

‘Voyage of the Pilgrims’, New Hebrides, June 1902: Australia’s First Attempt at Colonisation

Elizabeth Rechniewski

In June 1902, just over a year after Australia’s Federation, a small group of prospective settlers set out from Sydney for the New Hebrides on the steamship *Mambare* to assess their chances of making a living there. They were accompanied by A. B. (Banjo) Paterson who had been hired by *The Sydney Morning Herald* to report on their progress and the nature of the territory to which they were venturing. ‘Voyage of the Pilgrims’ was the title of the first article Paterson sent back to the *Herald*, published on 1 July 1902. Paterson wrote nine lengthy articles on the experience of this hopeful band, all of which appeared in the paper throughout July. This article draws on contemporary French and Australian newspapers, including Paterson’s articles and parliamentary debates, to explore the fate of what is arguably a first and failed Australian attempt to undertake privately initiated, state-supported, overseas colonisation in the Pacific. The use of the term ‘colonisation’ can be justified by considering both the aims and nature of this venture and the context of imperial rivalry in which it took place, as the tensions generated by the competing national and imperial interests of France, Britain and Australia were played out in the struggle for land, influence and political control over the New Hebrides and, more broadly, over control of the south-west Pacific. The article focuses on the years immediately preceding the dispatch of the ‘pilgrims’ when Australia emerged as a nation in her own right and began, however hesitantly, to assert her independence in the area of ‘external affairs’, the issue of the New Hebrides proving an early source of disagreement with Britain.

Through the Convention of 1887, Britain and France had agreed to share governance of the islands through the Anglo-French Joint Naval Commission (1887–1906) that protected the subjects of each country and administered summary ‘justice’ to the native population. The agreement did not, however, end the attempts by a range of interested parties to modify or overturn it. The entrepreneur John Higginson, who had made his fortune in New Caledonia, was, despite his British origins, a particularly active agent for France. In 1882 he founded the *Compagnie Calédonienne des Nouvelles-Hébrides* with the avowed goal of bringing about French political control through the acquisition of vast tracts of poorly demarcated land ‘bought’ from natives who may or may not have had the traditional rights (Stoll 2017, 6). The Company then sought, with varying degrees of success, to install French settlers on some of the land it had acquired. Facing bankruptcy in 1894 it was bailed out by the French government which assumed majority interest and control of the renamed *Société française des Nouvelles-Hébrides*. By the turn of the century, the French government had therefore ‘a vested interest in seeing the position of French settlers strengthened and their land claims validated’ (Trease 1987, 42). A French government initiative to promote settlement in 1900 saw the number of French settlers increase from 159 to 293 in a single year, greatly outnumbering the British population of 159 in June 1901.¹ Of the latter, seventy-five were missionaries and their family members. The French presence—supported by private and government investment—continued to expand and to dominate British settlement throughout the first half of the twentieth century.²

For the colonial lobby in France, exclusive French possession of the New Hebrides was a natural and necessary extension and assurance of French power and presence in the Pacific. The colonial press regularly campaigned for a French takeover of the New Hebrides, both before and after the establishment of the Condominium in 1906. They represented the archipelago as a natural dependency of New Caledonia, as a crucial staging post in Pacific trade, as possessing an excellent harbour, and, because of its

¹ The Society ‘provided them each with from 25 to 50 hectares of land, three native labourers, agricultural equipment, and a loan of 5,000 francs (c. £200)’ (Thompson 1970, 368–9).

² Aldrich (1990, 303) details the extent of French financial support and also the attempts to solve the shortage of labour through the importation of thousands of Indochinese workers in the 1920s.

reputedly fertile soil, as the potential source of abundant copra and other agricultural products (Lemire 1902; Jaray 1906). Above all the colonial lobby asserted the necessity of French pre-eminence in the Pacific against the Anglo-Saxon ‘enemy’; on learning of the departure of the Australian settlers, Charles Lemire declared in the *Dépêche coloniale illustrée*: ‘The enemy is at the gates of the Hebrides: we must not allow him to enter!’ (Lemire 1902, 8).³

The representatives of the ‘colonial party’ in the French parliament, including Eugène Étienne and André Ballande, consistently raised in the debates on colonial affairs the issue of control of the Pacific Islands in general and the New Hebrides in particular, accusing successive governments of failing to match or prevent the steady expansion of other European powers in the region.⁴ After the Federation of Australia, they directed their animosity towards the new nation whose ‘active, industrious and very ambitious men’ were seeking to ‘dominate the Pacific’ and impose a Monroe doctrine of their own.⁵ Indeed Jaray (1906, 454) suggested that this imperialist policy was a factor in cementing the unity of the new nation.⁶

³ *[Les Anglais] ont créé de nouvelles lignes maritimes enserrant les îles Nouvelles-Hébrides dans un réseau d’îles anglaises et ils s’apprêtent à jeter dans l’Archipel 200 colons dont le nombre contrebalancerait celui des Français. Le premier convoi est parti de Sydney le 1er juin. L’ennemi est aux portes des Hébrides: ne permettons pas qu’il y entre!*

⁴ André Ballande, ‘*Nous en sommes exactement au même point où nous a placés l’empire, il y a un demi-siècle.*’ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, 2 February 1905, p. 130. The *parti colonial* was a network of members of parliament with a particular interest in promoting colonial development and expansion (Andurain 2017).

⁵ Eugène Étienne, ‘*[L’Australie] renferme des hommes actifs, industriels, très ambitieux et qui ont la prétention de dominer le Pacifique.*’ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, 21 January 1902, p. 98.

⁶ ‘*À mesure que l’Australie se développe, elle accentue sa politique d’expansion et d’influence dans le Pacifique du Sud; ses forces grandissantes ont plaisir à s’exercer aux dépens de ses voisins et au profit de l’impérialisme australien; la colonie aspire à la domination et c’est une excellente occasion de cimenter son unité que de faire communier tous les Australiens dans l’espérance d’une hégémonie prochaine.*’

These arguments were regularly and faithfully relayed by the French newspaper published in Australia, *Le Courrier australien*.⁷

From 1883 the Australian colonies, led by Victoria's pro-imperialist premier James Service, argued for British annexation of the Pacific islands of Melanesia but met with an unsympathetic response from London (Service 1883). When Alfred Deakin, Victoria's principal representative at the Colonial Conference in London in 1887, confronted British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury over fears that Britain would cede the New Hebrides to France, Salisbury thought the Australians 'the most unreasonable of people' for wanting Britain to incur the 'stupendous cost' of a war with France for a group of islands which are 'to us as valueless as the South Pole' (quoted in Welsh 2004, 264; see also Stoll 2017). Australia's politicians, and opinion leaders remained, however, preoccupied by what they deemed the security and other dangers that would stem from French possession of the islands.

The relegation law, passed in the French parliament in 1885, that would condemn habitual criminals to forced labour in distant parts of the empire, opened up the prospect of the New Hebrides also being used as a destination for convicts and revived the long-term Australian opposition to the presence of 'penal hot spots' in their Pacific neighbourhood (Nye 1984, 89–90; Bergantz 2018, 164). To this concern was added a growing sense of vulnerability to the ambitions of European and later, Asiatic powers, and the fear of the establishment of foreign naval bases on the New Hebrides that would threaten the eastern flank of Australia: British annexation of the New Hebrides would complete the protective encirclement of the east of the continent. Economic interests were a secondary but not insignificant argument for possession, with a general belief in the agricultural potential of the islands.

The Australian colonies were anxious to ensure that the New Hebrides would not fall into the hands of the French through indifference on the part of London. They feared the precedent set by British inaction over the fate of New Caledonia, whose takeover in 1853 by two French navy ships

⁷ See for example 'L'Annexion des Nouvelles-Hébrides' which rehearses the arguments of the predominant French presence on these islands, the more extensive ownership of land and the archipelago's proximity to New Caledonia. *Le Courrier australien*, 14 April 1900, p. 4.

provoked little response from a British government then engaged with its French ally in the Crimean War. Their fears proved justified in so far as the larger interests of Britain in Europe and the world and the state of its relationship with France overrode the security concerns advanced by its colony. Roger C. Thompson’s exhaustive study of Australia’s relations with the New Hebrides concludes:

after the Anglo-German partition of eastern New Guinea in 1884 until hopes of the German portion were aroused during World War I, the New Hebrides were the only serious object of Australia’s imperialistic ambition. The constant struggle during this period to combat and remove French influence from the group was the mortar that held together the bricks of Australia’s wider opposition to any increase of foreign influence in the Pacific (1970, 639).

This imperialistic ambition was fostered throughout the period by the Presbyterian missionaries on the New Hebrides, supported by their powerful lobby groups in Sydney and Melbourne, who feared that French annexation would undermine their religious influence and also their ability to protect the natives from what they claimed to be cruel exploitation by the French recruiters and settlers.⁸

The Australian Natives Association (to which Alfred Deakin belonged) was another tireless advocate for annexation by Britain (Meaney 2009, 103–104). Even during the Planners’ conference preparing for Federation, the Premiers—on reading reports in French newspapers that Australian opposition to French annexation had supposedly diminished—interrupted their sitting to send a resolution to the Colonial Office expressing the hope that ‘no steps will be taken to give France greater control of the New Hebrides unless the Australian colonies are first consulted’.⁹ Despite the precedent set by Queensland’s pre-emptive annexation of New Guinea for the British Crown in 1883, no proposal was put forward, whether in the press or in parliament, for an Australian imperialist adventure, Australia’s

⁸ One of their leading spokesmen, Dr Paton, was described as a *spécialiste gallophobe* in *Le Courrier australien*, 2 March 1901, p. 2.

⁹ ‘Resumption of the Sitting’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January 1900, p. 5.

ambitions being limited at this stage to pressuring the British government to take action.¹⁰

Australia became a Federation on 1 January 1901. In the first months of the new Commonwealth, questions were asked in parliament about the future of the New Hebrides: Dugald Thomson (North Sydney, NSW) raised fears of French annexation on 22 May 1901, in reply to the Governor General's speech and again on 13 June 1901;¹¹ Charles Salmon (Laanecoorie, Victoria) and Isaac Isaacs (Indi, Victoria) put questions to the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, on 3 July 1901 concerning land disputes and other grievances that disadvantaged British settlers, and received a reassuring reply from the Prime Minister that 'this matter of the New Hebrides has had [my] earliest and continuous consideration' and that he had been in constant correspondence by telegraph and letter with the Secretary of State for the Colonies.¹²

It is important to note that while Federation had brought certain national powers to Australia, Australians retained the sole status of British subjects and identified closely with the Empire. Most had enthusiastically espoused the cause of the Empire during the Boer War, which straddled the period of Federation, and saw in this commitment the guarantee of the ongoing protection that the Empire would afford them (Reynolds 2016, 32–36). Federation was moreover founded on the White Australia policy that asserted the primary identification of Australians with the 'British race'. The distinction between 'Australian' and 'British' subjects was therefore in many instances irrelevant or ignored; in the discussions that took place around the colonisation of the New Hebrides, the term 'British settlers' generally referred to 'members of the British race'. If there was a need to make a distinction in terms of country of birth, it was common to use the descriptor 'English', as in the quote from Paterson below, where he

¹⁰ In 1883 Queensland's premier, Thomas McIlwraith, fearing German annexation, claimed possession of New Guinea east of the Dutch border and adjacent islands for the British Crown. His action was initially disowned by Britain. Peter Overlack (1979, 128 and 130) argues that this attempt at colonial expansion played a role in the move towards Federation, since it highlighted the necessity of joint action by the colonies to repel French and German expansion in the region and also taught them that they could not rely on automatic British support.

¹¹ 'The Commonwealth Parliament. Thursday's Proceedings', *The Evening News* (Sydney), 14 June 1901, p. 3.

¹² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1901, p. 5.

identified the men setting out for the New Hebrides as including New South Welshmen, New Zealanders and a lone Englishman.

In 1901–2, the articles and letters published in the press were almost unanimous in their concern for the future of Australia in the Pacific amid nervousness as to whether the tentative move towards independence might leave the new nation exposed to face alone the expansionary designs of all the imperial countries that had a foothold in the Pacific. With accompanying maps to highlight the dangers, articles named now Holland, now Germany—and almost always France—as dangers to Australia’s security in the region. Should Germany absorb Holland, for example, as one commentator believed inevitable, then the Dutch Pacific colonies would fall into German hands, creating a menace to Australian security that should make this ‘one of the chief questions of the day.’¹³

Germany was a serious and expansionary rival but France was generally perceived to pose the most immediate challenge because of the proximity of the islands it controlled, while the fluidity of control over the New Hebrides created the possibility of intervention by the Anglo-Saxon powers. A range of proposals was put forward in the press that would enable ownership of the archipelago to pass to Britain: perhaps the New Hebrides could be obtained through an exchange of colonial territory, in return for Madagascar or Mauritius,¹⁴ or an agreement on North Africa. Or perhaps the islands could be divided between the French and British. Similar proposals for territorial exchange or partition of the islands were put forward by the colonial lobby in France.¹⁵ The Australian press reported in 1901 on the proposal by Paul Leroy-Beaulieu that France give up its fishing rights in Newfoundland in return for sole control over the New Hebrides.¹⁶

News from and about the New Hebrides was regularly reported and commented upon in the Australian press, particularly when Australian

¹³ ‘Shall Germany Have the Dutch Empire’, *Evening Telegraph* (Charters Towers, Qld), 19 August 1902, p. 3.

¹⁴ In May 1906 a delegation of Presbyterian missionaries lobbied London to consider handing Mauritius to the French in return for the New Hebrides.

¹⁵ Jaray (1906, 455–456) suggested that France should either exchange territory or simply buy the islands outright.

¹⁶ ‘Another French Exchange Idea’, *The Age*, 12 June 1901, p. 5. In the same article Beaulieu is reported as suggesting that the New Hebrides ‘be bartered to Britain in exchange for very material concessions in Nigeria’.

interests appeared to be threatened; the papers reported, for example, on the petition circulating in October 1902 amongst the French settlers, and supported by some of the English ones, calling for France to annex the New Hebrides.¹⁷ Particular attention was paid to the speech in the French National Assembly on 22 January 1902 by Eugène Étienne—member for Oran, Algeria, and leader of the colonial party—calling for French annexation, perhaps in return for ending transportation to New Caledonia. News of this speech was reported and commented upon in many Australian newspapers.¹⁸ Speaking only a few months before the ‘pilgrims’ set off for the New Hebrides, Étienne asserted that there were no British colonists on the New Hebrides, only missionaries, and that for this and many other reasons the French had an unalienable right to annex the islands.

Did Étienne’s words provoke the Australian government into taking a more active role in promoting British settlement? Whatever the case, in light of Britain’s indifference and French activism, the Australian government decided that it should support settlement by British subjects in the archipelago. When news of negotiations between Australian shipping company Burns Philp and the government became known, Prime Minister Edmund Barton explained to parliament that:

although the Commonwealth does not propose to itself become, or to attempt to become, the owner of land in the New Hebrides—which I think would be quite beyond its scope—it may make an arrangement with the company in consideration of the contract which it is granting to them to enable settlers to acquire land under them in the New Hebrides, and thus afford a counterpoise to the large settlement which has been going on there at the hands of French organizations.¹⁹

¹⁷ ‘Petition to French Parliament for Annexation’, *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 October 1902, p. 9.

¹⁸ See, for example, ‘France and the New Hebrides’, *The Evening News* (Sydney, NSW), 23 January 1902, p. 5. Convict transportation to New Caledonia had ended in 1897. Étienne may be referring to the designation in 1887 of the *Île des pins* as a *lieu de relégation* for habitual criminals, who could be moved from colony to colony (*Décret du 25 novembre 1887 portant organisation de la relégation individuelle aux colonies*, article 11). This decree, which provoked some negative comment in the Australian press, was not revoked until 1909.

¹⁹ Edmund Barton. Question: New Hebrides. 4 March 1902. <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;orderBy=dateeLast;page=0;query=Burns%20Philp;rec=5;resCount=Default>, accessed 26 June 2018.

Agreement was reached in April 1902 between the government and Burns Philp & Co. Pty Ltd for the extension of the mail service, the free transport as passengers of such ‘officers’ as the Postmaster General might appoint and the cession of 50,000 acres of Burns Philp land in the New Hebrides, in return for an increased shipping subsidy. Article 11 read:

[...] the Contractors agree and declare that they, their successors and assignees, will stand possessed of all such lands and properties in trust to lease them to such persons at rentals of 1s. per annum for every 50 acres or part thereof, and on such terms and conditions as the Minister of External Affairs of the Commonwealth may from time to time approve, and at the expiration or sooner determination of this Agreement, or when required by the Minister, upon trust to execute such conveyance, assignment, or assurance of all their right, title, and interest in and to such lands and properties to such person or persons and in such manner as the said Minister may direct.²⁰

The aim of using the shipping subsidy to ‘develop territory’²¹ and ‘effectively occupy the New Hebrides’²² for Australia was openly discussed in the Federal parliament. It is noteworthy, and supports Thompson’s conclusion

²⁰ Articles of Agreement between the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia and Messrs. Burns Philp & Co. Pty Ltd, tabled in Parliament on 9 April 1902. Note that Article 7 banned the use of ‘coloured labour’ on any of the ships, except for local loading and unloading. <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=date-eLast;page=3;query=New%20Hebrides;rec=14;resCount=Default>, accessed 26 June 2018.

²¹ Senator James Drake, Supply Bill no 9, Second Reading, 30 May 1902. <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=date-eLast;page=0;query=Drake%20Content%3A%22developing%20territory%22%20Date%3A01%2F05%2F1902%20%3E%3E%2030%2F05%2F1902;rec=0;resCount=Default>, accessed 26 June 2018.

²² The volunteers had been enlisted ‘to grow coffee, tobacco, bananas and copra, for the purpose of effectively occupying the New Hebrides for Australia’. Visitor to New Hebrides, cited by Senator Staniford Smith, Governor General’s Speech: Address in Reply, 9 March 1904. <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=Content%3A%22coffee,%20tobacco,%20bananas,%20and%20copra%22%20Date%3A01%2F03%2F1904%20%3E%3E%2030%2F03%2F1904;rec=0;resCount=Default>, accessed 30 May 2018.

cited above, that one of the earliest foreign policy initiatives undertaken by the new Commonwealth government was to attempt to intervene in this way in the decades-long struggle over settlement and control of the New Hebrides.

It is not unusual that the Commonwealth's partner in this venture was a private company, given the long history of private initiatives in promoting colonial expansion. Burns Philp held land on Santo, the largest island of the group and home to only a handful of French settlers. The major Australian shipping line serving the South Pacific, including the New Hebrides, it was keen to extend its lines and the servicing of new British settlements, not least because it feared that if French settlement predominated, it might be driven out of the trade of the group. The settlers would therefore be tied to Burns Philp for goods bought or sold (Thompson 1970, 375). The Commonwealth and Burns Philp agreed to offer to British subjects who had at least £200 capital, leases of from 50 to 500 acres for three years at 1s. per 50 acres per annum, which they could convert into 99-year leases at 1d. per acre if they made improvements to their land within three years, after which time settlers could also apply for additional blocks (377).

This is the context in which the 'pilgrims' set out from Sydney for the New Hebrides on 1 June 1902, accompanied by Banjo Paterson. This was the third overseas mission that Paterson had undertaken for *The Sydney Morning Herald* within a period of three years, in each case reporting from the faultlines of British imperialism. He was the accredited war correspondent to the South African War for *The Herald* and *The Age* from October 1899 to September 1900; in July 1901 he was sent to cover the Boxer Rebellion, arriving too late, however, to report on the action; and only two months after his return from China in April 1902, he was sent to accompany the party of settlers to the New Hebrides. His experiences with Australian troops overseas—although they had been sent to support British imperial adventures—had confirmed his radical nationalist view that Australia was more than capable of defending her own interests and indeed must do so.

Though Paterson records that there were many applicants to join the party, most were turned away because they lacked the necessary £200 in capital; in the end only eighteen made the journey. The *Northern Star* reported the majority of the settlers to be single men between 25 and 35 years of age; the married men were leaving wives and children behind until they had

satisfied themselves as to the conditions of life in the tropics. At the meeting prior to their departure, they raised with the representative of Burns Philp the problems that they feared might hinder their efforts to establish themselves in this new land: the labour question, land tenure and the Commonwealth tariffs imposed on island produce. The government, they argued, should accord them concessions similar to those the French government gave to its settlers since, ‘by creating a preponderance of Australian interest in the group, they were facilitating the ultimate addition of the New Hebrides to the British Empire’.²³ These problems would indeed jeopardise the success of the settlement.

On board *SS Mambare* Banjo Paterson gave a more colourful description of his fellow travellers, to whom he ascribed the qualities of sturdy independence and practical self-reliance that he lauded in his bush ballads:

There are farmers, prospectors, labourers, bushmen and tradesmen among them. Two are New Zealanders. One may be very sure that in anything needing enterprise there will be a New Zealander. Two are Victorians, a few Queenslanders, the rest New South Wales men, except one who is English. Some of them are quite old men, but men of the type that don’t know they are old men who went out on the gold rushes in the roaring days and are now following their bent by trying this new scheme (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July 1902).

They have been driven from Australia, he writes, by drought and agricultural failure; they are tough men who take nothing on trust and whom Paterson sees as laying little store by his assurance that they will be known as the ‘Pilgrim Fathers of the New Hebrides’. They are equipped with an extensive if slightly eccentric cargo for this New World:

The ship is fitted up like a regular Robinson Crusoe ship—she has sheep, fowls, pigeons, canaries, a cockatoo, a ram, a dog, a monkey that doesn’t answer to his name of Kruger, onions, potatoes, rice, strawberry plants, bananas—in fact everything that can be needed in these outside settlements (1 July).²⁴

²³ ‘First Party to leave by the Mambare’, *Northern Star* (Lismore, NSW), 24 May 1902, p. 10.

²⁴ Paul Kruger was the Boer commander during the Second Boer War (October 1899–May 1902), which ended on the very eve of the pilgrims’ departure. Indeed they almost certainly did not know of the signing of the Treaty that ended the war.

Paterson was to report for *The Herald* on the prospects for settlement: on the material conditions, climate, labour force and potential for agricultural development. He defined his mission to the reader as answering ‘a few leading questions which everyone will want to know about in connection with the matter. What is the land like? Can a good title be got? Is the fever bad? What about the French? What about the natives? What return can be expected?’ (25 July). It can readily be seen that Paterson’s perspective will be significantly that of the ‘imperial gaze’, assessing the worth of territory and inhabitants to the colonial enterprise (Pratt 1992).

To these questions Paterson gave copious and at first largely positive answers. He reported on the promising economic prospects of the islands: the soil is ‘magnificent, right up to the summits of the hills’, suitable for growing maize as well as copra, coffee, spices and sugar (21 July). He noted that there was abundant fresh water and constant rainfall. His favourable opinion gradually wavered, however, as the denseness of the vegetation was revealed and the cost of clearing it became evident. The prospects of making a living were dented by the realisation that years must pass before the plantations made a profit and in the meantime the settler must pay the native labour and live somehow. Paterson in more cautious mode noted that only those with considerable capital behind them might make a living there, for should the price of maize fall, the settler must wait seven years before coconut trees would yield him a profit. He summarised: ‘The chief troubles before the settlers are fever, the scarcity of labour, and want of capital’ (21 July).

As for the natives, Paterson wrote that they would cause ‘no trouble’ since ‘they are dying out faster than ever our Australian blacks died out’ (25 July). Despite titling one of his articles ‘Cannibals and Traders’ (26 July)—possibly because the very mention of cannibalism would provoke a *frisson* of horror in the Sydney readers and sell more papers—Paterson debunked the idea that this practice was now at all common and, if it did occur, only between the natives themselves after a battle.²⁵ The menacing ‘savage’ who confronted the settlement party on a remote mountain path was discovered to have worked in Queensland and to have accosted them only in order

²⁵ Maurice Witts (1905), writing only a few years later from Santo, catalogued extensive feuds and deaths amongst the local tribes.

to exchange French for English money (26 July).²⁶ The major problem in securing the title to land stemmed from disputes between the British and French settlers, wrote Paterson, because of ill-defined boundaries and lapsed or long-unclaimed titles, a source of conflict that he predicted would only become worse with time (25 July).

Despite the problems he identified, Paterson’s enthusiasm for the project of settlement did not diminish, since in his final articles he was still arguing the economic and political necessity of British occupation:

For richness and carrying capacity those islands are among the finest lands in the world, and it will be a costly mistake if our nation allows them to pass into any other hands. [...] with such vast possibilities—nay certainties—of wealth in these islands we should put up a ceaseless clamour for their annexation by England (25 July).

Paterson’s radical nationalism, which cultivated an independent stance vis-à-vis the mother country, did not, however, extend to envisaging independent military action on Australia’s part, although Deakin had devised, and then abandoned, just such a project in 1888–89 (Welsh 2004, 264). At this early stage of Federation, it is not clear that Australia’s navy, an amalgamation of the colonies’ naval forces, would have had the resources, the experience or the organisational structures to carry out a distant imperial mission. To call for annexation by Britain was still the most realistic option to protect Australia’s interests and security in the Pacific.

Eleven men decided to remain on Santo and by October 1902. *The Australian Star* (Sydney) reported that twenty colonists were occupying the settlement, now named Annandale, that stretched for several miles along the south coast of the island.²⁷ Some had been joined by their wives and children while other families were on their way. Great progress was reported to have been made in clearing the bush.²⁸ Another party of settlers left Sydney in

²⁶ In the second half of the nineteenth century, extensive use was made on the Queensland sugar plantations of Indigenous labour recruited, often through deception or constraint, from the Pacific Islands. Following the Federation of Australia in 1901, most of the labourers were deported, in pursuance of the White Australia policy.

²⁷ The settlement was named after the missionary, Dr Annand, who had helped the settlers on their arrival.

²⁸ ‘White Settlers in the New Hebrides’, *The Australian Star* (Sydney), 24 October 1902, p. 5.

November so that by the end of 1902 there were thirty-one men, five women and fifteen children at Annandale (Thompson 1970, 381).

Gradually, however, the settlers' prospects dimmed and the numbers fell. By 1904, when only twenty settlers remained, Senator Staniford Smith (Western Australia) described the scheme in parliament as 'a lamentable failure' and accused the Commonwealth government of offering the settlers half-hearted support, far less than that offered by the French to their own settlers.²⁹ He cited as major problems the protectionist tariffs imposed on maize, which had a disastrous effect on planters' incomes after the drought broke in Australia in 1903, lowering the price of the cereal. To this was added the difficulty of obtaining labour—the French settlers were allowed to recruit their labourers by giving them guns and ammunition, possessions much prized by the natives—and the decline in the native population consequent on the impact of disease and recruitment. The debates in parliament revealed a rift between those who promoted free trade (Staniford Smith) and those who advocated the protection of local production through tariffs and the development of local settlement in preference to overseas expansion (such as Senator Higgs, Labour, Queensland);³⁰ the tariffs largely remained. The Annandale settlers drifted into other occupations or left, so that by 1906 only three properties were being worked there.

As an indication of the closeness with which events on the New Hebrides were followed by the colonial lobby in France, the lack of success of this attempt at settlement was cited by André Ballande in the French Assembly in February 1905 as proof that the French adapted better to the climate and

²⁹ Governor General's Speech: Address in Reply, 9 March 1904 <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=Content%3A%22lamentable%20failure%22%2Date%3A01%2F01%2F1904%20%3E%3E%2030%2F12%2F1904;rec=1;resCount=Default>, accessed 20 June 2018.

³⁰ Senator Higgs consistently argued that any subsidy should be used to settle Australia's own immense territory, adding on one occasion that 'the desire of some honorable senators to annex the islands of the Pacific [is] merely due to a mistaken "military" ardour'. Supply Bill n° 9, Second Reading, 30 May 1902. Higgs seems to be referring to annexation by Australia.

<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22mistaken%20military%20ardour%22;rec=0;resCount=Default>, accessed 20 June 2018.

life in the New Hebrides than did Australians, ‘thanks to the qualities of our race, thanks to the endurance, the courage of our colonists.’³¹ Ballande cited this superiority as another argument for French annexation.

Despite the failure of the Annandale experiment, argument continued to be made in the Australian parliament for Commonwealth support for settlement. In an impassioned speech to the Senate in March 1904, Staniford Smith demanded tariff and other support for British settlers. The same call was made in the Lower House by another free-trader, Elliot Johnson (Lang, NSW), in August 1905, with a motion urging the government to ‘provide every reasonable facility for the promotion of British and Australian settlement,’ in order to protect Australia’s and the Empire’s strategic and commercial interests.³² During a lengthy debate, the motion received almost unanimous support, including from Deakin’s government, but was amended to demand British annexation. Speaking during the debate, Deakin declared:

for more than twenty years I have been acting with those who sought to increase Australian interests in the New Hebrides, and to secure the islands for the Empire. Governments both in the State and the Commonwealth with which I have been associated have shared the patriotic opinions expressed here today, and have represented them perpetually, and reiterated them continuously, to the mother country.³³

In the years leading up to the *Entente cordiale* of April 1904, however, the British and French governments were less concerned with the fate of the remote New Hebrides than with ensuring that relations between them not be jeopardised by the demands of their ill-disciplined imperial subjects.

³¹ ‘*grâce aux qualités de notre race, grâce à l’endurance, au courage de nos colons,*’ *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, 2 February 1905, p. 131. Ballande quoted Staniford Smith’s description of the mission as a failure in his speech.

³² Elliot Johnson, Question: New Hebrides, 10 August 1905, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=date-eLast;page=24;query=Elliot%20Johnson;rec=14;resCount=Default>, accessed 30 May 2018.

³³ <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;db=HANWARD80;id=hansard80%2Fhansard80%2F1905-08-10%2F0056;orderBy=date-eLast;page=24;query=Elliot%20Johnson;rec=14;resCount=Default>, accessed 21 August 2018. Deakin noted that £12,000 was spent each year on subsidies: ‘the greater part of that sum is spent, not for any pecuniary gain, but for the purpose of maintaining such occupation as exists by British subjects in this group’.

The quest for security in Europe led the two nations to resolve a wide range of colonial issues in order to broker the *Entente*, while the Accord of 1906 setting up the Condominium in the New Hebrides was a further expression of their new-found desire to avoid conflict. Despite these agreements, there is ample evidence in the press and occasional speeches in the Commonwealth parliament that suspicion of French expansionism and demands for British annexation of the New Hebrides (and occasionally of New Caledonia as well) remained very much alive in Australia throughout the pre-World War I period, and indeed during and after the war (Aldrich 1990, 301–2). These suspicions were fostered by the ongoing pressure for annexation from the French colonial lobby in its press³⁴ and in parliament, which occasionally won from the French government reassurance that such was indeed the nation’s long-term aim.³⁵ But although the Commonwealth government continued to subsidise shipping services to the New Hebrides, sponsored settlement was never apparently repeated.

The fate of the Annandale settlement must have weighed heavily on the decision makers, since not only did the number of settlers decline dramatically in the few years after its founding, but, despite Paterson’s prediction that there would be ‘no trouble from the natives’, October 1908 brought grim news. *The Sydney Morning Herald* and many other newspapers reported that a massacre of Europeans had taken place at Annandale: one of the original settlers, Peter Greig, and his two daughters had ‘fallen victim to a mob of bush natives’ in what appeared to be a robbery.³⁶

³⁴ See, for example, Edouard Néron, ‘La France aux Nouvelles-Hébrides’, *Les Annales Coloniales*, 23 June 1910, n° 25, p. 2; ‘Les Nouvelles-Hébrides’, *La Dépêche coloniale illustrée*, 31 October 1912, n° 20, pp. 245–256; E. Berthier, ‘Les Nouvelles-Hébrides’, *La Dépêche coloniale illustrée*, 28 February 1914, n° 4, pp. 37–48.

³⁵ See, for example, Victor Augagneur’s speech in the Assembly in April 1911, calling on the government to take ‘*dès maintenant les mesures nécessaires pour nous assurer une situation telle que le jour où il faudra discuter sur le sort réservé définitivement aux Nouvelles-Hébrides, nous ayons dans notre jeu des atouts aussi sérieux que ceux de nos adversaires*’ and the encouraging reply given by the Minister for the Colonies, Adolphe Messimy. *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés, 2ème séance, 5 April 1911*, pp. 1754–1756. Both men were associated with the *parti colonial* (Andurain 2017).

³⁶ ‘New Hebrides Massacre. Father and Daughters killed’, *The Register* (Adelaide), 24 October 1908, p. 10. Rodman (2001, 86–87) adds that the murderer, when finally caught, claimed Greig had refused to pay his wages.

Punitive parties were sent out; a British warship, *HMS Prometheus*, shelled villages near the beach and sent a party inland where they sighted a group of natives who were identified as the perpetrators, though they were some 450–500 yards away. A volley of shots was directed against the group; accounts of casualties differed but gradually reports leaked out that the victims included women. A January 1909 *Cairns Morning Post* article suggested children might also have been killed and reported that a ‘large number of Australians’ considered the Santo reprisals to be ‘barbaric, un-Christian and unjust’.³⁷ However, Dr Annand wrote a letter to the paper in justification of the retribution party: ‘This surprise and slaughter of their women, painful though it may appear to many, had a very good effect upon the bush men generally’; he concluded: ‘This has been a severe but a much-needed lesson to man Santo’.³⁸ There is no record that Banjo Paterson ever discussed the outcome of the Annandale experiment or the massacre of the settlers or that he revisited his initial perhaps overly positive assessment of the islands. The story of the Annandale experiment faded from history and memory, and its location disappeared from the maps of Vanuatu,³⁹ the post-independence name for the New Hebrides.

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³⁷ ‘The Santo Island Murder’, *The Cairns Morning Post*, 14 January 1909, p. 6.

³⁸ Quoted in ‘The New Hebrides Murder. The Retribution that followed. Latest Details’, *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (Qld), 7 January 1909, p. 7.

³⁹ One of the few maps available that shows Annandale is in Jacomb 1914, opposite page 208. The undated map may have been drawn some years prior to the publication of the book.

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