The next day as we were steaming towards Takataka we met Deck in his launch and he came on board and asked if I had got Aliasi and I told him that the boy had run away. Then he asked me if I had got the Marist teachers on board and I said no of course not. He got very nasty and almost ordered me to take them away as they were on his station.

—Resident Magistrate Thomas Edge-Partington, 1910

The Catholic missionaries varied in their class origins, as opposed to the Melanesian Mission clergy, who deserved their moniker of ‘God's Gentlemen’. Two brothers, John Northcote Deck and Norman Cathcart Deck, were the mainstays of the SSEM. The Decks were just as much middle-class gentlemen, of impeccable English Quaker heritage with links to the Baring Bank family. Northcote (as he was always known) was a medical doctor and Norman was a dentist. Thomas Edge-Partington, the Resident Magistrate, was of gentry origins as well. Dr Deck, who acted so imperiously to Edge-Partington, could by many accounts be very self-righteous and annoying. It is comical to see the British class system being played out on board ships off the coast of southeast Malaita, with each standing their ground.

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1 SINA, BSIP 14/40, DM TWE-P to RC CMW, 1 Jan 1911 and 12 Nov 1910.
Once an administrative headquarters had been established at 'Aoke, other developments followed. Tens of thousands of male Malaitans were harnessed as labourers on protectorate plantations, adding to the earlier changes that occurred because workers had travelled to overseas plantations and returned with new ways. There was also a local commercial development: the Young family attempted to establish a copra plantation on Malaita, the Malayta Company, which had links to the SSEM. The Christian scene deepened as well, with the arrival of Catholic missionaries who challenged the joint hegemony of the Melanesian Mission and the SSEM. All of these factors brought Malaita more into the mainstream of protectorate life.

### Malaitans and Indentured Labour within the Protectorate

Table 5: Internal labour trade in Solomon Islands, 1913–40.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choiseul</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal</td>
<td>1,874</td>
<td>3,831</td>
<td>2,627</td>
<td>8,332</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makira</td>
<td>1,064</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>3,213</td>
<td>5.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaita</td>
<td>10,476</td>
<td>15,707</td>
<td>10,413</td>
<td>36,596</td>
<td>67.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temotu</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>2,804</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Islands</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>15,247</td>
<td>23,792</td>
<td>15,071</td>
<td>54,110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.d. = no data

Source: Shломовиць and Bedford 1988, 77.

Woodford knew that there was no way to develop the protectorate and its plantations while most of the available labour supply was being siphoned off to Queensland and Fiji. Although he had no influence over the forced return of thousands of Solomon Islanders from Queensland during the 1900s, it certainly suited his designs. After supervising this repatriation process, he concentrated his efforts on directly achieving the same end for the Fiji labour trade, which in the 1900s was drawing off an average
of 250 Solomons labourers a year. After several years of lobbying from Woodford, supported by his old deputy Mahaffy (now assistant to the high commissioner), in May 1910 Sir Everard im Thurn recommended the cessation of the Solomons labour trade to Fiji from the last day of 1911—Indian and New Hebridean labour would suffice for Fiji. Fiji had received 2,623 Solomon Islands labourers between 1890 and 1909. Over those same years, 1,281 were repatriated (an average of 67 a year), 701 died (26.7 per cent) and 223 children were born to labourers. Just over 2,500 Solomon Islanders remained in Fiji at the end of 1909. Malaitans began returning from Fiji in the early 1910s, some with wives and families, in a process similar to but smaller than the exodus from Queensland. Woodford suggested that any Malaitans who so wished should be allowed to settle near 'Aoke station until their future arrangements were made. Just as occurred in Australia, a residual immigrant Melanesian community remains in Fiji.

Fiji contracts were for three years, which meant that the last indentured labourers to work overseas returned in early 1915. German recruiting in the Solomons for Samoa also ceased as soon as the First World War began (it had not stopped under the 1899 Treaty of Samoa). Though Woodford succeeded in holding the labour supply within the protectorate, he failed in another plan: to introduce a capitation tax on adult males. The high commissioner refused this request and the tax did not eventuate until 1921–23.

Just as work in Queensland and Fiji shaped Malaitans and their new plantation culture, so too did work within the protectorate during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Malaitans made up two-thirds of the protectorate’s indentured labourers: 36,596 of the 54,110 contracts between 1913 and 1940, or 67.63 per cent. Statistics are inaccurate between 1896 and the early 1910s, although we know indenture

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2 CO 225/71 (1905) (microfilm 2868), Western Pacific no. 28501, RC CMW to Alfred Lyttleton, SSC, 9 Aug 1905; CO 225/85 (1908), Western Pacific no. 13760, RC CMW to HC Sir Everard im Thurn, 2 Mar 1908; CO 225/91 (microfilm 2915), AM, Assistant to HC IIT, 'Report of a Visit to the Solomons', 8 Apr 1910, 301.
4 CO 225/90 (1910) (microfilm 2914), 'Return of Immigrants Introduced into the Colony of Fiji from Solomon Islands since 1890', with HC Sir Everard im Thurn to SSC Earl of Crew, 19 Jan 1910.
5 SINA, BSIP 14/7, RC MW to DM AWW, 23 Apr 1912.
7 CO 225/90 (1910) (microfilm 1814), HC Sir Everard im Thurn to SSC Earl of Crew, 15 Jan 1910; CO 225/91 (microfilm 2914), WPHC HC im Thurn to SCC, comments on Draft Labour Legislation for BSIP, 14 May 1910.
8 Reliable statistics are unavailable from before 1913.
remained at a low level before 1905, when the copra industry began to expand.9 There were 10,476 Malaitan contracts between 1913 and 1919, 15,707 from 1920 to 1929 and 10,413 between 1930 and 1940. Ian Frazer calculated that the number of Solomon Islanders recruited actually declined over later years, as did the number of Malaitan recruits: from 1,560 a year from 1913–22 to 890 a year from 1931–40, a decline of 43 per cent. This was due at least partly to the Great Depression.10 Individuals served multiple contracts and the actual number of Malaitan individuals involved is probably around 27,000, which is nevertheless extraordinary from an island with a population of around 50,000.11 The only other islands that provided large numbers were Guadalcanal, which provided 8,332 labourers under contract, and Makira with 3,213. The spread of employment in 1911 gives some idea of where Malaitans were working in the early years, although few worked for the Malayta Company except as casual labour.

Table 6: Labour employed in Solomon Islands, 31 March 1911.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Numbers of Labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd</td>
<td>1,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns Philp &amp; Co.</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns Philp &amp; Co.</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands Development Co.</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortland Plantations Ltd</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malayta Co. Ltd</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svensen &amp; d’Olviveryra</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugotu Rubber Co.</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavare Plantations Ltd</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Hamilton</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Oien</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gizo Solomon Plantations Ltd</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Planting &amp; Trading Co.</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government employment (including police)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 smaller employers</td>
<td>661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>3,960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CO 225/96 [1911], [microfilm] 2920, RC CMW, ‘Minute of the Supply of Native Labourers for Employment in the British Solomon Islands, for the Information of His Excellency the High Commissioner’, 30 June 1911.

9 Frazer 1990, 192.
10 Ibid., 193.
11 Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988.
The majority of the contracts (73 per cent in 1914) were for £6 per year for two years, although there was also a tapering, more experienced labour elite (7 per cent) paid over 20/- a month and up to 40/- a month on short contracts, similar to the time-expired labourers in Queensland. As always with indenture agreements, the employers had the upper hand; some cheated new workers of parts of their wages and there was little means to complain or gain recompense. Although there was little direct resistance, aggrieved labourers could resort to covert retaliation, just as their fathers and grandfathers had done in Queensland and Fiji.¹²

Figure 8.1: On board a recruiting vessel in about 1914.
Source: British Museum, photograph by George Rose, Rose Stereographs, Edge-Partington Collection, Album 4, 1037.

¹² Moore 1993; Bennett 1993.
Judith Bennett divides the regulation of labour into three periods: 1897 to 1913, 1914 to 1920, and 1920 until the outbreak of war in the Pacific. Labour Regulations passed in 1897 set indenture contracts at two years (varied to three years in 1908 until overruled by the Colonial Office in 1911), allowed for government inspections of plantations and required employers to repatriate their labourers. Yet they did not establish average minimum conditions, and despite the new rules the early years were rough and ready and poorly supervised.¹³ There were horrific cases of physical abuse. One Yandina overseer used a stockwhip on his men, and at Baunani men were struck with *loia* canes. In some cases, labourers retaliated and deaths occurred.¹⁴

New Labour Regulations were passed in 1910. They raised the minimum enlistment age from 14 to 16 years of age and included a rations scale, although there is ample evidence that this was not followed and that employers became even more miserly during the 1930s Great Depression. However, two points need to be made, which were equally valid for Queensland and Fiji: labourers cultivated their own gardens, hunted and fished, and traded with local villagers, and in the long run employers had to provide labourers nutritionally adequate rations if they expected them to work hard. Very few copies of the 1910 regulations were printed, which angered the new inspector of labour, William Bell. He complained directly to the secretary of state, which was insubordination of the highest form and indicated both his personality and desperation. Much to Bell’s dismay, when an assistant inspector was appointed in 1914 he was immediately seconded into the Customs section of the administration.¹⁵

The numbers employed could vary by 1,000 between years: at the end of 1913 there were 4,446 indentured labourers in the BSIP; 3,251 at the end of 1914; and 4,111 at the end of 1915. The 1914 downturn was due to dysentery epidemics that killed 101 workers and deterred new recruits. Most new contracts were ratified at Tulagi, and about one-tenth of them at `Aoke. The turnover was huge: of 3,103 labourers in 1914, 2,905 were paid off, 178 died (6 per cent) and 26 deserted. Bell calculated that since 1911 only one-quarter of the labour force had remained stably employed. Even allowing for reengagements, this did not augur well for continuity in skills on plantations, and if workers went home between

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¹³ Bennett 1993, 134.
¹⁴ Bennett 1987, 154.
¹⁵ CO 225/119 (1913) (microfilm 2938), IL WRB to SSC, 10 Apr 1913.
contracts, which they often did, they had to be retrained once they returned. Nor were the overall numbers expected to grow. Woodford believed that the supply could increase to 5,000 or even 6,000 labourers with the incentive of higher wages, but no further, thus placing a cap on the expansion of the copra industry.

How different was the Malaitan plantation experience within the protectorate from that in Queensland or Fiji? The best research is contained in Bennett’s *Wealth of the Solomons* and an article and a chapter by her. Parts of the process had not changed since the decades of the external labour trade. The same passage masters or their sons supervised the recruiting (part of the beginning of a colonial elite). Beach bonuses were paid and passed to families, and to bigmen who had an interest in arranging the labourers. Much of the early work involved clearing rainforest, which was strenuous, dangerous work, since *Anopheles* (malarial) mosquitos lurked in the undergrowth. Copra-making was hard work too, but then so also was cutting green cane in Queensland and Fiji. Quite young teenagers were engaged, although some of them worked as domestic servants. All labourers quickly picked up Pijin English, having already been exposed to it on Malaita. Labourers travelled and worked with strangers or enemies from other islands or their own. It was a masculine environment: few women were involved (no single females were recruited after 1909) and if there were women they were married to other labourers. There were no sexual outlets other than the odd clandestine relationship with women in nearby villages or homosexuality, which seems to have flourished. There were no towns to escape to during free time on Saturday afternoons or Sundays. For the most part, labourers were confined to the plantations and close environs. Most first encountered Chinatown and a substantial European settlement when they passed through Tulagi to be paid off.

The plantation regime was harsh: the government’s presence was minimal and record-keeping was poor; even six-monthly inspections were spasmodic and rudimentary. Planters maintained their own militias to protect their labourers, particularly on the Malaya Company plantations. The system that developed included compulsion (via a head tax) and coercion, since the government and the planters believed that Solomon

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17 Bennett 1987, chs 7 and 8; 1981; 1993; See also Moore 1993 for a Queensland comparison.
Islanders were inherently lazy and had to be prodded, forgetting that they had been involved in plantation work elsewhere since the 1870s. Some plantations had reputations as being unsafe or as having harsh overseers (Levers plantations were the worst); passage masters tried to guide ‘new chums’ to safer plantations, but recruiters sometimes lied, naming safe destinations but then delivering labourers to harsh working conditions. Early on there were many desertions, but these had lessened by the 1910s and 1920s. Overseers were often inexperienced Australians from rural backgrounds; there was a rapid turnover and they proved their authority by physical intimidation, if not outright violence. Bennett describes the scene well:

New overseers would be provoked by a deliberately disobedient individual, and then a group of his friends and kinsmen would throw themselves at the man. If the overseer acquitted himself well, laborers accepted the odd kick in the backside or hit over the ear he doled out to them—given there was justification.

There is no doubt that order on BSIP plantations was maintained by force and that the government usually turned a blind eye. Labourers were not entirely innocent: some learnt how to operate the system and managed to provoke overseers, then quickly got to the labour inspector before the manager did and lodged a complaint. They also used the ‘weapons of the weak’, short-weighting sacks of copra, sabotage, setting fires, eating fresh coconuts and killing plantation cattle.

One notable difference from the Queensland and Fiji period is that in the protectorate plantations were not made part of the Christian conversion process. Christian labourers would have teamed up, but there was no outreach from the denominations and plantations were usually isolated from mission settlements. Plantations in the Solomons were mainly secular commercial ventures, except for the Malayta Company plantations at Baunani, Aola and in the Russell Islands, with their SSEM links. Indeed, Malaitan conversion to Christianity seems to have slowed between the 1910s and 1930s, and it may be that without the overseas indenture-Christianity package, which I have argued speeded early conversion on Malaita, there was insufficient outside stimulus to motivate the many non-Christians to convert. In some ways, BSIP plantations

19 Ibid., 139.
20 Ibid., 138.
21 Ibid., 141–49.
made it easier to maintain pre-Christian religious concepts, but there were often conflicts, for instance if a menstruating woman cooked food for ancestor-worshiping Malaitans. Labourers preferred to be accommodated in small groups from one island or language area. Plantation owners and managers realised this helped maintain stability, but it is also true that as Christian numbers increased it was often best to separate those who followed ancestral religions so as to lessen disputes and resulting requests for compensation when taboos were broken.22

The plantation owners had made a huge land grab and had great expectations, but they worried that the labour supply was insufficient. It was generally believed that the population was declining and that this would impact the numbers of workers available.23 In 1916, Hubert Murray, lieutenant-governor of Australian Papua, came to the protectorate to report on the alleged labour shortage. He accepted what was a standard calculation in the Solomons—one labourer to maintain 2.47 hectares of coconut palms—but considered this generous and suggested that one labourer to 3.7 to 4.95 hectares was possible by the standards of Papua or the Philippines. He concluded that, based on the 121.7 square kilometres already planted, and with the introduction of cattle to graze down the undergrowth, the available 4,000 labourers were more than enough for maintenance, although there were clearly problems with labour distribution and desires to expand plantations. The issue was more that the planters had taken up an excessive 2,023 square kilometres of land and were calculating a future labour supply based on their acquisition of land rather than on their ability or need to plant more coconut palms. Murray realised that Malaita, with its large population, was the key to future expansion, although officials were still very uncertain of the actual size of the population. Murray estimated 70,000 people, which, if accurate (it was not), he believed was sufficient, along with smaller numbers from the other islands, for future plantation expansion.

The cost of recruiting labour escalated fast: in 1911 recruiters were paid between £6 and £8 a head for labourers; in 1915 this increased on Malaita to £10 to £12 and in 1916 to £14, double similar expenses in Papua. The cost was largely justified by the need on Malaita to use two European recruiters and two boats, one to stand off for safety and cover the other on shore. The recruiting fee reached close to double the average annual

22 Ibid., 146.
23 Bennett 2014; Hopkins 1922.
wage. Beach bonuses, the gift given to kin, consisted of trade goods worth about £4 per recruit. If one adds the annual wage to half of the recruiting costs and the beach bonus (for one year), in 1916 Malaitan labourers were costing around £17 a year. The recruiting costs—for the ship and extra crew—were about equal to the wage and bonus costs, an unviable combination. Murray commented further on Malaita:

The Malaita system strikes one as cumbrous and expensive, and one is inclined to wonder whether, if the island were brought under control, so that recruiters could visit the inland villages, and thus free themselves from the tyranny of the ‘salt water men’, they could not achieve better results at a less cost.24

Murray’s advice was to proceed quickly to bring Malaita under government control. Government officials told him this would be accomplished over the next five years, although the planters feared that ‘pacification’ would result in less recruits being available:

Very little of the labour from Malaita, it is explained, is voluntary, most of the recruits being sent to work by leading men of their tribe or village; with the advantage of civilisation the power of these leading men will decline, and the young men, being left to choose for themselves, will most decidedly elect to stay at home.25

Murray did not take health and mortality issues into account, which affected not only the labourers but all BSIP residents. Dysentery (like malaria) was a major, perennial problem; epidemics during 1913–15 may in some areas have killed as much as 10 per cent of the population. Outbreaks on many plantations caused mortality rates as high as 5–6 per cent in 1914–15, with an average rate of from 2–3 per cent between the mid-1910s and the end of the 1920s. The 1914 death rate was a horrific 10 per cent on Levers plantations, leading to suspension of all recruiting from August to December.26 In 1928, dysentery broke out in Tulagi jail among the prisoners from Sinalagu, Malaita, imprisoned after the massacre of Bell and his party (see Chapter 10), and 20 per cent died, many innocent of any crime. In 1931, the BSIP Annual Report judged dysentery to be endemic. Plantations were ill-equipped to handle

25  Ibid.
26  Bennett 1987, 158.
outbreaks of disease: housing was basic, sanitation was poor and hospitals were rudimentary or nonexistent. Bell, then the inspector of labour, said in 1914 that only three plantations had adequate hospitals. If a plantation had less than 50 labourers they were exempt from having any formal hospital.

Malayta Company

While the government was establishing itself on Malaita, the missions continued to expand, although they had already established their patterns of operation. The major change was the arrival of Malayta Company Ltd, registered in Sydney, New South Wales, and begun in 1908–09 by Ernest and Horace Young, brothers of SSEM Superintendent Florence Young, as a commercial trading and copra plantation venture that could help support the mission. Just as the QKM had depended for part of its finances on the Youngs’ Fairymead plantation, on Malaita the SSEM worked hand-in-hand with the Malayta Company. While the Youngs claimed the two ventures were separate, they never were—the mission’s vessel was used to recruit labourers, the plantation’s vessels were used by the mission, and mission head Norman Deck and his brother Northcote purchased land for the company and Norman interfered in the management of its store. Furthermore, the company made applications to purchase land on behalf of the mission and there was a major SSEM boarding school at Baunani, the company’s headquarters. Although the decision to shift the QKM’s operations to the Solomons was justified as a spiritual challenge, it also involved Florence Young’s ambition and some level-headed logistical decisions, including that to establish the Malayta Company on land near the SSEM headquarters at Onepusu. The combined SSEM-Malayta Company operation is the best example of industrial Christianity in the Solomons, and equivalent to Charles Abel’s Kwato Mission in Australian Papua.

27 Ibid.
28 BSIP AR, 1931, 7.
30 Wetherell 1996.
There were 500 shares, with two-thirds owned by the two brothers (who were the managing directors) and one-third by various relatives and friends. The company’s first base was at Baunani, north of Onepusu. Malaita had no resident traders, who elsewhere in the protectorate facilitated land acquisitions. This left the Youngs and Decks with a difficult task since they had little understanding of indigenous land tenure. Purchases depended on the skills of the Deck brothers, who were both novices at dealing with Solomon Islanders. The Malayta Company land negotiations were motivated by a desire to gain control of a huge block of coastal land, and there was little concern with procedural fairness or establishing good will with the local people. The company’s land problems on Malaita were due partly to its staff’s inexperience, but also important was that Malaitans and others who had returned from Queensland and Fiji had a greater understanding of land values and were opportunistic in exploiting the company.
Map 15: The 24 kilometres of Malayta Company land claims along the west coast of Malaita in 1920.

Source: SINA, BSIP 18/II/1, Claims 1–6 and 51, Phillips Land Commission; redrawn by Vincent Verheyen.
In 1908, Malayta Company began to lease land along the coast of central west Malaita. It managed to secure a thin, 24-kilometre coastal strip centred on Baunani and stretching from south of the Kwa’a River to Su’u Harbour (see Map 14, Chapter 7, and Map 15 above). The land was leased in small pieces paid for with a combination of pounds sterling, porpoise teeth, pigs and tobacco, often by Norman Deck or his brother Northcote. The early purchases amounted to 926 hectares, with another 1,469 added in 1911. The company was not skilful at buying land. For instance, Ernest Young purchased 617.5 hectares adjacent to Baunani without accurate knowledge of the ownership, and in another case the company bought land at Baigua Island from the wrong people, land the Catholic Church had already purchased from the correct owners. In later years, particularly during the Phillips Lands Commission of 1919–24, many of these land deals were found suspect. Boundaries were not surveyed, land had been leased from false owners, or payments were improperly distributed amongst the actual land owners. The Malayta Company kept accumulating land: in 1911 Woodford had 14 fresh applications on his desk from the company for provisional land purchases on Malaita and elsewhere. The company also applied to purchase pieces of land on behalf of the SSEM, such as, in 1909, a 19.3-kilometre coastal frontage at ‘Ataa, and more land at Uru Harbour on the east coast and on Maana'oba Island just off north Malaita.

The Malayta Company accumulated 4,000 ha around Bunani. Their next land acquisition, in 1913 for £35,000, was the most expensive land purchase in the protectorate at that time. This was 12,359 hectares.
controlled by trader Billy Pope on Aola Island, northeast Guadalcanal, and Talina and Yandina plantations in the Russell Islands. All up, the Malayta Company accumulated 14,820 hectares, making them the second-largest plantation company during the 1910s and 1920s, after Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd.

Figure 8.3: SSEM teachers at Manaba, part of the Malayta Company plantation.
Source: Deck Collection, Black & White Photographs, 23.

In a pattern rare on Solomons plantations, the Youngs and Decks combined Christian proselytising with commerce. (The only other mission to do this, in a smaller way, was the Methodists.) Just as the Youngs had done in Queensland, the company included evening education and Christian conversion in its activities. In 1911, the SSEM transferred their training school to Baunani, where it remained until the Malayta Company shifted its focus to the Russell Islands in 1918.

In February 1912, the Malayta Company began small trading stations on `Aoke Island and in Maramasike Passage, along with others near Port Adam. Soon after, the company abandoned trading to concentrate on its plantations, although in the meantime they had annoyed other traders

38 Golden 1993, 429; Boutilier 1979, 50.
by paying relatively high prices for locally produced copra. The SSEM encouraged its adherents to recruit for Malayta Company plantations because of the Christian atmosphere, and for a time urged followers to sell copra only to the company. Yet this was as far as Christian sentiment went: the company was mean with labourers’ rations, worked them hard and imposed stern discipline, including physical punishments.39

Once the strip of land was acquired, during 1910 the company’s ship the *Royal Endeavour* regularly recruited batches of 15 to 75 labourers for Baunani plantation and its outstations. They were employed at between £9 and £18 a year on two- and three-year contracts. Most of the labourers were from Makira, Russell Islands and Guadalcanal. As in other areas of the Solomons, labour recruits had to be over 14 years of age and women had to be accompanied by their husbands.40 In 1911, Malayta Company was employing 649 labourers, just a few more than Burns Philp & Co. (642), but well behind Levers Pacific Plantations Ltd (1,213).41 During 1910, four Europeans were based at Baunani, but by 1912 there were eight, three employed by the Malayta Company and five by the SSEM. The company also had four overseers at Manaba and Hulo.42 Until March 1912, all Malayta Company labourers had to be signed on in Tulagi. After that the process became easier since it could be arranged through ‘Aoke, or onwards from 1914 at Aola on Guadalcanal.43

The Malayta Company had continuous troubles with its neighbours—it had failed to honour preservation of sacred sites, which, along with strong feelings that it had misappropriated land, angered Malaitans. The company had to post sentries day and night to guard its plantations from the surrounding people. There are continuous reports of prowlers around at night, although there were suggestions that the watchmen were not being entirely honest and perhaps knew the prowlers better than they admitted.44 Labour problems began to emerge in September 1911 when,

39 SINA, BSIP 14/41, 1911–13, RM TWE-P to RC CMW, 6 Feb 1912.
40 SINA, BSIP 14/40, RM TWE-P to RC CMW, 24 Jan, 4 Mar, 28 Apr, 11 May, 17 May, 4 Oct, and 14 Nov 1910, and 12 Aug and 25 Sept 1911; BSIP 15 VIII, Malaita DO diary, 2 Apr 1910. The early irregular contracts were anomalous since all labourers over age 14 should have received £6 a year.
41 CO 225/96 (1911) (microfilm 2920), RC CMW, ‘Minute of the Supply of Native Labourers for Employment in the British Solomon Islands, for the Information of His Excellency the High Commissioner’, 30 June 1911.
42 SINA, BSIP 14/41, 1911–13, ‘List of Whites and Half-castes Resident on Mala’, RM TWE-P to RC CMW, 1 Feb 1912.
43 SINA, BSIP 14/7, RC CMW to RM AWW, 17 Mar 1912.
44 SINA, BSIP 14/41, 1911–13, RM TWE-P to RC CMW, 24 Apr 1912; BSIP 14/10, DO Malaita to A/RC, 17 Nov 1915.
after three months on the plantation, Jackson Tomesulu from Guadalcanal, who had attended a school at one of the Melanesian Mission stations, led a mutiny, during which he attacked the manager and overseer with a hoe and stole items including dynamite and detonators. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment.45

We know something about labour conditions on the Malayta Company plantations. When William Bell inspected them during September and November 1913, he counted 112 workers at Baunani, where conditions were good and there were no complaints. At Hulo, the 69 employees were all men from Guadalcanal and Makira, and conditions were ‘decidedly bad’: they were ill-fed—the rations were mostly sweet potatoes—and many had ulcers and skin diseases that made them unfit for work. The 51 indentured labourers at Manaba were mainly from Guadalcanal, plus 21 local casual labourers, many younger than 16 years, who were paid monthly.46 When Bell kept his promise to return in November, he found conditions unchanged.

Figure 8.4: The Baunani labour line accommodation sometime before 1914.
Source: British Museum, Edge-Partington Collection, Album 4, Dscn1059.
One feature of Baunani was the large SSEM boarding school, the reason given for its presence being that it was cheaper to use the Baunani site than open another major mission base like Onepusu. The Baunani School exposed the falsity of Young and Deck family claims that they separated commercial and missionary activities. Of the 64 male students, 49 were from Malaita, eight from Guadalcanal and seven from Makira. About three-quarters of the boys were under 16 and had attended the school for two years. The teaching pattern was religious instruction combined with reading and a little writing and simple arithmetic. Lessons began at 6:00 am and went for one hour before the boys left to work on the plantation, tending gardens and doing light weeding until 11:00 am. The remainder of the day was spent at school and recreation. The company provided their clothing and food, which consisted of sweet potatoes, vegetables and rice. The few girls who attended the school performed domestic work for the company’s and school’s European employees. Bell was puzzled, since he could see no benefit to the company from the school, yet one cannot help but wonder if the students were also free labour for Baunani plantation.47

In 1915, men from a village about 6 kilometres away from Baunani attempted to murder Rowlands, the assistant manager, who escaped with a shot in his arm. At Manaba outstation, no action was taken to find a man who shot one of the labourers, and DO Ralph Hill reported, ‘The bush people in that locality are becoming aggressive and say that as long as the Government does nothing, they will do as they like’.48 Su’u Harbour plantation was a small outstation with three European staff, four indentured labourers and 18 local casual labourers. There were continuing threats from surrounding descent groups that dated back to an attempted theft in July, when the watchman had shot off part of the ear of one of the thieves and broke his rifle. This made Seiga, who had previously shot a man at Manaba, determined to kill a European or one of the labourers of the Malayta Company plantations.49

Just south of the Malayta Company land was another development that would have displeased the SSEM.

48 SINA, BSIP 14/10, A/DO Ralph B. Hill to A/RC, 17, 29 June 1915.
The Catholic Mission

Catholic missionaries, after an unsatisfactory beginning at Tarapaina in Maramasike Passage, had established bases at Rohinari in ‘Are’ are Lagoon and at Buma, then later returned to Tarapaina. The Marist Catholic mission arrived on Malaita at the same time as the government station (see Map 16, Chapter 10).

After the deaths of the first European QKM missionaries at Malu’u in 1902, Arthur Hopkins from the Melanesian Mission’s base at Ngorefo visited Peter Abu’ofa, and the Anglicans sent a teacher from Gela to help bolster the Malu’u mission. Presumably they hoped to entice Abu’ofa into the Anglican fold. When interfaith cooperation occurred it was seldom revealed in the published journals of the rivalrous missions, though there were occasional clues. Sea transport was always scarce and, as still occurs in the Solomons, people hitched rides on any passing vessel. In 1904, QKM staff travelled on the Melanesian Mission vessel Southern Cross from Malaita to Gavutu, and a year earlier Florence Young had dined aboard the ship at Gela. When Young returned to the Solomons in July 1905, Hopkins had come over to Gavutu in the QKM’s Daphne, and he offered to take the QKM group back to Malu’u in his whaleboat.

This on-the-ground informal cooperation lessened as new missions became more established. The Melanesian Mission and QKM-SSEM published records convey a studied lack of acknowledgement of the existence of the other denomination on Malaita. Later, the same is true for the Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. Christian denominations were competitive, not always cooperative, and could be mean-spirited toward each other. The Anglicans regarded Malaita as ‘their island’, since for decades they had a monopoly on missionary work there. Their slow progress and Malaita’s huge population made for too tempting a morsel to be confined to one denomination. When the QKM sent their first European missionary to Malu’u in 1900, the Anglicans lamented that the ‘unwritten compact’ that had allotted Malaita to them had been breached by an ‘undenominational mission’. Throughout the Pacific, the major Protestant missions—the Anglicans, the Methodist Mission, the Presbyterians and the London

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51 Young diary, 12 Apr and 7 May 1904, *NIV*, 1902–03, 10–11.
52 *NIV*, 1904–05, 11.
53 ‘The First Voyage’, *SCL*, Jan 1901, 10.
Missionary Society—managed to coexist in most areas through such unwritten compacts. The latter was an interdenominational church with close ties to the Church of England, and both their and the Methodists’ services were based on the Anglican’s *Book of Common Prayer*.\(^5^4\) Relations with the Catholic missions were always more difficult. In his 1910 New Year’s message, Melanesian Mission Bishop Wilson recounted how his dioceses had to retreat from Bougainville because the Catholics were already established there. He enunciated what he said was a general principle:

> Whichever Mission, the Anglican or the Roman, first establishes itself in Melanesia, holds the ground against the other, the two not allowed to work in the same neighbourhood.\(^5^5\)

There was no formal colonial rule about separation of denominations, except in British New Guinea where lieutenant-governors MacGregor and Murray had a policy of containing each denomination in a separate district. Initially, Woodford pursued a similar policy in the protectorate, although he seems to have given up during the 1900s. The separation of denominations there was largely self-imposed and only worked well on the smaller islands. The Methodists, who arrived in 1902, confined their activities to the northwest of the archipelago. The Anglicans already had strongholds on Ulawa, Makira and Isabel and in the Gela Group, where they were too dominant for other denominations to consider trying to break in. Elsewhere, islands with large populations, such as Guadalcanal and Malaita, came to be shared by multiple denominations. The Anglicans and the SSEM learnt to coexist on Malaita, establishing centres that complemented but did not clash with each other, although there were serious tensions at times. However, despite Anglican claims to be a ‘true Branch of the Catholic Church’,\(^5^6\) the Melanesian Mission was unhappy when the Catholics arrived and entered into competition. Malaita remained divided between the three mission churches until the Seventh-day Adventists arrived in 1924 as a fourth competitor.

After disastrous attempts to establish a foothold during the 1840s, Catholic missionaries did not return to the Solomons until 1898. Although the Solomons were within the ecclesiastic territory of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, because there was no chance of them extending their

\(^{5^4}\) Whonsbon-Aston 1964, 21.

\(^{5^5}\) Wilson, ‘New Year’s Letter from the Bishop of Melanesia’, *SCL*, Jan 1901, 99.

New Guinea-based operation to the archipelago to stop the Protestant advance, Archbishop of Sydney and Apostolic Delegate (papal envoy) Cardinal Patrick Moran persuaded his church that the French Marists should be given the territory.57

Woodford, on the grounds that it was too dangerous, advised the Marists against trying to set up a base on Malaita (despite the Melanesian Mission having successfully maintained a minimal presence on Small Malaita since 1895). They chose instead to settle on small Rua Sura Island contiguous with Guadalcanal, and purchased the island from a European trader. This brought them into conflict with the traditional owners, who recognised neither the Marist purchase nor the earlier transaction. Furthermore, Woodford had recently mounted a punitive expedition to the area, which people still resented.58 Bishop Julien Vidal returned to Fiji and left Father Pierre Rouillac in charge.59 Then, toward the end of 1899, a canoe from Malaita was wrecked at Rua Sura. The new arrivals begged the mission staff to take them home to Wairaha near Rohinari, which they did on the 19-ton mission schooner Eclipse. In gratitude, the people allowed Rouillac to take one of the shipwrecked youths back to his station. Soon after, in April 1901, the Eclipse, damaged from hitting a reef, made a memorable 19-day journey to Sydney for repairs. Rouillac made the voyage with four Fijian crew, and four young Solomon Islanders who were baptised there by Cardinal Moran.60

Late in 1901, the Eclipse visited Langalanga Lagoon to recruit workers. A dozen men returned to Rau Sura, although none showed any interest in Christianity. They did not cope well on Guadalcanal and were repatriated soon after. In 1908, the Prefect Apostolic Father Jean-Ephrem Bertreux used his small schooner the Verdelais to travel to west Malaita seeking land for a mission station. The Verdelais was difficult to manipulate through the reefs, and just as the Evangel had made transport much easier for the SSEM, the arrival of motorised 30-ton Jeanne d’Arc in 1909 improved the Catholics’ seagoing mobility. In September, the new ship made its first trip to Marau Sound and Malaita. Malaitans travelling with the Marists managed to persuade the Langalanga people to arrange the sale of a piece of coastal land at Buma.

58 Veperdi n.d. This was in relation to the Austrian-Hungarian expedition of SMS Albatros in 1895; mateinfo.hu/a-albatros.htm.
60 Raucaz 1928, 208.
At about the same time, bigman Ara’iasi at Tarapaina in the ‘Are’are area on Small Malaita had fallen out with the SSEM and sent word that he would like the Catholics to begin operations in his district. Father Bertrreux visited, purchased land and left two catechists at Tarapaina. Ara’iasi was the son of a well-known ramo and was also the spokesman for Iava’o, the hereditary araha (paramount chief) for the area. He had a reputation as a warrior in his own right and supposedly killed more than 80 Malaitans over the years before he became Christian. Historian Hugh Laracy recorded that Ara’iasi was offended by Florence Young in 1909, but that he and Iava’o recognised benefits from having a missionary presence and so invited the Marists to begin a station. Dr Deck was in charge of the SSEM in the islands and had been to Tarapaina before the Catholic presence was established. He purchased land there in October 1910, and also at nearby Orlu Island in June 1911. Deck landed a teacher at Tarapaina. According to Malaita District records, that was when Ara’iasi committed a murder and the teacher was frightened into leaving. Tarapaina was acknowledged to ‘belong’ to Ara’iasi and Naumauri. Ara’iasi seems to have invited the SSEM first, then taken advantage of the withdrawal of their teacher to invite the Marists to replace them, thereby receiving double payments for land.

The Catholics chose Tarapaina as their first Malaitan base in 1910, purchasing Tarapaina and small Orlu Island from Ara’iasi for £50 that November, although Orlu seems to have been controlled by Homa Hanua, not Ara’iasi. During 1911, the priest at Marau visited his Fijian catechist at Tarapaina several times and decided that the incessant rain and the slippery infertile red clay soils made the site unsuitable. No Catholic expansion into the surrounding area of Small Malaita was possible since the Anglicans had too firm a hold and the SSEM was gaining strength there. This forced the Catholics to search for land along the west coast of the main island. The priest and Ara’iasi set out from Tarapaina in a whaleboat and travelled to Rohinari at the top of ‘Are’are Lagoon. The local villagers were uncooperative and tried to drive them away. However, Arisimae welcomed the Catholics, being interested more in the

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61 Petero Ara’iasi was in his eighties when he died on 11 February 1963. BSIP News Sheet, 15 Mar 1963.
62 SINA, BSIP 14/40, DM TWE-P to RC CMW, 1 Jan 1911.
63 Ibid., 12 Aug 1911.
64 Ibid., 1 and 2 Nov 1910.
65 Ibid., 12 Aug 1911.
amount of tobacco and matches they could provide than any Christian message. He arranged for them to purchase Rohinari Island and some land on the neighbouring coast.\textsuperscript{66}

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\textbf{Figure 8.5: Arisimae, the most feared \textit{ramo} in `Are`are.}

This photograph is probably from around 1912. He is wearing a nautilus shell nose ornament called \textit{tare`ereereero}, often worn by men.

\textit{Source: NIV, Dec 1912.}

\textsuperscript{66} Raucaz 1928, 209–13.
Figure 8.6: Two brothers, Donatien and Jean Coicaud, served as Catholic priests on Malaita. This is Donatien and one of his congregation, probably from the late 1910s at Buma.

Source: David Ruthven, courtesy of the British Museum, with extra information from Burt 2015, 48.
The priest returned to Tarapaina, and in February 1912 was back in Rohinari to confirm the land purchase. On 2 July 1912, the Jeanne d’Arc brought another priest and eight Guadalcanal men to help clear land. In writing of the Rohinari arrival, Vicar Apostolic Raucaz gave the impression that Father Jean Coicaud was ‘alone in this cannibal country’, even though the coast was dotted with SSEM and Anglican mission bases and outstations and the government headquarters had been at ‘Aoke since late 1909. The nine men, protected by Arisimae, shared one crowded hut with their belongings at one end and an altar at the other. By 1914, Father Coicaud was sure enough of his welcome to leave the island to begin a base on the shore. While Tarapaina was isolated, the Rohinari base was just south of SSEM’s Onepusu headquarters, which must have alarmed the evangelicals. He was joined by his brother Donatien, also a Catholic priest.

Catholicism in the early Solomons consisted of station-centred Marist fathers and brothers, with an emphasis on religious education. They worked mainly through French priests, brothers and nuns and, unlike the Anglicans and SSEM, made no effort to introduce an indigenous clergy until the late 1930s. In *Marists and Melanesians*, Hugh Laracy describes Solomon Islanders’ views on religion as flexible enough to adapt to new circumstances, whereas Catholicism focused on ‘beliefs and behaviour dictated by an authority which transcended circumstance’. Yet the Catholics were also syncretic in their attitudes to Malaitan customs and, like the Melanesian Mission, were not averse to participating in local funeral rites and other ceremonies. One reason for Catholic success was the stability of their missionaries, who often remained at the same stations for decades and grew close to the local people, growing old in their communities and creating a sense of belonging. Father Donatien Coicaud is a good example: posted to Visale in 1913, to Rohinari in 1914, and then to Buma where he remained until his death in 1957. Baptism was the basic measure of good Catholics; anything beyond that could take three generations to accomplish. (The first three Solomon Islanders to become Catholic priests, all Malaitans, were not ordained until 1966 and 1967.)

69 Laracy 1976, 66.
72 These were Michael Aiki from Rohinari in 1966, Donasiano Hitee from Tarapaina in 1967, and Timothy Bobongie from Lau Lagoon, also in 1967. Moore 2013c entry for the Catholic Church.
Locals expressed allegiance to the mission by wearing a small Catholic medal strung on a cord on their otherwise naked bodies, although the Marist priests and brothers encouraged them to wear at least minimal clothes. The emphasis was on education of children and the schools served as the main Marist evangelising device; children were thought to be the best candidates for baptism. From the beginning of the twentieth century there were nuns in the Marist mission to the Solomons, although none were based on Malaita until much later. The Marists also had three linguistic peculiarities: their services were in Latin, and they spoke French among themselves, precluding any close understanding by the local people, but they also learnt local languages and did not depend on Pijin English. Marists, like all missionaries, also tried to give medical care, which, even if not always successful, worked often enough to convince Malaitans to accept the faith.

Although most converts came from the surrounding villages, two other Marist devices used to build up the nucleus of a religious community were to ‘buy’ (give compensation for) orphans and to provide refuge for people cast out of their communities. Father Jean Coicaud did this at Rohinari right from 1912, and Laracy recorded several cases. Petero Kaikihone, a 10-year-old boy, covered in sores and near death, was given to Coicaud to care for in January 1913. He recovered and became the first baptism and the priest’s mentor for learning the ‘Are’are language. Petero married Adela Poikana, whom Coicaud also ‘purchased’ after she fled to the mission to escape the consequences of a curse. The couple became catechists at Takataka in 1924 and Petero’s family followed him to Rohinari mission. Another famous case was Senoveva (Genevieve), an orphan baby whom Coicaud saved from a violent death, suckled with goat’s milk and put into the care of the nuns at Visale on Guadalcanal.73

Conclusion

Missionaries introduced modern spatial systems. They restructured settlement patterns to suit themselves, encouraging people to move into larger coastal villages and construct their houses in orderly lines. Christianity purposefully drew Malaitans to the coast, where they became part of easily supervised, single-denomination communities. Missions also

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resettled Malaitans of mixed origins into coastal villages, which in the early years often consisted of large numbers of males without families. These new villages were focused on a school, clinic, church, and mission house, not the ancestral shrines of old. Christian villages were an early stage of the urbanisation still exhibited today in large coastal villages. They were also part of the new economy with new ways to earn incomes. Rudimentary European clothes (often just loin cloths) marked the inhabitants of these villages as different from their families in the surrounding small hamlets, who remained naked.

Although there was ongoing movement between the Christian settlements and neighbouring hamlets, it was like passing between two worlds, one regulated by foreign rules and the other by indigenous beliefs and practices. Shrines were sacred places and Malaitan hamlets were structured to mirror cosmological and gender divisions. The churches were new sacred places, seats of foreign power that mirrored an introduced cosmology and new gender divisions. In mission villages there were different rules of intimacy and new public personas that created new public figures. The same was true in ’Aoke and Baunani.