

10. The critical question of labour

Between 1863 and 1906 more than 60,000 Melanesian labourers were recruited for plantation labour in Queensland. Some 20,000 were recruited for work in Fiji between 1864 and 1914 and about 6,000 for work in Samoa between 1885 and 1913 (Newbury 1981: 6; Giles and Scarr 1968: 2). Of the 62,475 recruited for Queensland, 18,217 came from the southern and central Solomon Islands and Santa Cruz areas (Price and Baker 1976: 110–111 Table 1). The largest component of Solomon Islands recruitment was 17,033 from the southern islands of Malaita, some parts of Guadalcanal, the Florida Islands and Makira (Price and Baker 1976: 115–116 Table 2). Because of their reputation the men of New Georgia were avoided. Only recruitment from the northern islands of the New Hebrides exceeded this figure (Price and Baker 1976: 111, 115). Woodford's opposition to the external labour trade was based around a number of issues. Returnees smuggled guns, ammunition and dynamite back into the Protectorate, they destabilised the home areas with their manners and attitudes, some returned with leprosy and venereal disease, and perhaps more significantly, labourers sent overseas deprived local plantations of labour. The final reason for the cessation of labour trafficking was the belief that it contributed to the depopulation of the islands. It was believed that the men going overseas were not marrying and having children before they recruited or that they declined to have children when they returned.

Some of the first pieces of legislation passed by the newly formed Federal Parliament of Australia impacted directly on the Solomon Islands. The first, the *Pacific Island Labourers Act* 1901 (1 Edward VII 16 1901), set time limits for ending the labour trade and the deportation of any remaining Islander workers. The second, the *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901 (1 Edward VII 17 1901), was designed to exclude any non-European migrant to the new Commonwealth (Butterworth *et al.* 1902: 250, 258–261). The Act began the restrictive practice of the dictation test, in any prescribed language, for any non-European migrant to the country. A complementary piece of legislation was the *Postal and Telegraph Services Act* 1901 (1 Edward VII 12 1901). This specified that any ship carrying Australian mail to and from the country had to be crewed by white labour only. These pieces of legislation were based on racist sentiments well enshrined in the Australian nationalism of the 1880s and 1890s that moved to restrict non-European labour from entering the country. Institutionalised racism was a part of early Australian political developments.

Repatriation of labourers and expansion of mission control

In 1901 there were approximately 9,800 islander labourers in Queensland. It was estimated about 500 older men could choose to remain, for various reasons, in Queensland. These older men were classed as industrious men of good character, men who had white men as employees or those who had married white, Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal women in Queensland. They were permitted to stay. The exact number of labourers to be deported by 1908 was determined by the commission into the question of labour for the sugar industry (Queensland. Sugar Industry Labour Commission 1906: lx–lxi; Moore 2000: 27). One factor that complicated the matter was that recruiting did not finish in 1901 for the *Pacific Islands Labourers Act* permitted the trade to taper off between 1902 and 1903 (Moore 1985: 287). According to Boutilier (1983: 49), who based his figures on those published by Corris (1973), there were 6,389 left in 1906. From that, 1,642 men were exempt from deportation on various grounds and the final figure was 4,747 (Moore 2000: 28 fn34).

Woodford, interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 December 1903: 3), stated that the last recruiting ship had to leave Queensland for the Solomon Islands before 31 December 1903 for it to be considered legal. He estimated, fairly accurately, that there were about 6,000 islanders to be repatriated in 1903. At the end of 1906, the legal time for deportation to commence, approximately 4,800 labourers from the Solomon Islands remained in Queensland; 2,500 of these were Malaitans (Boutilier 1983: 49). Of this number 265 men chose to go to work in Fiji rather than return home (Wright 1969: 13). The Governor-General Lord Northcote wrote to the High Commissioner in Suva reporting the number to be 5,000, mostly from the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. All arrangements for their housing, resettlement and reemployment were left to the Resident Commissioners in the protectorates (Northcote to im Thurn 11 May 1906 WPHC 4/IV 82/1898).

Officials in the islands, Woodford included, were not satisfied that the Queensland government was undertaking the repatriation with the well-being of the workers in mind. Concerns were raised that vessels were unseaworthy. In addition, and despite the supposed rigorous checking at the ports, the illegal supply of arms and ammunition continued. With the planned return of labourers from Queensland new legislation was passed to prevent the introduction of communicable diseases (*The Solomons (Quarantine) Regulation of 1907*, King's Regulation no 1 of 1907). Rev Arthur Hopkins of the Melanesian Mission had some misgivings about the nature of the men, especially Malaitans, repatriated after 1906 (Hopkins 1934). Hopkins stated that the presence of returned labourers had both good and bad effects on other islanders: good because the

men often went back to their home villages and started schools or established new villages, bad for the jealousy that arose from local chiefs who felt that their power was being usurped. Hopkins also had concerns over the resentment and quarrels that followed when the contents of trade boxes were distributed, and the disruption that followed the return of men accused of old social and cultural offences.

In addition to his land deals Svensen negotiated with Walter Lucas in Burns Philp to participate in the repatriation of the remaining Solomon Islander indentured labourers in Queensland. Burns Philp was in a commanding position to secure this deal. Only Commonwealth subsidised steamers operating the Pacific trade could be used. The Queensland government paid the shipping company £8 a head to transport the men to Tulagi. Burns Philp paid Svenson £3 of this to transport the men to their homes within the Protectorate.

With more than £85,000 in unused passage money and £35,000 in unpaid wages belonging to deceased labourers, the Queensland and Commonwealth governments were more than able to finance the deportation (Moore 2013b: 5–7). Between them, Burns Philp and Svensen shared the more than £32,000 paid in transportation fees (Wright 1969: 13; Moore 2013b). For Arthur Hopkins the years 1905 to 1907 would be anxious (Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1905: 25). It was first estimated that only 1,000 men were expected to be needed by local plantations. By 1905, only about 3,500 acres of land were planted and attempts at growing cotton, rubber, maize and commercial qualities of fruit, such as bananas, had all been unsuccessful. These small-scale plantations would not absorb the men returning to the islands if they sought further indentures.

Woodford requested that he personally supervise their returns home and that all deportations be concentrated through the selected Queensland ports of Brisbane, Cairns and Mackay. While Woodford was largely successful in having the men removed from the three ports specified, his request to supervise the repatriation was declined (Moore 1985: 288). Initially he clashed with im Thurn over the problem of labourers returning from Fiji with leprosy so he approached im Thurn in 1905 to end the Fijian trade completely (Heath 1974a: 89). Im Thurn was unwilling to do so because the Solomon Islander labourers were seen as a valuable labour source for Fiji before the importation of Indian labourers, and 'Im Thurn argued that the experience the Solomon Islanders gained in Queensland and Fiji was a civilizing one, an argument Woodford clearly rejected' (Heath 1974a: 90). Following the general theme then current, im Thurn was repeating the belief in a 'civilizing mission', meaning that indentured labour was necessary for indigenous peoples, who were inferior mentally and morally and lacked practical capacity when compared with white Europeans. For men like im Thurn, the experience in the cane fields was to be viewed as a

process of cultural and social development and enhancement of practical skills. Evidence suggests that im Thurn favoured development in Fiji over that of other protectorates like the Solomon Islands (Scarr 1967a: 282).

Woodford, arguing against im Thurn's position, took his cause to the Colonial Office in 1905 and subsequently won. Labour trafficking from the Solomon Islands to Fiji ended in 1911 with the final group of labourers returned by 1914. Antipathy between Woodford and im Thurn lasted for most of the High Commissioner's long reign. To make his point that the plantations in the Solomon Islands needed labour, Woodford was interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 June 1911: 7) and confidently said: 'The place is going ahead so fast that unless our labour supply is supplemented from new sources we shall be in a serious fix within the next 12 months'. He reported that over 4,000 men were currently employed in the islands, a figure that was not verified. Woodford also reported that 'Malaita is still the principal island for recruiting. On some of the islands the natives will not touch plantation work at all'. While the recruitment of men from Malaita was seen as beneficial to the development of the plantation economy, there was little understanding of the growing problems that these internal migrants would face. Malaita was left undeveloped, a cheap labour pool for the rest of the islands. It remained a place for the 'have nots'. Meanwhile on New Georgia and in parts of Guadalcanal, where local people declined to work on the plantations, the regions occupied by the 'haves' developed. This was a strategy used by British, German and French colonial administrations. Certain cultural groups were seen as valuable labour pools—the Kiwai in Papua as police and boat crews, the Tolai in New Britain as plantation workers, the Gilbertese as boat crews and mine labourers on Banaba, and the Torres Strait Islanders as pearl divers. In this way these groups became wage labourers subject to the supply and demand of the market economy.

Internal labour migration

When the external labour trade creased or slowed, inter-island recruitment of labourers for plantations within the Pacific colonies continued. The major plantation economies of Papua, German New Guinea, New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands all recruited local workers from one district and transported them to plantations in other areas. Only Fiji imported labourers from India. In Papua native labour regulations limited the hours of work. The weight load of patrol carriers was regulated as was the distance they could be made to cover in one day. Housing on plantations, and for those in domestic service, was scheduled and a simple ration scale set down. These regulations required enforcement and the Papuan patrol staff was not large (Mair 1970: 166). As in the Solomon Islands the pay for indentured labour was set at 10 shillings a month

(£6 a year). By comparison, workers in the Torres Strait pearling industry, many of them Papuan from the Daru coast, could earn between £1 and £2 a month (£12–£24 a year) but these men were at sea for many months working long hours. This was a dangerous maritime industry comparable with the mine labourers' wage on Banaba. Recruitment in the pearling industry served to pacify tribal fighting along the Daru coast and became a new initiation period for young men with its seclusion from women, its struggle for status and the return home laden with goods (Lawrence 2010: 13). For the Kiwai, employment in the maritime industries was an important economic foundation for the home villages. Once the pearling industry declined the standard of living in the coastal Kiwai villages also declined and in the Torres Strait they became the poorest of the poor.

In the Solomon Islands new contracts of two years became common and men from Malaita, the Guadalcanal south-east and Weather Coast, and Makira were mainly selected (Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988: 77 Table 7 & 14). Shorter employment arrangements for casual work or for particular planting and weeding periods or for cutting copra were made with local communities. This was also common when people needed money to pay for church contributions or special occasions and ceremonies. The cost of employing labourers increased during the 1910s to the 1920s as the price of copra increased and the plantation economy grew. Conversely, when the cost of copra plummeted in the 1930s fewer men were recruited for work and labourers were sent back to the village. This fluctuation in employment and earnings caused many economic and social problems in the home villages. For plantation owners, employment costs consisted of a recruiting bonus or beach payment, the average annual wage paid, general recruiting fees and a repatriation fee paid at the end of the contract when the worker was returned home. In the Solomons, the recruiting bonus was paid to relatives of the recruit in the form of trade goods, such as tobacco, knives and calico but the cost of these trade goods increased in value from £1–£3 between 1909 and 1913 and from £3–£5 between 1915 and 1918. The average wage was officially set at £6 a year. This increased to £12 a year, rising to £24 and £36 a year in the 1920s but only in special cases when workers had experience and skills. No labourer could be recruited if he—the labourer were usually male—was under 16 years old. The recruiting fee in the Solomons was paid to the professional recruiters and varied according to the demand and the difficulty in obtaining recruits. A repatriation fee of between £1–£2 was charged to return time-expired recruits home (Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988: 68–69).

Solomon Islanders entered the internal labour trade for a variety of reasons. First was the desire to obtain trade goods; this was a major factor behind participation in the earlier Pacific labour trade. Secondly, when the poll tax was introduced in 1920 (King's Regulation no 10 of 1920) it levied a head tax on all adult males between 16 and 60. The tax varied according to the home

islands. On Nggela it was £1 per head, on Guadalcanal 10 shillings, and on Malaita 5 shillings. Plantation workers were exempt—their tax was paid by the plantation company—but the men had to pay the tax for other family members. The tax was initially designed to raise revenue rather than stimulate recruitment but villagers did not see it that way (Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988: 64).

Hubert Murray was sent to report on the alleged labour shortage in the Solomon Islands in 1916 and he considered it important that regions be completely pacified before recruitment proceed. Planters and government officials disagreed. This difference in opinion was readily acknowledged by Murray in his report to the Western Pacific High Commission (Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988: 64 quoting from WPHC 4/IV 1779/1916; *The Brisbane Courier* 26 January 1916: 3). Murray considered that recruitment would be more successful in pacified areas of Guadalcanal and Malaita but he based that opinion on the Papuan situation where the country was, ostensibly, pacified before recruitment started. J. C. Barley, District Officer at Gizo in 1926, was strongly of the opinion that the process of pacification reduced the supply of recruits because men no longer fled tribal fighting and pay-back. In fact it was not possible to access the impact of pacification on levels of recruitment. Men from Malaita had been going to the overseas plantations for decades before any attempts were made to penetrate past the immediate coastal areas. Many who returned from overseas labour went home to areas declared unpacified. It was the price of copra that was a major factor in labour fluctuations. Quite simply, when prices were high, more men were recruited. When the prices fell the number of men required was reduced. Melanesians also chose their own time and place to work as wage labourers. When conditions were right, or people needed money, then they participated, otherwise they remained disinterested. Plantations with good conditions, and a good reputation for treatment of workers, rarely went short of willing workers. Reputation by word of mouth was far more important than esoteric ideas of the value of pacification.

One problem facing recruits was disease in the crowded and often unsanitary housing lines and transit camps. The annual death rate during the early colonial period in the Solomon Islands has been estimated at 15 persons per 1,000 (1.5 per cent). The most significant causes of death were bacillary dysentery, tuberculosis, pneumonia-influenza related respiratory illnesses, beriberi, and work accidents (Shlomowitz and Bedford 1988: 66–67 Tables 9–11). The widespread dysentery epidemic of 1914–1915 resulted in more than 100 of the annual count of 172 deaths in the Protectorate. The epidemic took serious toll of labourers in plantation lines then spread to the Lever's labour deport on Gavutu and to the Burns Philp depot on Makambo. Both were crowded places with poor levels of sanitation and hygiene, but they were located within Tulagi Harbour where supervision would have been easy. In all, it was estimated that 5 per cent

of the total number of labourers died but on the large Lever's plantations it was closer to 10 per cent (Bennett 1987: 158). The young, newly recruited men who had not built resistance were the group most likely to succumb to dysentery and other communicable diseases. But workers had to overcome labour abuse as well as disease. Following a tour of inspection of plantations by Arthur Mahaffy in 1908 and a report on labour abuses (Mahaffy to High Commission 21 December 1908 WPHC 4/IV 1605/1912), Woodford managed to have the *Solomons (Labour) Regulation of 1910* (King's Regulation no 3 of 1910) implemented. He thought that power in the hands of ignorant and prejudiced persons constituted a real danger to workers (Bennett 1987: 157). Abuse of labour meant that fewer men offered for employment and the figures for 1913 show some indication of this trend. The new regulations specified conditions for employment and repatriation to home villages and listed daily rations and medical procedures (Fairley, Rigby and Co Ltd 1912–1941 Item A.1972.0053, 4/14). In 1912 the labour regulation was amended to set 50 maximum working hours in a week, with Sunday a day of rest, but the amendment also set a penalty for neglect of work by the labourer (*The Solomons (Labour Amendment) Regulations of 1912*; King's Regulation no 8 of 1912; 14 J. Soc. Comp. Legis Ns 95 1914; Bennett 1987: 157). A new Inspector of Labour, William Bell, was employed in 1911 who found planters without copies of the regulations and labourers who had been signed on without the presence of a government officer. Records on estates were also poor. Bell's immediate complaint to Woodford was that he did not have a boat and could not conduct plantation inspections. Having regulations in place was one thing, but being able to supervise labour and inspect conditions was a near impossible task.

Concern with the external labour trade in the annual reports to 1905 would, by 1913, be replaced with concerns over the increasing demands for local labour. By this time 25,000 acres had been planted, not all productive, and copra continued to be of poor quality. In 1913 the amount of land claimed to have been purchased from local people by Europeans was estimated at almost 170,000 acres (Butterworth *et al.* 1897: 203). Land speculation between 1886 and 1896 had resulted in 80,000 acres alienated by purchase from local people, at least on paper (Heath 1979: 61–62). Waste land held on Certificates of Occupation was 240,000 acres and the amount of land purchased by the government that was to be leased to Europeans was 18,110 acres. Direct leases to Europeans, mostly land used for trading stations or missions, totalled only 980 acres (Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1913: 13). The progress of the plantation economy was painfully slow. Copra was the main export produce that showed only an incremental rise in exports (British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1909: 19). From an initial quantity of 1,200 tons in 1895 the amount exported rose to less than 3,000 tons in 1903–1904 but only increased to 4,200 tons in 1912–1913. Oscar Svensen continued

to invest in plantation development in the Solomons after his successful sales to Lever's Pacific Plantations Ltd. A consortium of directors, including Svensen, based in Brisbane and Sydney funded the purchase of 5,000 acres of freehold plantation land at Mamara, on the coast north-west of the present site of Honiara on Guadalcanal. The capital raised was £130,000 (Bennett 1987: 139, 140–141). The project was well advertised in the *Sun* [Sydney] newspaper under the banner *The Wealth of the Solomons* (6 August 1911: 24; Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 9/2/1 and 9/21/2). The aim was to produce copra, rubber and cotton. The prospects were reported to be 'fascinating' and 'immense' and the estimated profits after 12 years were projected to be more than £200,000. This arrangement was put in place before the government imposed controls over the freehold sale of land. Svensen and partners also invested in Ndoma plantation further along the north-west coast of Guadalcanal.

The administration was now actively promoting its leasehold arrangements, declared in 1912, under which land would be leased for 99 years at a minimum rent of 3 pence per acre for the first five years, 6 pence per acre for the years 5 to 11, 3 shillings per acre for the years 11 to 20, and 6 shillings per acre for the years 21 to 33. Then the land rent would be calculated at 5 per cent of the unimproved value (Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1913: 14). One-tenth of the land had to be cultivated within five years or it would be resumed. The annual report stated that 'considerable areas of land have recently been forfeited owing to non-compliance with the improvement conditions'. This covenant on planting within five years had never been particularly effective. When Stanley Knibbs was appointed Crown Surveyor in 1914 he found the area claimed by plantation owners often exceeded their legal right. Resumption of land was a drawn out legal process and even then the loss of uncultivated areas was not often contested.

However, the main problem with copra from the Solomon Islands was quality. It was so poor that it attracted very low prices. Smoke dried copra was still the standard and 'this slovenly way of preparation still prevails to a great extent' for only the larger plantations were beginning to use the more superior kiln-dried production. The Germans had been using this technique for decades. The Germans, under Weber, had been promoting effective kiln construction since the 1870s and before 1915 much of the world's copra and coconut oil production was shipped to Germany for use in the margarine and food industries (*The Brisbane Courier* 22 April 1915: 8). Fire-dried copra returned £1 to £2 a ton more than lesser quality produce. The annual report to the British government gave a lengthy description of improved coconut tree cultivation and the preparation of copra using a simple kiln made from corrugated iron, timber and fire bricks that could produce 1–2 tons of copra in 24 hours (Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1913: 16–23). This could not rescue

the Solomon Islands from having a reputation for producing copra considered the 'second worst in the world' (Boutilier 1974: 35; Kane to Advisory Council 20 November 1923 WPHC 4/IV 64/1924). Many kilns in the Solomon Islands were jerry-built affairs that only produced poor quality smoke-dried copra (see Smith 1971 for a photograph of the Binskin home-built kiln on Mbava Island).

Ivory nuts, collected from wild sago palms, were also poor quality. The Solomon Islands ivory nuts were coarse, hard to turn and polish and did not take a dye. At £12 10s per ton delivered to Sydney they were not profitable. The palm also took seven years to mature, gave only one very large crop and could not be cultivated as it grew in swampy, riverine areas (Smith and Pape 1917: 489). The sale of ivory nuts, in particular, was not assisted by a new regulation introduced in 1911 that controlled the sale of copra and nuts collected from native lands (King's Regulation no 12 of 1911). The trader had to agree to pay a £10 per centum (10 per cent of sales) to the administration as a fee and pay the local people for the nuts as well. For copra, this may have been economical, but for the fluctuating market in ivory nuts it meant its gradual demise.

Labour control

As a result, the economy remained heavily dependent on copra exports. At this stage, the main problem within the Protectorate continued to be labour, not land. Malaitans became internal labour migrants instead of external migrants. This would be the start of the long running tensions between cultural groups. In 1909 only 2,284 labourers were indentured, in 1911 the total number contracted was 3,940, but in 1912 only 3,713 had engaged. Woodford ended his report gloomily with: 'As recruiting for employment on plantations has never been carried on so vigorously as at present, it would appear that the limit of the available local supply has been reached, and the outlook is a most serious one. Applicants for fresh leasehold are in all cases warned of the difficulty in obtaining labourers, but it seems to have no effect upon the demand for land' (Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1913: 15). As a result of this demand, wages rose from £6 a year to £10 a year or even £12 a year in some cases (Smith and Pape 1917: 495).

By 1919, Lever's Pacific Plantations Ltd had become the largest employer of local labour with 26 plantations although this is probably based on 1916 figures (Allen 1919: 255; see also WPHC 10/IX Item 243). With Lever's an active participant in the copra industry the Protectorate was now considered the envy of older Pacific colonies. But of the 290,000 acres of land alienated to Lever's by 1912 little more than 9,000 acres were planted. The second largest employer was the Malayta Company with seven plantations, followed by the Burns, Philp

& Co group of subsidiaries—the Solomon Islands Development Company, the Shortland Islands Plantation Ltd and Choiseul Plantations Ltd—which had seven plantations. More than 55 per cent of all labour worked for these three main companies and their subsidiaries. Lever's Pacific Plantations Ltd proposal to overcome potential labour shortages by importing Indian labour was refused by the India Office in London and the plans to bring in Javanese and Chinese plantation labourers were also unsuccessful. Even at this early stage, Lever's plantation overseers were beginning to get a reputation for rough treatment of local labour. Their largely Australian overseers were renowned for being men of poor character who were generally unsympathetic to local people (Heath 1974a: 91). The large plantations needed a large labour force and the desire for cheap labour often led to the argument that indigenous workers needed to be treated differently—with force—from those back in the metropole. Certainly, Lever's model factory town at Port Sunlight stood in stark contrast to the plantation lines in the Solomon Islands. Heath's comment on Woodford's approach to labour abuses was: 'He may have been willing to quite ruthlessly put down armed opposition to his administration, but he was not willing to see brutal methods used on islanders because they would not work' (Heath 1974a: 91).

Bennett (1987: 153) has divided the Protectorate's development into three phases when analysing labour control. In the first period, 1897–1913, abuse of labour was worse due to poor government regulatory control and a 'concomitant frontier mentality among many overseers and managers' of plantations. As a place of work and residence, the Solomon Islands offered little in the way of attraction to potential European employees. The larger companies just took the managers they could get. These men may have been 'abundant in hopes but deficient in experiences' and so they took their frustrations out on the labourers (Bennett 1987: 156). Government control of both labour and supervisors was weak due to the shortage of staff, inadequate inspection and poor regulation of labour. The second period, 1914–1923, saw better legislative powers available to the administration and the employment of an Inspector of Labour. During this period labour costs increased but copra prices were high. This began the period of closer supervision. Costs rose but so did profits and the employment atmosphere calmed. In the third period, 1923–1939, the system of indenture and regulation was more stable. However, during this period labour costs remained high when copra prices declined. As a result uneconomic plantations closed and workers were laid off.

In the early period the labour regulation (*The Solomons (Labour) Regulation no 7 of 1897*) and the native contracts regulations (*The Native Contracts Regulation no 2 of 1896*) were designed to manage the activities of small-scale traders and planters. To some extent they regulated the external labour trade. These rules and regulations were not designed to supervise a large-scale commercial plantation

economy employing indentured workers from within the Protectorate. There was limited judicial authority and the chief justice was located far away in Suva. Many conflicts on the plantations did not get to court because no legal commissioner was based in Tulagi until 1914. Abuse of Solomon Islander workers by traders or planters was resolved by having the European removed from the islands using powers given to the Resident Commissioner under the Western Pacific Order in Council. To local people the different treatment of whites and non-whites was startlingly clear. If a native killed a local man or a white he would be shot or hanged, but a white man was ordered to leave the Protectorate (Bennett 1987: 155).

The case of the labour vessel, the *Rhoderick Dhu*, highlighted the need for regulation of the conditions on board recruiting vessels. The *Rhoderick Dhu* had a poor reputation. In 1898 it had been named as the labour vessel that had landed 50 rifles on the coast of Malaita contrary to the arms regulations (Woodford to O'Brien 12 January 1898 WPHC 4/IV 82/1898). In 1903, having collected men around the islands, the schooner arrived at Tulagi barely afloat. On board were over 100 labourers. Woodford cabled quickly to the Colonial Office that he prohibited any further recruiting to Queensland until he had fresh legislation to allow him to inspect vessels. He subsequently received power to force all labour ships to call into Tulagi harbour for inspection (King's Regulation no 3 of 1903; Heath 1974a: 87). Interviewed at length by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 December 1903: 3), Woodford explained his actions in temporarily stopping the labour trade. He had two objections: men were returning to the Solomons with hidden arms and ammunition that were not being detected by customs officials in Queensland, and the vessels, like the *Rhoderick Dhu*, were substandard and should not be permitted to recruit in the islands. The men were subsequently transferred to the *Lady Norman* and sent to Queensland. Woodford had his inspection regulations.

With the opening up of larger areas of commercial plantations after 1914, it became necessary to strengthen the powers of the administration with regard to conditions on the labour lines. Underlying much of this development was also the belief, common at that time, that the islanders were a declining race with little future. Woodford (1922b) also wrote on this constant question of depopulation, although his sympathy with the inevitable extinction of the people did not allow him to be derelict in his duty to protect them from abuse of their person or their livelihood (Heath 1974a: 83). The rapid growth in plantations meant that by 1908 conditions on some estates were 'sordid in the extreme' (Bennett 1987: 153). Government documents of the period paint a dismal picture of employment conditions in all areas. Woodford was able to send staff to inspect plantations located near government centres but those in more isolated areas were not inspected. Native hospitals were non-existent and plantation clinics

were shoddy. Lever's managers, in particular, did not appreciate inspection of their properties by government officials. Following court action and direct criticism of Sir William Lever by the Colonial Office in London, some attention was finally paid to the issue of labour management. This occurred at a time when Lever was trying to convince the Colonial Office of his company's care for coolie labour in other colonies. The personal admonishment by the Colonial Office resulted in quick action taken to replace notorious plantation management staff. Regulations were tightened, labourers had to sign on in front of a government officer, their health was monitored, their pay was checked, and new government stations opened at Auki on Malaita in 1909, Aola on Guadalcanal in 1914, and at Kirikira on Makira in 1918. Labour rights were better protected, but so too were the rights of the employers. Employers were able to exploit the regulations by imposing a daily task instead of a number of hours worked. The conventionally expected rate was 450 pounds of copra per day per man. This was unstipulated but generally accepted. The Malayta Company employees were expected to produce 510 pounds of copra a day and this imposed hard labour conditions (Bennett 1987: 160).

The Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to Melanesia

In 1907, W. H. R. Rivers, Arthur M. Hocart and C. Gerald Wheeler travelled from Cambridge University to the Solomon Islands to undertake joint ethnographic research. The Percy Sladen expedition is relevant to an examination of this period in Solomon Islands colonial history. It was the first ethnological survey of the islands by English academics and it was an attempt to follow the model used for the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait under Alfred Cort Haddon. The Torres Strait expedition was the first multidisciplinary anthropological expedition to Melanesia (Haddon 1901–1935, see particularly Volume 5 (1904), Volume 8 (1908) and Volume 4 (1912)). It was innovative for its day and set many standards for the development of anthropology as a discipline. Rivers was a notable member of the Torres Strait expedition and between 1898 and 1907 he transformed himself from a medical practitioner to a neurophysiologist and an experimental psychologist. But he retained a lifelong interest in ethnology. Rivers was an influential man who promoted a number of controversial theories of his day. Now discredited, they had a significant impact on academic thinking and colonial policy in the early-20th century.

When the Percy Sladen expedition members reached the Solomon Islands, instead of remaining as a team, they separated. Gerard Wheeler went north to the Shortland Islands to work on the language and folklore of the Mono and Alu islanders (Wheeler 1926; see also Woodford papers PMB 1381/021k). Rivers and Hocart concentrated on three months intensive work of population studies and

genealogical work on Simbo, as known as Eddystone Island (Hocart 1922 and 1931: see also Scheffler 1962). Following this, they undertook rapid survey work on Vella Lavella, Kolombangara, and in the Roviana Lagoon, all areas of intensive head hunting less than a decade earlier. They followed this genealogical and survey work with shorter visits to Savo, Guadalcanal and Malaita. Although Hocart and Rivers travelled together they really only cooperated rather than collaborated with each other (Kuklick 1996: 632; Richards 2012).

In the Solomon Islands, Rivers and his partners made use of the Melanesian Mission vessel, the *Southern Cross*, for Rivers came from a family with strong Anglican sympathies. Rivers wrote to Woodford for guidance about travel and locations for anthropological work but it was clear that Rivers had not done much planning even by mid-1907 (Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 2/59 Letter from WHR Rivers to Woodford dated 10 July 1907). The main publication that arose from this work was *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914). While important, this work does not compare with the richness of the material gathered in the Torres Strait with its strong links to people and place (Lawrence 1994; Welsch 1996). The information contained in the study of Melanesian society is complex but somewhat confusing. The aim of the expedition was to explain the then current belief that there was a natural transition from maternal to paternal descent among indigenous people. As a result, the first volume contains a mass of data relating to kinship terminologies in many of the societies visited. The second volume is a theoretical analysis of systems of relationships. The conclusion was that these systems reflect social organisation in particular states of marriage. The finding was that a definite correlation existed between relatives designated by certain kinship terms and certain social functions. Reviews of the massive tomes complimented Rivers on his intellectual achievement but then found critical voice in stating: 'It must suffice here to point out that the sweeping use made by the author of the principle of diffusion of culture is methodologically altogether unjustifiable and must of necessity lead to the gravest errors in historical reconstruction' (Goldenweiser 1916: 336–339). Other reviews followed a similar vein (Lowie 1915: 588–591). During the Percy Sladen expedition, Rivers and Hocart believed that they could make confident statements from genealogical research about the size of families, the number of childless marriages, and the rate of child mortality. Rivers based his work on a speculative evolutionary approach that set out to establish the importance of matrilineal descent in Melanesian communities. However, the development of bilateral or cognatic descent patterns evidenced in the Roviana Lagoon and elsewhere in the New Georgia region was not examined (Schneider 1996; Nagaoka 2011).

During their genealogical research Rivers and Hocart found evidence of a dramatic decline in fertility on Simbo since the 1850s (Bayliss-Smitth 2006: 28–30). In

fact the population increased in the years following the establishment of the Protectorate, the abolition of head hunting and raiding and the consolidation of the Methodist church on the island after 1904 (Groenewegen 1970: 122; Burman 1981: 252). Rivers remained convinced that a 'psychological factor' explained the depopulation of Melanesian islands. The explanation given was that women in Melanesia were too apathetic to conceive or to give birth or even nurture healthy children. This lacked any foundation for it was based on a synchronic analysis of the community at a time of great change. It was also dismissive of the introduction of alien diseases, such as venereal diseases, and the long-term impact they had on population growth and fertility. Rivers saw in the Solomon Islands a people traumatised by the impacts of colonialism and this contributed to the then current theories regarding a supposed lack of vitality among the Melanesian peoples.

Rivers had great insight but his examination of the psychological factor in the depopulation of Melanesia was not supported by concrete evidence. The dominant discourse at that time was that the native races of Melanesia were vanishing as a regrettable but inevitable consequence of contact with a 'higher civilisation' from the West. This was a theory also promoted by Dr Thorold Qualfe, a medical officer with Lever's Pacific Plantations Ltd, who believed that mental apathy, laziness, improvidence and lack of ambition were the prime reasons for the 'decadence of the native races'. He considered peace and good administration had weakened peoples' resolve and that 'savage warfare had made the people alert, active, wary, and provident' (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 23 January 1913: 9; Woodford papers PMB 1290 Item 9/46). Qualfe was reported as saying that as soon as Malaita was settled and fighting stopped the people would start to die out. He did not go so far as to say people should be allowed to start fighting again so that populations would, somehow, grow and prosper. Qualfe's position with Lever's also puts his theory into perspective for the company was actively promoting its case for the introduction of Asian labour at that time.

At the time, these ideas were not considered strange or irrational. Rivers had also become deeply involved in the diffusionism of Grafton Elliot Smith (1911) that held that Europe was the cradle of humanity and human civilisation. The heliocentric views of William Perry (1923), a colleague, considered Egypt to be the source of all cultural innovation. This theory of diffusion from one source, or hyperdiffusion, became widely accepted. Volume two of *The History of Melanesian Society* (Rivers 1914) contains a section on prevailing ideas of sun and moon cults and the spread of megalithic stone structures in Oceania. Rivers later developed this into a journal article (Rivers 1915: 431–445). In his critical review Goldenweiser (1916: 336–339) recognised the complex and intricate analysis and compilation of facts made by Rivers but then stated: 'in the minds

of many assent to the author's position will no doubt be prompted by the arduousness of the task of refutation'. Hardly an encouraging and supporting statement. The theory of diffusion assisted colonialism and gave credence to European economic and social expansionism in places like the Pacific where the 'superior' cultures of the West could introduce new technologies and new social structures to advance the 'savage natives'. At the time of Rivers' death in 1922 these views were widely held and praised. They later tarnished his contribution to ethnology, especially when Malinowski and his theory of functionalism began to excite students and ethnologists (Bartlett 1923: 2–14). The importance of the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the Solomon Islands lies more in the ties that bound class and Empire. Rivers and Woodford were both educated at Tonbridge and both had strong ties to the established church. The access to the *Southern Cross* was not just chance. Another ex-Tonbridgian was Bishop Cecil Wilson of the Melanesian Mission.

The question of depopulation

The depopulation of Melanesia was taken for granted in both the 19th and the early-20th centuries. The most influential document of the period was the *Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Decrease of the Native Population in Fiji* (Colony of Fiji 1896). Figures collected for the census of population in Fiji from 1881 seemed to confirm the gradual decrease in the native Fijian (iTaukei) people. A figure of 114,748 people indicated that native Fijians comprised 90 per cent of the population in 1881. In 1891 the figure had decreased to 105,800 or 87.3 per cent, and in 1901 to 94,397 or 78.6 per cent. By 1911 the figure was considered alarming at 87,096 or 62.4 per cent (Colony of Fiji 1896; <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/component/content/article/9-social-statistics/social-general/113-population-and-demography21>). But the Fijian population had also been impacted by alien diseases and epidemics and the influx of migrant workers statistically reduced the overall percentage of native Fijians in the population. The reason given for the decrease in the early years was that Islander populations were declining because they no longer found life exciting and so had lost their zest for life. This had to be reinvigorated (O'Brien 2009: 110). It was assumed that contact with the West had weakened the resolve of Melanesian people to produce, to survive and to prosper. Their fate, it was assumed, was to be annihilated.

Rivers subsequently published a collection of papers on depopulation in Melanesia that provides a standard reference for understanding the views of missionaries and colonial officials on the theory of depopulation in the early-20th century (Rivers 1922). With a preface by Sir Everard im Thurn the book presented a conservative opinion of a former high official. Im Thurn's introduction was full of

paternalistic concern for the fate of the 'folk' over whom British colonialism had assumed control. He was full of 'sympathy' for the 'natives' but his main finding was that the 'most potent cause of the decay of the race is the loss of interest in life' brought about by changes in their material and spiritual condition (im Thurn 1922: vii). The main paper that had stimulated this depopulation debate came from Dr Felix Speiser, a Swiss chemist turned ethnologist who had spent 18 months in the New Hebrides. His paper, 'Decadence and Preservation in the New Hebrides' (Speiser 1922: 25–61), was written in 1912 based on research undertaken in 1910 (Speiser 1913; Adam 1950/1951: 66). The English language version, published by Rivers, was translated from the German by Rev Arthur Hopkins from the Melanesian Mission. Speiser was principally interested in genetics and the movements of cultural groups across the Pacific. His theoretical ideas were based on *Siedlungsgechichte* (settlement history), evolution and the diffusion of cultural traits. Speiser repeated the commonly held views that 'the natives of the New Hebrides are rapidly decreasing in number' and that '[t]his is to be regretted both from a humanitarian and a commercial standpoint'. Speiser's role in this publication places much of the treatise in its true perspective. He was a strong advocate of the megalithic culture thesis that considered the presence of monumental stonework in Melanesia to be a sign of contact with higher cultures from outside the region (Speiser 1913). The theory, supported by Rivers but now much rejected, held sway for a considerable time at the turn of the 20th century (Riesenfeld 1950).

River's depopulation ideas were mirrored in missionary paternalism. The paper by Rev Walter Durrad from the Melanesian Mission concentrated on problems in the Banks and Torres Islands in the New Hebrides (Durrad 1922: 3–24). William O'Ferrall, another Anglican missionary, was more considered when he wrote that the depopulation of the Santa Cruz and Reef Islands was due to diseases like influenza and dysentery introduced by traders (O'Ferrall 1922: 67–68). Influenza and pneumonia were major health issues at that time (Groenewegen 1970: 9–10). The worldwide influenza pandemic of 1918–1920 killed 5.5 per cent of the Fijian population and 24 per cent of the Samoan population. In many colonial states inconsistent under-reporting meant that accurate figures were not available (Johnson and Mueller 2002; Wilson *et al.* 2005: 347). Arthur Hopkins, who worked for many years on Malaita and became principal of the Theological College at Siota in 1919, wrote about depopulation on Malaita. He suggested that the causes of population decline were the decrease in the size of families, the postponement of marriage to a later age, a move towards monogamy, the securing of abortions using tree bark concoctions, and sexually transmitted disease. Hopkins also listed 'dysentery', 'pulmonary diseases', 'infant mortality' and 'plantation life' (Hopkins 1922: 62–66). But despite the evidence suggesting the impact of diseases was significant, Rivers declared that depopulation was

due to a 'psychological factor' and that many societies disrupted by European intervention suffered from a 'loss of interest in life' that resulted in fewer births and more deaths (Rivers 1922: 93–97; Patterson 1975: 233).

Rivers' (1922) book on depopulation in Melanesia was taken as scientific evidence that the peoples of the Western Pacific were in terminal decline. Woodford had previously written that 'nothing in the way of the most paternal legislation or fostered care, carried out at any expense whatever, can prevent the eventual extinction of the Melanesian race in the Pacific. This I look upon as a fundamental fact and as certain as the rising and setting of the sun' (Hilliard 1978: 157, 162 fn91; Scarr 1967a: 293–297). Some time later he qualified this by noting that, in the absence of any guide in the nature of a census, it was impossible to state categorically that the population of the Solomon Islands had declined since the arrival of white men. He also stated that, 'in particular localities thirty years ago [1880s] compared with the number observed in 1914 is that there has been a considerable decrease' and that this was most noticeable on Isabel, the Russell Islands and the north-western end of Guadalcanal. This decrease, he stated, was due to slave raiding and head hunting that had been going on for three to four centuries. Woodford was of the opinion that recruitment of men from Guadalcanal, Makira and Malaita had been responsible for a decrease in population in those areas but his main argument focussed on two causes. The first was the impact of Europeans who have changed the conditions of 'native life, among which I give preference to the injudicious use of unsuitable clothing'. This he considered advanced the spread of mostly pulmonary disease. Suitable clothing for men meant the wearing of a *lava-lava* or *lap-lap*. The second cause was the introduction of new diseases, such as dysentery, influenza and yaws, caused by a bacterium that produced weeping sores. Yaws was transmitted by skin to skin contact with an infected lesion but was more prevalent among the coastal people than the inland dwelling bush peoples (Woodford 1922b: 69; Boutilier 1974: 30).

Woodford recommended that the government undertake a census of the population, prevent the use of unnecessary European clothing, and impose regulations for village sanitation and clean water supply. While many of his recommendations are simple practical steps, his suggestion that the government should form industrial settlements populated by nuclear families removed from their traditional cultural ties is the voice of a colonial administrator looking on the success of the industrial missions of the Methodists and the Seventh-day Adventists (Woodford 1922b: 69–77). Depopulation had become a keystone of British colonial policy in the Pacific by this time. Officials and settlers in the Solomon Islands 'drew what they imagined to be the only conclusion and set themselves to attract investment of capital to secure for the group a prosperous future, but one in which the Solomon Islanders would have no permanent place' (Scarr 1967a: 297).

Population estimates for the Solomon Islands

The early narratives of the Spanish explorers who landed on Isabel in 1568 tell of large populations of people in coastal regions and sizable numbers of men appearing armed for potential fights against the Spanish. In his journal, Mendaña lists wildly exaggerated estimates of the numbers of people on various islands visited. Hernan Gallego wrote that 'we saw more than one hundred Indians approaching with their bows and arrows and clubs' at Isabel, and later at Nggela wrote that '[t]here would be more than seven hundred Indians', and still later on the return journey to Isabel passed St George Island (San Jorge: Veru) and noted that '[i]n the Island of Veru, which has more than 300 huts, the Indians received us peacefully'. San Jorge, Mendaña wrote, was also thickly populated as at one place more than 100 canoes were drawn up on the shore. In conclusion, Mendaña estimated that 30,000 fighting men could be raised from Isabel and 10,000 from San Jorge. The annotation by Woodford noted that in 1888 no village was left on St George Island because the inhabitants and the settlement were 'swept away some years ago by head-hunters from New Georgia' (Amherst and Thomson 1901, Volume 1: 24, 28, 33).

At Guadalcanal, Gallego also reported that the 'whole coast seemed full of villages' and noted 'more than six hundred warriors' assembled for battle (Amherst and Thomson 1901, Volume 1: 41). He estimated that more than 300,000 men could be gathered from Guadalcanal and from the Nggela islands another 50,000. On Nggela, Mendaña reported that the 'island is thickly populated: all the people are well-grown and good-looking', and that their canoes were large and each contained 30 men (Amherst and Thomson 1901, Volume 1: 146, 147). From Santiago (Uki ni Masi) more than 100,000 men could be obtained and the same from San Christoval (Makira) (Amherst and Thomson 1901, Volume 1: 180–181). The figures are of course astounding. Mendaña was looking for the fabled Isles of Solomon and, if he found riches, he had to convince the Spanish authorities that a colony could be established there. Large numbers of 'indians' were also potential slaves. The annotation to the reports by Woodford acknowledges the exaggerations, 'but it is evident that the population in 1567 was at least four times greater than it is now. Head hunting and epidemics are the most probable causes of the decrease'. These annotations are consistent with and taken from the notes made by Woodford during his third expedition to the islands in 1888. In his published paper Woodford also noted that the Spanish sailors estimated the population of Aola village at 3,000 people (Woodford 1888a: 411). Such figures only added to the later belief that Solomon Islanders had suffered a catastrophic decline in the 300 years between about 1600 and 1900.

The widely believed depopulation of the islands should be treated with suspicion for factors such as internecine warfare, labour recruitment and

infectious diseases did not act continuously or uniformly over the whole area (Groenewegen 1970: 1). But Groenewegen, who noted the gross over-estimations made by Mendaña in the Spanish journals, wrote that in '1911 the first British Resident Commissioner in the Solomon Islands, Mr. C. M. Woodford, who was considered to have great knowledge of the area but was not in a position actually to count the population, gave an estimate of 150,000'. The same figure was still used as an estimate of the Solomon Islander population in the 1921 census (WPHC 4/IV 2991/1922). When island populations were counted and the figure revealed a total much lower than the accepted number, this was interpreted as evidence of depopulation. Numerous examples of such depopulation have been enshrined in the theory that Pacific peoples were becoming extinct in the face of Western civilization. It was apparent from evidence that some islander populations did suffer notable declines, and most certainly in the last half of the 19th century and the early-20th century each area must be considered on a case by case basis. The often quoted reasons for the decline were the increased scale and effects of warfare following the introduction of firearms, the rapid abandonment of social customs that led to the 'psychological factor' or the loss of the will to live, and the third reason, the introduction of foreign diseases that led to increased mortality of the young and those of reproductive age (Roberts 1927 quoted in Bayliss-Smith 2006: 21–22).

In 1913, Arthur Mahaffy was quoted by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 May 1913: 19) as saying:

The dark-skinned island peoples are slowly melting away. In nearly every group [in the Pacific] the native race is enfeebled, riven by disease, with no prospect ahead than annihilation ... Mr Mahaffy said that various causes were producing decay, and one of the chief of these was idleness ... They are dying fast from phthisis [pulmonary consumption] mainly, which is making great ravages in all the islands. The introduction of clothes and other habits had been responsible for this.

Mahaffy was primarily concerned about the impact poor health and the inability of men to work would have on the plantation labour problem. He too advocated the introduction of Indian collie labour into the Solomon Islands as had been done in Fiji. Mahaffy's opinions were part of the accepted view of islander populations and their future.

Rev Walter Ivens (1918; *The Argus* 10 October 1925: 6, 1930) from the Melanesian Mission was a careful linguist and ethnologist based on Malaita. He divided the depopulation question into three phases. The first was the period from the 1860s to the 1890s that coincided with the growth of the Pacific labour trade. Many men did not return, some by choice, and some died, but some of those who did return either delayed their marriage or did not marry at all. The second

phase was the period of escalating warfare between the 1870s and the 1890s when traders and blackbirders introduced firearms into the islands as payment for island produce and as part of the 'beach payment' for indentured labourers. Returning labourers also brought back weapons smuggled in their trade boxes. This period of warfare also advanced but did not entirely cause an increase in head hunting in the New Georgia region. As a result of warfare many villages along the coast of Vella Lavella, parts of New Georgia and Maramasike passage on southern Malaita were abandoned by people escaping raiders and the possible return of the Royal Navy's men-of-war bringing their annual display of 'Commodore Justice' (Scarr 1967a: 174).

In the New Georgia group the depopulation was indeed severe. It is estimated that in parts of New Georgia a population decline of 70 per cent was likely between 1850 and 1930 (Bayliss-Smith, Hviding and Whitmore 2003: 351). Indeed, the population of Simbo in 1908 was thought to be only 400 people (Hocart 1922: 74, Scheffler 1962: 137). The final period of population decline was the most devastating and widespread. Between the 1880s and the 1920s epidemic diseases spread throughout the islands. Diseases spread quickly through nucleated villages and the plantation labour lines. People moved between the villages and the plantations carrying dysentery, influenza, measles and whooping cough. Malaria and yaws were already known on the islands but ironically spread among people brought together in an effort to change living standards, to improve hygiene and to control pigs, garbage and effluent. The other major cause of population decline was the spread of malaria. It was not until 1897 that the mosquito was found to be the key vector in the transmission of the disease. Apart from causing death, a severe impact of malaria may cause foetal and infant mortality as well as miscarriages, premature births and stillbirths in women (Bayliss-Smith 2006: 41).

It was generally assumed that the population of the Solomon Islands for the period 1912–1913 was between 100,000 and 150,000 (Bennett 1987: 151 quoting British Solomon Islands Protectorate Annual report 1912–1913; Bayliss-Smith 2006: 27). Certainly, the colonial administration had been using the larger figure for some time (Great Britain. House of Commons. Parliamentary Papers 1905: 5; British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1911: 45). This was repeated throughout the early years of the 20th century (*The Register* [Adelaide] 19 February 1906: 4; *The Daily News* [Perth] 17 January 1916: 4; Scholefield 1919: 241). It was apparent that plantation companies were using the declining population thesis to support the case for the introduction of Asian labour (*The Brisbane Courier* 11 June 1927: 20).

Basing his data on a number of sources, Moore (2009a: 15–16) gives a more accurate population figure for Malaita circa 1900 as 50,000, for Nggela 5,000, and for Isabel a population of 4,000 in the 1890s. An extrapolation from these

data would give an estimated population of the islands as 90,000 at the end of the 19th century. This would be a more accurate figure at the end of the sustained contact period when the effects of epidemic disease, local warfare and population movements had taken their toll. This is largely confirmed by the population figures of 93,415 from the 1931 census, although this was largely a head count carried out by District Officers who relied on figures provided by District Headmen. Based on these figures, it is most likely that the pre-contact population of the Solomon Islands—one of the many demographic unknowns of the Pacific—was about 100,000 people and that about 10 per cent were affected by internecine warfare, epidemic diseases or the resulting fertility and mortality issues of the later quarter of the 19th century. Quoting the title of Jared Diamond's book *Guns, Germs and Steel*, Bayliss-Smith (2006: 47) summarised the issue of depopulation in Melanesia as: 'Guns and steel were important aspects of colonialism, but the role of Germs is more subtle than is usually assumed'. It was clear that colonial planning was based on bias with a poor understanding of epidemiology and was most certainly confused on the depopulation discourse.

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