* 5 Jul. 2019, https://www.lecourrieraustralien.com/makatea-lile-polynesienne-qui-hesite-entre-phosphate-et-

project since its inception, hoping that once the 6.5 million tons of remaining phosphate have been extracted and the holes filled in, the rehabilitated plateau will become home to a large-scale coconut plantation or even a truffle farm. Mai has been responsible for much of the island's development agenda since he first took office in 1995 and, in his eyes, the re-mining project is his chance to restore dignity to the island. As early as 1998 he was quoted as saying:

> Makatea and Moruroa have been the two islands which have marked the 20th century in French Polynesia. In September 1966 [sic], Makatea turned off its lights. We must now reinsert Makatea into the 21st century. The island in the shadows is ready to be reborn![69]

However, one of the most striking developments in recent years has been the launch of a rock-climbing eco-tourism venture by the *tāvana*'s son, Heitapu Mai. Over four days in June 2019, Makatea played host to close to 200 rock-climbing enthusiasts from across the world who participated in the inaugural 'Makatea Vertical Adventure' exhibition.[70] Judged unanimously to be a success, Makatea is now being touted as the Pacific's rock-climbing mecca.[71] While Heitapu believes the island is large enough to sustain both industries, it is doubtful that the island will hold the same appeal for wilderness-seeking outdoor enthusiasts if their climbing experience is to be hemmed in by a mining operation. For Moetai Brotherson, one of the most high-profile political opponents of the project, it is 'just going to be a classic mining project that is pretending to rehabilitate'.[72] The ability of the mining company to rehabilitate the plateau into productive land is questionable and there are concerns about the effect of the mine on the island's birdlife and fragile water supplies.[73]

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ecotourisme/ (accessed 30 Oct. 2020); Mike Leyral, 'Extractions à Makatea: un beau projet économique… ou un crime écologique?', *TNTV News,* 17 Jul. 2017.

[69] Julien Mai cited in Olivier Babin, 'Rapport de mission à Makatea (Commune de Rangiroa)', Service de l'Urbanisme, Gouvernement de la Polynésie française, 1998, 1.

[70] Mike Leyral, 'Makatea : une experience sportive, environnementale et sociale', *TNTV,* 27 Jun. 2019, https://www.tntv.pf/tntvnews/polynesie/societe/%e2%80%8bmakatea-une-experience-sportive-environnementale-et-sociale/

[71] 'Makatea, future Mecque de l'escalade ?', *TNTV,* 26 Jun. 2019, https://www.tntv.pf/wmaker/makatea-future-mecque-de-lescalade/.

[72] Zweifel, 'New French Polynesia Law Clears Way for Phosphate Mining'.

[73] In 1989, French researcher J.F. Dupon wrote that 'promises to turn industrial wasteland back over to agriculture, given the current economic circumstances of the Territory, are no more realistic than suggesting that tourism would be a viable investment'. See J.F. Dupon, 'Pacific Phosphate Island Environments versus the Mining Industry: An Unequal Struggle', *Environmental Case Studies: South Pacific Study* 4 (1989): 8.

Many more pages could, and hopefully will, be written about the complex interplay that has unravelled between stakeholders since at least 2011 in relation to the island. As historians, rather than anthropologists, our interventions in developments such as these can often feel woefully inadequate. Parallels between epochs, though often drawn, suffer from over-simplification and a failure to recognize the drastically changed social and political landscape. Despite my initial zeal for the role of a participant historian, the differences between phosphate mining at the start of the 20th century and today are simply too great to be drawing from the past for finding a way out of the present-day factional stalemate. Received warmly by the opponents of the mine, I was hopeful that I would find within the historical record the smoking-gun that proved irrefutably the folly of re-mining the island. Historical evidence of widely believed negative health impacts of phosphate dust on the island's population or the evidence of precious cultural artefacts or environmental treasures within the proposed re-mining zone were not readily forthcoming but this does not mean that they do not exist and nor does it mean that other researchers should not bring their own disciplinary backgrounds to tackling the island's contemporary problems.

If anything, the range of my research findings has shown the potential for future multi-disciplinary studies conducted ideally by teams consisting of both foreign and local experts who have the skills and resources to follow the leads I was unable to follow myself. There is a pressing need for oral histories to be collected not just from the rapidly ageing final generation of workers from the 1960s but also from those who are living with the uncertainty of the mining project hanging over them today. Until the creation of the rock-climbing venture, an often heard critique was the malaise that the mining project engendered on the island as its inhabitants waited for an answer.[74] Fortunately, in recent times, the local population have grown sick of waiting and have taken the matter into their own hands. As many people say, Makatea is on the move. Perhaps it was the increased attention and fanfare surrounding the re-mining project that inspired this action. Perhaps it was just the stirrings of a younger generation of Islanders who preferred to stay on the peaceful island rather than migrate to an overpopulated Tahiti as many have done before them.

[74] Danny Pittman, interview with Nicholas Hoare, 17 Aug. 2018.

While there has been a surfeit of advice about what the Islanders should do, it is now evident that the island's destiny appears to lie in the hands of landowners.[75] As opposed to joining this chorus of outside advisors, what historians might be better able to offer at this point is a sense of what not to do. Above all, this thesis has shown the risk of pinning the hopes of an economy to the fortunes of a single commodity. Even with a commodity as in demand as phosphate rock, markets are volatile and price fluctuations on account of factors such as war, trade competition, or environmental change have the ability to throw a company's best-laid plans into disarray. Though I have not mentioned every single weather event that hit Makatea, I have nonetheless conveyed how susceptible the island is to cyclone damage. The village of Temao, where the port and phosphate operations came to be located, was not just destroyed in 1906 but in January 1958 also.[76] During the latter calamity, the CFPO faced a damages bill of over 10,000,000 Pacific francs and also paid relief to the villagers who lost their homes. Because of the well-known cyclone risk, the CFPO was not able to insure itself against weather events. With climate change only increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, one hopes that *Avenir Makatea* has taken this into account.[77]

This thesis has also shown the dangers of a lack of independent oversight and an over-investment of power in the hands of one company or one set of company directors. As Michel Anglade wrote in 1966, the CFPO was 'a veritable state within a state';[78] the case of Pierson and Meunier in the 1940s demonstrates how easily social relations can be skewed on a small island when large egos are involved. Étienne Faaeva is a well-liked CEO but he has no plans to remain in the position once the mine begins. Given the mine is predicted to last for 27 years, the choice of a balanced mining director who can see out the operation will be important. Because mining, by its very finite nature, is not a sustainable industry, viable plans need to be formulated for the island's future before mining comes to an end. And while it is promising to hear Julien Mai speak about the prospects for the island's future, these ideas need to be up and running before the mine

[75] Ibid.
[76] Details of the response to this event are included in SPAA: 48W/1215.
[77] A.Y. Annie Lau et al., 'Understanding the History of Extreme Wave Events in the Tuamotu Archipelago of French Polynesia from Large Carbonate Boulders on Makemo Atoll, With Implications for Future Threats in the Central South Pacific', *Marine Geology* 380 (2016): 188; Remy Canavesio, Edwige Pons-Branchu and Yannick Chancerelle, 'Limitations to U/Th Dating of Reef-platform Carbonate Boulders Produced by High-Energy Marine Inundations in the Tuamotu Archipelago (French Polynesia)', *Coral Reefs* 37 (2018): 1153.
[78] Anglade, 'Makatea: l'île des phosphates à la veille de la fin', 4.

comes to an end so that there is a smooth transition between the mining and post-mining eras. In 1947 Governor Haumant cautioned that 'Makatea, it is the CFPO. You cannot find 10 people there independent from the company', yet, as we know, these words could have just as easily applied in 1966, such was the lack of effort that went into preparing for the company's departure.[79]

Lastly, royalties need to be tied to the market price and fairly measured. The CFPO's 'derisory' royalty, frozen at one franc per ton of phosphate exported, is one of the biggest tragedies about the first mining era. Given the automated nature of the mining industry today, there will only be 60-odd jobs created on Makatea. Randall insists that priority will go to those already living on Makatea but realistically only a small fraction of Makatea's inhabitants will find direct employment in the mine.[80] Hence landowners, despite there being many more of them today, need to be savvy in their negotiations and recognize that money that can be made on a commodity that is only going to become more scarce. The fear many have is that it is the better-off landowners who live elsewhere in the territory that will recuperate the lion's share of the royalties while the marginalized landowning families on Makatea's non-phosphatic lands will miss out. We know that there will be an inevitable honeymoon period once income begins flowing from the mine, but as reality sets in, and more and more parcels are re-mined and rehabilitated, the company needs to be careful in managing expectations. Ideally, mechanisms will be devised to ensure that the wealth generated from the mine is shared equitably.

There exists an erroneous idea in Polynesia that 'one is more often against something or someone than for',[81] and that those who are against the mining project are somehow inherently conservative and afraid of the future. I might be more willing to entertain this idea if it were not for the existence of Makatea and Moruroa, the collateral damage of French colonial rule. For many Mā'ohi, these sites are living history, *lieux de mémoire* that serve to remind the public what happens when one puts their faith, like the Mihiroa on Makatea initially did, in colonial development. These historical examples show, above all, that healthy scepticism is necessary to avoid unwanted outcomes. For Sabrina Birk, one of three leaders of the anti-mining group Te Rupe no Makatea,

[79] Governor Haumant in Lassalle-Séré, 'Rapport sur le reglement du conflit du travail', 16.
[80] It is quite probable that those who gain employment will be from the families already aligned to the *tāvana*.
[81] Regnault, *La Bombe Française dans le Pacifique,* 13.

> … without Ma'atea, this tribe [the Mihiroa] would not have existed. For these reasons we had to stand up for Makatea and say no. You cannot destroy this paradise. It is too important in matters of beauty, in matters of history. And because we've not finished learning from Ma'atea. It still has a lot to tell.[82]

Sabrina and the other members of Te Rupe no Makatea and Te Fatu Fenua no Makatea I have gotten to know over the course of this research might not like everything I have written in this thesis, but I have been wary of reducing the history to an 'Avatar narrative' where, as Nicholas Bainton writes, 'untrammeled capital devastates hapless tribal people'.[83] Instead, I have tried to outline the historical factors that contributed most to the island's transformation (serendipity, individual agency, global and regional markets, weather events, politics and labour) and how these factors coalesced to the point where we arrive today at our present juncture, where the Islanders must decide whether to re-make the island into a 21st-century 'phosphate island' or not.

What a 21st-century phosphate island will look like is difficult to say. We do know, however, that like the 20th-century phosphate island, it is likely to develop its own, distinctly Polynesian characteristics. Robert Nicole has helpfully suggested that since the arrival of Europeans, Mā'ohi responses to foreign colonialism have tended to follow 'two broad avenues', namely 'collaboration and resistance'. However, rather than choosing one over the other he argues Polynesian history has been marked by the 'Maohi's ability to work within, to alter, to manoeuvre, to manipulate, and to manage the choices that presented themselves in various political, cultural, and discursive spaces'.[84] He writes that despite the difficulty in doing this (as responses vary considerably over time and space), it is nonetheless 'important to identify that which Maohi did *with* Europeans, and that which they did *to* or *against* them'.[85] The way I see it is that the resistance shown to the re-mining project by the members of Te Fatu Fenua no Makatea and Te Rupe no Makatea is a healthy and necessary part of the negotiation process to make sure that, unlike their ancestors in the 20th century, they get a better deal both for themselves and for the long-term wellbeing of the island environment.

[82] Sabrina Birk, interview with Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018, Tahiti.
[83] Nicholas Bainton, 'Mining and Indigenous People', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.121
[84] Nicole, *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol,* 168.
[85] Ibid. Emphasis is in the original.

To further reiterate Nicole's point, there is no shortage of people who have taken up positions somewhere between the pro- and anti-mining camps. As independence leader Oscar Temaru has alluded to, the fate of Makatea and other resource-rich islands are tied to the Māʼohi push for independence. When asked in early 2012 why he thought the French were so reluctant to vacate the region, Temaru responded that it was largely due to economics:

> We know we have phosphate in our different islands. Just a month ago, people from Australia came, and they were ready to exploit the phosphate in Makatea again. But I told the mayor of Makatea and mayors from other islands, no, we have to organize international competition because we have phosphate in Makatea, in Rairoa [or Rangiroa], in Tikehau, in Mataiva, and Niau. We have phosphate all over. We also have manganese, cobalt, and rare earth minerals. So there's a huge economic interest.[86]

Notwithstanding the recent geo-political reasons for France's continued desire to remain a Pacific power, we can see here that the region's remaining phosphate deposits have the potential to be both a stumbling block for the independence movement and a potential asset for a future sovereign and independent nation. Given the rising value of these resources, it is perhaps unsurprising that some in the independence movement would like to delay their exploitation for as long as necessary and, like the more-developed Kanak sovereignty movement in New Caledonia, securing local control of the territory's natural resources is seen as a vital step in pushing for political independence. However, time will tell just how well this Tahiti-centric vision for an independent French Polynesia squares with Mihiroa hopes for their future.

The question of who or what Makatea is meant to serve has been at the heart of this thesis. The instrumental value of the island is undeniable, but it remains to be seen in which context it is best served. By extending our analysis of the island's past to both the pre- and post-mining eras, I have made the case for what Hanlon and Clifford have called the Indigenous *longue durée,* which means that rather than looking back at the mining years as a natural reference point for the island's future identity, we instead opt for a longer view

[86] Terence Wesley-Smith, Gerard Finin, and Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'An Interview with Oscar Temaru', *Contemporary Pacific* 25:2 (2013): 305.

that situates the island in its proper geographical and cultural context in the *pays* Mihiroa on the border between the Society Islands and the Tuamotu Archipelago. Phosphate mining ripped the island out of this context and threw it into a global one where the population increased from hundreds of Mihiroa (and their guests) to thousands of workers from across the region and the world. Instead of *pahi* plying the currents between islands for fish, there were weekly *phosphatiers* provisioning the island with its consumption needs in exchange for ballasts full of high-grade rock.

For some, this transition from Polynesian *fenua* to a phosphate island was a positive development; for others, one just has to look at the 'lamentable state' of the island today to know that it was an unwise leap.[87] This thesis has interrogated both perspectives, pushing back, following Edward Melillo, against the 'historical inevitability' of these changes by 'reframing givens as contingencies' and resisting the urge to apply metanarratives to the island's past.[88] As Sabrina Birk has stated, the Makatea story does doubtless have lessons for humanity, yet we should not be self-conscious about the fact that we are still in the process of working these out (and will continue to do so long into the future). It is understandable that so many of the *enfants de l'île* – the post-war generation who left for Tahiti at the close of the mine – have fond memories of the mining years. They grew up in the post-1947 golden years of the mine when the authoritarian Pierson and his tyrannical deputy, Meunier, had been replaced and mining conditions had improved to the point that the island was judged the most modern site in all of French Polynesia. While I would not wish to deny the validity of these perspectives, as historians we need to be wary of letting these types of testimonies dominate the memoryscape of the island and define what the Makatea experience was for everyone. It is for this reason that I have been so eager to uncover the forgotten stories from the first four decades of the mine, stories that cast a much darker hue over the landscape, and remind us to temper our optimism before embarking on a new mining venture.

Yet such a clear-eyed view of the past, essential for making informed decisions about the future, requires not only puncturing the overly optimistic interpretations of the mining era on Makatea but also the melodramatic portrayals of phosphate islands in general. Here, I

[87] Roti Make, interview by Nicholas Hoare, 30 Sep. 2018.
[88] Edward Dallam Melillo, *Strangers on Familiar Soil: Rediscovering the Chile-California Connection* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015), 11.

have argued against the classic image of the phosphate island as presented by observers such as Sydney Powell who, after happening upon the island only several years into its progression as a mine (1912), declared the place dead on arrival. According to Powell, ‘it gave fertility, but had none itself. It was a paradox and a parable. In death it lived and was more useful than ever it had been in life’.[89] By concentrating on the stories of those people indigenous to the island and the much larger group of people who came to visit the island, this thesis has shown just how lively phosphate islands can be. While the Pacific’s phosphate islands shared many characteristics, none is quite like the other. In Makatea’s case, I have demonstrated that there is more than enough evidence in its pre- and post-mining history to suggest that the island can continue to be useful, regardless of the status of its phosphate deposits. The continuities between eras – illustrated most vividly by the survival of the island’s emblematic endemic bird, the Rupe – are proof that the island has not stopped giving.

Finally, as a high island in an archipelago of low-lying atolls, Makatea carries undoubted regional importance due to the rapidly changing global climate. While I have shown in chapter one that the island has in the past been valued as a site of human refuge, Makatea’s importance as a refugium for non-human species in previous periods of sea-level rise has many scientists hoping to see the island protected from a second round of mining. This explains the enormous levels of enthusiasm shown for 2019’s rock-climbing project that finally showcased the potential for the island as a tourist destination. However, the onset of COVID-19 and restricted international travel makes a future based on ecotourism less viable and the prospect of resource extraction possibly even more appealing. Reductions in mobility and the ability to send independent observers to what are often remote locations enlarge what some are calling the zones of invisibility that distance stakeholders from the everyday reality of local relations at mine sites.[90] Even with French Polynesia’s borders remaining open (a rarity in the Pacific), the growing rates of infection within the collectivity are likely to diminish its appeal.

Even though it appears, at the time of writing, that a new mining epoch will be eventually inaugurated on Makatea, it is important that a vigilant and critical eye is kept on the island

[89] Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 79.
[90] Nicholas Bainton, John R. Owen and Deanna Kemp, ‘Invisibility and the Extractive-Pandemic Nexus’, *Extractive Industries and Society* 7:3 (2020), 841–3.

so that the worst environmental and social abuses of the first mining period are not allowed to happen again. The emergence over the last decade of a large and active network of ‘island guardians’ on Makatea and across the neighbouring islands of French Polynesia, offers reassurance that the behaviour of the new company over the next two and a half decades of predicted mining will be subjected to a level of scrutiny that the CFPO never faced during their brief but remarkable period of island dominance. The phosphate age might have been precipitated by the decisions of the inhabitants at the time, but it is safe to say that the *fatu fenua* of 2020 are not the *fatu fenua* of 1907, and they have the scars to prove it.

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Appendix 1: Key Historical Figures

The following is a brief, non-exhaustive guide to some of the key figures mentioned in this thesis.

Island Leaders and Other Notable Mā'ohi Figures

Bernière, Max (1908–c.82) – Union delegate, Makatea.

Céran-Jérusalémy, Jean-Baptiste (1921–2014) – Deputy leader, RDPT, 1947–58.

Ellis, Louise Vaine – *Tāvana*, Makatea, 1983–95.

Hiti, Hiti a (c.1850–1918) – Makatea landowner; district councillor.

'O'opa, Pouvana'a a (1895–1977) – Leader, RDPT, 1947–58.

Pambrun, Aimé (1902–96) – General Secretary, Tahiti Workers' Union.

Ruatai – LMS missionary; posted to Makatea in 1829.

Ta'aroa, Joanna Marau (1860–1934) – The last Queen of Tahiti.

Pou, Tara a (1862–1918) – Makatea landowner.

Tematuanui, Teare a (1873–1923) – Makatea landowner; *tāvana.*

Tepehu, Tevivi Tane (1854–1918) – Makatea landowner.

Viritua, Viritua (1932–2008) – Post-mining *tāvana*.

European and American Voyagers and Missionaries

Agassiz, Alexander (1835–1910) – Oceanographer & marine zoologist US Fish Commission Cruise of the *Albatross;* visited Makatea in 1899.

Bellingshausen, Fabian Gottlieb von (1778–1852) – Baltic German naval officer; visited Makatea in 1820.

Dana, James D. (1813-1895) – Geologist, US Exploring Expedition; visited Makatea in 1839.

Grouard, Benjamin F. (1819–94) – LDS missionary; visited Makatea in 1846.

Lafontaine, Paul-Émile (1829–86) – French naval officer; visited Makatea in 1877.

Moerenhout, J.A. (1796–1879) – Belgian diplomat; visited Makatea in 1829.

Peale, Titian Ramsay (1799–1885) – Chief naturalist, US Exploring Expedition; visited Makatea in 1839.

Pickering, Charles (1805–78) – Naturalist, US Exploring Expedition; visited Makatea in 1839.

Pinart, Alphonse Louis (1852–1911) – French savant; visited Makatea in 1877.

Roggeveen, Jacob (1659–1729) – Dutch explorer; visited Makatea in 1722.

Turnbull, John – Salt Pork Trader; visited Makatea in 1803.

Wilkes, Charles (1798–1877) – Naval officer, US Exploring Expedition; visited Makatea in 1839.

French Phosphateers

Bertrand, Léon (1858–1951) – Director, CFPO (Paris), 1908–48.

Bourgeois, Léon (1914-87) – Engineer, CFPO (Makatea).

Gooding, Aiden (1902–51) – Chief of extraction, recruiting agent, CFPO (Makatea),

Goupil, Albert (1876–1913) – Executive officer, CFPO (Makatea), 1908–13.

Goupil, Auguste (1847–1921) – Attorney, CFPO (Pape'ete), 1908–21.

Jacquemin, André (1893–1964) – Manager, CFPO (Pape'ete), 1931–55.

Lenhardt, Edgard (1893–1975) – Director, Office Chérifien des Phosphates, 1935–44; chairman and director, CFPO (Paris), 1954–66.

Marting, Émile (d.28 Jan. 1920) – Engineer, CFPO 1909–10; Head of service, CFPO 1911–19; Manager, CFPO, 1919–20.

Mesnier, Jules (c.1853–1919) – President, CFPO (Paris), 1908–19.

Meunier, Raymond (1909–1977) – Assistant-Manager, CFPO (Makatea), c. c.1953.

Mulliez, Hubert (1917–2003) – Executive officer, CFPO (Makatea), 1948–66.

Pierson, Flavien (1893–1970) – Assistant-Manager, CFPO (Makatea), 1926–33; Manager, CFPO (Makatea), 1933–40, 45–49.

Prive, Marcel – Assistant-Manager, CFPO (Makatea), 1934-42; Manager, CFPO (Makatea), 1942-45.

Touze, Etienne (1871–1951) – Manager, CFPO (Makatea), 1907–20; director, CFPO (Paris), 1920–37; chairman, CFPO (Paris), 1937–50.

British Phosphateers

Arundel, John T. (1841–1919) – Director, PPC, 1902–09.

Balding, Bernard T. – Director, Anglo-French Phosphate Company & CFPO, 1908–1951.

Bissett, J.A. – NZ Manager, BPC, 1945–49; reported on Makatea in 1947.

Bott, W.V. – Chief Engineer, BPC, 1943–46; reported on Makatea in 1943.

Burleigh, J.E. – Japanese representative, Anglo-French Phosphate Company, 1921–40.

Christian, Fred F. – Assistant general manager, BPC; reported on Makatea in 1930, 1945.

Coane, John M. (1848–1923) – Consulting engineer, PPC; reported on Makatea in 1911.

Dickinson, Alwin R. (1873–1944) – Director, PPC, 1907–1919; director, CFPO, 1908–17; UK phosphate commissioner, BPC, 1920–30; Anglo-French Phosphate Company.

Ellis, Albert (1869–1951) – NZ phosphate commissioner, BPC, 1920–51.

Ellis, George Coxon (1843–1922) – Director and shareholder, PPC & CFPO.

Ellis, James Morgan (1865–1940) – Assistant Manager, CFPO, 1908–10.

Gaye, Arthur S. (1881–1960) – UK Phosphate Commissioner, BPC, 1934–46.

Gaze, A. Harold (1885–1954) – General Manager, BPC, 1920–54.

King, A.J. (1949) – Managing Director, Anglo-French Phospate Company, 1949.

Lever, William H. (Lord Leverhulme) – Director, PPC, 1909–1919; shareholder, Anglo-French Phosphate Company.

Muir. R.H. (1886–1975) – Chairman, Anglo-French Phosphate Company, 1949–57.

Stephen, Alfred. E. – Chemist; analysed phosphate samples on Makatea in 1907.

Pope, H.B. – Australian phosphate commissioner, BPC, 1920–26.

Voss, Herman (–1920) – Managing Director, PPC, 1902–14; director, CFPO, 1908–1920.

Voss, Herman Albertus (1891–1957) – BPC London manager, 1935-46; managing director, Anglo-French Phosphate Company, 1946–57.

French Officials

Ahnne, Frédéric (1899–1970) – Administrator, Tuamotu-Gambier, 1944–49.

Basdevant, Jules (1877–1968) – Jurist, 1906–64; President, ICJ, 1949–52.

Besson, Maurice (1885–1946) – Colonial administrator, 1913–44.

Bonet, Frédéric (1833–1902) – Naval Lieutenant, EFO, 1864–80; lawyer, 1880–1902.

Bonhoure, Adrien-Jules-Jean (1860–1929) – Governor, EFO, 1910–12.

Brunot, Richard (1883–1958) – Governor, EFO, 1941.

Charlier, Élie-Adrien-Édouard (1864–1937) – Interim Governor, EFO, 1907–08.

Chasteny de Géry, Frédéric (1889–1976) – Governor, EFO, 1937–40.

Curton, Émile de. (1908–93) – Governor, EFO, 1940–41.

Fillon, Victor (1863–1923) – Colonial inspector, 1898–1916.

François, Joseph-Pascal (1853–1914) – Governor, EFO, 1908–10.

Gallet, Gustave-Pierre (1850–1926) – Governor, EFO, 1896–97, 98–99, 99–1901.

Haumant, Jean-Camille (1898–1955) – Governor, EFO, 1945–48.

Jore, Léonce (1882–1975) – Governor, EFO, 1930–32.

Jullien, Philippe-Émile (1845–1912) – Governor, EFO, 1904–07.

Lassalle-Séré, Robert (1898–1958) – Colonial inspector, 1930–49; senator, 49–52.

Maestracci, Pierre-Louis (1893–1960) – Governor, EFO, 1947–49.

Mansard, Edmond (1875–52) – Governor, EFO, 1940.

Marcadé, Charles-Adolphe (1877–193?) – Administrator, Tuamotu Archipelago, 1904–15.

Orselli, Georges (1896–1971) – Governor, EFO, 1941–45.

Petitbon, René (1902–65) – Governor, EFO, 1950–54.

Pujol, Georges (1920–2010) – Administrator, Windward Islands, 1966–71.

Sicurani, Jean (1915–77) – Governor, EFO, 1964–69.

Solari, Alfred (1868–1935) – Governor, EFO, 1923–28.

Viremouneix, Jean (1913–) – Administrator/Gendarme, Makatea, 1947.

Miscellaneous Historical Figures

Bateson, Frank (1909–2007) – Astronomer; manager, A.B. Donald Ltd. (Rarotonga), 1945–60; labour recruiter for Makatea.

De Mézières, Albert Bonnel (1870–1942) – French explorer; visited Makatea in 1908.

Emory, Kenneth (1897–1992) – Archaeologist; visited Makatea in 1930.

Fletcher, Robert James (1877–1965) – Writer; secretary-meteorologist, CFPO, 1920–23.

Hoare, Charles Burton (1833-c.1879) – Photographer; in French Polynesia, 1868–c.1876.

Johannessen, Captain – Captain of the *Ocean Queen*, 1909.

Marshall, Donald Stanley (1919–2005) – Anthropologist; studied and photographed Cook Island Makatea phosphate workers on Mangaia, 1955.

Moate, Piri – Head-clerk, A.B. Donald Ltd. (Rarotonga); Cook Islands politician.

Molet, Louis (1915-1992) – Social scientist; director of ORSTOM mission to French Polynesia, 1961.

Patrick, R.T.G. – Secretary, Island Territories (NZ); New Zealand's special representative to Tahiti, 1941–42.

Powell, Sydney Walter (1878–1952) – Travel writer; visited Makatea in 1912.

Seale, Alvin (1871–1958) – Naturalist, Bishop Museum, 1899–1904; visited Makatea in 1901–02.

Villaret, Bernard (1909–2006) – Writer and filmmaker; doctor, CFPO, 1952–4.

Contemporary Stakeholders

Ah-Scha, Gontran Teikihahitoua (1990–), President, Te Puna Nui no Makatea.

Birk, Sabrina (1969–) – Vice-President, Te Rupe no Makatea, 2016–.

Brotherson, Moetai (1969–) – Deputy, French National Assembly, 2017–; Deputy leader, Tavini Huiraatira, 2017–.

Egretaud, Charles – Director, SARL Pae Tai - Pae Uta, 1994–

Faaeva, Étienne – CEO, SAS Avenir Makatea, 2018–.

Ioane, Jacky (1962–) – Former President, Te Puna Nui no Makatea.

Mai, Heitapu (1984–) – President, Makatea – Agir Pour la Biodiversité, 2018–.

Mai, Julien (1952–) – *Tāvana*, Makatea, 1995–.

Nordman, Sylvanna Tupuhina (1959–) – President, Te Fatu Fenua no Makatea, 2010–.

Pittman, Danny (1960–) – President, Te Rupe no Makatea, 2014–.

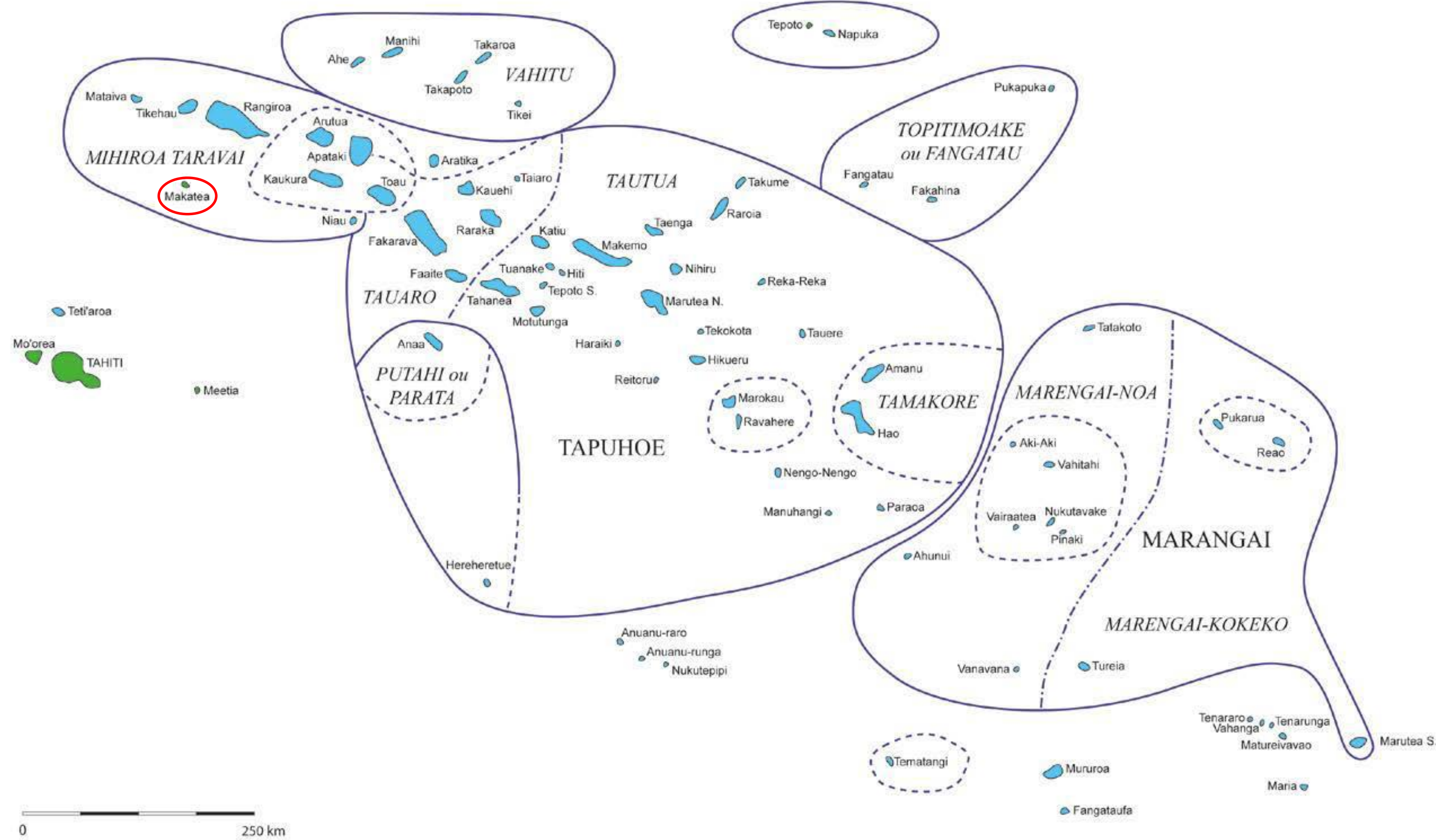
Poroi, Elie (1952–) – Local historian, knowledge-holder.

Randall, Colin – Founding director, SAS Avenir Makatea, 2010–18.

Temaru, Oscar (1944–) – Mayor, Faa'a, 1983– ; Leader, Tavini Huiraatira, 1983–.

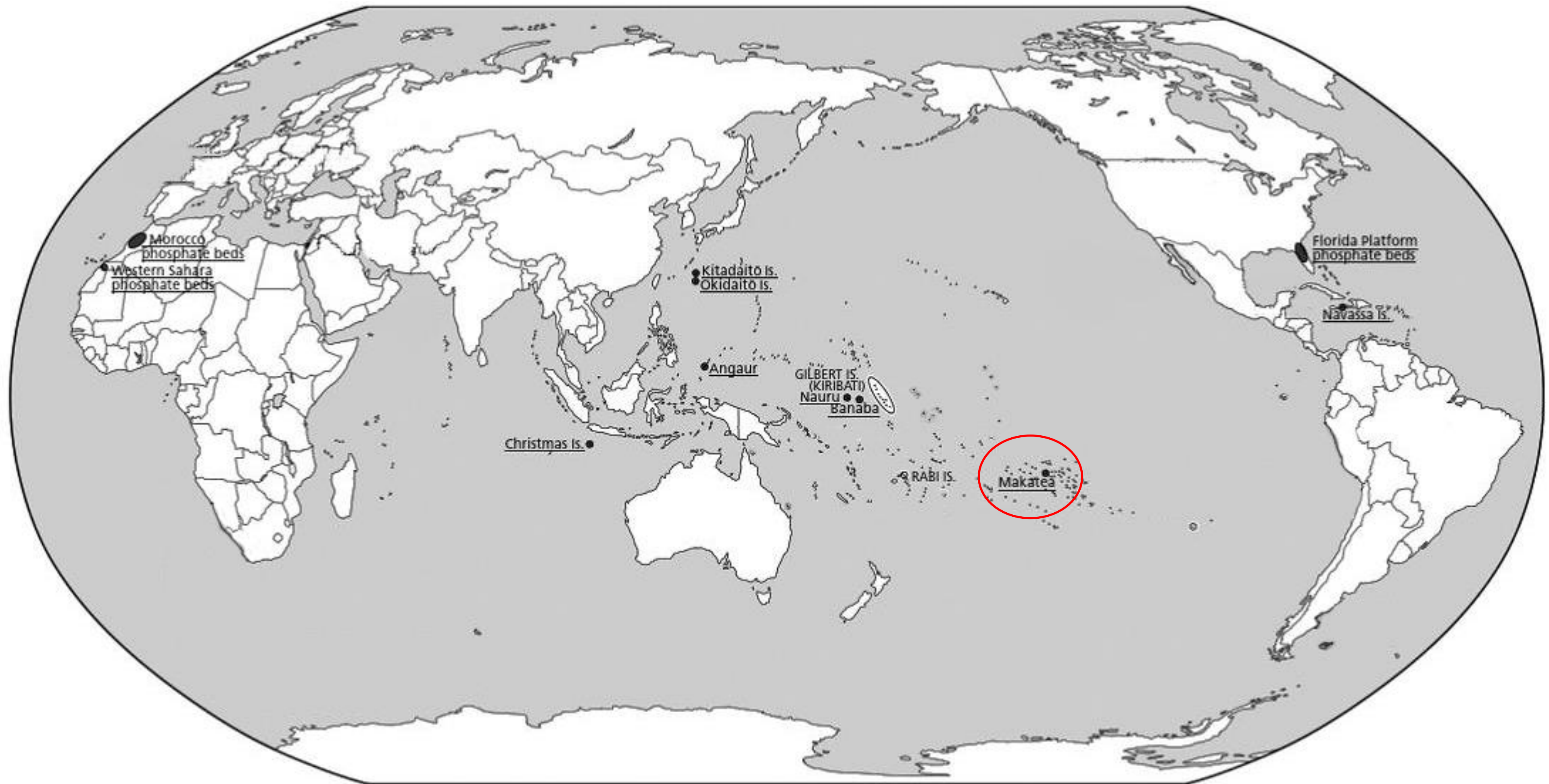
Viritua, Reretini (1987–) – Mayoral candidate, 2020.

Appendix 2: Oversized Maps



From p.42 – **Map showing the dialectical and cultural areas of the Tuamotu Archipelago based on Stimson and Marshall's 1964 work.**
Source: Guillaume Molle, 'Exploring Religious Practices on Polynesian Atolls', 264.

From p.43 – **Reconstructed copy of Tupaia's Map showing the voyaging routes from Makatea to Tepoto and Nāpuka, and Nāpuka to the Marquesas.**
Source: Eckstein and Schwarz, 'The Making of Tupaia's Map', 72.



From p.156 – **World map showing the location of phosphate deposits in the Pacific and beyond.**
Source: Adapted from Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, 46.