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The Reich and Race Relations in the New Guinea Islands

In 1899–1900, the Bismarck Archipelago sector of German New Guinea was still very much a trading colony, with more than half the export copra coming from trade with the New Guineans. Plantation agriculture was, however, expanding at a rate which would transform New Guinea into a genuine plantation colony by 1914. When the imperial government assumed full administrative responsibility for the protectorate in 1899, European plantations covered a planted area of 2582 hectares; Ralum alone had grown to 1010 hectares. The New Guinea Company had earned 80,000 marks from cotton in 1898, and in the same year exported its first ten tonnes of plantation-grown copra.1 A population of 200 Europeans now lived in the Bismarck Archipelago, scattered from the Solomon Islands to the Admiralty group.

Albert Hahl was called back from Ponape in 1901 to take over as Governor of German New Guinea after the first Imperial Governor, Rudolf von Bennigsen, had resigned. Von Bennigsen was an old-style Prussian army officer, whose scarred face betrayed the number of duels fought in his youth. His formula for control of the protectorate was brutally direct and simple: expansion by pacification; and his short tenure of office is notable for several bloody campaigns against recalcitrant New Guineans. A man whose sense of honour was absolute and unyielding, von Bennigsen is said to have resigned in a fit of pique, after Bishop Couppé persuaded Berlin to reverse a decision by the Governor not to sell land to the Catholics in the Duke of Yorks group, a Methodist preserve.2

Hahl’s approach to the job was more methodical and less openly violent. Though he too was convinced of the need to ‘pacify’ and ‘control’ the population in order to attract investment to the colony and encourage expansion, his program was not designed to cow the inhabitants, nor simply to keep the peace and let development take its own course. By opening up the land and incorporating the people into an ordered administration, Hahl hoped to mobilise them for the
developing economy, either as labour for the plantations or copra processors for the traders.

His plan was not as well articulated as Solf’s in Samoa, nor was it founded on a particular moral image of the New Guineans as a whole. Violence he regarded as an inevitable component of colonialism, a political problem not subject to clear-cut moral judgments or judicial decisions. Hahl considered that, in the long run, violence would only be eliminated by the growth of a sound administration, and by education. Thus Hahl preferred to treat individual acts of violence by New Guineans as acts of war, not as criminal offences, and his chief concern was to restore public peace and order in the quickest, most effective way. If this sometimes involved punitive expeditions or police hunts, with the threat of reciprocal violence, then so be it.

In 1901, after the virtual bankruptcy of Company rule, Hahl had to start from scratch. His problems were compounded by the continuing shortage of finance and personnel, and by the conditions of the country itself: the multitude of cultural groups, of languages, and the physical obstacles—reefs, swamps, rain forests and mountain ranges. These forced Hahl to concentrate his scant resources in the most advanced area, the Bismarck Archipelago, leaving the large plantation concerns under the New Guinea Company to carry out the opening-up process on the mainland. Outside the areas of white settlement and established sources of labour, Hahl intervened only when unrest was of a widespread nature, and then only with a reprisal. Where direct rule was out of the question for some time, he accepted as unavoidable the death of individual white people if they fell foul of local tribes.

Such a policy meant that the Germans’ administrative effort in the Archipelago for the first five years was centred on the Gazelle Peninsula, northern New Ireland, and regional stations in southern New Ireland and Bougainville, these latter acting largely as labour depots. Direct rule, based on Hahl’s original appointment of lualuas or luluais, was extended to all these areas, with a district officer keeping the area under surveillance and mobilising the inhabitants for government tasks. To give weight to his authority, and to impose control by conquest where tribes were at war, the district officer was provided with a complement of about fifty New Guinean police, drawn predominantly from the Solomon Islands area.

Administrative innovations after 1900 included organised public works and a poll tax. The former was an integral element of the direct control idea: in particular, the construction of roads was intended to
improve access to villagers so that they could be taxed. In November 1903, a Government Instruction \((\text{Anweisung})\) authorised officials to co-opt all able-bodied men in the areas of control for up to four weeks a year to assist in the construction and maintenance of roads, or to work on government plantations.\(^4\) By 1914, using this ordinance, the Germans had built a network of roads in the vicinity of all their main settlements, though outside the Gazelle Peninsula none of the roads stretched very far into the interior. In the Gazelle there were 209 kilometres of road between the Warangoi River and the Baining Mountains by 1911: a series running north and west of the Kokopo coast linked most of the inland districts and reached beyond the Varzin to Taulil, while a proper shoreline road was constructed between Herbertshöhe and Rabaul. There was also a road from Rabaul over the Ratavul pass to Talili Bay on the north coast, and from Weberhafen to Massawa on the north-west coast, and into the Bainings.

Not all these roads, whether in the Gazelle Peninsula or outside, were constructed with willing co-operation. More-or-less stern resistance occurred in areas where villagers saw no immediate advantage accruing (for example, in Bougainville), or where it was part of a wider and deeper protest against white presence flowing from the loss of land resources (as was to be the case at Madang, on the mainland). The coastal Tolai helped build the first roads willingly enough, because they were paid for it, and because roads gave them better access to markets. After 1900, however, their attitude changed, particularly under the corvée regulations, when it became clear that they were being used to extend the road network mainly for the regime’s purposes. Their growing distaste for roadwork made the Tolai particularly amenable to Hahl’s second new measure, the head tax levy.

When Hahl introduced the head tax to New Guinea in 1906, it was designed to act as an alternative to forced road maintenance and to push more villagers onto European plantations. For this reason Hahl delayed its introduction in the Gazelle Peninsula at least six months, so that he could exploit free Tolai labour in order to finish his road-building program. Such was the Tolai dislike for the roadworks that Hahl knew they would gladly grasp any opportunity that delivered them from it. With their comparatively large cash reserves from trading, the Tolai would have no trouble paying a tax the moment it was imposed, leaving Hahl with insufficient labour to carry out his projects.\(^5\) His fears were well-founded. When the tax was finally introduced into the Gazelle in 1907, the Tolai offered no resistance; even when in 1910 it was doubled
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in many areas from five marks a year for every adult male to ten marks, people continued to pay it willingly in preference to working on the roads.

Between 1900 and 1914 Tolai demand for consumer goods rose swiftly, and their material prosperity continued to grow. A district like Vunamami saw its per capita income treble during the period, despite rapid population growth. European-style businesses began to proliferate as Tolai took up carpentry, or purchased European boats, carts and horses to use as commercial transportation. Copra production rose steadily all this time, especially after the plantings on reserves like Vunamami began to bear; by 1909 some 'big men' were receiving up to 300 marks a month from the sale of copra. Up to 1914, four-fifths of the native copra produced in the Archipelago continued to come from the Tolai people, and they were responsible for perhaps one-third of all consumer imports into that area. By 1913 the value of clothes and textiles purchased by them amounted to 240,000 marks, and they seemed to have little difficulty in paying for the European cigarettes, tinned goods, clothes, even houses, which had become status symbols; several influential men were reported to have saved up to 10,000 marks in silver, one-mark coins.

Progress and prosperity were accompanied by a selective resistance to the European economy. The Tolai still refused to accept wage labour on a large scale unless it involved an elite position like domestic servant or policeman, where a sense of partnership existed. Only those on the inland fringe of Tolai settlement offered themselves as contract labourers, in order to share in the economic opportunities which were lacking on the frontier. By 1910 a mere ten per cent (or 1095) of the able-bodied Tolai population were indentured as labourers or soldiers, and the vast majority of these were employed close to home in the Gazelle itself. The head tax failed to alter this pattern of economic behaviour, for up to 1914, at least, the coastal Tolai were prosperous enough to meet all the levies from their manifold enterprises.

Disputes over land continued to occur as European plantations expanded their plantings. At the end of 1902, Europeans claimed 53,480 hectares of land in the Gazelle, only 5,330 of which were planted with coconuts, coffee, cotton and kapok. Though a dozen land reserves for Tolai had been set up by 1902, eight of them around Blanche Bay, the basis of their existence was precarious. Hahl had to fight plantation owners for every metre and every tree in seeking native enclaves in areas where wholesale land alienation had occurred in Company days. Even
when he was successful, the reserves possessed no legal basis, being subject to the continuing goodwill of the land’s European owners. For instance, on the Vunamami reserve in Ralum, To Bobo faced constant pressure from Emma throughout the 1890s. Finally, in 1901, after appeals by To Bobo, Hahl had the area properly surveyed and concrete markers erected, by which time reserves in Ralum amounted to 1000 hectares for some 2000 Tolai.  

Then in 1902 and 1903, imperial ordinances were issued in Berlin, giving colonial governors the authority to attach special conditions to the European right of ownership of native land, and to expropriate legally-acquired land from private persons in order to ensure to local inhabitants the possibility of an economic existence. By a regulation of July 1904, Hahl put the first of these into effect, probably using as a basis the agreement he had reached with To Bobo concerning the Ralum reserve in 1896. The conditions elaborated at that time, by which the Tolai were allowed to keep their reserves, thus became official policy and enabled the administration between 1903 and 1914 to set aside over 5740 hectares of previously-alienated land for the residence and use of New Guinean groups. In 1914, seventy reserves totalling 13 115 hectares existed in German New Guinea.  

These measures did not altogether eliminate conflicts over land, for the rights of native users of enclosed land were not made hereditary or transferable, so that interests created by continued occupation failed to be preserved. Moreover, abuses continued to occur in the process of acquisition, especially in areas not under permanent government control. Officially, purchases of land for Europeans were made by the government after assessing a customer’s claim in relation to local needs. In practice, a company or group with an interest in a particular area was allowed to make an arrangement with the often inarticulate and helpless local people, and the claim to a sale of land was then simply confirmed by the administration. Official investigation and government purchase were all too often an empty formality.

The last great war in the Gazelle Peninsula, in April and May 1902, can be traced directly to the omissions of German land policy. It occurred in the Varzin Ranges, an area which, under To Vagira’s influence, had evaded German control and remained hostile to Europeans since the 1890s. Armed intervention was necessary in July 1898, and two more expeditions were carried out within twelve months of the imperial takeover, after To Vagira had raided a neighbouring
district and captured fifteen prisoners for a cannibal feast. None of the administration's attempts to subdue him had been successful.

Because of the entrenchment of the large plantations on the Kokopo coast, those seeking to take up land in the eastern Gazelle had to move further inland beyond the borders of the New Guinea Company and Ralum. One such was a German planter, Rudolf Wolff, who in October 1900 settled on 500 hectares of land purchased from the local 'big man' To Kilang at the foot of the Varzin near Paparatawa, about three walking hours from Herbertshöhe. For a while relations with his neighbours were good, as Wolff inaugurated a prosperous exchange trade in copra with several inland districts, but in March 1902 To Kilang disputed the conditions of the original land sale. He claimed that Wolff was clearing an area not included in the agreement, an area which involved a marawot, land sacred to the ingiet society.11

This was not the first case of New Guineans in the area reclaiming land which they had sold in the recent past, so during the next few weeks Wolff joined with the Mission of the Sacred Heart, which was fearful of impending unrest, in trying to have the dispute adjudicated by the administration. Government officials, however, treated the matter in a dilatory fashion, seemingly unaware of any urgency. With an official survey of the disputed land being continually delayed, Wolff's Tolai neighbours were becoming more and more antagonised by his failure to control labourers who were pilfering local poultry. Finally, when Wolff took the imprudent action of firing his gun to frighten off a young warrior who was a relative of To Vagira, the latter persuaded To Kilang that it was time to take matters into their own hands.12

First an ambush was laid to catch and kill Wolff but this failed, so on 3 April some two to three hundred warriors from the districts of Paparatawa and Tomanariki surrounded his home while he was absent and fell upon his wife with their axes as she bargained with them over a pig. They then killed the planter's baby daughter and ransacked the house, taking with them thirteen rifles and 1000 rounds of ammunition. Wolff himself nearly shared his family's fate when he rode up to the house to investigate and found a solid wall of warriors brandishing their weapons. Only by charging his horse through their ranks did he manage to escape.

While all this was happening, the Governor lay stricken and delirious with an attack of black-water fever. The Herbertshöhe administration was in the hands of a young magistrate, also by the name of Wolff. Like most of the colonial Powers, Germany lacked experienced adminis-
trative personnel. Wolff was a good example of the authority bestowed on officers who showed initiative in the field; an example, too, of the effect which a single individual could have on the pattern of racial relations in his area of German New Guinea. Wolff interpreted the murders as proof of wide-ranging, acute resentment against white rule, and he suspected that some 1200 people in the districts of Paparatawa, Tomanariki and Viviren were involved, at least tacitly. Instead of mounting a quick police raid to seek out the ringleaders, as was the normal practice, Wolff responded by arming and releasing onto the Varzin districts 2000 labourers offered by white planters.

It was a decision which the Colonial Department later described, with masterly understatement, as 'injudicious'. In fact Wolff with this one decision turned what had been a local incident into a racial campaign, a total war in which leaders of the Tolai finally rejected any idea of coexistence. Old inter-group hostilities, dormant since pre-contact days, were rekindled as coastal people fought inland tribes and New Irelanders and Solomon Islanders invaded the territory of the Tolai. A war of indiscriminate slaughter followed, in which innocent men and women were shot and missionaries threatened, the hostilities penetrating far inland to the newly-contacted Taulil people and reaching back to pacified districts where the lives of whites and New Guineans alike were in fresh danger; even pacified Tolai in reserves between Herbertshöhe and the Varzin showed solidarity with the offenders by signalling troop movements to them with drums. For their part, Europeans aided and abetted the reprisals because, in their eyes, the slaughter of a white woman and her child represented the ultimate desecration of the white race. Even the Catholic Mission allowed itself to be drawn into the fighting when the war threatened to envelop its stations in the more settled districts.

The war lasted into May 1902, with no quarter given on either side. To Kilang and To Vagira resisted fiercely, despite the superiority in firearms of the European forces. To Kilang was driven inland to the Taulil people, traditional enemies, who ambushed his party, killed his son and promptly cooked him. To Kilang himself escaped, but fell eventually in a battle with police near Paparatawa mission station. To Vagira, enemy of the white people to the last, went on fighting even when his own people were ready to deliver him up. It was not until 18 May that he was killed in a gun battle with the police. With To Vagira's death and over eighty dead and wounded, the Varzin rebels were finally
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subdued. Peace was formally sealed with the administration on the Empress's birthday, October 1902.

There is no doubt the whole affair would have been handled differently had Hahl been at the helm. Total response was not his trademark, though once the campaign had become a general one Hahl showed no hesitation in using it to extend control over an area which had thwarted him for some years. As a result of the victory, the Germans placed a police post at Paparatawa, confiscated half the district land, and constructed a road from the Varzin to Weberhafen on the north coast, thus opening up the ranges and incorporating the Varzin into the regional organisation. By 1904 they could claim to have the entire one-language area of the northern Gazelle Peninsula in their control, with 107 districts organised under government *luluais*.16

Now only one area of European settlement in the northern Gazelle remained beyond the direct supervision of Herbertshöhe. This was the Baining Mountains in the north-west, and here, two years after the Varzin war, an incident occurred which showed up the fragility of German notions of control, even when an area was formally within the regional organisation. The Baining Mountains had been opened up only in the late 1890s by the New Guinea Company and the Catholic Mission, the Company with an experimental plantation at Massawahafen and the mission with 500 hectares at Weberhafen. The Catholics also had sponsored Hahl's anti-slavery raids in the 1890s, and were heavily involved in the 'pacification' of the area. By 1900 the coast, to all appearances, was peaceful, with four mission stations in the region. One of them was St Paul, an artificial village among the Baining people, some hours inland from Massawahafen and the furthest point of German contact from the north coast.

St Paul was founded as the Sacred Heart Mission's first 'industrial village', in which slaves and orphans adopted and educated at Vunapope were gathered together with land and tools, and expected to function as cells of Christian peasant-farmers and artisans amongst their heathen compatriots. One of their number in St Paul was a Baining man, To Marias, who, after fourteen years as a ward of the mission, found himself at variance with Church policy and alienated from the way of life now expected of him. To Marias wanted to divorce his wife, a mission convert, in order to marry his lover Sa Vanut, who was already wife to another man. When the Director of St Paul, Father Matthäus Rascher, refused to sanction the divorce, the two lovers fled to To Marias's adoptive father, 'big man' in a nearby village. At
Rascher’s behest, both were brought back to St Paul on the end of a rope, where Rascher proceeded to beat To Marias for his sins while a nun dealt the same punishment to Sa Vanut.17

The incident only brought to the boil the mood of desperation among a small group of the Bainings. Not all the redeemed slaves welcomed the new order of things—the European dwellings, the precepts of Christian morality, the Western work ethic and the paternalism of a priestly regime. To To Marias in particular the ‘industrial village’ represented pain and humiliation. Whether he also saw it as an unwarranted deviation from the life the Baining people had always led; whether he regarded Rascher as a powerful rival who had to be eliminated if he himself were to stake a claim to authority over the area, is not clear. Certainly the mission stood in the way of To Marias’s freedom and independence. But the discontent went beyond To Marias’s particular grievances. Threats of violence had already been made by other Bainings against the mission in 1901, for, in setting up a large plantation at Weberhafen, it had tended to divert traditional market exchanges on the coast in its direction and away from the Baining people, who depended on coastal markets for their fish and trade goods.

Matthäus Rascher himself must bear some of the responsibility for worsening relations. An autocratic disciplinarian who tolerated no opposition, nor suffered fools gladly, Rascher was not popular even among his own mission confrères. Rascher clashed several times with Bishop Couppé, for instance, who was also a man who liked to get his own way. Numbers of Rascher’s colleagues regarded him as obstinate, impatient and distant, though these may have been simply the outward shortcomings of a man whose superior attainments lifted him above his fellow workers. Albert Hahl admired Rascher’s pioneering spirit, and respected greatly the work he had put into learning the language and customs of the Baining people. But Hahl, too, considered Rascher rather too complacent, particularly where his authority with the Bainings was concerned.18

The Bainings themselves had their own reasons for disliking Rascher. Not only was he given to administering beatings for all sorts of failures in his little flock, but he also organised the much-disliked public road works for the area. Thus he faced the added danger of being identified more with the secular government and its demands than with the disinterested aims of the Catholic Mission. Rascher did not believe that the Baining people could give any serious trouble. In his pioneer
grammar of the Baining language, he wrote that the Bainings were 'more unwarlike, more irresolute, more untalented and undeveloped than the coastal inhabitants'. Even after signs of sullen hostility had been evident for some time and the first rumours of a plot against his life became common knowledge, Rascher refused the Governor's offer of a police detachment for protection until things cooled down. All this suggests that the priest was naïve about the extent of his authority, and guilty, in Hahl's words, of a 'lapse in intellect rather than an infringement of morality or law'.

The lapse was to cost him dear, for To Marias was fashioning a conspiracy against his life. Where Christianity hung lightly on New Guinean shoulders, more as a socio-economic alliance than as the product of inner conviction, Rascher's determination to preserve the Catholic ideal of marriage was hardly likely to be accepted with equanimity. Soon after his detention and punishment, To Marias had planned to attack the mission station on 7 August 1904, but the attack had to be put off at the last moment because of the arrival of the New Guinea Company plantation manager, who was well armed. The opportunity came again on 13 August. On that morning, after breakfast, as was his wont, To Marias asked for Rascher's rifle in order to shoot pigeons for the mission's kitchen. While Rascher, feeling unwell, lay on his bed, To Marias stole up to the priest's window and shot him in the stomach. It was the signal for the conspirators to fall upon the rest of the missionaries. Three brothers and five sisters were cut down with axes as they went about their daily tasks; at the same time on a lonely station at Nacharunep some kilometres west of St Paul, Baining people murdered a Trappist monk, Father Rutten, as he sat reading his breviary. Those Bainings who were regarded as particular supporters of the priests were also killed, though several managed to escape to the coast and raise the alarm.

The importance of this episode lies less in the fact that some New Guineans were unhappy with the trappings of European rule than in the way it exposes the tenuous control which the Germans exercised over New Guineans in the early 1900s, even in an area comparatively long settled and formally included in the regional organisation. When the report of the massacre reached Herbertshöhe on 14 August, Hahl and most of his executive officers were absent on patrolling duty in the far reaches of the protectorate; there were only twenty police at Herbertshöhe itself. The immediate dispatch of sixteen of these to the north left the centre of the colony without any administrative leadership.
or security forces. At the same time, labourers on a European plantation on the north-east coast made plain the uneasiness between whites and New Guineans at large when, on learning what had occurred, they wanted to cease work 'because all the whites were dead'. When Hahl returned and could divert more police to the area, it still took a month of regular expeditions into the Kara range and the Krau valley, where the insurrection was centred, before the rebels were suppressed. Many of them came from the village of To Marias's adoptive father, and at least fifteen were killed in encounters with the administration's forces, among them To Marias himself whose head was taken triumphantly to the coast. Seven of the participants in the massacre were eventually hanged, while more than twenty were given long prison sentences. In death the rebels achieved a small, if bizarre, victory over Hahl, for he was indiscreet enough to pack off the heads of three of the executed Bainings to Freiburg University for 'scientific examinations', for which he was roundly condemned by almost the entire German press.

Recriminations followed the Baining massacre thick and fast. Newspapers in Australia and in Germany made it front page news for days, and friends and enemies of Catholicism speculated endlessly about the reasons for the slaughter. The Superiors of the Sacred Heart Order themselves were understandably anxious to play down the role of Rascher in the affair, and the Provincial of the New Guinea Mission, Father Linckens, argued defensively that the massacre was a case of racial hatred, an episode in the black-versus-white struggle in German New Guinea.

Hahl would have none of it. He refused to consider the attack as more than an act of violence directed against the immediate cause of resentment; a limited affair carried through by a small unrepresentative group of the Bainings. The time he took to ferret out the murderers and bring them to justice makes this clear: Hahl wanted no repetition of the Varzin war in 1902.

This was not the last of the trouble in the 'industrial villages' of the Baining Mountains. There was a revival of hostility in 1905 when the priests took local children away to school without their parents' knowledge or consent. And in 1911 the mission once more received a threat from a local 'big man'. Government troops made several more forays into the area after 1904, but by and large the north-west Bainings were much more tightly organised by the time war broke out in 1914, and sufficiently 'pacified' for 200 local people to be working on government projects and private plantations.
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Map 6  Manus Island

The Baining massacre was the last major collision on the Gazelle Peninsula, and with its resolution the problem of physical security receded into the memory of a frontier past for most of the planters in the Gazelle. Questions of economic development, of finding more and more New Guinean labour for the plantations had been urgent before 1904, and now they became the major issue in the settled areas. Hahl had already moved to strengthen the planting economy by exerting control over proven recruiting grounds outside the Gazelle Peninsula. The first choice for a new government settlement from which to carry this through fell naturally on northern New Ireland, a prime source of recruitment for Gazelle plantations in the past, where by 1900 sixteen trading stations also flourished, plus two small plantation businesses producing 1000 tonnes of copra annually.

Early in 1900 the imperial administration established its first regional station there, at Kavieng on the north-east tip of the island. Under the iron hand of Franz Boluminski, a district officer whose fiery eye, awful presence and ruthless energy remained fixed in the memory of the population for more than a generation, it took only five years to transform northern New Ireland into a model province of empire, a
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stable, organised and easily accessible area stretching from Kavieng to Pinubit, 155 kilometres to the south. It was in northern New Ireland that Hahl first levied his head tax; the area also provided a steady stream of villagers to European labour lines, so that by 1914 seventy per cent of the adult male population was estimated to have recruited for European service during German times. Local European plantations prospered from the surge in recruiting: between 1902 and 1914 planted areas in northern New Ireland expanded some tenfold with the help of casual and contract labour from neighbouring villages.

The success of the Kavieng station reinforced Hahl’s conviction that permanent government presence was the key to development, and it encouraged, too, the Berlin authorities to provide greater funds for the establishment of regional stations in other areas. In 1904 and 1905 two more were founded on the frontiers of control in already proven recruiting districts: Namatanai in southern New Ireland and Kieta in Bougainville. The pacification process in both areas proved to be more arduous and bloody than at Kavieng, and in the end the Germans could claim tight control only over districts in the immediate vicinity of their stations, though roads were built along the coastlines and luluais installed over a wide area. Even under these uncertain conditions economic expansion went on. By 1911 there were seven plantations in southern New Ireland, and by 1914 two large concerns in Bougainville. In both areas the native inhabitants were taking advantage of new opportunities by hiring themselves out as day labour, and by regularly planting coconuts to ensure an independent cash income for the future.

With these two areas under direct rule and at least formal control, Hahl’s attention after 1906 swung to the western half of the protectorate. This left the Admiralty Islands as the only large group in the archipelago without a permanent regional organisation, a deliberate decision because of the untenable position which the imperial government inherited there in 1900.

The Admiralties lie off the northern coast of New Guinea. The main island is Manus, eighty kilometres long, with a maximum width of 27 kilometres. It is by far the largest island of the group, mountainous and well-forested, with alternating steep coastal slopes and swampy bays. The other islands lie to the south of Manus, grouped in a semi-circle beginning in the east; the largest of these is Rambutjo. European activity during the German period was concentrated in the east of
Manus and on the out-islands. The crescent-shaped Los Negros Island lies at the eastern end of Manus, separated by the very narrow Loniu Passage. Seeadlerhafen, where the Germans were to make their headquarters, lies within this crescent; so too do Papitalai village and harbour, and Loniu village, one of the largest settlements in the group.

The Germans found three major social groups in the Admiralties. The Usiai were subsistence agriculturalists scattered in small groups in the interior and were considered by the others to be a dependent and inferior lot. On the coasts lived the Matankor, who combined agriculture with fishing. The third group were the Manus, a truly maritime people who lived in lavishly-constructed pile settlements built over the waters of swamps and bays. The Manus were—and still are—great sailors, in the old days taking their giant outriggers into the west and as far south as the Gazelle Peninsula; only for sago, taro, beans and timber were they dependent on land dwellers. The three groups together were estimated by the Germans to number some 13,000.27

Contacts with the Admiralties had been many and frequent since the early seventeenth century, and by the 1880s the inhabitants had acquired the reputation of being particularly independent and wild. Cannibalism here was supposed to be the worst in the Pacific, and continual blood feuds between the Manus and the land dwellers endangered the security of most European passers-by. The Forsayth concern was the first to establish a trader in the group in 1881; Hernsheim and others followed in the 1890s. They survived only with difficulty, becoming the pawns in a series of payback murders carried out by different Manus groups. The Manus made a specialty of cutting off European schooners close inshore and then massacring the crew to get to the weapons store. These were then used to give one party an advantage in the on-going struggles between rival settlements, with the result that the victims in their turn took to plundering passing boats in order to retaliate with arms of their own. Six European traders were murdered one after another in the decade before 1900; in 1899 there were three punitive expeditions to punish raids on whites, all of them unsuccessful.

When the imperial government took over the protectorate only two German and three Scandinavian traders resided in the islands, and there was every chance that they would soon be murdered or driven out. In the circumstances, with little finance and no ready investment capital, with an intransigent population and a negligible number of labour recruits from the area, the Germans would not consider extending
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direct rule to the Admiralties in the early years. For most of the period the administration sought merely to contain unrest by occasional repression, a policy which proved more and more inadequate with the passage of time.

The first visit by the new Governor, Rudolf von Bennigsen, in July 1899, set the pattern. Although friendly contact was made with the people of Mouk Island, von Bennigsen used force against the inhabitants of St Patrick Island to punish them for repeated attacks on Europeans. Within three months of his departure, another three white traders and several New Guineans had been killed, and a schooner plundered. The reprisal for these murders was one of the most savage the Germans ever carried out in New Guinea. Von Bennigsen and his naval reinforcements from SMS Seeadler employed a minimum of restraint, raking settlements with machine gun fire, setting loose a party of Manus auxiliaries to plunder the villages, and then destroying the houses. Twenty-five people were killed in an initial assault on the inhabitants of St Patrick Island; several attacks on Pitilu Island off the north coast of Manus claimed another twenty lives.28

Von Bennigsen's brutal methods failed to stop the predatory raids by these groups. Until 1911 a major expedition to the Admiralties took place at least every eighteen months to punish the people for some misdemeanour. Another three Europeans were killed during that time, besides several Chinese and Malay traders, and their Melanesian assistants. Continued bombardments, police raids and the destruction of property had no lasting effect. When a warship appeared, a cunning system of signal fires from island to island warned of its approach, and guilty villagers had time to ferry themselves and their valuables to safer places.

In the early days, Hahl tried the expedient of stationing troops in the group temporarily, but without success. War-like villagers scattered by the police only became wandering raiders, and the Mouk-Mandrian, Rubal and Pak peoples in the east of the islands simply turned from marauding the centres of European trading to terrorising friendly islanders in the vicinity; a hundred people were reportedly killed in a single raid on Ponam Island, north of Manus.29

What the Germans faced in Manus was not just aimless savagery or conservative resistance to change. It was rather a contact situation common to many parts of New Guinea. Patterns of hostility and alliance which had prevailed in the past among the various groups of Admiralty Islanders were now being influenced by the intervention of
importunate, white newcomers, who claimed the authority to order the lives of all villagers and possessed technological marvels capable of changing forever the old way of life. The long confrontation between one Manus Islander, Pominis, and the Germans is a striking illustration of the New Guinean ability to exploit the new sources of power while giving precedence to relations with neighbouring groups of islanders.

Pominis was from Papitalai, on Los Negros, a shore-dwelling group of Manus people who relied on canoes for fishing, transport and fighting; who obtained meat from the sea, from hunting, from breeding pigs and dogs, and from cannibalism; and who traded frequently with other Manus communities in coconut oil, dogs' teeth and clay pots. In the early days of German contact with Manus, Pominis seems either to have recruited for Herbertshöhe as a labourer or been taken there as hostage after a punitive expedition. Once in Herbertshöhe he became acquainted with the Catholic Mission, acquired an elementary education and offered himself as a convert, ultimately reaching the rank of catechist. Sometime before 1904 he was returned to Papitalai, where, from all accounts, he began evangelising, built two schools and set out to educate his village.

As the only educated, bilingual member of Papitalai, Pominis took the lead in adjudicating disputes with neighbours; perhaps the possession of a rifle gave him added authority. When, soon after his return, Papitalai was attacked by its long-hostile neighbour, Loniu, it was Pominis who led a retaliatory expedition. Loyalty to freshly-acquired foreign ethics was of no practical use in dealing with such traditional hostilities, and Pominis was quite prepared to use customary methods. Unfortunately, from that point on Pominis found himself condemned by local Europeans as the worst kind of half-educated savage, branded as a cannibal and accused of organising raids on schooners.

In March 1904 the German cruiser SMS Condor arrived off Papitalai, and the captain ordered Pominis to go with him to Herbertshöhe 'to be questioned'. Pominis showed himself willing at first, but at the last moment he was overcome by apprehension and retired into the interior, emerging only briefly to offer half his land as compensation for any wrong he had committed. His offer was refused, and a police party finally captured him with the help of people from Pitilu Island.

In considering what to do with Pominis, Governor Hahl, as was his custom, took a pragmatic, political view of the matter, rather than one based on a strictly legal interpretation of the charges. Hahl did not normally interfere in local disputes among New Guineans unless they
occurred in areas under government control, or posed a serious threat to the reputation of the regime. In his eyes, Pominis, the catechist turned war leader, constituted just such a threat; he was seen as a political delinquent who must be removed. Hahl wasted no time. Without formal court proceedings, he convicted Pominis as a menace to public order and banished him to Kavieng for ten years.32

Hahl's 'political' approach to such disputes enabled him to find the quickest and tidiest solution to the problems of inter-communal peace, but it also laid him open to charges of expediency and miscarriage of justice if his solutions compromised the interests of European colonists with powerful friends at home. The reputation of the Sacred Heart Mission was directly affected by the banishment of Pominis, for it had succoured him and trained him, and now his activities were being blamed on its proselytising policies. The tenacious Bishop Couppe was a fair match for Hahl. He would never let the good name of the Order be so tarnished. Accordingly, Couppe used his considerable influence within the German Zentrumspartei to have Pominis's case reopened. It was not long before an investigation by the Colonial Department discovered that Pominis's conviction had been secured in irregular fashion: no defence counsel had been provided, nor had Pominis been informed of the verdict against him.33 Hahl was rebuked for his haste. Pominis was released. Couppe could be well satisfied. Now Pominis returned to Papitalai, this time as the thin end of the missionary wedge to sound out the possibility of purchasing land for a station.

Pominis's case demonstrated, as Police Master Full concluded, that the administration could get its fingers burnt by taking sides in what were basically 'native feuds'.34 But if the Sacred Heart Mission thought that, as a result of its intervention, Pominis was now their man, they too were mistaken. For in the years after 1905 Pominis became more and more a law unto himself. Visiting Europeans used his linguistic talents, and he became a valued guide and interpreter for government and private expeditions to Manus. New complaints against him, that he had abducted a woman from a nearby village and planted a skull on a stick next to the Christian crucifix in Papitalai, were an unintended testament to his growing individualism. Papitalai eventually became too small for Pominis, and, after quarrelling with the 'big man', Songan, he agreed to leave the village and set up a new one with his followers on Mokareng Peninsula. By 1912, when Couppe arrived to buy land, Pominis had achieved a leading position as spokesman and intermediary for his people.
The Catholic Mission was afterwards to claim that, under Pominis's authority and through his good offices, it had purchased some 500 hectares in the Papitalai area. If this was so—and the Papitalai villagers were disputing it as late as the 1960s—then the Catholic Mission had been duped by its protégé. For later investigations into land dealings on Manus make it eminently clear that Pominis had no such authority to dispose of land, since genealogically he was from a junior branch of land controllers in Papitalai; at most he could dispose of ten or fifteen hectares. If Pominis did transfer 500 hectares to the mission, then he did so without any reference whatever to the rights and interests of the real owners.

It is evident from these transactions that Pominis was by now independent of all his sponsors, traditional and European, without either his own people or the Catholic Mission being certain where he stood, or what he was up to. The first to find this out was the mission. In November 1913 two priests and a brother arrived at Papitalai to claim their estate and till what they thought was prepared ground. Instead they found a wilderness. Pominis, who was supposed to set up a house and plantation for the newcomers, was nowhere to be seen. For three years the priests laboured fruitlessly in Papitalai, the people indifferent to their presence and unaware that much of their community land was assumed by the priests to belong to them. Finally, in 1916 the mission abandoned Papitalai altogether and moved its station to Bundralis, sixty-four kilometres to the west, on Manus. Pominis remained a maverick to the last. While the priests struggled dispiritedly at Papitalai in the years after 1913, he lived at Mokareng as a ‘Catholic pagan’, the teachings of his youth all but abandoned. Only many years later, when his compatriots had all become Catholic, did Pominis return to the fold.

All this was in the future. The disorder and aggression which had been a marked feature of the early German period in the Admiralties gradually gave way to an acceptance of German hegemony. The turning point in the eastern out-islands seemed to come after 1905: at the end of that year, after three Buka labourers had murdered their German employer, the people of Pak Island surprised the Germans by taking the law into their own hands and killing the labourers themselves.

The next step was the extension of direct rule to the Admiralties. The first lulusais were appointed in 1909, significantly enough on Pak. Two years later, a permanent government station was erected in Seeadlerhafen; the decision to establish the station probably was hastened by
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the need to compensate for the exhaustion of old recruiting grounds. German law and order spread so quickly from then on that by 1911 European businesses had begun to take a secure grip without the worry of warding off attacks. Hernsheim by then owned more than 980 hectares of land in the Admiralties, nearly half of it under cultivation; boat building and pearling were two of the industries already established; and the final sign of pacification was the jump in labour recruits, from a mere seventeen in 1905 to 823 in 1913.37

Manus was an outer point in the gradually-expanding economic frontier of German New Guinea. When war rudely shattered the colonial enterprise, that frontier, though yet slender and irregular, was outwardly impressive in extent. European businesses laid claim to more than 185 000 hectares of land, 34 190 hectares of which were plantations under cultivation; planted areas had increased by fifty per cent between 1908 and 1912 alone. From a little over 2950 tonnes at the beginning of imperial rule, copra exports had risen to 14 260 tonnes in 1914; total trade amounted to 16 000 000 marks.38 Governor Hahl had mapped out a development program for the years 1914 to 1917 which, under the benefit of large but decreasing Reich subsidies, would round out the local administration with new stations in southern New Britain, Bougainville and on the main rivers of the mainland; build up the police force, especially the expeditionary corps used to open up and ‘pacify’ new areas; and increase government schools and health facilities for New Guineans. Within ten years Hahl hoped to have the colony independent of imperial subsidies.39

This neat, European model of progress was, however, under strain from the New Guinean end. Resistance to German control still hampered settlement in the Bismarck Archipelago and on the mainland, and New Guinean self-sufficiency was proving an obstacle to the conception of development which Hahl and the planters held. To begin with, the extension of regional stations throughout the protectorate and the appointment of native intermediaries were no guarantee of complete German control. Though it was basically a system of simple, direct rule and luluais were little more than levers through which to mount police action or levy taxation and forced labour, the regional organisation fell short even of these modest goals in many areas. Not all luluais were able to gain the respect of their groups; and astute ‘big men’ tended to avoid the office altogether because of the dangers associated with unpopular
government demands. The Germans also had to deal with many cases of partiality, excessive zeal and ignorance on the part of their agents.40

The root of these problems lay in that these managerial positions were generally the first institutionalised, political offices in New Guinea societies, and cut across customary categories of leadership and power. Leaders of local groups were not the only instruments of social control, and what influence and policy-making roles they did possess were usually circumscribed. They could not and would not sacrifice the co-operation of individuals on whom they depended for daily support, by making demands in the name of a new abstract authority.

The other main instrument of mobilisation, the poll tax, also had a limited effect. Official figures indicate that the tax was paid fairly readily throughout New Guinea. Revenue rose steadily from 76 370 marks in 1908 to 301 550 marks in 1914, and reports mention only minor resistance to the tax, probably because it removed some of the forced labour obligations to which people like the Tolai took particular exception.41 But the head tax was not generally achieving the ends for which Hahl had designed it, namely to force ever larger numbers of New Guineans onto the labour market and thus accustom them to the plantation economy. The coastal Tolai experienced little trouble meeting the tax from existing trade incomes, while, on New Ireland, villagers in both the north and the south were engaging in day-labour at local plantations to earn it, then returning to subsistence gardening and coconut cultivation in their home villages. Indeed, the head tax had started an upsurge in local coconut plantings so that New Guineans might enhance their own trading incomes.

The labour question posed the most serious of all the threats to the model of progress that Hahl and the planting community conceived for New Guinea. New Guineans, it is true, underwent much greater pressure to offer their labour to white planters than did Samoans or Ponapeans. In May 1913 Hahl estimated that ten per cent (or about 20 000) of contacted villagers were engaged in some capacity in the service of the non-New Guinean population,42 a high percentage for a colony in New Guinea's stage of development, with a people fragmented by topographical, cultural and social factors; in the Kavieng area alone more than fifty per cent of the male population had already recruited for European work.

These figures, however, only give an indication of the size of the economically-active population, those who participated at different stages in the European economy. They do not prove that there was a
vast army of New Guineans assimilated into the plantation economy by 1913. In fact no recognisable ‘urban’ work force existed in German New Guinea, no pool of permanent wage labour. Employment with Europeans was in general a temporary experience: the majority of New Guineans returned to their villages after completion of contracts or casual labour, and resumed subsistence gardening. Plantations in the Gazelle Peninsula were also suffering in 1913-14 from the preference of people in old recruiting areas to work locally. In 1913 three-quarters of all the recruits from northern New Ireland worked on local plantations, and this region, like southern New Ireland, Bougainville and New Britain, experienced a relative decrease over the years in the numbers of recruits it contributed to the total labour force. 43

Whether this relative economic independence would have continued had the war not intervened is at least doubtful. For the fragmented societies of German New Guinea were confronted by a growing class of pan-German planters, which could, and did, place considerable pressure on the policies of the colonial government. Theirs was a crude philosophy of colonisation: they considered that colonies belonged to the immigrant settler, not to the native inhabitants, nor to the local administration. They saw the ‘native’ as a negligible quantity, a mere commodity to be exploited in the search for profit; and they viewed the government’s first priority as protection of settlers, doing all in its power to help them achieve prosperity, in this case by securing more and better labour.

Inevitably these beliefs and their intolerance brought the pan-German settler clique into conflict with Hahl, who sought to develop New Guinea with an eye to the people of the land and their future. Hahl appreciated that village New Guineans had a claim to just and sympathetic treatment, and to some protection against the consequences of radical social change: hence his work to ensure that villagers in areas of wholesale land alienation should have reserves on which to fall back. He also fought to regulate the processes of labour recruitment, for, with a practical sense of the colony’s future, he was concerned at the depopulation of some areas brought about by excessive recruiting. In 1909-10 he wanted to close the entire protectorate to the recruitment of women, and he periodically placed an embargo on ‘worked out’ areas so that population balance and local economic activity would not be damaged permanently by premature depletion of labour. 44

But in the end it was the size of white settler communities, and their
ability to mobilise support back in Germany for their sectional interests, which determined the degree of colonial exploitation. German New Guinea had a European population of more than 1000 by 1913. Of these, some 350 were traders and planters, and the vast majority of them were concentrated around the centres of government activity in the Gazelle Peninsula and northern New Ireland. Giant companies like the New Guinea Company, the DHPG of Samoa fame, and Rudolf Wahlen’s Hamburg South Sea Company (HSAG), possessed equally giant stakes in the economy of the colony. A branch of the highly nationalist German Colonial Society had been functioning in New Guinea since December 1903, and a Planters’ Society since mid-1904, while an additional pressure group was found in the Governor’s Council, though until 1914 it was subject to Hahl’s appointments and possessed no legislative powers.

Exploiting every avenue of access to the home authorities, the planting community managed often to impede Hahl in his efforts to protect New Guineans from the effects of European penetration. Because of their influence, Hahl was permitted to close only northern New Ireland and Nusa to the recruitment of women, instead of the whole protectorate. In 1913 the settlers’ unceasing demands for labour and the chronic shortage of finance forced Hahl to renew the recruiting drive in already hard-pressed areas, with the result that there were major outbreaks of violence in southern New Ireland and at Aitape on the northern mainland. Hahl was caught also between the conflicting pressures of competing entrepreneurs. When, occasionally, the smaller settlers found themselves on the Governor’s side against the interests of large-scale capital enterprises, it was usually the latter which triumphed, not Hahl. Thus he failed to get abolished the continued privileged access of the New Guinea Company to labour resources on the mainland, or to curtail the right of the DHPG to recruit labour for Samoa in the Archipelago.

Because of his attempts to procure equitable treatment for the inhabitants of New Guinea and to conserve them into the future, Governor Hahl attracted the contempt and genuine animosity of many of the planting community. When he left New Guinea in 1914 at the end of his term of office, prominent settlers bade him good riddance as ‘one of the best hated men of the protectorate’. And yet, in their basic ideals and ultimate objectives, German planters were much closer to Hahl than they realised or were willing to accept. At heart Hahl was in sympathy with the needs of settler-entrepreneurs. Though he claimed
in his farewell speech in April 1914 to have recognised the importance of the relationship between the two races for the future of the colony, it was not a claim based on an ideal of equality for New Guineans in their own land. Rather it was an admission, and a warning, that the prosperity of New Guinea lay in the Germans' ability to tap the labour of the population by creating an ordered existence. Hahl was adamant that New Guinea life and thought must be assimilated to that of the German people if the Reich's national ends were not to be subverted. With this in mind, it is easier to understand Hahl's assumption that violence was a natural and inevitable part of the colonising process.
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