

From Phosphate to Refugees:
The Offshore Refugee Boom in the Republic of Nauru

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Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	v
Map of the Republic of Nauru.....	viii
Timeline.....	ix
Introduction: A Refugee Boom Town	1
The Miracle of the Renaissance.....	2
The Global Refugee Boom.....	6
Offshore Exceptionalities?	8
Refugee Literary Assemblages.....	11
Bringing in the Refugee as a Commodity-Being.....	14
Research Methodologies: Following Value.....	20
Awkward Bedfellows: Anthropology and... the Native?	29
A Note on Terminologies.....	33
Chapter Overview.....	35
Chapter One: Building the Workingman’s Dream.....	39
Part One: A Company Town State.....	42
The Coconut Boom.....	43
The Global Phosphate Boom.....	47
“A Fine Democratic Example”	48
The Phosphate Town.....	50
The Miracle of the Boom.....	58
Part Two: From Phosphate to Refugees.....	60
A Depressing Time for the Financial Barometer.....	63
The Jewel in the Crown.....	65
A Refugee Terra Nullius.....	67
A Refugee Company Town.....	71
Chapter Two: Mineral meets Migrant Metallurgies.....	77

Part One: Phosphate Extractions.....	79
Metallurgical Processes.....	83
Phosphate Pollutancies.....	85
Part Two: Human Extractions.....	89
Extractive Metallurgy.....	90
Offshore Circulations.....	92
Extractive Enclaves.....	94
Pollutant Practices.....	100
Well-Founded Fear.....	102
The Lived Experience of Assessment.....	104
Refugee Purity.....	108
Crude Contaminates.....	111
Quality is Elementary.....	118
Commodity Control	123
Ethical Disposal.....	124
 Chapter Three: Securing the Offshore Boom.....	 127
Part One: Company Town Safety.....	131
Part Two: A Corporate Mindset.....	137
The Spectacle of Risk: “End Offshore Extraction”	139
A Higher Risk Profile.....	146
Australia’s Safest Workplaces.....	151
Part Three: A Transparent Supply Chain.....	158
Global Risk Management	161
Humanising the Battlefield.....	162
Safe Work Nauru.....	166
Risk Managerialism to the Extreme.....	168
A Nauruan Ombudsman.....	171
On Company Town Responsibility.....	176
Company Town Responsibility II.....	180
 Chapter Four: Resource Frictions.....	 184
Part One: On Commodity Hazards.....	187
On Self-Commodification Anger.....	195

Part Two: Safe Communities.....	203
Commodity Custodianship.....	210
A Peaceful Refugee Protest.....	212
The Militarisation of City Life.....	216
Part Three: Resource Wars.....	217
 Chapter Five: <i>Ekamawir Omo</i>: Connecting Communities.....	225
Part One: World Refugee Day Goes Offshore.....	233
World Refugee Day II.....	236
Celebrating Diversity.....	238
From Rock to Resources.....	243
The Beach House.....	246
Part Two: Sowing the Refugee.....	250
Mobility Futures Australia.....	255
Refugee Industrialisation.....	256
Flexible Subjects.....	261
Freedom or Death.....	263
The Spanner in the Works.....	266
 Chapter Six: Bitter Money.....	269
Part One: An Ungovernable Space.....	271
The Devil's Excrement.....	277
A Renewable Resource Cycle.....	284
Part Two: A Finite Resource?.....	286
Offshore to Offshore Extractions.....	294
Refugee Resurgencies?.....	296
Coda: PO ₄₃ meets RSD.....	298
 Bibliography.....	300
Appendices.....	341

List of Figures

Introduction

Figure 1: World Phosphate Rock Reserves and Resources.....	1
Figure 2: UNHCR Populations of Concern.....	1
Figure 3: UNHCR Geneva; Australia; Nauru; Nauru RSD; Nauru Refugees...	2
Figure 4: Company Town Life.....	26

Chapter One

Figure 1.1: Phosphate Royalties; Refugee Royalties.....	40
Figure 1.2: School Sports Day.....	43
Figure 1.3: Former phosphate company housing; Current refugee company housing; Former phosphate administrator housing, now refugee corporate occupied.....	50
Figure 1.4: Phosphate Corporate Diversions.....	52
Figure 1.5: Phosphate Days.....	53
Figure 1.6: Japanese gun relic and Nauruan war memorial.....	55
Figure 1.7: Nauru House, Melbourne.....	58
Figure 1.8: Phosphate Company Bus; Refugee Company Bus.....	71
Figure 1.9: A Refugee Model Town.....	72
Figure 1.10: Refugee Corporate Diversions.....	73
Figure 1.11: The Magical State.....	75

Chapter Two

Figure 2.1: Processing Phosphate	77
Figure 2.2: Phosphate Fields; Buada Incursions.....	80
Figure 2.3: Ore From Rock.....	83
Figure 2.4: Phosphate Loading Day.....	89
Figure 2.5: Processing Refugees in the Distance of Phosphate Weighing Fields; Resettling Refugees in Phosphate Fields.....	97
Figure 2.6: Extractive Metallurgy.....	102
Figure 2.7: Certified Product Pileup.....	110
Figure 2.8: A New Courthouse.....	116

Figure 2.9: RONPhos Laboratory; Phosphate Samples for Mainland Analysis.....	118
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Chapter Three

Figure 3.1: Aiwo Driving License Checks; Refugee Corporate Health and Safety Display; Hi-Viz Light Protocol.....	127
Figure 3.2: A Company Town Road Scene.....	132
Figure 3.3: Mosquito Control Spray.....	133
Figure 3.4: Phosphate Commission Traffic Control.....	134
Figure 3.5: Refugee Labour Strikes, Nauru and Melbourne.....	139
Figure 3.6: Refugees on Nauru Facebook Page.....	157
Figure 3.7: Refugee Guardianship.....	178

Chapter Four

Figure 4.1: Refugees on Nauru Facebook Page.....	191
Figure 4.2: Resource Intersectionality.....	198
Figure 4.3: CLOs on Patrol.....	203
Figure: 4.4 The Protest Imaginary.....	220

Chapter Five

Figure 5.1: A Save the Children Worker “Getting Henna-ed”.....	226
Figure 5.2: Market Wares.....	228
Figure 5.3: Connecting Communities.....	230
Figure 5.4: Phosphate Commemorations.....	235
Figure 5.5: Learning about refugee processing.....	241
Figure 5.6: Refugee Poetry.....	243
Figure 5.7: The Beach House.....	246
Figure 5.8: Bringing the Community Together.....	247
Figure 5.9: Training in Refugee Work.....	252
Figure 5.10: Nauru Lifeskills.....	254
Figure 5.11: Marketing Cambodia.....	256
Figure 5.12: Refugee Ecologies.....	260
Figure 5.13: Refugee Labour Strikes.....	264

Chapter Six

Figure 6.1: Ship to Port.....	271
Figure 6.2: Nauru Leaks.....	275
Figure 6.3: Donald J. Trump Twitter Page.....	283
Figure 6.4: Imperial Debris.....	286
Figure 6.5: Boom Town Highs.....	289
Figure 6.6: New Learning Village Higher Education Complex.....	290
Figure 6.7: PO ₄₃ meets RSD.....	299

Nauru Timeline

1798 Captain John Fearn first recorded sighting of Nauru.

1830 Traders arrive in Nauru.

1878 10-year civil war among district clans.

1886 Anglo-German Convention, Nauru awarded to Germany as part of its Marshallese Protectorate.

1888 Jaluit officials and the German Imperial Commissioner arrive to Nauru on the gunboat *SMS Eber*.

1899 Nauru's first long-term missionary, the German Protestant Reverend Delaporte and his wife brought to the island.

1899 Albert Ellis identifies Nauru's phosphate supply.

1902 Nauru's first resident Roman Catholic missionary, Father Grundl arrives in Nauru from Germany, later seconded by Father Kayser in 1903.

1906 Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC) and the Jaluit-Gesellschaft begin a joint venture mining Nauru for phosphate.

1914 First World War. Nauru occupied by Australian forces. Germany loses territorial control.

1919 The Nauru Island Agreement creates the British Phosphate Commission, comprised of administrators from the Australian, British, and New Zealand governments, who take over the rights to phosphate mining.

1923 League of Nations gives Australia a trustee mandate over Nauru, with the United Kingdom and New Zealand as co-trustees.

1940 Germany sinks three of the BPC's four phosphate tankers en route from Nauru.

1941 Japanese bomb Nauru's wireless station by aircraft.

1942 Phosphate Administration surrender Nauru to Japanese.

1943 Japanese deport 1,200 Nauruans to work as labourers in Truk.

1945 Japan surrender to the Australian occupation force.

1946 Nauruans returned from Truk by the BPC ship *Trienza*.

1947 Nauru becomes a UN Civilisational Trust Territory and the island's administration returns to the same three powers.

1964 Proposition for Nauruans to relocate to Curtis Island – eventually declined.

1966 Nauru becomes self-governing.

1967 Nauru, under Hammer DeRoburt, purchases the assets of the BPC.

1968 Nauru independence.

1970 Nauru Phosphate Corporation takes over phosphate mining from the BPC.

1989 Nauru takes legal action against Britain, Australia and New Zealand for damages.

1993 Nauru and Australia agree to an out-of-court settlement of AU\$73 million over 20 years. New Zealand and the UK agree to a one-time settlement of AU\$8.2 million each.

1998 The bank of Nauru collapses.

2001 Nauru's President Rene Harris and Australia's Prime Minister John Howard broker the first refugee deal under the Pacific Solution.

2005 Nauru Phosphate Corporation changes name to the Republic of Nauru Phosphate Corporation (RONPhos).

2006 Nauru's primary phosphate deposits exhausted.

2007 Newly elected Rudd Labour (2007-2010) government closes offshore processing.

September 2012 Gillard Labour (2010-2013) reopens the offshore processing sites together with Nauru's President Sprent Dabwido, following the Australian Expert Panel Report recommendations.

2013 Families and children moved from Manus Island to Nauru.

March 2013 RSD commences but no decisions announced.

July 2013 Nauru riot – RPC 3 burned down.

December 2013 Salvation Army loses contract – Transfield Services expands from Manus to Nauru (February 2014).

July 2013 Rudd Labour government announces that all prospective refugees arriving by boat after 19 July 2013 will be transferred for processing in Nauru or PNG.

February 2014 Manus Island riot – Reza Barati killed.

May 2014 First RSD certifications – refugee resettlement in Nauru commences.

July 2014 First sitting of the Nauru Refugee Tribunal.

September 2014 Cambodia trade agreement.

December 2014 Connect Resettlement Services begins operation in Nauru.

February 2015 Open centre begins on designated days.

October 2015 24-hour open centre begins.

February 2016 The High Court of Australia delivers judgment in *Plaintiff M68*, which challenged the lawfulness of Nauru's refugee processing operations. The Court holds that Australia has not acted unlawfully.

April 2016 Manus RPCs ruled by the PNG Supreme Court as unlawful. Centres slated to close.

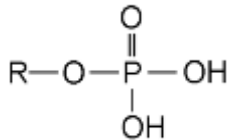
August 2016 Guardian Nauru Leaks campaign.

2016/2017 United States trade deal.

Introduction: A Refugee Boom Town

A small island indeed, only about 31/2 miles long and 21/2 wide, a place where primate native life and stirring enterprise are almost side by side in striking fashion – Sir Albert Ellis, Discoverer of Nauru Phosphate (1946: 8).

Phosphate:



$\text{Ca}_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$ (phosphate rock) + $2\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$ (sulfuric acid) =
 $\text{Ca}(\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4)_2$ (single superphosphate) + 2CaSO_4
(waste calcium sulfate/gypsum)

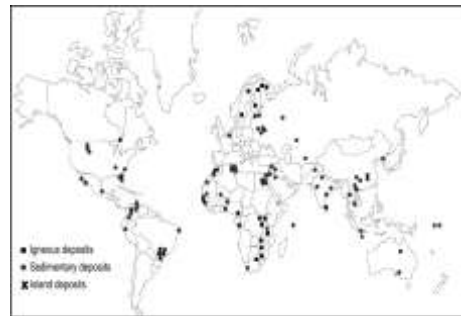


Figure 1: World Phosphate Rock Reserves and Resources

(Van Kauwenbergh 2010)

The treatment of phosphate rock with sulfuric acid liquefies and isolates the phosphorous usable by plants. This produces “superphosphate,” a fertiliser used to intensify crop productivity and restore soil nutrients. Waste calcium sulphate is discharged for disposal.

The Refugee:

“Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”



Figure 2: UNHCR Populations of Concern

(UNHCR 2017a)

Refugee Status Determination or “RSD” is the distillation process by which government or UNHCR workforces screen out the high-value product (the refugee) from the raw material (the migrant). The idea of the refugee holds firm political economic appeal, heralded as a symbol of liberal democratic statehood or explicator

of state inequalities. The contaminate (the economic migrant) is subject to safe and timely expulsion to their country of origin or a selected alternative.

The Miracle of the Renaissance



Figure 3: UNHCR Geneva; Australia; Nauru; Nauru RSD; Nauru Refugees

This book seeks to lend a new perspective to one of the most high profile topics of the era, looking at the explosive growth of the refugee as a commodity. I detail how the refugee is set within a promotional industry of state and non-state actors, refugees and non-refugees, describing the processes at work that refuel the global refugee economy. I do so by way of the 21km² Republic of Nauru, the world's smallest island state, located forty kilometres shy of the Equator in Micronesia. Nauru certainly does not fit the usual mould of a refugee absorbing state, which is normally characterised as one with a substantial domestic economy and home market, developed infrastructure and welfare system or geographical proximity to specific production sites of refugee wealth. In 2016, the United States, Canada, Australia, flanked by Nordic countries imported the most people, pre-certified as refugees, as so called “refugee resettlement states” (UNHCR 2017a). Turkey, Pakistan, and Lebanon hosted the most newly-made refugees, overflowing from conflict-driving production sites just across their borders. Until 2001, Nauru on the other hand had no history of refugee processing or resettlement. The country was not a signatory to the Refugee Convention nor did it have its own state asylum procedures. Amongst many in government and the public, there was little understanding of what the refugee entailed. But under 2001 then 2012 agreements, the cash-strapped sovereign state, bankrupt in the 1990s from ostentatious days of phosphate wealth (Williams and Macdonald 1985), resurged on the back of refugee wealth, importing Australia's maritime asylum seeker populations in exchange for a growth sector for economic reform. Anyone who makes their way by boat and claims to be a refugee in Australian

territorial now excised waters is “offshored” to Nauru or Papua New Guinea for Australian “mainland-style” “refugee processing” and “resettlement.”

Between September 2013 to March 2016, 1,355 asylum seekers were sent to Nauru, buoying the 10,500-strong populace with a new human import commodity from marine sediment turned phosphate export before (DIBP 2016). The majority of Nauru’s new ‘raw materials’ for processing are migrants from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka, leveraging for legalisation in Australia through the 1951 industry refrain, which categorises “the refugee” as a person who can prove “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (United Nations Treaty Series 1951). Histrionic debates about national security and border control coupled with a deep history of selective state-building constitute some of the political currency of offshoring refugee operations for Australia (Marr and Wilkinson 2003).

Nauru operates more prominently on the global scene. Across the summer of 2016, the small sovereign state found itself at the centre of another global media frenzy with the Guardian Australia’s “exclusive Nauru Files leaks.” With a catalogue of over 2000 filed incident reports, Nauru’s offshore refugee operations were characterised as an exceptionality, “a dark, wretched Truman Show without the cameras,” a “gulag archipelago” (Baird 2016), rife with “horrible mistreatment,” “squalor,” “trauma and self-harm” (Farrell, Evershed, and Davidson 2016). Media outlets and spokespeople around the world took up this narrative, stressing the brutal conditions for refugees through tropes of suffering, persecution, and vulnerability. Others continue to level anti-civilisational accusations on Nauruans as savages and cannibals, claiming that the country is outside the rule of law and international oversight, with Nauruans chasing refugees with machetes through the streets. “Regular - we're not talking several incidents. Regular, systematic attacks from local population. People are hacked with machetes,” said Amnesty’s Anna Neistat in interview on National Public Radio on 11 August, 2016 after flying to Nauru on a three-day “Refugee Mission.” “Every single woman I spoke to told me that they cannot go out because now they're absolutely at the mercy of the locals.” Headlines such as “Nauru, Refugees and Australia’s “Torture Complex”” (Kampmark 2016) and “Nauru rule of law ‘nonexistent’” (ABC 2015) are commonplace.

And so when I arrived in Nauru to conduct my fieldwork after ten months spent criss-crossing Europe and Australia, immersed in these narratives, I encountered

an abrupt and jolting shock. I stepped out of an aircraft carrier into a heady wave of Equatorial heat, and immersed myself in a refugee company town in miniature. Nauru was not, as I believed, a torture complex. Rather, Nauru made so visible the industrial system at work behind manufacturing the migrant into a refugee, where phosphate and refugees bumped alongside each other through new resource intersectionalities.

On a nigh on daily basis, familiar organisational logos flashed past, and even individual faces. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) staff and Australian refugee legal academics, British human rights monitors and Melbourne social workers operated on "fly-in-fly-out" stints, keeping Nauru's refugee determination procedures to international best practice, going straight into refugee processing bound vehicles with refugee determination procedures and quality control checklists in hand. The red flash of a Save the Children t-shirt would catch my eye; a dark blue International Organization of Migration (IOM) vest visible across a supermarket shelf; close-knit huddles of Australian Immigration Department refugee case officers, decision-making folders clutched to their chests, waiting patiently for rides up to the country's sparkling new regional processing centres or "RPCs."

Nauru's phosphate cantilevers went unrepaired, testament to the residues of a past resource economy in maritime sediment to phosphate. Dregs of scientifically purified fertiliser component sedimented in loading warehouses, unfeasible for export to earmarked Australian and Asian destinations. The country's landscapes lay pockmarked, mined in ad hoc frenzies of dwindling availability. But three refugee processing centres crowned the metropolis, gleaming from in between phosphate extraction fields. In a new refugee appeals courthouse, a *Nauru Refugee Status Determination Assessment Quality Control Checklist: Based on the UNHCR Quality Assurance – Decision Assessment Form* sat on a side-table. Refugee and refugee service personnel housing speckled the coral atoll's urban fringe. Dazzling white breezeblocks, Australian standardised to air-conditioned perfection, testament to international refugee legal directives and cosmopolitan best practice. Around the country's ring road, identikit white vans performed refugee and phosphate workers' collection rounds in synchronic motion, distinguished only by RPC or RonPhos logos imprinted on auto-bodies. In 2015 alone, the Nauruan government received over AU\$50 million from the Australian government, in addition to vast infrastructural development projects from a new hospital and courthouse through to the reinvigoration of bygone government departments, local training in refugee legislation

and determination. Thirty-one percent of the local population is now employed in refugee labour forces, rising swiftly from 7% in 2013, and easily overtaking the country's beleaguered phosphate industry, which fell from 15.1% in 2013 to 9.6% in 2015.¹

New forms of commodity-*beings* wandered the streets, immediately discernable in *tariqas*, *burqas*, some skin-tight jeans. Signs for Persian cuisine, Rohingya takeaway abound, all testament to the new commodity world fomenting in the shadow of rusted phosphate turrets. Eid, Ramadan, and World Refugee Day are all annual events. But outside a refugee resettlement house by the new fish and chip shop, weatherworn banners flap in the sea breeze, hinting at some of the resource politics that wrap around Nauru's newest commodity, which help obfuscate these industrial realities:

"We're refugees not criminals!"

"No Cambodian inside! Cambodia never ever."

"Nauru GULAG"

"Australian people open your hearts"

"Urgh, you seen this one?" Jackie, a local phosphate turned refugee worker leans over, showing me the latest "refugee beating" newflash on her iPad at the country's new expat-packed cocktail bar. "I try and stop reading this stuff, just makes me mad now. I felt so sorry for them, used to be so kind to them, but the lies the refugees tell. If they're fleeing persecution why are they so picky?"

Arguably, past scholarship, in particular within the social sciences, has been slow to apply a political economic analysis to the refugee as commodity because of the moral quandaries of making this conceptualisation. For me, it was an unsettling realisation, but so vividly stark when I stumbled into Nauru's industrial landscape. By examining Nauru's phosphate and refugee entanglements, I hope to recapture something of the shock that I encountered, as helpful to understanding contemporary refugee capitalism. As Jackie's iPad reading makes clear, the biological and physiological properties of the resource are vital to its fetishisation. The obfuscation of Nauru's industrial developments is bound up in the self-promotional animacy that buoys the resource.

In this book I present a quite different account to the popular line. I argue that

¹ These figures are unpublished and were acquired from the Nauruan government during my fieldwork. Throughout the book, I refrain from source citation where this is the case.

Nauru's offshore refugees actually *enhance* the moral and financial economies of industry trading and manufacturing operations in other regions. In reality, as successive chapters will show, Nauru's refugee operations are made possible by the industry actors and RSD guidelines that operate elsewhere. Many disasters that arise in Nauru are symptomatic to global refugee manufacturing in a context that involves labour relations of power and social injustice.

The Global Refugee Boom

The lacuna of scholarship that moves away from reinforcing the idea of people as refugees is unsurprising. Refugee work holds clear moral and political economic appeal. Not only does it make us feel as if we are bettering people's lives, but processing and protecting humans into refugees has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry. From a budget of US\$300,000 and thirty-four staff members in 1950, UNHCR is now a bureaucratic leviathan of more than 9,300 staff worldwide and an annual budget of over US\$7 billion, with IKEA its partner in Better Shelter refugee flat-pack construction, and Angelina Jolie its Special Envoy for Refugee Issues (UNHCR 2016). 2016 was declared "The Year of the Refugee" (Wong 2016), crowned by the first Refugee Olympic Team, naturalising the refugee within the cultural politics of capital. Recent years have seen lawyers, clinicians, educators, social workers, bureaucrats, and more coalescing around refugee wealth. Some determine if individuals are refugees or help present them as such; others contractually care for asylum seekers and refugees; still more return the rejected refugees to their point of origin from camps, processing centres, and other factory floors around the globe (Moran, Gill, and Conlon 2013). Refugee studies centres, programmes, and policy institutes proliferate from Oxford to Toronto, Bangalore to Cairo, Sydney, Dar-es-Salaam, and beyond. Refugee production wells span Damascus to Mogadishu, 2015 saw an annual turnover of 65.3 million lives alone (UNHCR 2017b), and global consumer #RefugeeWelcome movements lobbying around a morally irrefutable commodity form.

But the political potency of refugee scares has touched the extremities of the refugee economy as the refugee has become imbricated with a discourse of danger as much as an ideology of victimisation. As a renewable resource, the exploitation of the refugee, either as victim or terrorist, provides force for democratic state invasions,

particularly in the Middle East, which cyclically replenishes supplies of migrants who move as refugees. To add to the windfall of the high-value refugee, the international popularity of the 1951 commodity episteme ushered in the crude refugee, debated in terms of “ungenuineness,” “economic migrancy,” and “welfare scrounging” (Squire 2009). Flush production rates of course reflect an unjust legal reality. For many people, it has become increasingly difficult to move elsewhere. Freedom of movement is allowable for some and not others. Populations are differentially treated according to class and ethnonational differences, in what Aiwa Ong (2006) refers to as “graduated sovereignty.” The hardening of state immigration and border controls catalyses more resource flows. People are placed in a position where refugee self-construction is one means of attaining their mobility goals as they move in and out of commoditisation (Appadurai 1986).

In Australia, many in the public are alarmed by the prospects of ‘dangerous’ or ‘scrounging’ arrivals flooding their markets. Discourses of economic migrancy have swept the Antipodes, but these ideologies are ones shared on a global scale. It is for this reason that UNHCR promotes “regional cooperative frameworks” as a form of refugee trade cooperation between disinterested states, signalling something of the refugee’s exchange-value through barter and simple exchange. Under the “RCF” system, states with established refugee operations can work together to distribute asylum seekers between each other as a form of “burden sharing.” It is through the RCF system of marketisation that Nauru’s offshore processing site is brought to life as Australia, like other dominant powers, looks to physically transfer the commodity to more distant ownership. These human trading relationships have imperial dimensions, reinforcing popular anxieties about human purity and eligibility, while also reproducing, what Susanne Freidberg (2010: 258) shows in the contemporary fresh food industry, lasting colonial patterns of “trade and dependency.”

A focus on Nauru’s extractive landscape has far-reaching implications, shedding important light on the popular anxieties that extend the geographies of human circulation into the making of distanced industrial worlds (be it refugee camps, immigration holding centres or entirely new outsourced and offshored sites). Of particular importance is also the industrial assemblage that makes these far-flung worlds so easy to reproduce. As the routine labour and subjectivity that underlies the industrialisation of the refugee is made malleable, increasing scope is opened up for refugee processing to take place in hitherto new extraction sites. Pro refugee

campaigns are implicated within the system of production in an era that has seen exploding demand for certain types of ‘fashionable’ refugees, shaping what Ian Cook et al. (2004) describe in the tropical fruit business as “the tropics of consumption.” In the current zeitgeist, Syrian refugees have become commonplace in western refugee trade press. Pro refugee campaigns strengthen the product package of people as refugees, providing surplus moral capital that gives authority to democratic refugee production technologies. With more refugee flows, this leads to the propensity for the outsourcing of industrial processing to new extraction zones. My work seeks to intervene in this context, which remains otherwise trapped in an unending refugee parthenogenesis.

Offshore Exceptionalities?

Nauru is an exemplary context from which to unpick the workings of the transnational refugee industry and some of the rationalities its apolitical and indeed “anti-political” (Ferguson 1999) figurations obscure, as my opening ethnographic moments suggest. The country’s industrial assemblage rests on the foundations of refugee booms and market formation in Australia and worldwide. However a rather opposing narrative obscures Nauru’s cosmopolitan best practice. Photographs and videos of refugee self-harm pair with headlines like “Australia’s Offshore Cruelty” (Cohen 2016) and “Refugees attacked ‘on a daily basis’ on Nauru” (Davidson 2016), overtaking the global media sphere. Academic press is replete with such titles as *Repeating Despair on Nauru: The Impacts of Offshore Processing on Asylum Seekers* (2012) and *Offshore: Behind Manus and Nauru* (2016). Oscar filmmaker documentaries like *Chasing Asylum: The Film the Australian Government Doesn’t Want You To See* (2016) and *Freedom or Death* (2011) and books such as *The Undesirables: Inside Nauru* (2012) and *Yearning to Breathe Free: Seeking Asylum in Australia* (2007) all create quite a different impression. There remains a tendency to suggest that Nauru operates outside the rule of law and refugee industrial best practice (Dastyari 2015; Gleeson 2016) or that it is rife with abuse through civilisational discourses of “savagery” and “underdevelopment.” Given the lack of research conducted in Nauru or from industry outliers, it is unsurprising that most scholarship comes from this perspective. Given the marketing power of the refugee through tropes of suffering victimisation, it is unsurprising that this remains the dominant assumption. Next to no

ethnographic research has been conducted in Nauru and none on the transnational refugee workers that carry out the country's everyday operations. Nor has research sufficiently examined the activist campaigners that work to refute Nauru's offshore site.

Australia has developed a vocal middle-class refugee movement for whom the idea of welcoming the refugee holds a great deal of moral and at times financial currency. The refugee activists (made up of full-time activists, incensed citizenry, industry personnel, refugees and non-refugees) bear stark parallels to the Aborigines' Friends Movement of yesteryear. They work to bring offshore refugees to the mainland through #RefugeeWelcome-style campaigns. As successive chapters will describe, the work of some of the more vehement activists is focused on what I term "labour organising" in the refugee fields of Nauru, enabled by social media and cellular networking technologies. As this book will show, these sorts of practices have gained widespread media popularity at the expense of Nauruans, who are again marred with a resource curse from the destructive capital of the once phosphate mining boom. Terms like "refugee agency" or "refugee resistance" remain the dominant frame rather than adequately conveying the ways in which protest mobilisations are caught up in the rhetorical tropes of industrial formations (Tsing 2005). Rather, the offshore exceptionalist presentation produces something of a three-fold commodity fetishism, in which the uneven system of production that makes people into refugees lies further obscured.

By contrast, my research dismantles representations of the offshore manufacture in refugees through 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork between Geneva, Australia, Fiji, and Nauru. I came to Nauru enveloped in the mythologies of exceptionalism, until I stepped out of an aircraft carrier into the Equatorial heat, and encountered the reality of Nauru's refugee company town. Having conducted 12 months of research prior, and seen industry workers in action from Geneva, across Australia, in Europe, and in North America, was important. I quickly realised the power of the refugee as a fetishised commodity in obscuring the facilitability of company town worlds, "hopping" between extractive enclaves like the corporate mining operations James Ferguson (2006) describes. In looking at the operations of the oil town of Dharam in the remote Saudi desert, Robert Vitalis (2007) also points to the power of mythologies in obscuring tried and tested company town forms. The Arabian American Oil Company and the US government established the Jim Crow

system in the Dharan oil camps, already prominent in oil towns in the American Deep South, securing what soon became their largest overseas enterprise. Hierarchies of discrimination, racism, and labour inequalities moved alongside company forms, profitable to oil giants and oil consuming states. Hannah Appel (2012a: 692) similarly calls attention to the power of offshore exceptionalism in oil rigs in Equatorial Guinea, showing how “routinization and standardization” makes the “modularity” of a capitalist project possible. Appel argues that the fantasies of an offshore context outside of state accountability play a powerful part in sustaining the conditions of contemporary capitalism.²

Like the oil towns Vitalis and Appel describe, popular affective narratives also obscure how Nauru’s refugee boom operates “just like” manufacturing procedures elsewhere. As Chapter 3 will show, self-harm and suicide have become standardised workplace hazards in refugee processing sites. It is the distancing effect of Nauru’s offshore, portrayed and often understood as outside of state control and accountability, that is an important part of sustaining offshore fantasies and reinforcing transnational commodity practices, just onshore not offshore. The offshore exceptionalist frame has at times been useful for the Australian government, in which the spectacle of maritime deterrence is essential, as much as it has been repercussive for Nauruans. This also of course remains at the expense of people who go through the demeaning determination process, even as the legal categorisation is leveraged by one and the same. Here, the refugee can be seen as a form of biopower (Foucault 1976), which shapes people’s relationships with themselves (Ong 2003). Throughout this book, I promote a critical approach to the study of the refugee economy, integrating refugee claimants as labour industrialists working to insert themselves into state economies within a landscape of structural imbalance. In so doing, I draw attention to the profound ways in which humans become freighted – and self-freighted – with meanings within global production circuits.

Refugee Literary Assemblages

There is undoubtedly a large body of scholarship on refugees at large and Australia’s offshore industrial operations in particular (Crock, Saul, and Dastyari 2006; Hyndman

² There is a substantial body of scholarship on the notion of “the offshore” (see for example Maurer 1998; Palan 2006). Following Appel (2012a: 692), I see offshore as made of simultaneously grounded and placeless interactions, of which “fantasy” plays an important part in fuelling industry practices.

and Mountz 2008; Magner 2004). A great deal comes from legal functionalism, concentrating on the disjuncture between industrial daily practice and the scientific prescriptions of international refugee law (Foster and Pobjoy 2011; McAdam and Chong 2014). Still more is ethnographically rooted, empathetically engaging with the asylum seeker and refugee, largely as a means of demonstrating a “shared humanity,” “refugee self-reliance,” “suffering,” and “empowerment” (McPherson 2015; Robins 2009), often in an effort to challenge Agambenian perspectives of refugees as “bare life.” Most scholarship protests the consequences of refugee laws, policies, and institutions on people’s lives, denouncing their failure to adequately protect. There is little consideration of how the alleged progressivism of refugee operations functions to control and subordinate. Rather, critiques largely centre on the need to improve industrial operations, expand industry categories to new forms of human life (McAdam 2012) or better indigenise systems to new geographical contexts (Chimni 2009; Falk, Rajagopal, and Stevens 2008). Still more forensic analyses examine the refugee and its Others as clinical subjects, working with or funded by industry firms and bureaucracies, usually also with goals of improving industrial processing and protection systems.³ The Geneva Convention, UNHCR, and its development regime are often taken as benevolent, given added weight by claims of progressive politics.

Important work details some of the networks and institutions that govern human mobility (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Betts 2010, 2013). Yet within this body of work, the industry of refugee border admission is depoliticised into “a global public good” (Loescher and Milner 2011: 21), with non-governmental, intergovernmental, activist, refugee and non-refugee involvement positioned in opposition to state power (Rozakou 2012) and refugee law depicted as a means of “emancipation” (Barnett 2011: 105). Non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations are often portrayed as alternatives to “repressive, undemocratic, mercenary logics” (Malkki 1996: 396) of commercial firms, whose industry involvement sits at odds with utopic goals of “humanitarians.” But commercial and performance-based concerns play an important part of UNHCR and its development terrain, as does a concentrated effort to push the refugee commodity-being and the paternalistic structures of refugee protection agendas (Betts, Loescher, and Milner 2012; Morris 2016a,b). Ethical values, others show (Hopgood 2008), also drive the material and technical life of

³ The reconfiguration of knowledge through academic research has been discussed in other contexts as part of the performance-based drive towards applicability (Castles 2007). Issues I do not explore here, although do so elsewhere (Morris 2016a,b).

industry as much as financial value. Neither is it easy to untangle refugee from non-refugee, state actor from non-state actor, profit from nonprofit, in an industrial complex writ large (Brown 2015; Duffield 2001). Economic survival sees organisations and bureaucracies contract in with one another, as does the search for new markets for development (Harvey 2006). Individuals hop between job sectors, many not immune to the industry's aporetic realities.

The refugee is often figured outside of this industrial assemblage, rather than an active player in manufacturing operations amid a booming human trading and what I term, following financial derivatives trading systems, a "mobility futures trade" of people who want to, Ong (2003) details, "engineer themselves" as democratic political subjects. Instead, the refugee often becomes "the displaced" (Hyndman 2000; Malkki 1995), operating "within a continuum of violence" outside commodification (Vogt 2013:767) through exploitative smuggling chains. Liisa Malkki (1995: 495) provides a still important repudiation of the refugee as "a naturally self-delimiting domain of knowledge," highlighting some of the overall academic and institutional domains that are part of the refugee production apparatus. Malkki (1995: 496) sheds valuable light on taking a denaturalising stance toward the refugee "order of things." Yet Malkki too narrowly delimits the frontiers of the refugee as a state-centric "construction-in-progress." The refugee remains a victimised category, rather than a commercial industry lobbied for by state and non-state actors, refugees and non-refugees. Figurations of "displacement" and "state violence" are powerful because they can replicate the idea that certain categories of people who move are "out of place" and "vulnerable," reinforcing the epistemological assumptions that define the commodity form.

As per others navigating mobility industries (Andersson 2014; Coutin 2003; Griffiths 2012), I have learnt to see the refugee as a labour industrialist invested in or vested into the commodity trade; individuals who intentionally place themselves or are placed into a Lockean contract subject to global capitalism, state territorial controls, and the knowledge economy. While refugee self-commodification is part of a mobility futures trade, it is also related to the engineering potential of *turning* people into democratic political subjects. The refugee is a category necessary for liberal statehood, associated with enlightened democratic practice. Thinking of people making refugee assertions as labour industrialists within their commodification answers agentic calls of scholars in the field (Castañeda et al. 2016), expanding

commodification processes as enveloped in knowledge economies that revolve around a self-commodified body imbued with a “cultural biography” of narratives and referents (Kopytoff 1986) and practices of legal reasoning (Riles 2011). State-centric or non-governmental perspectives negate the far-reaching technologies of industry projects and overlapping forms of rule that have led political theorists like Hardt and Negri (2001) to speak of “Empire.” As others show (Dezalay and Garth 1996; Nader 1990; Ticktin 2006), ideologies and legal systems that are presented as inherently good and acquire cultural sense, manifested in norms, structures, and routines, are also imbricated within systems of power and domination, within a context of market fundamentalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006).⁴

Many limitations are related to the conceptual framing of “human rights” and “humanitarianism,” which can obscure the industrial complex of refugee/non-refugee, state/non-state actors involved in working in and/or promoting the refugee commodity-being. Using these framings can become trapped in questions of agency and affectivities, segueing from commercial and value-driven dynamics of how and why refugees have been constructed and targeted as commodities for organizational intervention. This can also have the effect of replicating the very form of knowledge that is intrinsic to the reflexive redefinition of the commodity, abstracted from its field of practice, and replicated *ad infinitum* (Knorr Cetina 1999). Like others elsewhere (Callon 2007; Dezalay and Garth 2002; Malkki 1995), my approach questions and integrates refugee academia as part of the science driving refugee commodity beliefs and industry growth. There is a thematic tendency for much scholarship to play into the commodity schemata of humans as intrinsically refugees and become enveloped in their metanarrative. Refugee academia can help commoditise the refugee body as much as industry leviathans like UNHCR. Major industry players like the University of Oxford’s Refugee Studies Centre and the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at the University of New South Wales are also institutionally tied into the demands of people being refugees in their revenue streams

⁴ Although the labour practices are quite different, fruitful parallels might be made with the trafficking industry (see for example Cheng 2010).

as much as moral beliefs. All are densely networked; many come to architect or operate in the refugee company town of Nauru.⁵

Within this body of work, now commonly termed “refugee studies,” I contribute a new theoretical framework for approaching the refugee as a commodity. Ethnographic attention to refugee market operations opens up the “black box” of personnel and technologies that go into the iterative definition of commodity-beings (MacKenzie 2005). This is particularly essential in the face of an *animate* commodity sector, whose commercial value is promoted and enhanced by the labour practices and moral power of a self-asserting commodity en masse. Refugee self-knowledge has provided an irrefutable basis for industry power, erasing the actors at work in producing the self-evident idea of humans as persecuted and fleeing refugees. This is all tightly linked to the fetishisation of the refugee as a commodity, a term used by Marx (1977) to denote how value is not inherent but produced in the labour process and realised among commodities in exchange through capitalist and non-capitalist transactions. It is this exchange process that disguises the social relations that enable profitable appropriation. However, refugee industrial assemblages are certainly not buttressed on Weberian economic calculations alone. Profit in this transnational commodity network, my research shows, encompasses an array of ethical, political, and economic forms of value, which are born of and cyclically reinforce the industry.

Bringing in the Refugee as a Commodity-Being

Taken in Marx’s (1977: 125) terms, a commodity is an external object produced by human labour that “satisfies through its qualities human needs of one kind or another.” The nature of these needs, Marx points out, is irrelevant nor how the entity satisfies that need “whether in an immediate way as food – that is, as object of enjoyment – or by a detour as means of production.” The commodity has both a use and exchange value, exchangeable in transaction for an equivalent. The exchange can be direct or it can be achieved indirectly by way of money. Building on Marx’s analysis, scholars have done much to illuminate the social processes that make objects into valuable exchange items and commodities (see Miller 1995). Such diverse ranges of commodities as food (West 2012), the environment (Smith 2007), and oil (Appel,

⁵ There is certainly a contradiction in that I make use of the same work that forms part of the refugee industrial assemblage. Critique is not immune to its own reproduction of power (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Rather than replicating this commodity’s meaning systems, I aim to do so in a way that dispels “phantom-like” qualities (Marx 1977:128).

Mason, and Watts 2015) have all been subject to analysis. When it comes to humans, research has examined the production and sale of body parts (Scheper-Hughes 2002), the prisoner (Davis 2003), and the slave as commodity (Kopytoff 1986).

Approaches have been varied and far-reaching. Some research seeks to unearth the unequal labour practices that go into bringing the object to consumer, following the commodity en route to the market (Knowles 2014). Others hone in on the distribution and circulation process (Hughes and Reimer 2004), some specifically looking at the new geographies of circulation that are constructed under global commodity scares. Freidberg (2004: 5) for example charts the trajectories of green bean supply chains, reconfigured through “reported risks of invisible food-borne pathogens.” Freidberg points out that the potency of scares has “little to do with proven danger.” Rather, what alarms people is the possibility of risks hidden within the supply chain. However, collective anxieties have resulted in new trade routes for commodities, and practices of civilising manufacturing states. A focus on commodity scares is pertinent in this context. Across the nineteenth century, Nauru’s high-grade sedimentary deposits played an important part in assuaging global food scares of agricultural depletion. Fears of cadmium pollutancy then demanded Nauru’s mineral products conform to ever-higher standards common across the industrialised world. Now Nauru’s high-grade refugees are pivotal in assuaging the fears of the disinterested Australian consumer, as much as whetting mainland addictions. In order to assure the project’s longevity, Nauru’s mineral now migrant raw materials for processing must meet standards of hygiene and accountability through, I will show, an incredible array of added assurances.

The role of culture has become an important aspect of enquiry, particularly as it shapes marketing and consumption, bringing more layers of meaning to Marx’s conception of commodity fetishism. In the marketing of fair trade goods, Daniel Jaffee (2007) shows how marketing images add value to the commodity, and makes consumers feel as if their consumption betters people’s lives. Cook et al. (2004) look at how the marketing of tropical fruit embellishes consumer’s superficial understandings and curiosity about the faraway, which obscures the social relations and exploitative practices of production. Cultural analyses find traction when examining the refugee product images targeted at the western consumer. Marketing images in the refugee industry are designed to establish the broad appeal of the commodity, commonly depicted as an “exotic” vulnerable other. Again, the

biophysical properties of the commodity are important in this industry. Migrant raw materials and refugee products use industry representations and performances, situating themselves as mediums through which to channel the advertising images that flow through commodity chains. Amid the downturn of the refugee industry, forms of living propaganda are used to entice consuming publics with “promises of authenticity and/or ‘exoticism’” (Coulson 2004: 139). As Chapter 5 will detail, refugee marketing images play a crucial role in the work of activists attempting to bring the offshore refugee to the mainland. Repertoires of offshore “disaster images” (Morse 2012) that include photographs and videos of refugee self-harm pair with stereotypes of the island cannibal and vulnerable refugee, used to stir a demand for offshore refugees, creating “narratives of guilt-ridden consumers as rescuers, seeking salvation from oily sin through efforts to save the helpless.”

In the analysis of production, the anthropology of resource extraction on local communities is particularly well developed (Smith and Frehner 2010; Wilson 2006). Joseph Jorgensen (1990) provides the classic impact assessment of oil extraction on northwest Alaskan villages, concluding that oil production fails to provide local long-term benefits and threatens the local subsistence base. Suzana Sawyer and Edmund Gomez (2012) examine the dynamics between state, corporate, multilateral, and indigenous actors that subvert and often support each other to sustain extraction projects. Nauru, an already boom and bust state, makes an unusual counterpoint. Once Nauru had the world’s second highest GDP, but now, as a percentage of their GDP, Nauru’s aid receipts are higher than any other Pacific Island country (ADB 2015). By pairing phosphate and refugee processing, my work examines some of the resource curse consequences that have again befallen Nauru. Commodified minerals and human species are relationally entangled across Nauru’s historical pathways (Haraway 2008; Tsing 2012). The industrial risks now posed on Nauruans by refugee extraction are decidedly human.

To these interdisciplinary approaches, sometimes loosely assembled under the umbrella of “commodity studies” (Bernstein and Campling 2006), my work contributes an analysis of the refugee as a morally powerful and at times self-promoting *commodity-being* that has not been considered in these terms, but is at the

forefront of global consumer debates.⁶ Throughout, I draw on and add to these many academic advances, illuminating one manufacturing site in connection with its wider industrial assemblage.⁷ My research shows not only how humans are objectified in the creation of value but also how complex these objectifications are to unfurl in this particular migrant-refugee cycle. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the labour process is highly exploitative, and fraught with hazards, but one that can also be furthered by asylum seekers and refugees. People's relationships with themselves are shaped not just as a form of refugee identity making (Ong 2003), but also through everyday labour practices in the process of self-commodification. For refugees, the use-value of self-commodification is the ability to move elsewhere within ever-restrictive immobility geographies – the mobility futures trade – even when entangled, this book will show, in damaging labour practices of manufacture, distribution, and consumption. As Anna Tsing (2009: 152) points out, in supply chain capitalism, “self-exploitation” and “superexploitation” are crucial to the disciplined enterprise of commodity chains as a whole. Supply chains thrive because people perform within industry “tropes” and forms of “entrepreneurship,” which simultaneously reaffirm the profitability of the industry.

Arguably, one of the major reasons why existing scholarship has failed to properly depict the refugee as a commodity is that some work has been incapable of seeing a commodity as ascribed value from anything other than money. Capital of course takes a variety of forms, including human, financial, symbolic, and moral capital, all of which generates surplus value, and all of which enters into the refugee equation. Destabilising this blunt analysis, scholars have focused on the material substance of commodities, looking at the many ways in which profit is generated. Timothy Mitchell (2011) discusses the shift from coal to oil as the primary energy source in the twentieth-century tightly linked into democratic politics, particularly in the Middle East. The material substance of oil as fluid and transportable made it harder to threaten energy supply chains, resulting in new democratic possibilities. Michael Watts (2001: 189) also argues that the biological and geophysical properties

⁶ I have tried to avoid a “commodity determinism” (Watts 2009: 81) by drawing on scholarship focused on a variety of commodities, but I have found particular traction with work on oil because of the obvious nature in which oil has become a fetishised object of geopolitical conflict, state-building, profit, and consumption.

⁷ Michael Watts uses the term “oil assemblage” to refer to the many techniques and procedures that have led oil to become so heavily saturated within daily life. This bears theoretical lineage from Foucault's analysis of knowledge production. See also Angela Davis (2010) on the “prison industrial complex.”

of a natural resource matter. Petroleum is “a commodity not only saturated in the mythos of the rise of the West but also indisputably one of *the* most fundamental building blocks of twentieth century industrial capitalism.”

Drawing on these analyses, my work attends to the “mythos” of the refugee and its entanglements in the edifice of capitalism. As Chapter 1 details, the refugee is a newcomer among company town operations, a timing that reflects conditions particular to the expansion of democratic political power. Once “grist for the labour mill” (Pittaway 2002) for industrialising states, the refugee has been physically central in body to the development of industrial capitalism. Similarly, as a method of “calculated kindness” (Loescher and Scanlan 1986) for offsetting Communist then Islamic State regimes, discourses of persecution and democratic protection have been key to the use-value acquired by politicians from this commodity-being. The refugee continues to hold utility vis-à-vis the non-refugee arrival: the ideas of which are sold to the consuming public by politicians, and mediated by mythic images, such as those made popular in Lampedusa, reinforced through industry marketing campaigns.

Of course people are made into refugees the world over. Some countries that absorb large numbers of migrants, displaced or in search of better livelihoods, do not actively trumpet their refugee booms: the magnitude of which are generally more sizable but, with less of a refugee welcome and non-governmental (NGO) community, generally produce less feverish activity. However, for other countries that have signed the Geneva Convention – what I term “shareholder governments” – refugee absorption has become a marker of liberal democratic pride. This depiction of liberal salvation is backed by an institutionalised refugee industry sector, excited to manufacture and market the labour-product – often, for the western consumer, a particular product varietal that complies with state political interests and industry funding appeal. In this instance, the refugee has come to symbolise a sanctimonious universal subject that demonstrates the benevolence of international law and, by extension, the civilised world in addressing third world or despotic state concerns. But depending on the political zeitgeist, refugees ping-pong between shining examples of state benevolence or scapegoat figures that explain low state employment and societal unrest, preying on deep-rooted fears surrounding the dilution of national identity.

Now, the political potency of refugee scares has touched the far reaches of the refugee economy as the refugee has become imbricated with a discourse of danger. Donald Trump’s descriptions of the “tens of thousands” of Syrian refugees pouring

into the country as “a great Trojan horse” that will spawn future terrorist attack, “who knows, who knows, maybe it's ISIS ... lock your doors, folks” exemplifies the latest meaning attached to the refugee as critical to geopolitics and democratic state legitimacy. Here, the refugee is used to create a climate of xenophobia favourable to right-wing populist governments that shape supply and demand. These sorts of refugee tropes have become popular campaign fodder the world over. In Australia, Pauline Hanson’s One Nation anti-refugee stance; in Britain, Nigel Farage’s demonisation of the refugee through UK Independence Party campaigns, are some of the new forms of political economic capital acquired from the conviction that the refugee is an economic migrant and/or terrorist. Nauru’s history is driven by anxieties over crude flows, which has produced new relations of supply and exchange.

Either way, the refugee holds immense use-value amid first world salvational lore. Whether Islamic terrorist or persecuted victim, the refugee legitimises increased military intervention under democratic ideologies, inducing more human movement at top capacity. This creates a refugee industry rush or a “boom” once a deposit is known, with personnel moving the commodity form to more forms of human life (“refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “internally displaced person,” “economic migrant,” and so forth) until production declines and the next boom is found.⁸ The industry is contingent on a reliable supply of labour-products. Thus lead firms reinforce human difference; otherwise a dearth in raw materials for manufacture undermines their business. Visual and rhetorical illusions of “a frightening number of refugees and migrants at state borders dying each year ... people fleeing finding their way blocked by closed borders” provides a powerful reinforcement to statistical truths, from which UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi saw refugees emerging at an extraordinary rate, attesting in 2015 that “every 113 people on earth is either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee” (UNHCR 2015). Without a refugee, there would be no refugee industry, intermeshing the economic and political with the moral appeal of refugee work.

As this signals, the moral economy of refugee consumptive habits makes it difficult to push politics away from the populism of the recursive chain. Matthew Huber (2013) makes a similar finding, using the metaphor of addiction to describe American oil dependency. Huber (2013: 4) argues that “oil is an uncontrollable thing

⁸ See UNHCR’s International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology, which provides the latest in emerging refugee formations, <http://www.refugeethesaurus.org/>.

trapped in the American bloodstream – pernicious, yet practically unavoidable,” forgetting the massive degradations produced along the commodity chain. Arguably more than other commodities, the refugee involves an irreducible human and moral dimension, associated with a form of anti-political addiction that only further *strengthens* the authority of the supply chain. Unlike the prisoner and the migrant, the refugee is saleable, and often self-promotional: refugees and non-refugees strengthen this product package – amassing profit (moral and economic) in the process. But, I will argue, by presenting Nauru’s operations as an exception, end offshore campaigners have the effect of reinforcing the categorisation of people as inherently “refugees.” Instead, efforts to achieve social justice fuel the institutional capital and global refugee scares that produce refugee company town worlds like Nauru. This book digs deeper into these ideas and examines how they apply in the concrete realities of Nauru’s offshore refugee operations.

Research Methodologies: Following Value

My research came about not by following a commodity from the point of extraction or by targeting Nauru’s specific manufacturing and distribution operations, but by following value.⁹ My ethnographic account follows a long tradition of “studying up, down, and sideways” (Nader 1972), but perhaps not in its most neatly premeditated form. I began with an effort to understand the logics and networks that go into the agendas of international institutions focused on state immigration policy, and specifically immigration detention. But everywhere I turned, conversations magnetised themselves around “the refugee.” My research soon became enveloped in this discursive field of study, taking on something of an improvisational character, as I was towed into and became a part of the refugee’s commodity networks myself. This starting point led me to a methodology focused on “following value,” in particular, the moral and economic values that come to play around the refugee as a commodity-being.

In Geneva, I conducted in-depth interviews and spent time with personnel from most major UN institutions, international NGOs, intergovernmental organisations (INGOs), academic institutions, commercial firms, and many state

⁹ Global commodity chain analysis focuses on following financial value, often finding that value is added to a commodity as it journeys from the place of manufacture to the place of consumption (Gereffi 1994).

government bureaus whose work intersects with refugees. I spoke with people working to be refugees or certified as such, many of who occupied blurred roles across these categories. I signed up to listservs, attended refugee industry conventions, and collated a wealth of documentary material. I attended UNHCR's NGO Consultations in 2014, along with other regional industry networking meetings in Bangkok and Washington D.C. Government representatives often attended these meetings, many of whom were passionate about refugees themselves, and not in simplistic opposition, as is often depicted. One government representative, nose piercing and dreadlocks, stressed how they always made sure refugees were "on the table" at roundtable discussions. Another former Immigration Minister led me through their photo album, filled to bursting with refugee camp visits, genuinely expressing passion and concern for refugees. On the other hand, an NGO CEO told me how they knew the best government MPs to lobby for increases in refugee industry funding and import quotas.

A focus on value led me to follow the international refugee operations initially through to Australia. No better example of refugee hegemony and anti-hegemony lies than on the former Pacific colony. Since the 1920s, Australia has operated a humanitarian-figured system of refugee selection and resettlement, in tandem with strict immigration entry requirements and controversial offshore asylum policies (Jupp 2002). The Australian government helped establish UNHCR and was one of the Geneva Convention's first signatories. Like the majority of Australia's once public-led services, most of which were privatised under the Hawke and Keating Labour governments in the 1990s, the efficiency of markets at finding low-cost solutions are the main rubric of Australian refugee processing and resettlement. The Australian government has contracted out its refugee operations amongst a complex network of private sector refugee "service providers" comprised of NGOs, ecumenical professionals, commercial firms, academic institutions, and state bureaucratic organisations.¹⁰ Alongside this, a vehement pro refugee movement calls for "welcoming the refugee to Australia," positioning themselves as the mouthpiece of activist critique. Tireless lobbying across agencies and within government seeks to up

¹⁰ "Refugee service provider" and "refugee sector" are the terminologies used by the Australian government and organisations themselves to denote any outsourced supplier of provisions or management, irrespective of their commercial or non-profit status. Organisations are contracted in to the Australian Immigration Department (DIBP) and tenders are available for bidding largely online, unless conducted privately under closed tendering processes.

refugee import quotas. Since 2009, import levels been set at 13,750 lives annually (DIBP 2015). Twenty percent of which is made available to the spontaneous or crude refugee arrival (onshore protection grants) outside the regulatory supply chain. In 2015, the government increased their existing intake, publically announcing that they would take an additional 12,000 pre-certified refugees fresh from production sites in Syrian conflict zones. Because of the operational success of offshore processing in stopping the crude maritime surpluses, they also increased their industry quotas to 18,750 refugee lives from 2018-19.

I travelled around Australia for nine months as a research student tied into Monash University, meeting with most of the major commercial firms and NGO service providers operating in this space, along with Immigration Department and government representatives, policy advisors, academics, media personnel, activist campaigners, asylum seekers and refugees, and members of the general public; many of whom occupied blurred roles across these categories.¹¹ I attended rule-making workshops and built up extensive contacts through my Geneva and prior research, and sheer snowballing persistence. Without following value, I never would have come to Nauru. The import quotas on Nauru are minute on a wider scale, 1233 imported in August 2014 at its peak, but the moral intensity and contractual dollars are huge.¹²

While Australia certainly has a well-instituted refugee industrial sector (refugee determination case officers, refugee tribunal judges, refugee social workers, refugee legal prosecution and defense firms, refugee clinicians, and more) that could easily put Nauru's new industry project into action, the apparent ease with which Australia's industry architecture extrapolates to Nauru masks a contentious operational context. Contracts on Nauru are lucrative, more than treble the same work on Australia's mainland. Figures like AU\$1.5 billion for refugee management, AU\$450 million for refugee health, and AU\$354 million for refugee infrastructure,

¹¹ All interviews throughout the entirety of my fieldwork sites were conducted with written and oral research consent forms and university ethics clearance. I refer to few government officials by name and only for historical accuracy, never in an interviewee capacity. I have changed all names of people to protect confidentiality and only refer to companies when I was given written or oral consent to do so.

¹² The numbers of maritime asylum seekers are of course low compared with cross-border flows elsewhere. In 2011 in a peak season, when there were 4565 boat arrivals to Australia, over 61,000 so-called "irregular" maritime arrivals flowed to Italy from North Africa, Greece, and Turkey, and over 100,000 to Yemen from Somalia (Philips and Spinks 2013). Globally, the IOM (2010: 24) notes that "the overwhelming majority of migration is fully authorized," estimating that only 10 to 15 per cent of international migrants are outside of regulatory systems, most of whom are visa over-stayers. Within these mobility flows, South-South migration is as significant as South-North migration. Hein de Haas (2009) refers to the egoistic statistical inflation in the Africa-Europe directional context as the "myth of invasion."

flow easily around this space.¹³ It is an AU\$400,000 per year per body industry (Australian National Audit Office 2016), signalling the political economic currency of the offshore operations. However, fieldwork made immediately apparent schisms that have erupted across the international and Australia refugee sector around the offshore refugee industry. I was repeatedly told about the controversial nature of working on Nauru and how offshore refugee work is “different” to performing the same function in Australia’s mainland refugee sector. Many organisations that conduct similar work in Australia were also quick to make the distinction and point out that offshore work does not sit with their values and principles even if mainland refugee work does. I was in Canberra when “Close Nauru” was spelt out in the sky, government bureaucrats shielding their eyes against the sun, and many smiling in support as the unidentified biplane whizzed by. Seemingly everyone had an opinion on Nauru and was at pains to discuss “offshore processing” with me. Many believed that the operations should close in favour of similar mainland procedures. Many were also in favour of the operations, believing that the government should close the spaces for “queue jumpers” entering into Australia in unregulated ways. Nauru was, for them, an important node in the deterrence spectacle that dissuaded unregulated boat arrivals. I also spoke with many members of the refugee and non-refugee public, angry, fearful or fed up with refugees in an age of industry and media scares, political scapegoating, and sheer compassion fatigue.

And so, like a latter day Albert Ellis, Nauru’s first British Phosphate Commission prospector, I followed financial and moral value(s) to its epicentre, the company town boom of Nauru’s refugee extractive sites. It was not until arriving in Nauru that I fully realised that “immigration detention” was only a small, albeit no less distressing, component of an entire processing cycle and commercial industry. As my later chapters will make clear, many of the hazards and harms of this industry do not relate to the built environment, but to the processing and distribution operations of turning the migrant into a refugee. It is the refugee assessment process not the factory set-up around which the majority of industry contracts derive, closely followed by the market absorption process of sowing the refugee into the consumer landscape. It took me until Nauru to distill out the commodity from the infrastructural obfuscations, and

¹³ See AusTender, where government contracts are available for bidding and published, unless operating under closed tender <<https://www.tenders.gov.au>>.

the industrial assemblage that makes the manufacturing process happen.¹⁴

I knew that the Nauruan government was anxious about allowing researchers' access, fearful of refugee activism that might hamper their source of livelihood. End offshore campaigning does have something of a history in Nauru. As I discuss in Chapter 3, staff from major industry firms like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, as well as snuck-in refugee labour organisers, have all done "exposes" on Nauru's operations through refugee suffering tropes. It has now become difficult to obtain a visa for Nauru *not* because of, as is so often depicted, Nauru's "dark island Guantanamo operations" but because the majority of visitors come with the goal of toppling the country's manufacturing enterprise, like proverbial offshore oil rig campaigners. In reality, it is partially the government's economic dependency on the refugee enterprise, I will later detail, which has stimulated the building of Nauru's operations to high manufacturing standards. It is also partially the presentation of Nauru as a refugee Guantanamo that has interested a spectrum of international organisations and industry personnel in the country's regulation. Some of the same industry players that critique Nauru have also assisted in the country's standardised industrial formation.

I went to Fiji on a two-month placement as an anthropology research student at the main University of the South Pacific (USP) campus. Here, I delved into Nauru's historical archives, most of which is kept in Fiji or Canberra, some in the British National Archives in Kew, owing to colonial Phosphate Commission legacies. I learnt a great deal about Pacific colonial pasts and the intersecting networks of missionaries, capitalist enterprises, governments, and locals that make extractive projects happen. Suva is the headquarters of NGOs, INGOs, inter-agency forums, and media outlets focused on the Pacific. I was brought into direct encounter with Pacific media circulation about Nauru, most of which adopts the same civilisational critique and refugee salvational reverence. Many of Nauru's government administrators, lawyers, medical staff, and teachers also come from Fiji, while lower-rung positions are often staffed by Kiribati labour. Living in Fiji dispelled any simplistic assumptions for me of Oppressor versus Oppressed, and the redundancy of a postcolonial framework in

¹⁴ Several personnel did make this point to me along my value trail. Although Australia maintains a system of mandatory detention, the reality is that human assessment against immigration criteria, in increasingly well-regulated institutions, is temporary. On average 9 months in length. This was also the case in Nauru, more so as I will later show, where refugee manufacture was much faster and well-regulated than elsewhere.

illuminating the complexities of extractive operations.

I then applied for a research permit through Nauru's small USP satellite campus on the basis of my research focus honed in Fiji, exploring Nauru's postdevelopmental continuities through the phosphate now refugee industry. My interest was not in refugee activism; I for one was not particularly interested in studying the refugee or in replicating humanitarian-gearred assumptions. I was also keen, like any good anthropologist, in helping the communities in which I embed myself. This, I made clear in my research communication, all of which came with ethical clearance, and which, I think, I have accomplished, bringing to light the realities of Nauru's obfuscated industrial context.

And so, I lived in Nauru for three months, becoming as much a part of the many slices of everyday lives I could. I lived with locals and expat personnel, learning about and coming into contact with people's many different experiences. Many locals were grateful for my presence, keen to dispel anti-civilisational claims, as much as some refugees were keen to promote the suffering frame, and others, their disassociation from refugee activist campaigns. I was at first under suspicion from principally Australian refugee workers and government personnel. However, my continued presence in Nauru under the protective auspices of USP, and involvement in all walks of life, made suspicions largely unsustainable or at least not pursuable to some degree. My identity as a British female research student undoubtedly helped. I was not treated with the same level of suspicion that I would have been as an Australian, enveloped in highly polarised end/support offshore debates, and possibly direct campaign practice. Conversely, I was often adopted, invited to many events in sympathetic concern of the lone young woman in the field. As an anthropologist I was also seen as somewhat benign – in government interviews, officials would veer off on excitable asides, referencing TV series like *Bones* or charting their kinship ancestries, even when I made clear the discipline extended beyond these archetypal signifiers.

In Nauru, I fully embedded myself in company town life. I helped with everything from the Rotary Club to the Globe Theatre's touring *Globe to Globe Hamlet* production. I learnt how to catch noddie birds, husk coconuts, and spear fish. I drank kava and sang liturgical hymns with government bureaucrats as much as I spent time with phosphate lorry drivers, waitresses, and dinner ladies, played bingo and gossiped with ministers' wives, and ate pancakes with Australian law enforcement and bureaucrats. I often hitchhiked, striking up deep conversations with all manner of

residents, from refugee industry employees to presidential advisors, Australian government contractors to Fijian security details, certified refugees to uncertified asylum seekers. I went to Thursday Ladies Night at the Joules Bar, I ran in the country's annual Coca-Cola Cup, I hung out at the boat harbor, I went to NGO aerobics and film nights, I attended every festival on offer, and regularly attended Sunday church. I helped out with school speech days, taught Year 6 classes, and manned USP stalls at government service days. I learnt a great deal about phosphate processing, taking tours around factory floors and extraction sites, and spending hours with chemists conducting test samples for exportation. In short, I participated, observed, and learnt from people living in Nauru.



Figure 4: Company Town Life

Following the refugee workers through to Nauru's offshore sites was essential in understanding the money, knowledge, and expertise through which new industrial worlds are made. Not to mention, the immense moral values that flow around this space. Without having conducted the back research in Geneva through to Australia, I never would have received the same abrupt shock when stepping out of the aircraft carrier into company town Nauru. Nor would I have realised the specific focus of the industrial terrain, caught up in my own academic mind-set of infrastructural forms not manufacturing processes. Living in Nauru also enabled me to see the sets of daily practices and networks through which media narratives are constituted (Ginsburg et al. 2002). The media has shaped everyone's lives in Nauru, stirring the country's waters externally on an everyday basis. Refugee activists in Nauru and in Australia are a part of the construction of this discursive and bodily choreographic universe, as

are incensed publics now morally invested in the public relations campaign on a global scale. Nauruans and offshore refugees more than anyone feel the repercussions of this product advertising imaginary.

In Nauru, I was free to do what I liked, provided I did not go into the RPCs without administrative clearance. During my fieldwork period, I went into Nauru's refugee resettlement housing but not its processing centres, nor even attempted. This will certainly be the dominant criticism of my research. With persistence, I probably could have arranged entry. My decision against pursuing processing centre access was largely because I found that, like with phosphate, the processing infrastructure was almost superfluous to the productive life of the refugee, the economic arrangements of which, as my opening vignette illustrates, enveloped the entire country's fabric. Like the Chicago trading market Caitlin Zaloom (2006: 181) describes, in Nauru "city and market rose together." Being in Nauru reinforced the reality of how industrial procedures shape the landscape of one high-value manufacturing site. It is significant that the entire country of Nauru is labeled as an "offshore" now "regional processing country," a company town, Chapter 1 will describe, in its starkest form. I could freely speak and engage with everyone from refugee to non-refugee workers outside the facilities, all of who can come and go openly or at designated times. Access would also have been treated with a great deal of suspicion, as the dominant perception was that my research would come with a refugee activist agenda once I made clear that I was not a refugee worker. It was already the immediate assumption from non-refugee and refugee alike that I supported refugee operations, as nested in best practice onshore not offshore industry. It is also important to my other argument that much of Nauru's industrial operations are assembled and cyclically feed into resource economies and politics on the Australian mainland.

It is not out of happenstance that I leave Manus and Christmas Island out of my analysis. As an Australian territory, Christmas Island does not come under the purview of "offshore." When I was in Australia, Christmas Island's own company town closure was imminent. The Australian government sought to move people to offshore facilities or remote Northern Territories, using Christmas Island as a waypoint before distributing maritime prospectors elsewhere. PNG's Manus Island is under the banner of offshore processing. PNG also struck and restructured trade deals with Australia at the same times as Nauru. Manus is different but also very comparable to Nauru. Similar frictions and dynamics developed on Manus, as much

as company town networks fomented with Nauru. Personnel jumped across and circulated their industrial improvement schemes between the two extractive sites, mostly in the unidirectional flow of Nauru to Manus. But here I seek to illuminate one place in minute detail, deeply exploring the groundedness of a refugee manufacturing enterprise, while connecting its social orderings with widespread dynamics and debates.

Many industry personnel also took pains to stress how offshore processing on Nauru has been far more facilitable than on Manus Island. As Chapter 1 will go on to detail, Nauru has its forms of “imperial debris” (Stoler 2008) from which rise new industrial assemblages. The legal and governance arrangements developed throughout the country’s history of Hanseatic (1886-1917) then Anglophonic (1918-1968) colonial restructuring in line with guano extraction, coconut oil before, make this industry project a more facilitable endeavour. Nauru continues to use the Australian dollar, the Queensland Criminal Code and Education System. The appeals court remains the High Court of Australia. A great deal of labour forces including doctors, teachers, lawyers, and government employees are still recruited from overseas. The Nauruan government readily implemented all manufacturing protocols and keenly worked with refugee professionals around improvements, adopting the necessary legislative and administrative structures with extraordinary rapidity. Manus on the other hand did not authorise the same degree of external rule from Australia. The PNG government has not looked to the same level of cooperation as Nauru through the placement of Australians in government. Nor have they agreed to the same level of legal and operational reforms elicited by Australian advisory bodies. Indeed several of PNG’s government ministers have been outspoken about the deal. The 21km² context of Nauru has presented a world ripe for company town control as much as local and pioneer boomtown opportunities.

Nauru’s refugee processing operations have been through a number of fluctuations since my ethnographic research period, many of which I will later describe. I continue to maintain connections with all manner of personnel who are part of the country’s industry enterprise externally and in Nauru. I am of course now embedded in the industrial assemblage as much as I am an external part. Certainly, I am also now reliant on the workings of some of the media imaginaries that I critique. But having lived in Nauru, where the media interact so heavily with people’s quotidian lives, I am all the more attuned to how Nauru is shaped by and shapes the

dematerialising global imaginary. Anthropology, Ginsburg et al. (2002) point out, while firmly grounded in the local, can show the significant consequences that virtual worlds have for social life.

Awkward Bedfellows: Anthropology and... “the Native”?

A foundational concern throughout anthropological research is the liberal democratic quest for agency and resistance. Indeed liberal democratic politics has become intrinsic to anthropology, with questions revolving around relevance, agency, “intellectual-moral engagement” (Ticktin 2014: 277), and the law as a tool of enablement (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005). In the company town context of Nauru, this line of enquiry runs in circles. Nauru’s manufacturing project is carried out by a vast spectrum of industry personnel from locals through to Australian external firms, and of course asylum seekers who take a boat, and elect to go through the processing operations, which Chapter 2 will detail. People occupy many positions between unbounded categories and are brought into constant proximity. In Nauru, the small town context made me conscious of not making simplistic assumptions of who constitutes elite and non-elite. Deep conversations with expat workers also led me to think more carefully about why people were drawn to working in the refugee industry: those in commercial firms, NGOs, government bureaucracies or otherwise. Moral values and financial value were inextricably enmeshed. In this context, I do not take a particular stance in supporting one labour faction over another. Whose agency would I represent? I have only tried to render my experiences as faithfully as I can.

Nauru does have a short history of anthropological involvement when it comes to company town operations. In 1932, the Australian anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood stayed in Nauru for four months with the British Phosphate Commission administrator. Her work focused on the effects of phosphate mining and Australian administration on Nauruans, supported by the Administration for its corporate social relations appeal.¹⁵ My work was not company funded nor is my goal to make future recommendations or contrive a postcolonial once bucolic frame of the destruction of Nauru’s Pleasant Island. The refugee operations have certainly had a deleterious effect for Nauruans, as successive chapters will make clear, but like phosphate

¹⁵ See Wedgwood, Camilla H. “Report on Research Work on Nauru Island, Central Pacific (part one),” *Oceania* 6 (1936): 359-94.

extraction, many of these repercussions are felt not just in Nauru, but the world over.

Presenting Nauru as I lived through its company town world and came to understand its external creation is what I offer in terms of agency, while also emphasising the troubling notion of agency as a concept. Agency is itself an essentialising and preferentialising technique, which configures and subordinates people in demeaning frames of empowerment and difference, with the decision of who is granted agency by no means a value(s) free project (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Anthropologists are in an important position to challenge dominant ideologies that obscure inequalities related to standardised market operations. By bringing in rich ethnography, we can not only destabilise the reproduction of culture, but also illuminate the power and knowledge that undergirds fetishised market operations. It is the representation and reproduction of refugees as “humanitarian” subjects or of refugee workers as “coopted” by practices of “state violence” that propels depoliticised industrial worlds, urging us to think about the values of commodity-making that animate market operations. Following the manufacturing and circulation of the refugee as a commodity moves away from thinking about refugee work in moral, humanitarian, and legalistic terms, which can obscure the value-driven dynamics of why refugees have been commoditised as objects of intervention, and the many industrialists, self-representations, artifacts, and calculations involved in this commodity economy’s operations. Of course in bringing a new commodity onto the academic market, we also help to solidify it as such. I do not see myself outside of the commodificational process nor outside of Nauru’s offshore company town operations, but someone who disrupts the flow, while playing a part of the supply chain.

There is certainly substantial worth to be had in shifting the focus away from the agency quagmire, allowing for a more balanced critique, rather than the trap of romanticising indigeneity, international manufacturing projects or their objectified resources. One reason why the offshore refugee project was figured in such vehement terms was because few examined the state’s workings publically from outside of the industry or its moral economy. Many refugee majors chose to work behind-the-scenes because of the operation’s controversy or because government confidentiality is part of their workplace protocol. Those who did make populist exposes more often than not came with heavily laden and sensationalised pro-refugee agendas, deterring the Nauruan government away from granting AU\$8000 journalist visa access in the first place. Reports on Nauru were mostly rooted in a concern for the plight of the refugee,

rather than more tempered appraisals, with “facts” often obtained through the usual agenda-laden channels. Interestingly, the first journalist permitted entry to Nauru in eighteen months published an article on “sifting truth from spin” in the “topsy-turvy reality of Nauru” (Kenny 2015). Kenny discussed refugees’ and asylum seekers’ use of rape discourses as part of the political ballgame, compassion leverage to reach Australia. Instantly, Kenny found himself loudly vilified as “insensitive” and “harassing rape victims” by Australia’s refugee activists. Opposition Labour MPs to self-billed refugee activists all came together in Tweets, blogs, and newspaper tirades. The mainland refugee activists maintain a powerful grip on Nauru and anyone repudiating the legitimacy of the suffering refugee and Nauru cannibal rhetorical claims. As this signals, the decision of who is granted the agency is by no means a value free project.

I will no doubt predictably be vilified as insensitive to offshore refugee suffering and myself the target of refugee racist derision. I wholeheartedly agree that the offshore refugee operations are unjust and debilitating but *not* within an exceptionalist frame. What I am trying to emphasise is that it is important to underline how and why people are made into refugees in order to redirect energies towards the uneven points of production, and hazardous manufacturing cycles that enable their perpetuation. Nor are people who say that they are refugees outside of the industrial assemblage. Many bemoan operations as discriminatory and demeaning, coursed through by power and privilege, but are part of a powerful embodied routine of self-perpetuation. Stephanie LeMenager (2014) expresses this as “petromelancholia” when discussing the sociocultural entanglements of oil: a failure to imagine an alternative to a fossil-fuelled capitalist modernity. Even when faced with intense processes of extraction and precarious future reserves, the affective and embodied routines of living oil produce an “amnesia” that screens the consequences of extraction and consumption. So too, pro refugee campaigns only become enveloped in a brick-wall endeavour, using terms like refugee compassion and refugee empowerment rather than, as David Harvey (1990: 423) would have it, “getting behind the veil, the fetishism of the market and the commodity, in order to tell the full story of social reproduction.” It is the notion of people as refugees, buoyed by a mega-industry, which makes possible the creation of dystopian refugee worlds like Nauru’s new company town or wherever the next booming industrial sites are to be found.

Another major criticism might be that I do not focus extensively on individual

“refugee stories,” although I do draw in deep conversations and time spent with people in process, certified, and declined as refugees. Many people, I will detail, had been through incredibly difficult circumstances, and for a variety of reasons sought to move elsewhere, self-commodified as refugees in the face of the uneven mobility geographies of what Bridget Anderson (2013) terms “communities of value.” I have several reasons for refraining from a refugee storytelling approach. This angle has already been well covered as it relates to Nauru, where the offshore refugee has been given exponential airtime play through a suffering frame (see Green et al. 2017; Metcalfe 2010; Refugee Action Committee 2017). Refugee stories have also become a big business – bought sold, and traded along the commodity trail as part of the product self-packaging model that comes with the demands of refugee self-presentation. Uncertainties of who or what to believe are paramount in this context.¹⁶ It is this uncertainty that has led to the bodily and psychologically scrutinising practices of “RSD” – the inequalities of which I will go on to describe in Chapter 2. These uncertainties are all the more extreme in Nauru’s supply chain, where many offshore refugees, in sheer desperation, look to circulate any narrative that might give authority to the end offshore campaign. At the same time, a focus too heavily on individual stories of suffering is what has galvanised a vast body of disinterested and impassioned Australian consumers, the former keen to offshore the raw material and labour product to other lands, the latter morally and/or financially driven to carry out the refugee work entailed, all resulting in the refugee’s cyclical perpetuation. I prefer not to be part of the metallurgical operations by also attempting to extract stories from would-be refugees under immense scrutinisation. Instead, I balance my analysis by illuminating the inequalities of the overall operations.

The very real danger is that in trying to tackle the refugee complex I become the poster child of anti-refugee divisions, keen to emphasise the value in ceasing all refugee operations. It might be stressed that my research gives evidence to the false nature of the refugee as a human inherent or the vast operational expenditures frittered into Nauru’s trading economy. This is of course the case with any research released into the ether. Nor is it my argument. Noel Castree (2001) makes a similar point, noting some of the moral implications of unveiling the fetish. I am certainly cognisant

¹⁶ See Lau (2007) on the concept of “paper families,” in which restrictive US immigration policies and practices against Chinese American communities from the late 1800s resulted in an elaborate system of claiming fictive identities, including the creation of “crib sheets” outlining genealogies, village maps, and other information that could be used during immigration processing.

of this eventuality but believe that it is important to display the limitations of fetishised approaches, through which new extraction sites are cropping up all the time. Important also to pull analyses back to how and why people are made into refugees, the vast expenditures on border enforcement and militarisation, the global gains from conflict reduction and enabling human mobility, whether as refugee or no. Pro refugee campaigns and normative critiques gain little traction, in fact the reverse. Instead, they actively rile the dynamics that bring destructive company town worlds like Nauru into existence. These worlds, my research shows, are so easily transferable with their attendant hazards and harms.

A Note on Terminologies

Throughout this book, I heavily use the categories I critique, often with purposeful objectification, in an attempt to “get with the fetish” of the refugee, to “hijack”, and “re-contextualise” it (Cook et al. 2004: 174), all of which require some definition. Although the words “refugee” and “asylum seeker” are relatively new inventions (Gatrell 2013; Shacknove 1985), the terms have acquired an incredible amount of baggage over the years, drawing to mind advertisements of economic scrounging and/or third world suffering. As a rhetorical device, the word “refugee” has become fixated with a discourse of populist fear, often aligned with the “terrorist” or the “low-skilled economic migrant.” At the same time, the word “refugee” has become an evocative technique for pro refugee teams lobbying for an expansion to refugee import quotas and industry funding *ad nauseam*. Discourses of persecution and protection are key to this propaganda construction. I use “the refugee” as my catch-all noun, denoting quite how conflated this term has become, automatically pinned to anyone making their way across borders outside of state visa channels, sometimes regardless of their actual legal status. Many people do not self identify as refugees or use the term as a marker of distinction. However, part of what I hope to illuminate is how the paradigm, and those invested in its perpetuation, does artificially divide and segregate people, maintaining essentialised distinctiveness.

Put simply, the raw material in all capacities is a migrant, whether crude spontaneous arrival, free flowing to market, evading well-control techniques, or high-grade deposit, imported pre-certified from politically useful extraction sites or those with exotic allure. The asylum seeker is an unprocessed migrant seeking refugee

status, subjected to intense pressure before refugee certification. The refugee is a migrant who has been certified as displaying a “well-founded fear of persecution” and permitted access to the associated social welfare provisions; most of which generally come well below the entitlements of members of the absorbing state’s public. The legal procedures surrounding the separation of the human between useful product or crude contaminant – known in industry lingua franca as “refugee status determination” or “RSD” – the processing and protection sites, and facilities and provisions provided throughout the processing and certification phases are dependant on the geographical location and mode of transport from which a person claims to be a refugee or is determined as such. However, the entire operations hinge on the industry refrain of Article 1A of the 1951 Geneva Convention. This has shapeshifted somewhat into the current working definition delineated by its 1967 Protocol. The Protocol removed temporal and geographic restrictions, and made the category open and targeted to all.¹⁷

Article 1A of the 1951 Convention:

A. For the purposes of the present Convention, the term ‘refugee’ shall apply to any person who:

(2) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

1967 Protocol:

2. For the purpose of the present Protocol, the term ‘refugee’ shall, as regards the application of paragraph 3 of this article, mean any person within the definition of article 1 of the Convention as if the words ‘As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and...’ and the words ‘...as a result of such

¹⁷ In the year of the Protocol’s launch, lobbied for by expansionist Commissioners Felix Schnyder (1960) and then Sadruddin Aga Khan (1965), the refugee doubled in number from 2,356,991 to 4,518,659 just ten years later. UNHCR’s annual budget soared to over US\$500 million by 1980 (Loescher 2001).

events', in article 1A(2) were omitted.

3. The present Protocol shall be applied by the States Parties hereto without any geographic limitation, save that existing declarations made by States already Parties to the Convention in accordance with article 1B(1)(a) of the Convention, shall, unless extended under article 1 B (2) thereof, apply also under the present Protocol.

Since this time, a number of additional terminologies have been added to the industry jargon, some of which are descriptive or normative labels and others which have solidified into legal categories; most of which find relevance to the Nauruan context, and all of which have deep social implications. These will become clear over the course of my narrative.

Chapter Overview

This book finds its empirical ties in the industrial assemblages that coalesce around Nauru as a phosphate turned refugee company town. In arguing that inequalities are embedded in the refugee extractive processes, it proceeds as follows:

Chapter 1 examines the beginnings of Nauru's offshore refugee operations as historicised within the state's first company town operations in phosphate processing. The history of Nauru is typically told before the advent of the country's refugee boom, fashioned around the superiority of science and the rule of law, and as one of straightforward colonial domination, exploitation, and islander innocence. Placing the refugee project within Nauru's other colonial extractive industries emphasises the project's similarly dispersed and commercially constructed nature. Copra and phosphate followed by refugees spurred the transformation of Nauru's law and governance structures into a patchworked European system. These large-scale industries grounded in scientific and legal epistemologies defined and altered Nauru into successive waves of company towns.

Chapter 2 is a more concrete attempt to defetishise the refugee by exposing its making. Rejecting the claim of offshore exceptionalism, I turn to examine the exploitative labour practices of refugee determination as connected to my observations more internationally, arguing that similar operational conflicts operate no differently offshore as onshore. Here I draw in ethnographic material from Nauru's

phosphate and refugee processing operations, following mineral and human deposits through the assessment operations as helpful to understanding the purificational processes that imbues certain migrants with status, others as pollutant, ripe for waste disposal. Harking back to my overall argument, I detail some of the operational nuances that look to make Nauru's processing system "much better" than the Australian mainland. This chapter also emphasises the power that a human commodity has in normalising industrial operations under a subjectivised bodily frame, which enables further accumulation, and the solidification of global exceptionalist narratives.

Notions of risk were an important part of Nauru's "high modernist" (Rabinow 1989) design. Chapter 3 again focuses on questions of offshore exceptionality, thinking through the relationship between high-risk and high-value, which have inspired a culture of risk adversarialism in Nauru. I argue that because offshore refugee processing is exceptionally risky – financially, politically, and in terms of human safety – risk managerialism has been intrinsic to contemporary company town development. I again pair my analysis with phosphate processing, looking at some of the systems of regulation that were part of assuring the sustenance of phosphate operations in the BPC heyday. Ultimately, I show that risks are endemic to both the human and mineral manufacturing industries, which can be little constrained by state or international company town regulation.

Chapter 4 analyses the social conflicts that have developed between Nauruans and refugees in the country's latest human manufacturing industry. I examine the performative aspect of media imaginaries curated by offshore refugees and end offshore campaigners, which have been given massive global visibility, and affected local dynamics. Here, I attempt to explain some of the tensions that have emerged from both local and refugee perspectives. I detail some of the new forms of community policing that have looked to secure the offshore refugee boom, arguing that they separate the refugee and local as per the market economy, generating more conflicting social interactions along the assessment line. I show how in Nauru, end offshore campaigners have also stirred tensions within the local population, as the government opposition jockeys for position.

Marketing techniques are an important part of furthering the saleability of a product. Chapter 5 turns to the marketing advertisements and campaign images that have contributed to the refugee's rise as an industrial growth sector. I set Nauru's

contemporary refugee consumer drives within the development of World Refugee Day, the industry's biggest promotional event of the year, which found instigation in Nauru in 2014. These sorts of marketing events have gained popular appeal the world over for the very reason that sees refugee processing offshored to Nauru's consumptive lands. This chapter addresses the power of refugee marketing events that focus on promoting a subjectivised human form. Marketing has taken on a more complex character in Nauru. I examine the different marketing tactics that have looked to stabilise or subvert the offshore refugee boom, the latter of which centres on stirring Australian consumer demand for the offshore refugee.

While the refugee project has been monetarily lucrative for Nauru, it has been marred by bitter consequences. A cursory Google search reveals some of the humiliation that many Nauruans contend with on a regular basis, often shouldered with remarkable stoicism and jocularly. Cheap blows come all too easy and have provided countless Australian media fodder across the course of the country's history. However the refugee enterprise rivets Nauru far beyond the global debasement of refugee rapist and Australian handmaiden portrayals. I close in Chapter 6 with a deep look at resource curse of the refugee enterprise in connection with more widespread global trading dynamics.

Like phosphate before it, Nauru's refugee industry is a temporary one and tied into the political whims of the Australian consumptive zeitgeist. I greatly respect many of the people I met on Nauru. I was bestowed with an incredible amount of warmth, kindness, and sheer generosity. Nauru's isolation is only relative; many people are well travelled; all are globally interconnected. I met some who could tell me the best spots for London afternoon tea and others who directed me towards – or were themselves – a wealth of historical archives. Still more, who jokingly collected first editions of Nauru's unashamedly racist histories or engaged in debates around postdevelopmental critique. This book is not a ridicule or derision of Nauru and its many multifarious peoples. Rather, it is an attempt to bring to the fore what the Australian government and end offshore campaigners obscure under divergent yet convergent value(s)-driven frames. It is a genuine concern with what will be left in Nauru in the wake of another failed, and ultimately destructive, industrial enterprise. The utopian rationalism at work is clearly deeply imbalanced, characterised, unlike phosphate, by ever-plentiful reserves. It is only through an active effort to qualitatively rethink and refute the international refugee project that more equality

will be achievable. Otherwise, the seemingly universal tendency towards human commodification and differentiation remains relentless.

Chapter One:

Building the Workingman's Dream

The Treasury Department would like to advise the general public that it will be paying out land rentals for the Refugee Processing Centre (RPC), Statesite and Rontel this week. It is further advised that beneficiaries with Bendigo Bank accounts will receive their rent payments in their account on Wednesday 22nd July 2015.

The rest will receive their cheques on Friday 24th July between 2pm-5pm at the Post office and cashing of cheques at the Nauru Revenue Office from 2pm-5pm.

Treasury Department Noticeboard, Government Buildings, the Republic of Nauru

It's a sunny day. People jostle to get inside the post office. The small dusty building, sandwiched between Nauru's phosphate headquarters and Bendigo Bank, the latest addition on the country's scene, is a hive of activity. The Civic Centre has become noticeably livelier over the past few weeks with the resurrection of international banking. Over a decade with no bank is enough to provoke a bit of excitement. But as we manoeuvre our way inside it becomes apparent that this is not another promotional event.

"Oh, just the refugee processing royalties," Georgia casually remarks over her shoulder, noticing my quizzical looks. "Every two months we collect them. You know, my family has many lands. If it's phosphate we go down the road. It's just the same for refugees and rocks. This really isn't bad. Sometimes you can wait all night to get in. You come back later, you'll see. It might be going round the building."

Several landowners bide their time playing poker on smartphones. Children crawl on the floor. A middle-aged man slumps past, still groggy from the night before. Another leans against the wall, wearing a khaki shirt marked with the logo Transfield, the Sydney refugee managerial contractor, another Wilson Security, their Melbourne-based security subcontractor. Others from the Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation, the ironically named national phosphate mining firm, also mill about, but in dwindling capacity, testament to the fading industry of Nauru's yesteryear. Homegrown security firms have also become a ubiquitous presence, many earning high paying subcontracts for guarding the refugee housing and worker complexes that have sprung up in recent years.

Curious, I ask Georgia, “Which RPCs are on your family’s land?”

“I think 1, 3, and 4, and maybe one of the resettlement sites.”

“I thought there were just three centres?”

“Hmm... 1, 2, 3,” she counts on her fingers. “I can’t remember. Let me look at my statement, then I’ll tell you.”

There’s confusion over which queue to go in.

“This is such a stupid system it’s so stupid,” she sighs. “You queue to collect then you queue again to sign. That’s what takes the time.”

We stand patiently in the first line. Forty-five minutes later we reach the front. The clerk flicks through several pages, trying to locate Georgia’s surname. After a painstaking search, her surname is ticked off. An envelope bearing her name is removed from a folder and alphabetised into a pile at the front of the second line.

We wait in the second line.

Her surname is again located, the envelope is reproduced and her signature is taken. This time the envelope is hers to keep. Inside: a rental payment statement. Royalty recipients compare their tallies.

We go next door to the revenue office, which now also serves as the Bendigo premises. A signboard is propped up at the side, a few leaflets scattered about: “Savings account? Now’s the time.” But we keep to the orderly queue at the other side, where her statement is again exchanged, this time for cash. Grand total, AU\$159.90. Those with more finite partitions of land are not so fortunate. We pick up her cousin’s land owings: it comes to just AU\$12.69.

“Why’s his so low?” I ask.

“Well, you see here, his share is between 5760 family members. Me, I’m lucky, I have a 480th share in our land. Like I said, my family are big landowners. But you know, for those others, well, at least it gives them something for the weekend.”

Nauru Post Office, Civic Centre, Aiwo District. 24 July 2015.



Figure 1.1: Phosphate Royalties; Refugee Royalties

The idea of the refugee as a commodity is very natural and explicit in Nauru. Stumbling across Royalties Day was by no means the first time I came into close encounter with the circulation of refugees through Nauru's financial streams, albeit it was one of the more extreme. Frequently, my conversations with people in Nauru would be accompanied by the interchangeability of phosphate and refugees. Nor did I have to read shrewd parallels between Nauru's two industries, even if I initially wrapped my questions with woolly tact, worried that I might offend people by insinuating that their entire country rode on a refugee economy or offend those whose bodies held such financial capital to an entire Equatorial state. In fact, people in and out of government, refugees and non-refugees alike, were open that refugees had overtaken phosphate as Nauru's main resource sector.

In one of my first government meetings, a local bureaucrat nonchalantly says, "The refugees, it's just like phosphate, but hopefully we've learnt a bit from the last time. The big thing we need to think about is planning for when we no longer have refugees. That's what keeps us afloat." I'm in Nauru for the government's release of the 2014/15 Budget Papers. The word RPC or "regional processing centre" features interchangeably throughout the pages informing me of the latest changes in government finance:

RPC related revenues are now the dominant revenue stream to Government but were subject to political and other externalities outside the control of the government. The Government has moved to remove this uncertainty through the signing of a 5 year plan that provides surety of around AU\$31.5 mil in non per capita based grants and reimbursable expenses from the Australia Government associated with hosting the RPC asylum seekers and refugees in the community. This agreement is expected to provide a surety over revenues from this source for the next ten years. On this basis these funds represent the largest single revenue stream to Government.

- Republic of Nauru 2015-16 Budget

I catch a lift with an acquaintance, "God this traffic. You know, when the refugees weren't here we never had rush hour. Now all these cars, it's crazy." Another day, I sit outside the country's first Persian restaurant, opened by a small group of Iranian migrants, now refugee certified, living in resettlement housing on the urban fringe. I speak with Tanya as she recounts being sent to Nauru. She sighs, "I was sent here in 2012 when they first restarted it all. It was so different. Shops closed. No music, few

parties. Now look. You can get piña coladas over there. They have that jet ski. There's boom boxes on full blast night and day. When the refugees came, Nauru turned green." It was a widely acknowledged fact that Nauru was remade through and by refugees.

This chapter takes a step back in time, historicising Nauru's resurgence as a refugee company town within the country's first boomtown copra then phosphate operations. I examine the shift from phosphate to refugees as the dominant state growth sector, owing to Australian food turned human commodity scares. Compared to mining and oil towns, the refugee company town is as a newcomer arrival, a timing that reflects the current industry climate around the crude refugee arrival. Consumers are less interested in the idea of unregulated refugee absorption, outsourcing refugee processing and resettlement operations to new processing sites. The refugee also presents conditions that differ from mineral exploitation because it is an extractive industry around a human and animate form. As following chapters will show, in refugee company towns, labour riots and worker discontent also comes from the commodity form.

In the second half of the chapter, I hark back to my overall argument that Nauru's refugee operations are much higher standard than elsewhere. I examine the reasons and operational schemata behind the remaking of Nauru as the jewel in the refugee industrial crown.

Part One: A Company Town State

The industries stand unparalleled in the tropical world for the care, attention to, and comfort of the employees ... The health and comfort of all are assured by well-planned systems of sewerage, fresh and salt water in unstinted abundance, electric light, fresh food supplies refrigerators and telephones connecting every office, workshop, and house. Every nook and corner of the settlement is lit up at night, giving the impression, when viewed from a few miles out at sea, of an approach to a great town - British Phosphate Commission (1929: 58)

Michael Powles: In some ways Nauru was run a bit like what the Americans would call a company town?

Ludwig Keke: Yes it is. That's my personal view.

- Ludwig Keke, Former Speaker of Parliament and Ambassador to Taiwan, 2011.

A company town is traditionally defined as a community shaped around a dominant business enterprise. Company towns were established in places where extractive industries such as coal, metal mines, lumber, and oil held a monopoly franchise.¹ Generally speaking, the company town differs from the factory or farm, which is the principle workplace



Figure 1.2: School Sports Day

for employees (Crawford 1995; Porteus 1970). Rather, characteristic of the company town style is how the industrial landscape and settlement form is shaped in line with the particular technical and social necessities of the method of industrial production. Essen in Germany, Cadbury's Bournville in England, Pullman's in Illinois, and Moomba gas town and Jabiru uranium town in Australia, are some of the more famous company town forms. The refugee company town of Nauru's current industrial landscape has an extensive history across the country's resource-rich landscape. Nauru's political economic inheritance before that of refugees is one derived from coconut then phosphate wealth, both of which were dominant global industries of the day. Once termed "a company town" by former Speaker of Parliament Ludwig Keke, Nauru's latest incarnation extends from a colonial history rooted in international commercial trade.

The Coconut Boom

The chances of people arriving and claiming to be refugees by happenstance were slim for the coral atoll. Nauru's size and distance from other archipelagos – 595 km east of nearest neighbour, Kiribati – the fringing coral reef, and easterly trade winds coupled with strong Equatorial currents kept the island off the international trading scene later than most. Unlike other islands in the vicinity, Nauru had "none of the tropical fruits, which are generally very prolific in these islands" (Fearne 1798), no

¹ Margaret Crawford (1995) provides one of the most informative discussions of company towns, from which the title of this chapter is derived.

sandalwood, tortoise shell or *bêche-de-mer* as with the lush verdant lands of Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. But Nauru, Anaoero, or “Pleasant Island,” as Captain John Fearn (1798) first recorded, slowly found itself within global trading currents.

Traders arrived from the 1830s on Nauru, setting up stations with tobacco, alcohol, hardware, guns, ammunition, hard biscuits, and tinned food around the whaling season. European business was conducted largely around imported goods while Nauruans traded in coconut products and handicrafts (Simpson 1843). As coconut oil became a primary commodity on the European trading scene, large-scale commercial interests started turning to Nauru in the mid-eighteenth century. German companies dominated the western Pacific trade. The Hamburg firm of J.C. Godeffroy & Sohn was the pioneer firm, establishing a trading base in Samoa in 1857. Once the German firms identified the profitability of Nauru’s rich coconut supplies, business was expanded over to Nauru from the Jaluit regional offices in the Marshall Islands (Fabricius 1895). The firms recruited resident traders to purchase copra from the islanders. Agents and independent traders bought their copra from the chiefs in return for retail goods (Moss 1889). Those who cut and dried the copra then received a share of the goods as the chiefs saw fit. By 1888 ten traders were on the island, some acting as agents for DHPG and Robertson & Hensheim, along with the British New Zealand firms, Tiernan Venture and Henderson & McFarlane (Maude 1971: 14). Chiefs with title to large tracts of land became very wealthy through their control of the copra profits (Moss 1889).

Trading companies and commercial interests largely drove the expansion of colonial empires. Trading companies were often given official recognition by the Reich and empowered to perform acts on the government’s behalf (Firth 1973). These so-called “charter company colonies” saved the Reich the expense of a regular bureaucratic organisation in the colonies, administering the territory through their own officials and bearing costs while in return being given trading rights and concessions. With the rapid development of German trade in the Pacific, commercial rivalries became more acute as British, Australian and New Zealand companies sought control over high-value resource sites. Although traders preferred to keep government involvement to a minimum, they sought consular protection to consolidate their activity and ward off increased competition.

In Nauru, traders and beachcombers had provoked enough local antagonism to require imperial protection. To popularise their trade locally, traders issued free

samples of tobacco, and alcohol, along with rifle demonstrations. With the take off of fermented sour toddy on Nauru, introduced by shipwrecked Kingsmill Islanders in the 1870s, alcohol and firearms soon entered out-of-control proportions. In 1878 a drunken dispute erupted during a marriage feast. A chief from one of Nauru's perpetually warring district clans tampered with a bottle of coconut oil brought as a present for the bride. A pistol went off and the young chief of a rival high family was shot. Stoked by traders keen to offload their cargo, the argument soon led to a ten-year civil war. Fatalities amongst Nauruans and traders were plentiful. Importantly for traders and Nauruans alike, the island's unsettled conditions made commerce difficult.

Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was initially disinterested in joining the scramble for colonial possessions. He viewed distant colonies as a drain on state resources and a distraction from European politics (Hezel 2000). But with Franco-British rivalry at a peak in the 1880s and increasingly vocal demands at home, Bismarck began to see the value of establishing Protectorates in East and West Africa and in the Pacific (Fabricius 1895). On 24 June 1884 Chancellor Bismarck informed the Reichstag that he would extend official protection to German traders wherever they had established a commercial predominance. Germany's growing commercial presence was also seen as a threat by the nearby Australian Queensland and New Zealand governments (Viviani 1970). Still part of the British imperial empire until 1901, and unable to claim territories themselves, the Queensland government agitated London's Colonial Office for annexation of New Guinea and the need to ensure their strategic stronghold. On April 6-8 1886, Germany and the United Kingdom came together at the Anglo-German Convention to demarcate their respective areas of imperial influence. As part of the land divvy, Germany, urged on by its regional trading firms, established its Marshallese Protectorate to cover "the small but fertile island called Pleasant Island" (Fabricius 1895: 171).²

On 17 April 1888, Jaluit officials and the Imperial Commissioner arrived into Nauru on the gunboat *SMS Eber*. Nauru's chiefs were imprisoned overnight in a copra shed until all arms were surrendered, then tasked with helping German administration instate order. Over 800 fire-arms and more than 1000 rounds of ammunition were handed over. An almost Domesday style compilation, the *Grundbuch*, was compiled

² While the island was administered as a colony, the Germans did not want to use the word "colonies" and instead preferred the term *Schutzgebiete* or 'protected territory'. In reality, German Protectorates were administered no differently from colonies, with full German sovereignty over the area (Weeramantry 1992).

which detailed all individual landholdings of Nauruans, the eight trading stations and transactions relating to land claims and boundaries (MacSporran 1995). The traditional boundaries drawn up for the *Grundbuch* then served as the delineation for tax districts. Bismarck's policy required that the expansion of German Protectorates must as far as possible avoid involving the Reich in any direct expenditure. In order to pay for Nauru's administration, Jaluit levied annual copra taxes. Jaluit operated through indigenous collaboration, holding chiefs responsible for local enforcement. The chiefs were tasked with collecting the copra tax of their districts. In return for exerting their influence in the company's interests, chiefs received special concessions, including one third of the collected tax in German marks, and alleged rides in the German warship (Firth 1973).

But the promise of a flourishing coconut trade failed to translate into a sufficiently viable pioneer vision. Prolonged droughts reduced the crop yields in the 1890s with traders petitioning for reductions in taxes from the Marshallese administration (Viviani 1970). Nauruans refused to make more copra than was needed to pay their taxes. In one particular slump, no ship landed on Nauru for eight months. The German administration generally left Nauruans undisturbed except for tax collection. The nature and viability of the copra industry was such that little moved beyond the small town trading stations already established. However, the arrival of European missionaries did have an immediate social effect in Nauru, facilitating Nauru's soon-to-be birth as a phosphate town. At Jaluit's request, Nauru's first long-term missionary, the German Protestant Reverend Delaporte and his wife were brought to the island in 1899, gradually setting up a European-style church, school, and moral codes for Nauruans, supported by the copra administrators.³ Heathen practices such as immoral dances and the worshipping of erected stones were banned and European-style clothing was firmly encouraged. In 1902 the first resident Roman Catholic missionary, Father Grundl, came to Nauru from Germany, later seconded by Father Kayser in 1903, who opened a Catholic mission in 1907 in Arubo and another in 1920 in Yaren District, along with a Catholic school, still in operation. But it was the discovery of phosphate in Nauru that soon transformed the island into the distinctive company town form, a timing that reflected changing commercial interests.

³ The American Protestant mission first sent Gilbertese missionaries to Nauru in 1887. They met with little success soon departing the island. However, they did leave an adherent in Chief Auweieda, who conducted small religious gatherings after their departure and prior to the Delaportes' arrival (Maude 1971).

The Global Phosphate Boom

In 1798, the British economist Thomas Malthus famously made the doomsday prediction that the human population would soon outgrow its ability to feed itself, raising alarm bells and spurring the humanitarian and business savvy impulses of scientific experimentation. Bone meal and manure, long used by agriculturalists worldwide, had only a limited and frugal future. However with world populations on the rise, agricultural productivity needed to be increased faster than demand (Bogaard et al. 2013). The expansion of farming and pastoral activity in the Americas, Australasia, and Japan also called for methodologies that would free farmers from relying on animals to produce fertiliser, and heighten their crop yields.

Chemists went hard to work developing solutions to the population conundrum. The German chemist, Justus von Liebig, and the “father of the fertiliser industry,” emphasised the importance of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium in plant nutrition (Brock 1997). Popularising the “law of the minimum,” Liebig advocated the need to extract and increase the scarcest mineral nutrient to improve plant growth, not the minerals already in abundance in the plant. The British agricultural scientist, Sir John Lawes, built on Liebig’s efforts, and that of James Murray, discovering that mineral phosphates could be treated with sulfuric acid to make superphosphate, which rapidly released phosphate into the soil for use by plants. Lawes’ “artificial manure” came onto the market in 1843, and he set up his first factory at Deptford in 1844. After these experimental days, the phosphate industry took off. By 1855, 60,000 tons of phosphate fertilizers were being applied in England alone, most of the product coming from Lawes. The technology spread like wildfire. Prospectors began searching for deposits of the valuable rock that would meet the needs of western agriculturalists and consumers. The discovery of large deposits of rock and alluvial phosphate in America, along with Morocco and Tunisia, fomented the beginnings of a global fertiliser industry.

The Pacific Island Company grew out of the John T. Arundel and Company; a London-based firm that worked the Pacific trade in copra before later moving into the phosphate business. The late 1800s were a depressing time for the Pacific Island Company, “the day of small things” (Ellis 1936: 51), which boded poorly for “the financial barometer.” By 1890 all known phosphate deposits in the Central Pacific had been worked out. Anything and everything called for phosphate analysis.

Australian farmers were clamouring for higher grades of phosphate and the Company had resorted to scraping residual guano around the Queensland coast. But Henry Denson, the office manager of the Pacific Island Company, had an unusual looking doorstep. It was given little regard except when brought out as a curiosity from his passing visit to Nauru (Williams 1971). In July 1899, Albert Ellis, a Sydney-based officer with the Pacific Islands Company, took an interest in the peculiar rock, so remarkably like the Baker Island deposits he had been sampling. Ellis put the specimen through his routine chemical tests. Low and behold, the results were far greater than Ellis had hoped, 78% phosphate of lime, superphosphate, ore of the richest quality! “There never was a ‘gusher’ more welcome or more opportune,” Ellis reflected on these times (ibid 58). “A gleam of sunshine has come in a discovery which I think will prove extremely valuable to the P I Coy,” Denson quickly wrote to Arundel, the Company director. “The whole island I firmly believe to be one huge mass of Rock Guano. How this is to be worked, I cannot suggest, as you are aware the island is under German jurisdiction and under German laws” (Williams and Macdonald 1985: 11).

“A Fine Democratic Example”

Industrial and governmental secrecy engulfed transactions between the German and British governments, the soon renamed Pacific Phosphate Company (PPC) and the Jaluit-Gesellschaft, resulting in a joint venture in 1906 that sanctioned phosphate mining of Nauru. As part of the agreement, Jaluit retained the monopoly of trade on Nauru, receiving £2000 and royalties of one shilling per ton of phosphate. Meanwhile, overall phosphate profits were divided in the ratio of two-thirds for the PPC and one-third for Jaluit. In return for the mining rights, the PPC took up the administrative payments originally paid to Germany by Jaluit. Shares in the PPC were also given to Jaluit and German administrators. Before mining began, the chiefs representing the tribes of Nauru were called together for a meeting with German officials and Pacific Phosphate Company representatives. It was agreed that documented landowners would be paid for the lease of their land and the loss of any trees. Payment for the phosphate mined was calculated at a half-penny for each ton of rock exported, most of which concentrated on mining the central plateau Topside. The *Grundbuch* register of land holdings set up by the German administration for copra extraction ensured the

administrative and legal frame for phosphate extraction, making it easier for phosphate companies to plan their investment.

As soon as the terms were established, the PPC began the planning and building of the settlement. An important aspect of company town development is that it depends on a precedent (Crawford 1995). The PPC were already active in mining projects in the region, particularly on nearby Ocean Island (Teaiwa 2015). They brought the home-building campaigns from their other industry pursuits to recreate Nauru as “the jewel” of their phosphate towns. The PPC hired a German manager for the island operation and a mix of British and German employees, including experienced phosphate workers from Ocean Island. The phosphate administrators were eager to have Nauruans employed in the labourforce. However the majority, with easy cash in hand from copra now phosphate extraction, were disinterested in the backbreaking phosphate labour work. In 1906, 100 Nauruans were contracted for a year to mine for phosphate but “fed up with digging” (Viviani 1970: 35) no one renewed their contracts. The Administration established a model copra dryer to encourage Nauruans to produce copra if not phosphate. However, few were drawn to a similarly labour-intensive industry. Nauru instead became, Viviani argues, a “well-appointed nursery” of backyard cash consumers. “Favoured wards,” D.L. Oliver, an American observer, wrote, “they became increasingly parasitic upon the mandate administration and the phosphate industry” (ibid 59). Instead, labour for the phosphate fields and the building of the company town infrastructure came from China and the Caroline Islands.

After German rule folded with World War One, intense political grappling divvied the island between a tripartite British, Australian and New Zealand administration as a League of Nations mandated territory. Nauru was technically awarded to Great Britain but Australia and New Zealand argued for a shared division. Their farmers had become reliant on the low cost prices they gave themselves, which enabled them to become leaders in the global food market. “Its phosphate deposit marks it of considerable value, not only as a purely commercial proposition but because the future productivity of our continent absolutely depends on such a fertilizer,” cabled W.A. Watt, the Australian Treasurer, to Prime Minister Hughes in May 1919, encouraging him to do what he could to secure the phosphate island (Viviani 1970: 42). Under the Nauru Island Agreement (1919) deal, the Australian government purchased 42% of the company, Great Britain 42%, and New Zealand

16%. A commissioner from each country was appointed to the board of the newly inaugurated British Phosphate Commission (BPC) along with an Administrator to “make ordinances for the peace, order and good government of the island.” Under the BPC, the phosphate town expanded rapidly into “not only a business success, but ... an enviable respectability” (Williams 1971: 42).

The Phosphate Town



**Figure 1.3: Former Phosphate Company Housing;
Current Refugee Company Housing;**

Former Phosphate Administrator Housing, Now Refugee Corporate Occupied

Company towns, for Crawford (1995), are generally characterised by a two-part style. On the one hand, lies the industrial landscape, shaped around the system of manufacture. On the other hand, lies the model town, designed to create an attractive way of company life. The phosphate town of Nauru was no exception. Urban growth was controlled around phosphate processing. Deep-sea moorings went up with rapid speed. A wooden jetty with a north and south arm was built for exporting the phosphate onto specialist phosphate ships. The first phosphate digs and eventually a crushing plant and a storage bin were all in line with the jetty. Puffing railway engines ferried the rock from the extraction fields along a light rail system to the shining new crushing and drying plant. A second jetty and unit were soon added, this one built of steel, much safer for the phosphate loading process. The railroad tracks extended to the end of the jetty straight to the new phosphate ships ready to be loaded with tonnage for farmers and global consumers. The mining was extraordinarily successful, with over 11,000 tons of phosphate shipped to Australia in the first year alone (Williams 1971).

Well-laid-out settlements provided housing for the pioneering offshore phosphate workers. Ordered housing quadrants, churches, social clubs, and sports and

tennis grounds remade the landscape so that “a little bit of the suburbs transplanted out to the field” (Hinton 2008: 375). The single large residences of the high-rung administrators were built high on the hill, fringed with bougainvillea, and open to the cool sea breeze. If married, officials lived in commodious furnished bungalows, while the bachelors had two-roomed houses built of concrete topped with corrugated iron roofs (Collinson 1923). Electric light was made universal, and a complete telephone system installed. Every one of the “stag” bungalows was named after the native town of its present or previous occupant, such as ‘London,’ ‘Leeds,’ ‘Liverpool,’ ‘Belfast,’ ‘Londonderry,’ and ‘Aberdeen.’ Upon request, Nauruans’ traditional thatched homes were replaced with shining new concrete structures. Each house had a tank for collecting rainwater, a shower and a saltwater flushing toilet. There were free daily distributions of ice, weekly distributions of household goods such as soap and cordials, and free public laundries and dryers. Nauruan children were educated in the Mission Schools under the London Missionary Society and the Catholic Sacred Heart Mission, who also trained Nauruan teachers.

A nine-hole golf course added to the luxury world, and an outdoor picture theatre for Europeans, which showed films twice a week where “chairs were set out under the stars” (Goody 2014: 123). A separate natives’ outdoor picture theatre was established in addition to a Chinese theatre. Other forms of landscaping looked to secure the settlement’s long-term prosperity. A system of sewerage drained the phosphate town’s new ring road, constructed of crushed coral together with phosphate rock. Curvaceous streetlights fringed the new sidewalks, which glimmered at night, making the new phosphate town “perhaps unequalled in any industry in the British Empire” (BPC 1929: 19). Free hospitals were established that later included operating theatres, a dental clinic, and eventually, pathology, and radiography departments.

Other Pacific Islanders were recruited as indentured labour forces to keep the streets sanitised and clean for the company town to flourish. Visitors admired the gardens and pretty hedges that beautified the homes, the walks and the streets of the community, and “the finest plant in the Pacific” (Williams 1971). Employees and their families played billiards in the clubhouse, “two sets of tennis before tea,” frequented the local cricket grounds, and organised evening entertainment, designed to counterbalance the exacting demands of their jobs. Company-town newspapers provided local export statistics and sought to give a sense of company unity. Nauru also boasted a well-equipped refrigerating plant. “Fresh meat was issued three or four

times a week, the cattle and sheep being brought alive from Sydney, and slaughtered on the island,” wrote Clifford Collinson (1923: 249) on his Nauru visit, adding, “they even have ice-cream every Tuesday!” “There is an air of comfort and cleanliness that is delightful, making the surroundings seem ideal. A fine democratic example. The industries stand unparalleled in the tropical world ... to the lasting credit of British enterprise” (BPC 1929).



Figure 1.4: Phosphate Corporate Diversions

Courtesy of British National Archives, Kew

Royalty payments were certainly exploitative to the extent that Nauruans received little of the overall price obtained on the global market. Between 1908 and 1913, approximately 630,000 tons of phosphate rock was shipped. Nauruan landowners received £1,320 of the commodity value of £945,000 of this tonnage (Viviani 1970: 35). However locally, many Nauruans also became wealthy through their backyard extractions, even as they had little say in the dramatic and deeply segregating upheavals that took shape around them. “The bank balances of some of these brown-skinned Nauruan plutocrats are by no means to be despised. The old dame who nursed me could write her cheque any time for more than three hundred pounds!” wrote Collinson (1923: 248) in the racialising terms that characterised the booming phosphate town.

Vitalis makes a similar finding in oil company towns, describing the hierarchies of discrimination, racism, and labour inequalities that move alongside oil company town forms. Mining firms often organised drilling in ways that best inhibited the organisation of unions, particularly by dividing and subordinating labour by race:

Texaco, Chevron, Exxon, and Mobil accumulated decades of experience in dozens of locales: Beaumont, Bakersfield, Coalinga, Maracaibo, Oilville, and Tampico. And they laid out each field and camp everywhere the same way, decade after decade, with the labor force divided, segregated, and paid

different wages according to race. [...] The incontrovertible fact is that it was a purposeful strategy deployed consistently and unaltered across most of a century (Vitalis 2007: 22).

In Nauru, zoning and laws accomplished practices of segregation. When the British Phosphate Commission arrived they instituted the *Movement of Natives Ordinance* (1921), which demanded strict curfews that forbid Nauruans, Pacific islanders and Chinese to be in European settlements between sunset and sunrise. Norms of separate and unequal rights and privileges governed life in the phosphate company town. Schools, hospitals, and shops were firmly segregated into “native,” “European,” and “Chinese.” Some of the forms of segregation enacted were at local leader instigation, keen to institute law and order among the once ten-year feuding populace. Nauruan leaders petitioned the local administrator for the creation of new laws such as the *Arms, Liquor and Opium Prohibition Ordinance 1936*, which prohibited the consumption or possession of liquor by Nauruans and the manufacture of alcoholic liquor in the island (Viviani 1970). But these forms of paternalistic control were encouraged and usually suggested by the BPC Administration, who sought to quell any signs of labour uprising or coup d’etat phosphate control. In order to seek support for their extended presence across the island, the phosphate company administration later opened a branch of the Commonwealth Savings Bank in Nauru in 1922. Nauruans were astute. Within one year locals had deposited over £2000, later earning the nickname “The Scots of the Pacific” (Viviani 1970: 52). Across the course of the centuries, Nauruans’ royalties increased after continued agitation.



Figure 1.5: Phosphate Days

The vision of profitable philanthropy and backyard consumerism fell apart with the advent of World War II. A brutal Japanese occupation during the Second World War halted the project (Garrett 1996). Geographically, the island was an ideal base for launching air offensives and occupying North American and Australian sea

routes. For many years the Japanese had also been seeking better access to Nauru's phosphate. Before the war, Japan had purchased roughly half of the island's phosphate, but not at the cut prices afforded Australian farmers (Viviani 1970). They had watched enviously as Australia's agriculture underwent a revolution in productivity using Nauru's high quality phosphate. The Germans were also keen to regain control of Nauru's phosphate lands. In December 1940, they sank three of the BPC's four phosphate tankers en route from Nauru, before later bombing the oil tanks and the phosphate pier. The BPC officials evacuated all European women and children in July 1941. Then on 22 and 23 December 1941 the Japanese launched their offensive, bombing the wireless station by aircraft. The following year, they bombarded the island with planes and cruisers, resulting in the Phosphate Administrator's surrender.

During the interim, the Phosphate Commissioners all but abandoned the island, repatriating the majority of the Chinese and Pacific island mining workers, and removing vital parts of machinery from the phosphate infrastructure to Melbourne. Only a few of the phosphate administrators stayed including the Administrator at the time, Lieutenant-Colonel Chalmers, and Doctor Bernard Quinn, and the Catholic priests Kayser and Clivaz. Ellis (1936) wrote, "with their genial natures and friendly manners [they will] not suffer at the hands of the Japanese." Ellis was optimistic. Under the Japanese occupation, many Nauruans were forced to work constructing airfields and military fortifications or deported to the Japanese naval headquarters at Truk Island. Backbreaking labour, starvation, and humiliation characterised the Japanese period.⁴ Nauruans were not as harshly treated as the Chinese and Gilbertese, some of who were executed. Nauruans were instead favoured to the extent that they were seen as useful for Japan's envisaged phosphate control. They were taught Japanese in school and some continued in former employment, but punishments were severe, and food was scarce. All forty-nine of the island's leprosy patients were sent adrift in a leaky boat, all of who drowned. Several local girls were molested, and some forced to serve as attendants in the Japanese officers' club. Some women gave up their children for adoption so that they might not die of starvation (Deireragea 1995). Many were forced to watch public executions; several committed suicide; many died of starvation or from punishment wounds; others were forced to eat rats for

⁴ See the war diary of Patrick Cook, the personal diary of a local Nauruan sent to Truk, kept from 8 December 1940 to 9 August 1945. Copies are kept at USP Nauru and the National Archives in Canberra.

survival. By the time Japan surrendered to the Australian occupation force in August 1945, only half of the population had survived. Of the 1,200 Nauruans evacuated to Truk, only 737 returned to Nauru, repatriated on the *Triona* phosphate ship.



Figure 1.6: Japanese Gun Relic and Nauruan War Memorial

Upon immediate return, carefully stowed phosphate cogs in hand, Ellis, by then the British Phosphate Commissioner for New Zealand, was quick to turn to the “dire effect” (1946: 16) to the industrial workings. He noted the easterly breeze, good for phosphate shipping operations, and admired the rendition of *You’ll Come a Waltzing Matilda With Me* made by a small group of returning Nauruans. But, “tragic and harrowing,” Ellis (1946: 52) wrote, the company town was “quite destroyed.” He was “shocked by the devastation.” The moorings were gone, the cantilever and conveyor belts were unusable, the loading bin was destroyed, and the staff houses, stores, workshops, and labourers’ quarters had been levelled to the ground. To cap it all, “our worst fears were realised ... the boat harbour ... was completely wrecked.”

Although the BPC had accumulated stocks of phosphate in Australian and New Zealand ports, from 1942 they had to buy more than 300,000 tons of phosphate per year from Florida, Makatea, and Morocco for Australian consumption (Viviani 1970). This cost over AU\$400,000 and panic had set in about future agricultural productivity. In 1939, 40% of the phosphate shipped to Australia and New Zealand came from the BPC’s fleet on Nauru and Ocean Island, delivered to twenty-nine fertiliser works at eighteen ports (Williams 1971: 43). Immediately, BPC employees were brought back in, and the task of laying moorings, constructing storage tanks, and repairing the cantilever was begun. The speed with which the phosphate company town was remade was astounding. “To the sound of the music of hammer on nail, sawing timber and the churning of concrete mixers, the buildings went steadily up” (Goody 2014: 110). Suburban villas met with new trade stores, an aircraft runway, motorcars, post office, basketball and volleyball courts, and a cricket clubhouse. In 1947, Nauru officially became a UN Civilisational Trust Territory and the island’s

administration returned to the same three powers. BPC again controlled the island's resources, with Australian farmers only paying a third of the world price for Nauru phosphate, and only 2% of profits to Nauruans (Hughes 2004).

Following the World War II period, many of Nauru's leaders began to protest their paternalistic treatment. They had been largely abandoned by the phosphateers who returned with their eyes gleaming towards the operational reparations of their island's resource frontier. Their island had been fought over, bombarded, and exploded, purely for its mineral resource, with little consideration for Nauruans' welfare. Even during Nauru's company town reconstruction, priority was given to the restoration of the industry and housing for phosphate employees, all of which was quickly achieved by 1948 (Viviani 1970). But it was not until 1949 that local housing was even given attention, and 1951 before only 319 total houses had been completed. The houses were insufficient in size and number for the expanding population, and cost AU\$850 each. The majority of expenses were also borne by Nauruans through the Nauru Royalty Trust Fund; set up by the phosphate administration in the 1920s, in addition to a Landowners Royalty Trust Fund paid directly Nauruan landowners. Several of the overseas teachers and missionaries also came with civilisational complexes, treating Nauruans through racialising frames, such as Collinson's (1923: 248) ungrateful "brown-skinned Nauruan plutocrats" characterisation. Few Nauruans were content to return to the former toy town dependency, in which their revenue was far at odds with Australian profits. In the 19 years in which the Commissioners worked the phosphate up to World War II, Nauruan royalties had only risen from ½d a ton in 1920 to 8d a ton in 1939 (Viviani 1970). Of the 8d, half was cash payment, one-quarter went on works and education for the Nauruan community, and one-quarter was held in trust for the Nauruan landowners. The BPC increased the amount of housing, water, transport, medical and educational facilities, absorbing the costs, but many Nauruans were keen to extricate themselves from the cycle of paternalistic mendicancy.

The Chief at the time, Timothy Detudamo, had spent time in the United States through the American Board of Missionaries. He had observed systems of agricultural manufacture in the States and in Australia. Across the 50s and 60s, many locals had also been abroad on phosphate freighters. Others had trained as teachers, doctors, policemen, and in the ministry in Australia, Fiji, and nearby Pacific islands. New groups like the Nauru Scouts, set up as form of local placation, had affiliations with

Melbourne's Geelong Rovers, travelling to Australia for jamborees.⁵ Detudamo and others now well knew the value that their phosphate accorded on the global agricultural market, some of the foods of which were imported back through their local cooperative and BPC-run stores. They were keen for Nauruans to take on more of a role in the business and control their own economic destiny. "Education, they were always telling us education," one older resident told me when looking back on this time. "That's how we can be the ones running the show."

After World War II, the local governing body, the Council of Chiefs, asked for royalties increases, but had to settle on what the BPC agreed, which was far at odds with market value. Although royalties dramatically increased across the 1950s and 60s after UN and Australian Congress of Trade Unions pressure, negotiations were often hostile. Thomas Cude, the Chief of Police under the BPC in the 1940s, refers to "the troublesome Geelong boys," writing in his diary, "I don't blame them so much as Mr. Hurst who was responsible for their training and education in Australia" (Cude 1945-47). Post-war, several Nauruans also sought phosphate employment, initially in minor administrative positions but with the view to future promotion. The BPC officials would only employ Nauruans in lower-run clerical positions or in the phosphate fields, buttressing them from advancement in the fear that they might take over the lucrative extraction operations.

Like elsewhere, decolonisation efforts were well underway in the Pacific in the late 1960s and seventies. With the economic viability of Nauru's commercial phosphate industry, Nauru's educated elite, the "Geelong boys," tirelessly lobbied for their independence. They had the support of many in the United Nations, the Trusteeship Council, Australian liberal lobbyists, academics, and others who also argued for a greater degree of Nauruan self-government through phosphate revenue. It was not until 1951 that elections were first permitted for the Nauru Local Government Council, which first elected Detudamo as Head Chief, followed by Raymond Dadabu in 1953, and then upon his death in 1955, a young local school teacher educated at Geelong Technical College in Victoria, Hammer DeRoburt. The Phosphate Commissioners envisaged that Nauruans would agree to be resettled on Curtis Island or in Australia, as was the case with Banabans from the BPC's other worked phosphate island, who agreed to move to Rabi in 1945. As part of the move, Nauruans

⁵ Scouting in Nauru began in the 1920s through the initiative of a German phosphate worker. Harold Hurst, the leader of the Geelong Scouts, then helped fully establish the Nauru Scouts in the 1930s, setting up links with the Geelong Rovers.

were expected to renounce their sovereignty in favour of Australian citizenship. However the deal was refused. Instead, in 1967 Nauruans, with DeRoburt at the helm, purchased the assets of the British Phosphate Commissioners for AU\$20 million over three years, which passed into the control of the newly setup and locally owned Nauru Phosphate Corporation. In 1968, after fervent agitation, Nauru became an independent sovereign state from and through their territorial resource.

The Miracle of the Boom

The result was that in the 1970s Nauru earned the world's second highest per capita GDP (over AU\$50,000 per person per year), second only to Saudi Arabia, taking on the colonially instated phosphate industry to heady extent. Nauru's newly independent government splurged on a fleet of seven Air Nauru Boeings and a state Nauru Pacific shipping line, exporting over 2 million tons of phosphate per year



Figure 1.7: Nauru House, Melbourne

with peak export earnings of almost AU\$382 million in 1974 (Hughes 2004). Shopping sprees to Dubai met with ostentatious displays of wealth. Prime international real estate, a public treated to free international medical care and education – often abroad in Australian boarding schools – heavily subsidised utilities, and absolutely no taxes made Nauru the envy of many a neighbouring country. But mismanagement and poor investment – AU\$4 million lost in the unsuccessful London musical *Leonardo: A Portrait of Love* and another AU\$24 million to investment scams – combined with dwindling phosphate resources and a skyrocketing diabetic population keen on imported canned goods, fast food, and beer. School truancy was high and politics of little interest to the majority of Nauruans, who zipped around the world in resplendent style on the back of spectacular phosphate wealth. They imported Lamborghinis and Land Rovers to the newly independent state, and filled swimming pools with real-live terrapins. Often government MPs would commandeer the state Boeing 737s at 10% capacity, taking families and friends on trips to Hong Kong or Tokyo, leaving passengers and their luggage on the tarmac.

In 1998, the Bank of Nauru crashed. Eight Americans were convicted in New York of larceny and fraud of US\$37.5 million from the Government's investment arm, the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust. An Australian businessman and accountant were convicted of attempted Trust money fraud. Air Nauru had run an annual loss of up to AU\$40 million. By 1996 the fleet was down to a single 737. Nauru, under President Rene Harris, borrowed loans to pay off existing loans, including AU\$236 million from the US-based GE Capital Corporation. When Nauru defaulted on GE loan payments, receivers moved in and took over Nauru's prized central Melbourne skyscraper, Nauru House, and the remaining 737. The government was forced to sell the Grand Pacific Hotel in Suva, replete with its ornate fountains, sauna baths, boutiques, and salons; then later their hotels in Waikiki. Upon my arrival in 2015, their remaining property, the NASA training station in Houston, was up for grabs.

By 2000, the country had external public debts of AU\$280 million and internal debts of AU\$265 million, quickly rising as the government took on debt to repay Bank of Nauru customers (Maclellan 2013). The AU\$1.3 billion in reserve in the Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust in 1990 had declined by 77% to an estimated AU\$300 million in 2004, due mostly to extravagant spending, mismanagement, and misappropriation. In 2004 the government was stopped and ration cards were handed out. With the shortage of power, all phosphate mining ceased. Unable to pay the satellite phone bills, the entire country lost global contact for several months.

Certainly characterised by immense hardship, many locals I spoke with did look back fondly over these years. "It was a better time," "We shared what we had," "Went fishing," "Got into walking instead of driving," "Told stories by candlelight," were some of the comments I heard. But ultimately, keen not to renounce their sovereignty by ceding into Australia, the economic prerogatives were more pressing. Any and every resurgence scheme was tried. "I did some weird and wonderful things, I had to," a former finance minister recalled to me. "Bugger protocols, the country was running dry. You know the sign of poverty when you see the white upturned rocks on the reef. That's desperation of people looking for food. They broke coral to get eels out of holes they were so desperate." The government attempted to sell passports and expand into offshore banking.⁶ They skipped between Taiwanese and

⁶ US\$70 billion went through 450 banks in Nauru in 1998 (Hughes 2004).

Chinese for any financial dregs of consular recognition and rebuttal.⁷ The whole country ran on a shoestring staff, who had little incentive to turn up to work with salaries paid by “IOU” cheque. Capelle’s Supermarket largely spotted the entire state. Most Nauruans lived on ration cards; many supplemented their diets with reef fish, coconuts, and breadfruit. Supplies of water and electricity were sporadic; thoughts of law and governance were tentative at best. Then in 2001, came Tampa. Like the phosphate days, secrecy once again engulfed Nauru. As George Pittman (1959: 9) wrote of Nauru’s mineral modernisation, this was again “a discovery which would change Nauru from a little island living by itself in the middle of the ocean to a place which ships and aeroplanes would visit and which would play a part in the modern world.”

Part Two: From Phosphate to Refugees

Its ... deposit marks it as of considerable value, not only as a purely commercial proposition but because the future productivity of our continent absolutely depends on such a fertilizer – W.A. Watt, British Treasurer, May 1919 (Viviani 1970: 42).

The refugee company town is a new industrial formation growing in popularity, shaped through the grip exercised by the crude refugee arrival over the population, and particularly in Australia, the deep-water prospective arrival. A political crisis was sparked when the Norwegian merchant vessel, the Tampa, was refused entry to Australian waters, with 433 prospective refugees (predominately Hazaras from Afghanistan) brought aboard from an Indonesian fishing boat, directing their asylum claims to Australia (Marr and Wilkinson 2003). At the time of the Tampa’s arrival, the Howard Coalition was faced with a looming election. In 1999, 3,721 unregulated arrivals made it to Australia’s shores, followed by 2,939 in 2000, slim numbers compared with elsewhere, but given widespread numerical inflation by the Labour Opposition. Howard needed to maintain electoral support in the Australian hinterlands, where the notion of “boat people” had gained scapegoating appeal under Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party. “We will decide who comes to this country and

⁷ The Nauruan government severed their diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2002, receiving US\$130 million from China. In 2005, they switched back to Taiwan. In exchange, Nauru received US\$4 million to repay Kiribati and Tuvalan workers. In 2006, Nauru received another US\$10 million to bail out Air Nauru, doubled health care assistance, and a monthly stipend of AU\$5000 to each government minister. These stipend payments continued during my fieldwork. Although described in popular end offshore campaign press as evidence of government corruption, the majority of government ministers were openly generous with their constituents, handing out cash when requested.

the circumstances in which they come,” boomed Howard’s legendary refrain at the time, in an attempt to display that he was the gatekeeper of the refugee supply.

The Howard Coalition enflamed Australian popular opinion around the need to contain the “boat people,” preying on deep rooted fears around “boat people,” “queue jumpers,” and “illegals,” and sensationalising the numbers of attempted arrivals. But the refugee presents conditions unusual in mineral exploitation and indeed departs from many human industrial sectors (Davis 2003) because the commodity form has hooked in a rabid consumptive demand. At the time of the Tampa, a vocal pro refugee lobby clamoured around the need to bring persecuted and war-torn people, immediately equated with “refugees,” to Australian shores; all heightening immigration policy, refugees, and asylum seekers into a politically charged issue as “resource wars” (Klare 2001) narratives battled across the media airwaves.

When the Tampa arrived, the Australia government was at an impasse with where to send people. Although the boat’s Captain was widely lauded a hero, “a maritime Good Samaritan” (Crock 2003: 49), who undertook “a dangerous rescue mission in heavy seas, hauling asylum seekers to safety” (Lusher and Haslam 2007: 52), he was, involved senior Australian bureaucrats informed me, at the duress of his boat passengers who insisted he take them to Australia. This intensified the stalemate situation. Not keen to appear devoid of compassion or a soft touch, the Immigration Department did not want to accept the attempted arrivals, but had difficulty with where to send them. The Indonesian government were fed up with the Australian policy of pushing back boats into their territorial waters, and refused to take the government’s phone calls. Alexander Downer, the Australian foreign minister, later recalled, “Howard said to me, “go and find someone who’ll take them.” So I went back up to my office and got my staff together there and said, “Well now, we are literally going to have to think up a country to send these people to that’ll take them.” One of my staff, she said “well, look, you had that call from Rene Harris, the president of Nauru, a week or so ago pleading for AU\$200,000 or AU\$300,000 so he could pay for some oil, so what about ringing him?” That was a good idea I thought. So I rang Rene Harris and he said, “Yeah, that would be fine.”⁸

As soon as the new site was found, the Australian government put through a

⁸ See the ABC documentary *The Howard Years* (2009).

series of Migration Amendment Acts that excised islands and ports from Australia's migration zone (Appendix 1).⁹ Anyone claiming asylum at an excised place or Australian waters by boat without a valid visa would be transferred to Nauru or Papua New Guinea for "offshore refugee processing." In the first era, next to no effort was made to neither develop a long-term refugee processing or resettlement site. All certified refugees were ultimately exported from Nauru, declined refugees were returned for dispersal.¹⁰ Nor was there any effort to indigenise the refugee operations to Nauru and develop a body of manufacturing laws and principles for the small country: the emphasis was on "offshore" not "regional" processing. The Nauruan government and public wanted little to do with the operations, some of the latter fearful of their new import arrivals: 1637 prospective refugee lives across the course of the first 2001 to 2008 phase. Few locals wanted the operations to extend on longer than required to secure the much-needed resurgency cash: a AU\$20 million down payment, AU\$100 million in foreign aid, and an emergency grant of AU\$12 million in 2003 to pay public servants' Christmas wages (Appi 2012). The operations took place at a processing site enclaved deep in Nauru's phosphate extraction fields, Topside, later the former government State House buildings, contractually managed by IOM. UNHCR then later Australian Immigration Department personnel assessed each migrant's credibility of fear under Australian law with the intermittent assistance of Australian mainland refugee defence lawyers. Nauruan residents held menial jobs in factory management, cleaning, and security: 1000 locals at its peak (ibid). In 2007, the newly elected Rudd Labour government halted the offshore operations, under accumulated mainland end offshore pressure, moving instead towards a system of Australian mainland and Christmas Island processing. Nauru's last import cargo was processed then distributed in Australia by the following year.

A Depressing Time for the Financial Barometer

⁹ The *Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act 2001* excised Christmas Island, Ashmore Island, and Cartier Islands, shortly followed by Cocos Keeling Islands. Throughout 2001 and 2005 the Howard government made ad hoc attempts to excise further areas from Australia's migration zone, sometimes thwarted by the Opposition and other parties in the Senate, but gradually extending territory excision to over 5,000 places (Carrington 2006). The Act particularly aggrieved the refugee import lobby because it did not just interdict boats from reaching Australian territorial waters, but also disallowed their legal claims if on excised Australian territories.

¹⁰ Between 2001-2008, 1509 prospective refugees were sent to Nauru. 586 were certified and resettled in Australia, 360 in New Zealand, 19 in Sweden, 10 in Canada, and 4 in Norway. The remaining 486 were rejected and returned to regions of provenance or redistributed to alternative destinations (Appi 2012).

But by 2012, waves of change were again brewing far beyond Nauruan lands. The Rudd then Gillard Labour government was still in power. However with a looming election, Australian consumer fears of the “boat people” had resurged, fuelled by the Opposition Liberal Coalition, now under Tony Abbott. The Labour government’s policies had resulted in the reappearances of maritime surpluses from a temporary drop in arrivals, latched onto by the Abbott government as a veritable gusher age. The Abbott Coalition found popular currency with their political line of “turning back the boats,” presented in security and humanitarian terms through a reversed angle of “protecting lives at sea.” The Refugee Crisis scares, the War on Terror residues of 9/11, and reports of spiralling numbers also generated more paranoia and popular revulsion around the boat people and the places where they came from. Not to be outdone, the Rudd turned Gillard Labour government quickly followed suit, taking a stronger stand on maritime self-importation outside of the state’s system of regulated refugee processing (Appendix 2). Initially, Labour did not move towards processing migrants on Nauru. Due to some of Nauru’s past controversies, made prominent by end offshore campaigners, the government explored other maritime enforcement strategies to display to voters. The government was also keen to create more permanent supply chain operations within a regional cooperative framework or “RCF.” This would export the crude refugee arrival to one durable site far beyond Australian lands for processing, retail, and consumption.

Like the chemists of Nauru’s phosphate yesteryear, lawyers, and a new class of refugee industry professionals, had been hard at work developing solutions to the human movement conundrum. In particular, in a climate of public disinterest, UNHCR, the international refugee trade regulator, has become evermore concerned with their own global relevance and institutional capital, brokering refugee trade relations between countries. UNHCR’s new Pacific regional policy of RCF came out of the Bali Process, a network forum setup in 2002, shortly after the Tampa arrival. The Bali Process was designed for regional governments to broker trade deals around migrants outside of the regulatory processing line. Through Bali process involvement, UNHCR and IOM, the network’s overall convenor, broker and invent mechanisms of refugee trade cooperation, like those adapted to Nauru.¹¹ Before Nauru’s resurrection

¹¹ The idea of RCF carries a long organisational pedigree. Previous incarnations of UNHCR, including the Nansen Office and ICGR, but particularly IRO, found great financial success and institutional growth from moving thousands of people around the state system, and to hitherto new geographical contexts. IRO, with its specialised staff and fleet of more than forty ships,

as a long-term processing site, the Australian and Malaysian governments looked to unify the trade in crude arrivals through the RCF system. But the plan met with high profile action from Australia's refugee consumers and industry supermajors.

A high court ruling led by Melbourne refugee defence lawyer David Manne removed the possibility of Malaysia as a seat of industrial manufacture, despite UNHCR agreeing to the industry contract for refugee processing. In a challenge spearheaded by mainland refugee corporates, and an unlikely alliance between the Green and Liberal Coalition parties, the judgment stipulated that Malaysia was not legally bound by international law and so could not provide appropriate refugee protection.¹² Australia's Migration Act incorporates the Refugee Convention into state law. The High Court decreed that refugee trading alliances could only be made with countries that had signed the Refugee Convention.¹³ In response to the popular end offshore propaganda (Amnesty and Australia's refugee activists widely circulated racist depictions of Malaysians as refugee beaters), the East Timorese government opted against the offer, coupled with a lack of United Nations support. Nauru, still reeling from the 2008 factory closure, having just recognised the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in financial desperation, quickly acceded to the Geneva Convention and the Convention against Torture (CAT), and ratified its Optional Protocol (OPCAT).¹⁴ They also became Bali Process members, opening their lands wholeheartedly to refugee processing.

But the Labour government were still reticent to reopen Nauru's offshore processing sites. In June 2012, Gillard and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Chris Bowen set up the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers. This brought together Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, a retired senior officer of the Royal Australian Air Force, Professor Michael L'Estrange, former head of the Australian National University's National Security College, Howard advisor and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) chief, and Paris Aristotle, one of Australia's leading refugee champions, government refugee advisor, and CEO of The Victorian

relocated more than one million people between 1947 and 1951 from Europe to Paraguay and beyond (Simpson 1939). See Kneebone (2014) for more discussion on the Bali Process.

¹² The Green Party instead supported a "Tasmanian Solution" as a means of keeping offshore refugee processing explicitly within mainland operations while resurging Tasmania's beleaguered economy.

¹³ See *Plaintiff M70 / 2011 v Minister for Immigration and Citizenship*; *Plaintiff M106/2011 v Minister for Immigration and Citizenship*.

¹⁴ Nauru received AU\$50 million in aid from Russia for diplomatically recognising the two South Caucasus Republics.

Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc., contracted into refugee counseling services across Australia. Drawing on consultations and written submissions across sectors, the Panel controversially backed reinstating Nauru and Manus as “a circuit breaker” to “reduce the attractiveness of Australia as a destination point for irregular migration” (Expert Panel Report 2012: 12), along with upping mainland refugee import quotas and those for non-maritime prospective arrivals.

This was a blow for the Gillard government. They failed to enact their meticulously planned Malaysia deal, which had taken months of careful brokerage. They were now faced with having to use the Opposition’s bill of reinstating Nauru and Manus. With the recommendation to instate offshore processing legislation, the government obtained UNHCR’s blessing from Geneva Headquarters. In 2012, Gillard and Nauru’s then President, Sprent Dabwido, signed a Memorandum of Understanding, and the Nauruan refugee company town soon boomed in full glory. Meanwhile, in September 2013 the Abbott Coalition won a landslide victory against the by then Rudd Labour government, pointing towards the offshore closure “bungles” (Kelly 2014).¹⁵ They gave assurances of “stopping the boats” through the grand spectacle of offshore deterrence, which solidified into a bipartisan number one policy.

The Jewel in the Crown

There had to be absolute guarantees against non-refoulement and then there were all the other issues in the crock around education for children, training for adults, adequate healthcare, and all of the appropriate oversight and monitoring mechanisms and all of those things that form part of the architecture for managing how you process asylum seekers anywhere in the world – Offshore Refugee Advisor, Canberra, Personal Interview 2015.

Like the phosphate years before, refugee legal and social workers got quick to work to make the new Refugee Convention state, “perhaps unequalled in any industry in the British Empire” (BPC 1929: 19). Because of the operation’s controversial nature and

¹⁵ Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister under the Labour Party between 2007 and 2010. Under a leadership challenge, Gillard assumed the office of Prime Minister and Leader of the Labour party in June 2010. Rudd then challenged the leadership in 2012 not long before the state election, citing the inability of Gillard to achieve party victory in the upcoming election. At the February 2012 leadership ballot Gillard retained the vote. A second leadership spill took place in June 2013, in which Rudd was elected as Labour Leader. Rudd was then defeated by Abbott. See Kelly (2014) for a good synopsis of the political period.

significant number of Australian contractors involved, the company town operations had to be in line with Australian occupational standards. Having decided to push ahead with the scheme, neither the Australian nor Nauruan governments wanted the political or economic devastation of a High Court challenge that saw the project's reversal. Central to the Expert Panel's recommendations was that the operations must be subject to clear guiding principles. In their report, they advised that mechanisms would need to be in place to process people effectively as per international standards, such as those disseminated by UNHCR in corporate guidebooks like *Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status* (2011) and *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration* (2002).

As the project's raw material supplier, financier, and site of industrial expertise, the task fell principally on the Australian government to build Nauru's refugee operations. As per the Expert Panel report and stipulations of UNHCR bureaucrats, international and state agencies would need authorisation to quality control and risk assure the offshore manufacturing sites. Stalwart businesses and bureaucracies like UNHCR, the Red Cross, and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and state statutory organisations like the Commonwealth Ombudsman and Comcare Health and Safety would fine toothcomb Nauru's processing sites with heightened concern, checking factory compliance against standard operating procedures, and stoppering the risks attached to the offshoring of refugee processing operations (Chapter 3). The system needed to be legally watertight from these pragmatic standpoints but many government bureaucrats on both shores also held a deep belief in the morality of refugee processing. For government staff, offshore processing might be a vote-winning imperative, but many wanted the operations concocted as finely as possible, as long as it lay under the enforcement spectacle of maritime deterrence.

There were several more pressing reasons to ensure that the reality of Nauru met manufacturing protocol. International law is only binding in Australia if cited in state legislation. Section 198a of the Migration Act (1958) binds the Australian government into Geneva Convention obligations. Together, Australia and Nauru as refugee processing partners cannot:

(i) *refoules* a person to ‘another country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion;

and must

(ii) make an assessment, or permit an assessment to be made, of whether or not a person taken to the country under that section is covered by the definition of refugee in Article 1A of the Refugees Convention as amended by the Refugees Protocol.

Because parliamentary legislation codifies the Geneva Convention, the Australian High Court takes seriously attempts to break international and by default state law. Eagle-eyed end offshore campaigners are always on the lookout for legal flout as with the Malaysia RCF loophole. Importantly, this time round, the Australian government sought to emphasise the shift from *offshore* to *regional* processing. The project was not about extrapolating manufacturing operations from Australia but training Nauruans to carry out refugee determination and resettlement procedures. Regional cooperation required distributing roles between countries. If Australian workers took on too much obvious responsibility, it might present loopholes for Australia’s end offshore legal teams. As one of Nauru’s company town planners explained:

There was a real question around how do you second an Australian officer to make a decision about an international obligation to an individual on behalf of another country. Who has an obligation to provide protection to that person?

There’s a chance that we’d invoke some sort of a protection obligation.

Creating a state refugee system for Nauru aligned with the Australian government’s line that exporting prospective boat arrivals to Nauru transferred their international obligations. It also aligned with the Nauruan government’s goal of extracting more revenue through more local employment. In order to cement this position, the two governments openly changed Nauru’s designation from “offshore processing country” to “regional processing country.”

A Refugee Terra Nullius

But in 2012 at the dawn of Round Two, Nauru had none of the labour or industrial expertise to run a refugee manufacturing operation in “the mainland style.” Previously, Nauruan residents held menial jobs in facility management, cleaning, and

security. No one in Nauru was trained in determining refugees, in refugee social work or refugee medical care. Most of Nauru's refugee infrastructure had fallen into disrepair, requisitioned as phosphate corporation premises or ransacked by locals for useful spare parts. The tropical climate had taken its toll on the Menen Hotel: the logical port of call for accommodating the large fly-in-fly-out workforce required for the operations. Little in the way of Australian health and safety standards were being met. Electrics at the Menen were unsafe and bound to fail Australian occupational health and safety requirements. Materials, tradesmen, and labourers would need to be brought in from the Australian mainland, given the shortage of skilled labour and materials on Nauru. All these extensive works would have to be geared around the three-month monsoon season, which extended from November to February. As one Australian government official succinctly put it, "When I arrived on Nauru, all I could say was 'bugger.'"

But like the pioneering phosphate days, persistency persevered. As the refugee processing and settlement industry is such a well-honed sector in Australia, tendering processes tempted many firms into expanding their fabric to the small state. Firms whose specialisms centre on working in remote environments are also easy to come by, owing to Australian outback and offshore mining work throughout the Pacific region. However, the necessity of involving such a number of Australian contractors meant further obligations for ensuring refugee industrial best practice. Nauru might be a processing site for crude arrivals, but the values that revolve around the operations are extreme. Not only would there be on-the-ground regulation, but as Chapter 3 will detail, the Immigration Department could not evade Australian occupational health and safety requirements. Extensive refurbishments would be required to bring infrastructure to Australian certifiable standards. In the Australian Immigration Department's first financial year of Nauru's reopening (2012-2013), a total of AU\$344 million was spent on the project, from operating and capital expenditure to departmental costs (Parliament of Australia 2015). In the following 2013-14 financial year, this rose to AU\$1.3 billion as the country packed full of the refugee expertise, enterprise, and institutional practice at work in Australia and worldwide. "Because of the "stop the boat" thing, money has not been an issue when it comes to Nauru," an offshore planner in Sydney remarked.

As elsewhere, a mix of NGOs, INGOs, and commercial businesses found industry contracts as "refugee service providers" on Nauru in a "mundane" tendering

process. They brought in, in the words of one offshore policy advisor I spoke with in Canberra, “all of those things that form part of the architecture for managing how you process asylum seekers anywhere in the world.” From refugee legal claims and medical services to operational security and child welfare, numerous organisations buoyed Nauru’s refugee developmental practice. Canstruct Pty Ltd construction solutions, Craddock Murray Neuman Lawyers, International Health and Medical Services, Overseas Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Royal Flying Doctors, Save the Children Australia, Translating and Interpreting Service National, and Transfield Services are but some of the major firms that found success in the tendering process as Nauru once again became something of a charter company colony, but now to the neoliberal (and locally advantageous) extreme. I came into daily contact with many refugee industry personnel, most of who performed the same work in Australia and worldwide. Many have longstanding refugee CV credentials from industry disciplinary institutions. I recognised many as central refugee or outsourcing industry workers from Australia and elsewhere, having spent the previous nine months interviewing CEOs and staff in mainland boardrooms and coffee shops, seen them at work in industry conventions from Bristol to Bangkok, as they all piled into Nauru.

Under the terms of the Nauru Memorandum of Understanding, the Australian government established a Joint Advisory Committee for Regional Processing Arrangements (JAC). JAC was divided into two subcommittees: (1) the Refugee Status Determination and Claims Assistance Subcommittee and (2) the Physical and Mental Health Subcommittee. The Health and Mental Health Sub-Committee focused on enhancing medical provisions in the processing centres and the local hospital, whereas the RSD Sub-Committee advised on matters relating to refugee processing operations. The subcommittees consisted largely of representatives from mainland advisory bodies and prominent legal and medical industry professionals. The Nauruan government were keen to uphold excellence in their refugee operations but had little idea of what refugee determination entailed. While concern for human welfare and the rule of law was for many their *raison d’être*, none had devoted their work to specialising in refugees. A few Nauruan government representatives held positions in JAC but this was largely a token gesture. While labelled as a joint endeavour, the Committees consisted almost entirely of Australian representatives, in which UNHCR staff maintained observational status, giving advice around operational improvements.

The other notable challenge was the need to train Nauruans in determining the economic migrant from the refugee – a practice explored in the following chapter. To qualify an Australian public servant to conduct RSD takes a minimum of six months. The training is intense: the determination trainee observes others making credibility assessments, they are then observed and quality assessed over a long period. Refugee assessors also have access to information-sharing provisions with other countries such as the United States in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, which can be used to inform the decision-making of a migrant's credibility of fear. While the Australian government is closely allied with the American government, one of only four countries in the "Five Eyes" arrangement (Paul 2006), the Nauruan government has had a colourful history of US diplomatic relations. They have a legacy of offshore banking with Russia in the late 90s, laundering AU\$70 billion of funds (Hughes 2004), then passport selling across the Middle East (1,000 passports by 2003 for AU\$1,500 each).¹⁶ The small yet entrepreneurial state has also had instantaneous alliances with China over Taiwan at the drop of a pile of cash, including close relations with Cuba.¹⁷ They then had the history of Operation Weasel in 2003, a failed deal with the CIA in which they were set to lodge North Korean scientists in their shop-front Beijing embassy in exchange for cash payments.¹⁸

With this past, Nauru was unlikely to ever be given access to the Allied information sharing provisions required for RSD Assessment in the "mainland style." "Without the intel data access, even the most qualified Nauruan officer will still not be able to make as strong a decision as an Australian officer and that's in the best case scenario across the board. That's not what we've got on Nauru," said one Australian Immigration Department official. And so, while continuing to outwardly stress that "Australia's role extends to assistance and support only ... departmental staff are not decision makers" (Australian Government 2013), "Nauru is responsible for the RSD process ... it is the case that Nauru manages and controls the RSD

¹⁶ In 2001, the US government defined Nauru as a "rogue state" under the 2001 Patriot Act, forbidding American banks to do business with the country,

¹⁷ In 2007 the Nauruan government reinvigorated their Cuban ties on a diplomatic visit to Havana, during which time, Nauru's Foreign Minister, David Adeang, extolled Cuban policies and criticised US foreign policy. The Cuban government provides medical training to Nauru, and other Pacific island states, reciprocally deploying Cuban doctors to Nauru on an intermittent basis.

¹⁸ Under Operation Weasel, President Ludwig Scotty agreed to setup a shop front Nauru Embassy in Beijing through which the CIA could smuggle North Korean defectors in collaboration with the New Zealand government. When accused by China, both the US and New Zealand governments denied the scheme, pointing the finger at the Nauruan government. Nauru closed their embassies in Beijing and Washington D.C. in August 2003, never receiving the promised cash.

process” (Mackinnon 2014), labour for the industrial work of the refugee fields – like Nauru’s phosphate era before it – also came through an influx of Australian workers into Nauruan government positions. Instead, in this new industrial era, Nauruans took on superficial high-ranking and menial positions. The Nauruan Secretary for Justice gave his final shop front signature to refugee determinations, behind which operated a back office manned by Australian-seconded “Nauru government” employees.

A Refugee Company Town

Here was material in scores of millions of tons which would ‘make the desert bloom like the rose’ ... One could visualise a great industry springing up on this lonely spot, quite dwarfing all of our previous efforts

– Albert Ellis describing his first impression of the phosphate deposits on Nauru, 28 May 1900 (Williams 1971)



Figure 1.8: Phosphate Company Bus; Refugee Company Bus

When I arrived in 2015, the extent to which the Australian government had gone to build the state in the mainland style was astounding. Nauru revolved around industrial manufacture like the days of yesteryear, remade as a refugee company town. Processing sites had gone up with rapid speed: RPC 1, RPC 2, and RPC 3 in the country’s once phosphate heartlands. Like the phosphate tankers for mineral export, charter jets now *imported* the prospective refugee from deep-water extraction sites to Nauru, but now not for export; discussed in detail in the next chapter. In this reinvigorated company town era, Nauru’s raw materials were processed in the shining new factories, then given Nauru refugee visas for state absorption (first 5 year, then 10 year, extended on an ad hoc rolling cycle, the Nauruan government took AU\$1000 per person per month visa fees, their second largest source of revenue). As more migrants were certified as refugees, resettlement housing was soon added, air conditioned and built of steel to Australian standard, complete with separate

generators that never went out. When certified, refugees were assigned resettlement housing around Nauru by Australian contracted caseworkers. Now, electric light and wi-fi emanated from the refugee processing, resettlement, and worker residential sites, all of which glimmered at night, “giving the impression, when viewed from a few miles out at sea, of an approach to a great town” (BPC 1929: 58). When once declined refugees entered the cycle, refugee appeals courts extended the operations. Charter jets exported the crude contaminate from Nauru to return lands.



Figure 1.9: A Refugee Model Town

The high-rung refugee project administrators, on fly-in-fly-out cycles from Australia, occupied the former phosphate administrator’s large residences high on the hill, still fringed with bougainvillea, and open to the cool sea breeze. Every one of the “stag” bungalows was made from gleaming white aluminium and steel, now named things like ‘Den’s Place,’ ‘Pak’s Corner,’ and ‘Lad’s Corner.’ Brand-new white trucks and shipped-over Land Rovers were parked outside, all with attached safety hazard lights for heading up to phosphate turned refugee extraction fields.¹⁹ The ordered quadrants of BPC blue-collar housing was now occupied by Nauruan landowners, the BPC phosphate leases since expired. Most company town residences had sunk into abandon without the BPC corporate sheen. Long gone were the nine-hole golf course and cricket pavilion of the phosphate company town days. Now, refugee industry workers set up an outdoor picture theatre comprised of an inflatable screen on special occasions. Workers watched Aussie Rules football games, from chairs set out under the stars. Refugee workers frequently took to walking the country through the Nauru Hash House Harriers, a colonial-style walking group first set up in the industry surge of 2001 for company town recreation, recalling the white segregations of Nauru’s phosphate boomtown. Visits to the imperial relics of phosphate extraction and Japanese bombing sites, enabled them to counterbalance the exacting demands of

¹⁹ Car rental services became a lucrative form of local revenue.

their jobs. Company-organised events also flourished, but as Chapters 4 and 5 will detail, not to such widespread success. However, company football thrived as major contractors encouraged local teams by sponsoring football shirt jerseys. Company town newspapers provided local import statistics and pictures of the blessing ceremonies of new manufacturing sites, all of which sought to give a sense of industry unity. Visiting dignitaries would often be toured around Nauru's refugee processing centers alongside phosphate industrial operations.

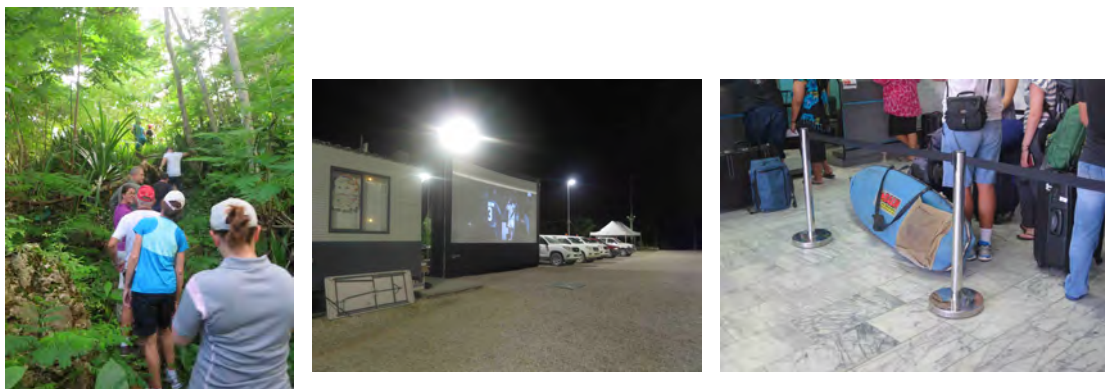


Figure 1.10: Refugee Corporate Diversions

In *The Magical State*, Fernando Coronil (1997: 5) looks at the processes by which Venezuela, a once poor agrarian country, became the site of rapid wealth accumulation with the expansion of the oil industry. Coronil discusses the Venezuelan dream that came along with the rise and fall of the Venezuelan petro-state, referring to the “oil illusions” produced by state leaders of a Venezuela flush with rampant progress and modernity. At the time of Venezuela’s oil boom, the state leaders gifted themselves as “agents of progress” and “modernity,” proclaiming Venezuela’s “second independence”:

manufacturing dazzling development projects that engender collective fantasies of progress, [petro-magic] casts its spell over audiences and performer alike. As a ‘magnanimous sorcerer,’ the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions – a magical state.

Like the mythic land of oil fantasy described by Coronil (1997: 2), the government presented themselves as “magnanimous sorcerers” through “exalted self-representations,” “fashioning political life into a dazzling spectacle of national

progress.”

In the past, political instability has characterised Nauru’s ever-rotating government chambers. During the 42 years since Independence in 1968 there have been 36 changes in government, on average a new government after every 1.16 years (Ratuva 2011). But while Nauru’s parliamentary system is characterised by a cycle of presidents, President Baron Waqa has remained in office since June 2013 as of re-election in July 2016. Charismatic, well educated, and generally well liked by the public, under Waqa the political system has remained stable.²⁰ David Adeang, his second in command, has not the same charm but undoubtedly the business acumen. Ascending the ranks through different ministerial portfolios, Adeang has been indispensable in keeping Nauru on an even keel. This stability is grounded on the contribution of refugee wealth towards the country’s sustainability, including the amount of interest in regulating the company town district. Now that Nauru again has a resource sector for economic resurgence, the IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and UN development agencies, among others, are all keen to help Nauru achieve long-term sustainable development goals, as much as locals are keen to elicit their assistance.²¹

“Ladies and gentlemen, in my government’s effort to improve the livelihoods of Nauruans, we have honoured our pledges of giving back what belongs to the people,” said Baron Waqa in his 2015 Independence Day Speech. “We have honoured and paid all pending salaries ... we have also paid backpay salaries to all government employees. In addition, we are up to date on all land lease payments for properties in use by Government and state owned enterprise. This is unprecedented in our history and my Government will be fair and continue to honour what is owed to the people.” With the boom once again flourishing, 600 prospective refugee lives at first import (for the Australian government a AU\$859,363 a person a day industry), the government began repaying backdated phosphate mining. In 2014 they liquidated the

²⁰ Waqa, a former schoolteacher, and Minister for Education, defeated opposition nominee Roland Kun in the 2013 elections, one year after the refugee business restarted under Dabwido. Kun had been part of the Dabwido government, of which Waqa was not, but resigned over a disagreement with Dabwido. Dabwido stepped aside to allow for Waqa to put himself forward as an electoral candidate, following which he was elected into office.

²¹ IMF and World Bank involvement is often presented in terms of small state predation. However, the Nauruan government actively solicited their involvement. Several in the government are well versed in postdevelopmental critique, and the repercussions of involving the IMF and World Bank, but are keen on the financial stability that involvement brings in the long-term. The IMF and World Bank previously refused to work with the Nauruan government under Rene Harris because of the state’s legacy of phosphate corruption.

Nauru Phosphate Royalties Trust with holdings of over AU\$90 million, distributed to local landowners. Mobile phone, wifi services, and Bendigo Bank all came to the country. The government reopened the state supermarket, refurbished, crowned with the country's first automatic teller machine. The newly invigorated Air Nauru, now renamed *Our Airlines*, purchased a third aircraft to cater to the increase in fly-in-fly-out offshore worker and local demand. Locals once again holidayed in Brisbane, flush with the land leasing and RPC employment wealth, not-to-mention a host of other entrepreneurial schemes.



Figure 1.11: The Magical State

As in the phosphate years, the vision of local profitability was brought into resurgence. Shares in firms like Transfield were now given to local administrators, and often bought by industry personnel (NGOs, bureaucrats, and commercial firms alike). As my opening vignette described, landowners earned money from leasing the land for the refugee processing and resettlement housing. The system of land holdings that developed out of the *Grundbuch* formed the administrative frame for refugee land leasing. Now, land acquired new forms of value tied into refugees, which added to copra and phosphate value from the past company town days. A number of entrepreneurial local schemes took over including stocking supermarkets with halal cuisine, catering to the new company town demographics created by a human import commodity (largely Iranians, Afghanis, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans). But underneath this fabulous fiction, as later chapters will detail, the extractive operations were plagued with operational harms. Alongside the magical displays of the effects of refugee wealth in the local papers – “New home owners awarded housing loan from the Nauru government’s housing scheme” (Republic of Nauru 2012a) and “civil servants and private sector learn innovative new business ideas” (ibid 2012b) – other company town hazards became commonplace – “a group of transferees at the processing centre are engaging in a peaceful protest. They have also indicated they

have stopped eating meals” (ibid), “ten asylum seekers to stand trial in April over rioting charges” (ibid 2013): hinting at some of the country’s new resource politics. The import quotas were minute on a wider scale, 1233 in August 2014 at peak tonnage. But in comparison to Nauru’s wider population of 10,200, these import flows have been significant for the country.

Nor did the “magical performance” of “petro-magic” sufficiently dazzle and divert the Nauruan public. The particular qualities of Nauru’s new commodity provoked far more hazards than the state’s modes of magical capture could counterbalance. While a moral storyline of exceptionality is used to orient the offshore refugee towards Australia’s mainland consumers, a politics of fear and compassion fatigue also converged around the refugee. These fears all came to interact in and shape Nauruans’ fears of their new imported resource. The high-value accorded Nauru’s offshore refugees by mainland activists also made Nauru’s offshore sites subject to an unprecedented level of volatility. Nonetheless, as I argue in the next chapter, whether in the manufacturing plants of Sydney’s suburbs, the processing centres of Oxfordshire or the RPCs in Nauru, many disasters that happen in Nauru are intrinsic to refugee operations as a whole, including anguish for humans in process.

Chapter Two:

Mineral meets Migrant Metallurgies



Figure 2.1: Processing Phosphate

This chapter examines the distillation processes whereby Nauru's resources are refined from raw material into a purer form. I start with a focus on phosphate processing, which sieves valuable mineral from dry rock, before moving to a more detailed look at Nauru's latest enterprise in refugee processing, in which a migrant's physical qualities are determined under the assessment of purity or "RSD." Ordinarily, the labour that goes into a sack of fertiliser or a refugee body lies obscured. This is because of the power of industry marketing campaigns, which align both the refugee and agricultural productivity with notions of liberal democratic progress: the former taking advantage of middle-class philanthropic interests, the latter scientific modernity. However, critical social theorists draw attention to the exploitative labour practices that lie hidden behind the commodity (Appelbaum and Gereffi 1994). Drawing on Cook et al.'s (2004: 174) approach, I attempt here to unveil manufacturing realities, "rupturing the commodity fetish" rather than remaining epistemologically tied to the end product (the phosphate and the refugee).

What I am interested in here is how the refugee presents conditions unusual in toxic extractions as an industry around a morally appealing and mortal form. Compared with phosphate, the refugee seems the most natural and unmanufactured of resources. But a great deal of work goes into the smiling refugee face that gazes out from UNHCR funding appeals or proud government aid reports. The consequences of Nauru's extractive industry developments are bound up in the allure of this particular resource, which has led to something of a mineral stampede. For refugee activist campaigners, the different degrees of purity that come with refugee assessment are immaterial ("economic migrant," "woman at risk," "special humanitarian entrant"). Some operate through refugee tunnel vision, seeing all migrants as refugees, as if in a

gold rush dream. Near all call for refugee assessment as a human right that marks progressive liberal democracies.

Emerging refugee subjectivities (Ong 2003) are also part of the new forms of labour involved in maintaining the industrial supply chain – not quite, as Zygmunt Bauman would have it, humans dumped and excluded. In *Wasted Lives* (2004), Bauman points to the refugee as a human excluded from their own society, an expunged population of little consequence or use to modern society. However, Bauman fails to identify the subjectivities and forms of capital that buoy the movement of migrants as refugees, reproducing the vulnerabilities that define the refugee's mass marketing appeal. The larger socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions have made refugees a product of the time, as has as the rise of the refugee industry that promotes the living product through popular advertising. In a gusher era of conflict and exclusionary mobility geographies, which has made raw materials easy to find, heightened concerns about product purity have intensified the refugee assessment cycle.

As this chapter will detail, in Nauru's phosphate and refugee extractive enterprises, notions of pollutancy and purity were central to the elaborate practices entailed in determining phosphate and refugee qualities from mineral and migrant. By bringing phosphate and refugee assessment into dialogue, I aim to shed a critical light on the practices of hygiene and markers of worth that have come to be associated more generally with enlightened liberal democracies. My investigation of resource intersectionality in this chapter has several dimensions. The first is in making parallels between the assessment of limestone and humans as valuable products for societal consumption. Making explicit the commodificational process betters our understanding of the back processes that go into the commodity. It also makes clear the ideologies of disease that mark refugee culturalised bodies. In this debate, contemporary notions of alterity are organised no longer by 'race' but 'culture,' in which humans are essentialised through deterministic markers of difference (Stolcke 1995). As with phosphate beneficiation, the prospective refugee goes through layers of accreditation to ensure a genuine and sanitised product for onward consumer economies: a key part of the refugee's greater societal use-value. My second investigation of Nauru's resource-ways is in its material entanglements. In these instances, I trace the ways in which phosphate and refugees jostle alongside each other in the histories of Nauru's extractive landscape.

In this chapter, I start by bringing in my ethnographic research from the field, to defetishise the processes that go into phosphate processing. In tracing phosphate through the extraction and assessment process, I explore some of the immediate pollutancies of Nauru's state industry. The forms of ecological and bodily devastation I describe remain obscured under the marker of political progress and phosphate wealth. In the second section of the chapter, I look at the processing operations that distil genuine from non-genuine refugee as related to Nauru's extraction sites. I trace Nauru's prospective refugees along the assessment line, detailing some of the many toxic byproducts that are part of the determination process. I tie back to my overall argument, arguing that not only are Nauru's refugee processing operations of higher design than elsewhere, but that the waste by-products that accumulate provide surplus capital that furthers the offshoring of refugee industrial systems.

Part One: Phosphate Extractions

Phosphate – key to life. A miracle of nature harnessed by man's ingenuity for the benefit of all. An island shrouded by repetitive routine behind which lies a prolonged continuity of persistent endeavor and technical awareness (Nauru Philatelic Bureau 1983)

I cling to the back of Tony's motorbike as we rattle up the dusty track, making our way to Nauru's Topside phosphate extraction fields. The air is thick with clouds of rock and dust that billow about the potmarked landscape. The vast majority of soil and vegetation has been stripped away – 80% of the country's surface area subject to strip meaning – leaving a barren wasteland of limestone and coral. In some places up to 40 feet of earth is gorged out in the hunt for $\text{Ca}_3(\text{PO}_4)_2$. The sun-baked pinnacles drive away rain clouds that might help re-quench the landscape, reignite growth; restore the pandanus grove that once covered the country's upper atoll. Tony points out some of the more recent excavation attempts that have expanded mining down from the country's phosphate plateau. Tony is no stranger to the phosphate business. One eye missing, voice caked in dust, the legacy of a lifetime working in the industry, he is well versed in phosphate hazards.

Nauru is a country where the phosphate industry and its attendant pollutancies – toxic waste, respiratory disease, and dependency – seem to be so everywhere palpable. The effects of phosphate extraction are not felt just by those directly

employed in extraction fields and processing factories, but extend far beyond the labour-intensive point of production. From 1906, Nauru's phosphate ore has been mined and exported in earnest to global agriculturalists. Ironically, this has left little viable ecosystem for Nauru's agricultural development. Phosphate wealth might have industrialised Nauru, but it has left a cycle of dependency on imported fast foods. 77.8% of Nauru's population are overweight and 45.6% obese (Nauru Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2011), resulting in a healthcare system wracked with the consequences of soil degradation. In 1975, the prevalence of diabetes in Nauru was 34.4%, ranking Nauruans second in the world for the highest ever-recorded rate of diabetes as they simultaneously ranked second in the world for per capita GDP after Saudi Arabia. Now, with annual expenditure for diabetes approximately 20% of the governments' annual health care expenditure, statistics have fallen slightly (Thu Win Tin et al. 2015). But at 23.47%, Nauru is still ranked with one of the highest diabetic rates in the world. A mortality rate of 55 years old is one of the byproducts of land degradation and hyperconsumption.



Figure 2.2: Phosphate Fields; Buada Incursions

We pass through areas that ten years ago would have been covered in tangled vegetation. Now, owing to sheer land depletion, many new areas have found themselves as sites of extraction. The talk at the moment is on Buada lagoon. The sign that proclaims Buada as “the jewel of Nauru” as you enter the land-locked district is no exaggeration. Fringed by papaya and coconut trees, Buada is a stark cry from the dust moonscape encountered elsewhere. For me, Buada held joyous surprises. The first weeks of my fieldwork were spent in digestive disarray, consuming packs of Bird's Eye frozen peas in a panic of vitamin deficiency. But one month in, I learned at Buada I could find wild chermoyas plus a local variety of swamp cabbage. The salt-soaked circumference of Nauru's lower fringe and the land decimation of the country's upper, makes this rich produce unique to Buada. “I can't afford to buy the things they sell down at the supermarket. Of course I'd love to be able to feed my kids

more fruit and vegetables but take a look at the prices. One savoy cabbage is AU\$9. Maybe on a special holiday but the rest of the time it's spam, chips, bread, the cheap stuff," Trish, a local resident told me, echoing the common fertiliser country irony.

Buada, on the other hand, is richly laden with cabbages that even Nauru's remaining phosphate millionaires take pause at. Residents maintain real pride in cultivating the district's 100 fertile hectares, a noticeable contrast to the many beer can strewn yards around the country's lower coastal belt. In Buada's brackish lagoon, locals breed milkfish and tilapia following a tradition that harks back hundreds of years. A Taiwanese community farm flourishes. Chinese cucumbers, bright red tomatoes and crisp cucumbers all grow at unprecedented rates. For me, a visit to the vegetable gardens often resulted in takeaway bags of greens, unobtainable in Nauru's spam-packed supermarkets, unless at exorbitant import prices. On my many trips to Buada, I watched school groups regularly paying visits to the fertile beds for classes on gardening and cooking techniques. I spoke with eager Taiwanese agriculturalists carrying out research to identify the best species for the Nauruan climate in the hopes of encouraging agricultural development.¹

But while it is easy to make classic mining company incursive portrayals, in Nauru it is usually landowner instigation that results in rampant extraction: many of who elicit mining in their backyards. One of my many shocks in Nauru was learning that the Nauru Landowners Association was focused not on guarding against phosphate incursions, but on lobbying the government for phosphate royalty payments.² Landowners are as much a part of active mining instigation as much as publics that enjoy the hyperconsumptive excess of the country's phosphate economy. In Buada, I spoke with the residents of a house that totters precariously beside a vast extraction hole. They contacted RONPhos with the view to testing their backyard soil for mining viability. The laboratory tests were clearly successful. Plastic toys and a giant soundsystem are still in their wrapping on the front porch, all newly shipped over from Brisbane. Children squeal in the background; none at school. "Well what's the point? We've got money. If they want to go they can," I'm told. A few piles of

¹ The Taiwanese government maintains a full-time diplomatic and developmental presence in Nauru, currying favour with the Nauruan government for UN recognition through a number of agricultural and medical projects and concrete cash funding. See Dobell (2007) for a further discussion on the "diplomatic chess" of Taiwanese versus Chinese recognition in the Asia Pacific.

² Land preservation and redevelopment is of course an extractive industry in its own right, replete with alienating effects and power-laden environmental campaigns (Li 2008; Smith 2007), discourses of which have been used by the Nauruan government and local landowners on multiple occasions (see for example Weeramantry 1992).

earth sit to one side of the excavation hole, part of the half-hearted rehabilitation attempts to patch-over what was once a verdant acreage.

The local joke of “Rehab? Rehab do the mining” is no exaggeration. In 1999 the Nauruan government instated the Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation (NRC) as a statutory corporation tied into the state mining firm, which up until 2005 was still named the Nauru Phosphate Corporation. Unlike the Nauru Phosphate Corporation, NRC’s original purpose was to rehabilitate the mined land so that a sustainable ecosystem could flourish. The move towards environmental reconstruction has something of a legal precedent. In 1989, the Nauruan government filed proceedings against Australia at the International Court of Justice, demanding reparations for the rehabilitation of phosphate lands mined under Australian administration. A highly publicised case ensued, which focused on the Phosphate Commissioners’ inattentiveness to land rehabilitation, with the Nauruan government alleging that they were victims of environmental degradation (Weeramantry 1992). In 1993, both parties reached an agreement outside of court. Part of the provisions of the agreement held that Australia award AU\$107 million to Nauru as compensation for the environmental damage. Nauru waived the right to make any further claim to issues arising from either the administration of the island during the mandate and trusteeship era, or phosphate mining itself. The Australian Keating government paid Nauru AU\$57 million in part settlement of the claim. They also established the Nauru Rehabilitation Trust Fund for the remaining AU\$50 million, earmarked, and administered through AusAid (now DFAT) for Nauru’s rehabilitation.³ Annual instalments of AU\$2.5 million were paid into the Trust Fund, with AU\$12 million each contributed by the British and New Zealand governments in recognition of the below world price phosphate sales given to their farmers in the colonial years. NRC originally had the target of rehabilitating 20 hectares of land a year. I am shown a small plot of land with a few sage bushes – a one-hectare demonstration site – that marks the fruits of NRC’s rehabilitation goal. Most of the money found its way elsewhere. Instead, in 2008, NRC became the state phosphate mining company, subcontracted to RONPhos. New diggers were flown over or requisitioned from RONPhos’ use. RONPhos took on the processing and marketing of phosphate rock.

³ AusAid (the Australian Agency for International Development) was the Australian government’s international development department. In 2013 the department was integrated into the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). DFAT maintain an active office in Nauru, staffed both by expatriates and locals.

Not only are Nauru's once untouched areas of agricultural fertility the targets of extraction, but also mining is going deeper into the earth. When the BPC first began mining in Nauru, phosphate deposits were found close to the surface, about 30-40 feet below ground. Large digging machines could easily remove the sandy topsoil to obtain the sand, clay, and rock mixture, the matrix, from which phosphate rock is extracted. As mining expanded at a heady rate across the twentieth century and post-Nauruan independence, primary reserves of phosphate were eventually exhausted in 2006. To continue to fulfil economic quotas, mining of secondary phosphate began the following year. The elongated grab buckets of the rehab-emblazoned extractor trucks that ply up and down the country's atoll are part of the secondary mining process, testament to resource depletion panic as the government struggles to maintain political hold and landowners clamour for the backyard ease of extractive dollars.

Metallurgical Processes



Figure 2.3: Ore From Rock

From the point of extraction to later repercussions, the social and environmental impact of phosphate mining on Nauru has clearly been immense. I speak with Jeremiah, a coral picker, occasional truck driver, who takes me through the manufacturing process. Jeremiah knows all too well the immediate pollutancies of the phosphate industry, wheezing to catch his breath as we walk through the phosphate fields: chronic bronchitis immediately apparent. As he traces the movement of limestone rock along the conveyer belt, I then notice a finger missing on his left hand. “Ahh,” he says, catching my gaze. “I lost it rightttt there.” I look a bit closer, following his line of sight to the top of a rickety structure – the screening and crushing station – where limestone rocks shoot helter-skelter across tracks. Against the mid-day sun, I can just make out the shadowy outlines of two figures perched atop the wood and steel edifice. We drive over to the station and he takes me up a steel staircase running through the core. We dodge limestone rocks that hurtle down from the belts. Perched

on railings next to the conveyer belt are two men, flip-flops, shorts, long steel rods raised at the ready. They smile momentarily to greet us but keep their eyes glued to the earthen sod that circulates beneath them, often leaning in to brush away twigs, leaves, coral, sometimes a large clump of dirt that does not meet their screening. Here, Jeremiah tells me, leaning in to determine phosphate from coral too closely, is where he lost his finger. “Is this sort of thing common?” I ask, thinking back to Tony and his missing eye. I need not ask, looking at the two men in their flip-flops, legs splayed over the rocks that hurtle across the circulation belt, I can anticipate his response.

This element of the phosphate certification process is just one of several assessments rounds that screens valuable rock from crude contaminant (Appendix 3). Once the contaminated phosphate is mined or “raised” from the ground it is brought here to the crushing and screening plant by tip-trucks from the working faces. The phosphate rock is first crushed into sizes of 50mm then circulated on a conveyer belt that snakes through the plant where it is subject to three sorting rounds, of which human assessment is the second. Like other practices of commodity assessment, the purpose of the sorting is to screen out contaminate (dirt, coral, leaves, and so forth) from the high-value phosphate sent down to the main plant. Watching the amount of once land that slowly builds into two sand dunes – one side AAA+, one side “contaminate,” swept off the conveyer belt by a steel rod; I cannot help but think of the devastating ecological loss to Nauru. Further down the road sits the relocated piles of certified ground phosphate marked with signs #0931, #160. Each pyramid designates a different landowner’s revenue ready to be weighed before the final stages of calcination and transportation. I am pointed out Nibok and Anibare districts, two dusty peaks visible on the left-hand side. Buada district, #186.

Neither are the drastic amounts of non-phosphate contaminate reunited with the gaping holes around Nauru’s districts. Initially, under the BPC, non-phosphate contaminate was separately crushed and used for Nauru’s company town industrialisation. The elaborate roads and buildings of Nauru’s past phosphate heyday are constructed from coral and limestone phosphate rock. Under RONPhos and local desires, the repackaging of land has intensified through new entrepreneurial schemes. Even limestone pinnacles have found themselves subject to new resource projects: decorative stone or aggregate for road, port construction, sent to other surrounding Pacific island states in sizes of 50mm, 20mm, and 5mm for an ever-growing catalogue of purposes. Climate-change construction in particular has spurred this

growth sector. As I ponder the ecological loss to Nauru, contaminate piles find currency in increasing the land mass of surrounding Pacific island states. Regular shipments are sent out to the Marshallese government, fearful of land loss due to encroaching climate change seas.

For Tsing (2015: 134), “salvage accumulation” best describes the process by which commodities “finish their lives in salvage operations for the making of other commodities, to be recouped again for capitalism.” As with the re-accumulations that Tsing describes, phosphate contaminate exportation has also taken on new commodity convergences. Now, with the building of Nauru as a refugee company town, it is not uncommon to see Australian refugee construction workers shaking hands with phosphate workers and landowners down at the weighing bins, cracking deals over expended limestone for new refugee housing foundations, which at the time of my fieldwork were sprouting up at an extraordinary rate. With the amount of phosphate raw material required for refugee processing construction, Canstruct workers sometimes speed up the process by crushing their brokered phosphate aggregate at the side of the refugee enclaves in their own screening and crushing site. In Nauru’s company town context, phosphate and refugees, one industry executive remarked, operate in “deep symbiosis.”

Phosphate Pollutancies

The most direct by-products of processing rock for phosphate are made clearly experiential to me. My rental accommodation sits in Aiwo district, just down from the main phosphate processing plant, which houses the drying kilns and calcination reactor. When it is first mined, phosphate ore contains a number of gangue minerals including carbon, bone phosphate lime, and a high level of moisture otherwise indiscernible to the naked eye. At Aiwo’s main factory complex, the wet phosphate rock undergoes several processes of “beneficiation” that break down the ore by removing the contaminants, which results in a higher grade product (concentrate) and a waste stream (tailings). Nauru’s phosphate rock is widely certified as premium grade, requiring a lesser process of beneficiation than processing operations in other regions, but it also contains a high level of naturally occurring carcinogenic cadmium, averaging about 450 mg Cd/kg P. Cadmium is an extremely toxic heavy metal pollutant classified as a Group 1 human carcinogen. Cadmium is released into the air

through the industrial heating process but also in the water and soil that dust particles and cadmium-containing solubles come into contact with. Even in low doses cadmium is highly toxic. People who work in or live near waste sites and factories are particularly vulnerable to cadmium exposure (Cichy et al. 2014). Cadmium also circulates through the food commodity chain, eventually absorbed by plants from the soil onto which the fertiliser product is applied. Acute exposure to cadmium can produce a spectrum of severe health disorders: respiratory damage, kidney and liver damage, osteomalacia (softening of the bones), osteoporosis (loss of bone mass and weakness), and even the so-called “cadmium blues.”

The industrial processing of phosphate also produces its own radioactive byproducts, the major by-product being calcium sulfate, otherwise known as phosphogypsum (Cordell et al. 2009). When sulfuric acid is applied to the phosphate during the calcination process, the rock produces a leakage of phosphogypsum. Each tonne of phosphate processed from phosphate rock generates 5 tonnes of phosphogypsum. Marine-deposited phosphate, such as that of Nauru, typically has a higher level of radioactivity than igneous phosphate deposits because uranium is present in seawater. Although gypsum is a widely used material in the construction industry, phosphogypsum is usually not used because of the high level of radionuclides. Handling and management of phosphogypsum is a major problem in phosphoric acid plants because of the large volumes and large area required and the potential for release of dust, fluoride and heavy metals (Conklin 1992). Increasing evidence of cadmium’s toxicity across the 1940s and 50s has led many states to place limits on cadmium exposure for workers in manufacturing sites and for public consumption in imported fertilisers and food commodities at large. As the next chapter details, in Nauru these guidelines were predominately enforced by the BPC, accountable to the United Nations. As is now the case with the contemporary refugee corporate context, the BPC were often called to task to defend company town administration by Australian and international campaigners (Viviani 1970).

When the mining went into Nauruan hands, in-house guidelines over phosphate pollutants went into abandon within the company town district. However, for manufacturing export, quality control guidelines over phosphate purity only became more intense. When it was recognised that Nauru’s phosphate rock contained high levels of cadmium, and the repercussions that phosphate pollutancy entailed for global food production, agriculturalists in former importing sites like New Zealand

were up in arms about the “toxic legacy” of colonial extraction (Radio New Zealand 2015). Phosphate buyers now demand regular product testing before any shipment is exported to give added quality assurances. Contracts with buyers place strict contaminate levels for optimum product, of which RONPhos obtain penalty charges of AU\$20,000 per level exceeded. Nauru’s on-site phosphate laboratory collects samples hourly from products when drying, analysing cadmium content in addition to bone phosphate lime and moisture levels. RONPhos chemists also send samples to mainland laboratories for quality control every two weeks to give added assurances. Buying companies then test phosphate samples when in dock at the port.

But while immense attentivity goes into international export (“we want to impress them” said one of Nauru’s chemists in pride at the still yet whirring state operations that brought Nauru onto the global scene), Nauru itself is a landscape saturated with the pollutant effects of phosphate. I only had to step out of my door or take a walk up past the plant to experience the geochemical signatures of phosphate. Leach water was noticeably a problem across Aiwo’s congested residential areas. In heavy rains, a vast sewage pool emerged like clockwork outside the state hospital. The underground drainage pipelines that led down from the plants bubbled through into the pool, still rusty from years of Nauruan neglect. Clogging sewage stench the air as children played in the brackish pool around the corner from my door. Although the desalination plant serviced the country with potable water, I had been advised by several of my neighbours, and all of my expat refugee worker and refugee informants, who lived to their Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) guidelines, never to drink from the tap, especially as a resident of Aiwo.⁴ When the phosphate factory was up and running, my neighbours described how backyard water tanks in Aiwo district soon filled with cadmium dust and debris. They recounted weekends spent scrubbing the tank interiors, attempting to rid their tap water of liquidised dust pollutants.

But while phosphate pollutants clearly had a devastating impact on Nauru, the pollution of dust everyone spoke of was not so discernable. I knew that in Nauru the leading cause for hospital admissions after pregnancy was for respiratory diseases from conversations with medical staff, and from sheer everyday observation, in

⁴ The Australian government imported bottled water to Nauru for all refugee industry personnel – later a major source of local revenue through import customs and taxation schemes. They also installed a special desalination tank at the RPCs for non-potable water in addition to expanding and largely running Nauru’s state desalination set-up through refugee industry contractors, at immense local profit.

particular acute bronchitis, but during my time in Nauru, phosphate processing had ceased. The dust spouts at the batching plants that overlook Aiwo lay dormant. No phosphate shipments had taken place nor had they for months prior to my arrival. Meanwhile, panic had descended at RONPhos, in government hallways, and gossiping circles. Nauru's mooring system lay broken. Four of the floating buoys used to anchor ships had been disconnected from high winds, one floating off of the Denig district shoreline. Phosphate was stockpiling in the storage bins, which was heaving over in capacity. My many visits to the RONPhos offices were often met by anxious management on the phone to international buyers trying to explain that loading ships could not possibly land into port. Alternatively, managerial administrators were preoccupied with warding off a mixture of landowners and government ministers, all questioning when phosphate shipments would restart. Trips to the plant and living in a non-processing Nauru illuminated the biopolitics of Nauru's "atmospheric urbanism" (Sloterdijk 2009: 63), inspiring panic when spouts did not flume. However, they were uninformative about life in the pollutant particles I had heard so much about. Only the dust that covered each surface gave me a picture of what Nauru might be like when processing was up and running. In the meantime, as phosphate lay dormant, daily riots enveloped the RPCs; rejected refugees were air-freight exported on a regular basis. Phosphate seemed somewhat benign in comparison to the blowouts and spills common in the refugee industry.

Then suddenly, a few days before I leave, wondering whether I'll witness a shipment, I woke up, stretched out onto my Aiwo doorstep and into thickened fog, at odds with blue-skied equatorial climes, instead air heavy and bronchial. Plumes of smoke rose from the plant behind me, which had spontaneously resurged into life. Certified phosphate chugged along the raised conveyer belts that cross the main road. Workers excitedly swarmed around the port yelling out directions to a tugboat driver working as a makeshift mooring. He attempted to maintain direction in the dangerous rip-tides. A phosphate loading ship was anchored off his starboard. Phosphate dust poured into the ship's belly from a funnel spout at the end of the no. 2 cantilever. Billows of smoke enveloped the westward side of the country, curling in and around oblivious children climbing on a jungle gym in the school playground by the loading site. I choked and strained to catch my breath, looking aghast at the bare faces of the children and scurrying workers.



Figure 2.4: Phosphate Loading Day

After months of painstaking panic from locals and government alike, in which the Nauruan government did not meet their annual phosphate production and export figures, RONPhos management has put together a ramshackle mooring system. Ropes and a small lifeboat enable phosphate buyers to dock near the rusty but workable no. 2 phosphate cantilever. It was then that I experienced the full extent of living in a mineral extraction district.

Part Two: Human Extractions

There is no odour or unpleasantness of any kind about the Nauru or Ocean Island phosphate, and to the unpractised eye it just looks like ordinary, friable, light-brown soil (Collinson 1926: 245).

In many respects, Nauru's latest industry in processing migrants for refugees comes with as many pollutant effects as the state's industrial enterprise of processing limestone for phosphate. In the phosphate industry, dry rock circulates on conveyor belt extraction rounds. Phosphogypsum and cadmium toxins are released into the atmosphere from an unnatural metallurgical process, all with immense social and ecological repercussions. In offshore factories, raw bodies were fed through a dangerous legal manufacturing cycle of untold human and economic costs. Self-harm, anger, fear, and frustration were everyday realities in offshore processing much like the Australian mainland. As I have made clear, the particular forms of ecological damage are in this industry human in nature. Here, I draw on conversations with migrants under assessment, declined and certified, as to their experiences in undergoing the RSD cycle, to emphasise the pollutant effects of the metallurgical process, in which objectification and ideological differentiation is central. I argue that

Nauru's assessment operations operate to much higher design, but filled with the same, and indeed far greater, practices of labour exploitation.

The majority of scholarship on the damaging effects of refugee processing skews human exploitation in terms of the factory environment in which RSD is conducted (see for example Coffey et al. 2010; Steel et al. 2005). Critiques focus on how the practice of “detention” affects refugee quality. This is also the case with media narratives focused on Nauru, which often take an infrastructural frame. Headlines popularly read “Nauru's detention centre: ‘Many of us think of suicide’” (Blakkarly 2016) and “Australia Houses Migrants in ‘Degrading’ Offshore Detention Camps” (Cahill 2017). The Australian Green Party's flagship campaign platform is “End Cruel Offshore Detention.” This section seeks to demonstrate the flaws in that approach, not to mention their inaccuracies. Since 2015, Nauru's refugee processing sites have taken the “mainland-style,” operating to higher design than Australia, open to in-and-out commodity movement. Rather, I argue that many industrial byproducts do not relate to the built environment, but to the assessment process or “RSD” that humans along the assessment belt are under. Framing extractive harms in relation to the factory sites obscures the processing operations and forms of human exploitation, fetishising the commodity still further under a vulnerablising frame. Part of the reason “detention” appears to have gained so much authority as the marker of human anguish is the power of refugee supermajors in this field in relating the story of RSD and its effects to architectural violence. Not least that “immigration detention” has also developed into an institutionalised industry in its own right (Morris 2016a, b), establishing lasting patterns of labour and infrastructural design on which Nauru's assessment process has relied. Nauru provides a unique vantage point from which to make this argument. In reality, as this chapter will go on to detail, human consequences are part of the processing cycle not the factory infrastructural encasement.

Extractive Metallurgy

Extractive metallurgy is the process whereby valuable raw metals are removed from an ore and refined into purer form. Nauru's phosphate goes through many processes of beneficiation that break down the ore by removing the contaminants. Nauru's phosphate rock is subject to extreme levels of product testing because of mainland

pollutancy scares. Similarly, Nauru's migrants are also subject to extreme levels of beneficiation because of mainland *human* pollutancy scares. Many screening and quality assurance procedures look to ensure that only "genuine" products flow in, but importantly here, that only "ungenuine" contaminants are expunged from the assessment line. This is a high-value context where accusations of *refoulement* and legal challenges mean the threat of company town closure. It is also one in which locals have heightened concerns of the pollutancy of imported deep-water arrivals.

I start my narrative at the point of deep-water arrival from whence the offshore supply chain uniformly begins.⁵ I do not focus on the back-stories of production prior to offshore supply chain circulation, which are often immaterial to whether or not a migrant is imported to Nauru. Instead, I begin from where Nauru's raw materials are lumped together, from many provenances and backgrounds, circulated through new trading routes, which are entangled in the politics of the self-producer and Australian consumer relations.

Australia's visa entry process is strict and, as with the White Australia days, favours particular nationalities and/or social classes of educated elites such as "the high skilled migrant" (Jupp 2002). Nauru's black market refugee speculators were those initially of little worth, who fell outside of Australia's institutionalised market system. The majority are from unwanted state groupings (Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka) or socioeconomic backgrounds ("the low skilled migrant"), attempting Australian market absorption outside of the regulatory system of manufacture. Of non grata provenance or social demographics, they could not prove economic stability, technical/intellectual utility or in-country connections. While many carried the victimhood identities required of refugee trade and exchange, most could not face the bureaucratic morasses of UNHCR manufacture in Jakarta or Colombo, not knowing where they might be sent. Instead, all spent several times the amount of a plane ticket on a boat (up to AU\$10,000 in 2013 I was told), objectifying and commodifying themselves as refugees when stopped by the Australian coastguards, so as to inject themselves in Australia's social economy.

The refugee processing operations that I will go on to describe are very labour intensive. In order to dissuade the migrant from inserting themselves into the refugee processing operations, a redistribution system is available throughout the processing

⁵ See Missbach (2015) for a discussion of boat pushbacks into Indonesia and the "ebb and flow" of maritime trading economies.

phase run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Part of the politics of the crude refugee arrival is that governments are less interested in facilitating their state absorption. IOM first started an Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme in 1979, which has since exploded in popularity, particularly in Europe.⁶ Now contracted in over seventy countries, IOM workers persuade unregulated arrivals to return to their region of provenance, offering return transport, sometimes business set-ups, and financial incentives. This is of course not an appealing prospect for many, when points of production are marred in conflict, deep personal fears or limited possibilities, preferring to insert themselves within the offshore processing system.

The system operates as follows (see Appendix 4).

Offshore Circulations

Upon deep-water arrival, normally in the Timor Sea or Indian Ocean, all prospective refugees are exported to Christmas Island, if not pushed back prior. Christmas Island, another once phosphate now refugee isle, has become the main preparation hub for raw materials before regional processing sites are selected. Prior to circulation to Nauru, all prospective refugees undergo a preliminary “post-transfer assessment” or “PTA” by Australian Immigration Department RSD Officers and contracted International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) clinicians at the processing centre on the island’s own Phosphate Hill. All are logged by boat ID under the operational term Suspected Irregular Entry Vessel or SIEV, commonly referred to as “client,” “transferee” or boat ID by medical, social worker, determination, and other metallurgical workforces. In the extraction of phosphate, roasting and crushing is done to remove impurities in the form of gangue minerals. Here, routine chemical tests include a PTA interview, Health Induction Assessment, and bio-data collection to determine refugee probability and “fitness to travel” (“FTT”) to Pacific processing sites. During these assessments, vulnerabilities, family links to Australia, and initial

⁶ Although financially successful, IOM has become a marginalised industry player among the industry sector as a result of their close collaborative work with state governments in managing human migration. See Ashutosh and Mountz (2011) and Blitz, Sales, and Marzano (2005) for discussions into some of the issues around AVR programmes and IOM’s work at large.

refugee narratives are noted into electronic medical and RSD Registry databases that travel with the prospective refugee to the regional processing sites.⁷

As with other practices of commodity assessment, ensuring a certifiably clean product is essential to the global refugee trade. Imported products are treated with suspicion whereas in contrast domestic products – state citizens, those from particular provenances or socioeconomic backgrounds – are seen as safe and reliable (Rosenberger 2009). The forms of assessment in place in the offshore processing chain are all the more elaborate where the provenance of deep-water arrivals is viewed as hazy and unreliable. Those on the offshore mode of circulation undergo extensive “rituals of purification” (Douglas 1966) as it ensures the distinction between productive and unproductive human bodies for public consumption. Alison Bashford (2004, 2006) discusses how biomedical practices have become one means of ensuring the boundaries of citizenship. For Bashford (2004), writing on what she calls “imperial hygiene,” the colonial management of race in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries joined with public health policies to constitute the new boundaries of a “racialised cordon sanitaire.”

To clear the prospective refugee of pollutants for the processing stages, and provide a handle-able human product, the initial Christmas Island health assessments include a Public Health Screen, Nursing general assessment, and General Practitioner evaluation. All prospective refugees are checked and treated for particular diseases from physical examinations, chest x-rays, blood and urine tests, such as Hepatitis B and C, HIV, and syphilis. Clinicians’ evaluations of the product’s mental health are also conducted including the prevalence of torture and trauma (“T&T”), posttraumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”) or other psychiatric diagnoses relevant to the particularities of the refugee.⁸ These many technical advances reveal how bodies are marked as unclean, categorised within differentiating discourses of “cultural competences, sexual proclivities, psychological dispositions, and cultivated habits” (Stoler 1995) marked by imperial legacies of pollutancy.

From the Christmas Island assessments, all deep-water deposits are marked for safety and quality by IHMS medical inspectors, placed in categories of green, amber

⁷ Until recently, a USB stick was attached to all deep-water arrivals with biometric data. IHMS is attempting to coordinate their mainland medical records system into a cloud-based system that expedites data sharing of human biophysical composition between Christmas Island, offshore processing sites, and the mainland.

⁸ See literature on the refugee as a pathological object of knowledge (Malkki 1995; Pupavac 2008) and the cultural constitution of trauma within refugee processing (Marlowe and Adamson 2011).

or red for exportation to a regional processing site. A red-screened migrant is identified as having complex medical requirements that are expected to require medical attention unavailable at a regional processing hub. A green categorisation on the other hand indicates regional processing suitability, in which no significant Physical or Mental Health issues have been identified. Amber operates somewhere in between with further assessment required. In order to combat more red human alerts, incremental funding has been put into the medical setups at regional processing sites, in particular those on Christmas Island and Nauru. Not only is the governmental rationale to prevent excess seepage along the trading line, but also to ensure less medical evacuations (“medivacs”) from offshore sites to the mainland.⁹ On the one hand, medivacs are expensive, with their own circulatory trade manned by peak organisations like the Royal Flying Doctors of Australia. On the other hand, physically circulating a prospective refugee to the mainland often leads to high profile pro refugee/offshore suffering campaigns.¹⁰ Pregnancy, abortion, and self-harm have become methods to leverage for medivac transfers onshore. The Immigration Department seeks to avoid activist campaigns, which lead to escalating levels of self-harm, and provide more political capital for the government opposition. Sending a prospective refugee to the mainland reduces the political potency of the spectacle that no deep-water arrival will *ever* move to Australia.

Extractive Enclaves

Because of the Nauruan government’s compliance in meeting and, Chapter 3 will show, exceeding manufacturing guidelines, Nauru is the main processing site along the offshore supply chain. This includes the processing of the prospective child refugee, all of who as of 2013 are processed in Nauru, in an extensive operation managed by Save the Children and mainland advisory teams.¹¹ Upon arrival in Nauru, all prospective refugees are transferred directly to one of two newly built processing centres in the heart of the country’s phosphate fields: RPC 2 for single men eighteen years and older or RPC 3 for families, unaccompanied minors, and single adult

⁹ Over the 12 months between 23 November 2012 and 29 November 2013 there were 53 medical transfers or evacuations from Nauru to the mainland (JAC 2014). These numbers have dramatically reduced over the years.

¹⁰ See among many high profile incidents (Allard 2015; Beech 2017; Hoang 2016).

¹¹ Previously, Manus had been the seat of child refugee processing but in 2013 the operations were switched over with all under eighteens and families exported to Nauru.

females. Alternatively, some unaccompanied juveniles are designated as low-risk, and undergo a slightly different fabrication in foster care set-ups with local Nauruan families under community processing arrangements (see Appendix 5).

Ken Maclean (2008: 140) uses the term “extractive enclaves” to describe temporary encampments that are constructed around natural resource ventures in Burma. Resource extractors seek to consolidate control over commodities and populations, creating spaces that make “intensive forms of commodity extraction possible.” Despite end offshore campaigns that spell the contrary, Nauru’s extractive enclaves are no different from what town planners refer to as the “mainland-style.” Because assessing prospective refugees is tied into a long certification process, the sorts of industrial plants like Nauru’s refugee processing centres have become the go-to forms for carrying out RSD worldwide. Globally, the elaborate human screening procedures are usually conducted from manufacturing setups such as immigration processing centres, refugee camps, prisons, and other holding sites (Moran, Gill, and Conlon 2013). Manufacturing refugees in “the community” is also the new capitalist growth sector in new wave NGO and commercial-contracted workplaces that span the globe, made to look and feel less restrictive (Morris 2016a). Australia is microcosmic of the global manufacturing trend, the formulas of which extrapolated to Nauru through the advice of architectural planners from Canberra’s professionalised Detention Services Division, learned in the art of humane manufacturing design.

Initially, Australia’s Detention Services Division staff and refugee policy advisors put forward the architectural framework of an “open plan centre” to the Nauruan government. The open factory set-up would allow refugees-in-process to come and go on designated times and days. “Processing people on an island doesn’t present the same fears of absconding as on the Australian mainland,” one offshore team manager remarked. Most of Nauru’s imports were of little security threat, the majority trying to reach the dream of Australia’s Lucky Country. Nauru’s many town planners contended that the mainland IDC design was far too restrictive and espoused the same ideologies and anxieties amongst the public about the cleanliness of their resource that informed the offshore project. Nauru’s planners decided that incorporating the large-scale edifice of a securitised industrial plant with the liberalising principles of Australian refugee determination-style “Community Detention” or “CD” dwellings fit perfectly with the offshore modernising effort. Embracing and making contact between the refugee and Nauruan a feature of the

design could counter local fears of new refugee seeking arrivals, simultaneously nullifying some of the mainland and offshore opposition. It was also thought that instrumentalising an open centre model could indigenise the processing sites into a sustainable operation well into the future as a *regional* not offshore processing country.

But the new wave of experimental refugee design was not to many in the Nauruan public's liking. Globally, fears of human pollutancy have brought refugee racial politics to the fore. Local sentiments of the refugee as a threat and orientalist Other are no different on Nauru. Although refugees are a new resource for the island, none of the locals I spoke with were immune to the debates that circulated outside of the country. It would be hard not to have adopted refugee stances as Australian media is the sine qua non on the atoll. Blaring ABC broadcasts are in no short supply, with the occasional Nauruan transmissions spliced in. Most residents have broadband cable and enjoy easy access to popular and social media that circulates about the country's refugees or those more globally. The revenue of phosphate has also left its legacy in an exceptionally well-travelled middle-aged population. Now, owing to the country's resurging economy from refugee wealth, Nauru's cosmopolitan links have reinvigorated with the reinstatement of the once bankrupt Air Nauru. Flight routings extend from Brisbane to Suva and Pohnpei. Pollutancy rhetoric that spins around the asylum seeker and refugee outside the coral atoll injects itself into their concerns. "I've read about these refugees online, they'll take our jobs, they'll make trouble," many locals commented to me. "We don't know who these people are. They could bring disease." "You know what some of the media have said about the people they're sending us? They're dangerous. They could be Taliban for all we know."

Popular global media narratives project Nauru and often Nauruans as pollutant to the purity of the refugee – "Dengue fever outbreak in Nauru hits 10 per cent of asylum seekers" read the latest representative headline in the Sydney Morning Herald on April 27, 2017. In reality, many Nauruans feared the pollutancy of the asylum seeker and refugee. Nauruans have already lived through several major disease epidemics brought by imperial incursions. In particular, during the initial phosphate operations in 1905, an influenza epidemic brought by the newly introduced Chinese labour wiped the population down to 1,550. Other islanders brought yaws and leprosy and introduced the mosquito (RON Independence Day Journal 1968). The arrival of Phosphate Commissioner Brigadier Griffiths in 1921 led to a campaign to ensure

Nauruans' survival. It was decreed with local chieftains that the population must always exceed 1,500 people, still celebrated to this day in Angam Day. Now, locals feared the diseases brought by the refugee, pathologised as Other.

Anxieties about refugee pollutancy also shared much in common with local responses to phosphate pollutancy. On several occasions, angered Aiwo residents joined together to lobby for phosphate factories to move to the windward side of the country. They put together health and environmental impact assessments, obtaining signed petitions for the relocation of the phosphate factories beyond their backyard. However, phosphate relocation campaigns had little effect. The structures of the phosphate factories are more permanent than those for processing refugees, set up under the imperial long-term ambitions of the British Phosphate Commission. Importantly, the money for post-independence phosphate mining comes not from the Australian government, but from Nauruan pocketbooks. By contrast, lobbying efforts for RPC relocation, with its Australian blank cheque backing, were markedly successful.



Figure 2.5: Processing Refugees in the Distance of Phosphate Weighing Fields; Resettling Refugees in Phosphate Fields

Previously, migrants were processed within the securitised setting of Nauru's State House compound and another bespoke factory in the phosphate fields. The processing sites were secured, access was strict, requiring authorised permission, accredited security or visitor passes, which eventually morphed into an open centre-style in 2005 under regulatory guidelines. At its peak, up to 1000 locals were employed at the two sites working in refugee security, cleaning, cooking, and welfare. Once assessed, certified or denied refugees were eventually redistributed to other locations outside the country on an import-export setup. This time, and throughout the period I conducted my fieldwork, no one was clear in Canberra or Nauru how long the

new import loads would be in situ. This is not to suggest that many friendships did not develop between locals, certified and uncertified refugees. However the locals I spoke with employed in the 2001-2008 refugee factories were all well aware of the screening protocols that are used to assess potentially pollutant bodies.

Nauru's prospective refugees are subject to the same – albeit more – vigorous labour practices that go into the refugee. Refugees and non-refugees are separated by nature of the assessment process, which is founded on questions of human pollutancy and desirability. Human bodies are automatically positioned as diseased and threatening that need to be screened and assessed in the production of desirable and certified human goods ready for societal consumption (Ticktin 2011). Categorising humans according to the collective identity of “asylum seeker” and “refugee” codifies them through what Foucault (1970) calls a “grid of intelligibility” (see Hall 2012). Similarly, public fears are entangled in the manufacturing process and built environment used to carry out commodity assessment, in which the spectacle of deterrence and punitivity is central. This industry segmentation is analogous to the racialised hierarchies that have come to characterise the oil operations that Appel (2015: 268) describes, in which “with the mobility of rigs and workers comes the mobility of racism and other forms of discrimination.” The scare word “detention” reinforces popular anxieties about the dangers that foreign bodies present.

Many locals also closely follow the debates that circulate in Australian media about asylum seekers, boat arrivals, refugees, and the war in the Middle East. The asylum seeker and refugee have come to emerge as key scare figures, entangled in industry representations of resource overabundance. Political campaigns have found traction from depicting floods of unwanted border arrivals. The refugee industry has also worked hard to sell the idea of spiralling numbers of Taliban-persecuted refugees battling across stormy seas. Both images propelled the fears of foreign bodies that took shape in Nauru. “We don't know who these people are. They could be Taliban from all we know,” I heard on multiple occasions.

Here, the animacy of the resource also played a large part in locals' understandings of resource pollutancy. The self-commodification spectacle of riots, lip-sewing, hunger striking and “refugees not criminals” refrains that shake processing facilities are also part of reinforcing the narratives of victims and threats. Industrial sites like Western Australia's Woomera Detention Center, Washington's Tacoma, and Bedfordshire's Yarl's Wood imprinted themselves on many public

imaginings worldwide, converging with other places like Guantanamo Bay and supermax prisons. These narratives and more were entangled in the commodity culture that overtook Nauru, influencing the distribution of Nauru's new extraction sites, buoying the moral economy that later took hold around the "detention" of Nauru's refugees.

Steeped in the politics of refugee pollutancy that circulates globally, the majority of locals vetoed the "best practice" blueprint of Australia's ethical manufacturing plants. "Not this time, not in our back yard. They might be dangerous;" "How many are they sending us!? We're a small island. Have you seen what's been happening in Europe?!" "Did you see what happened at Woomera?!" all formed part of the general consensus. Some argued that the very culture, behaviour and religion of the new imports would clash with Nauru's own culture, behavior and denominations. Ironically, it was cultural pandemics related to prospective refugees as threats to Australian palettes and national integrity that transformed Nauru into a processing site from the very beginning. The same discourses attached to refugees fed into Nauruans' concerns, further segmented by industry employment that pathologised prospective refugees as diseased, in need of medical and security screening, and managerial control.

This time, unlike the phosphate factory placement, the majority of locals took a stand against their backyard extractions. They advocated for the segregation of factories away from the urban metropolis into the Topside phosphate fields, and as closed manufacturing facilities, much like the processing centres in Australia. It was not until 2015, at the calls of mainland refugee activists, and a series of high profile end offshore campaigns, that the Nauruan government agreed to the recommendations of mainland industry advisors, opening the factories – as per their original infrastructural design – to in and out movement in February 2015. At the same time, many Nauruans also could not understand how children could come to be in the processing system. Close-knit family ties define life in Nauru, with many generations living in one house or in separate houses on the same plot of land. Locally, many volunteered to house unaccompanied children in their homes through a CD-style system that promised humanely raised produce.

Pollutant Practices

What was apparent was that for many prospective refugees I spoke with, the ethically certified CD-style “modernization” effort was largely superfluous. While the built environment was certainly affective in producing ideological differentiations, what those undergoing assessment stressed to me was how the RSD system itself produced an affectivity that translated to any environment. “I felt like I was still in a jail wherever I was,” Andy commented to me. “You can’t plan, you don’t know what the future will be, it’s hard to keep on going in that kind of situation,” Soraya said, expressing anguish about the inability to “be useful in any way” and “work towards future goals” under commodificational conditions. Although several of those in process complained about the factory environment, it was the lived experience of going through assessment that provoked for many far greater anguish, in particular what Melanie Griffiths (2014) describes as “the temporality” of the decision-making system, indeterminate in length. Ben Anderson (2009: 77) also examines the materiality of space, referring to the concept of “affective atmospheres,” to describe how emotional feelings “envelope and press upon life.” Despite the regalia of air conditioned, flat screen, movie, yoga, and other provisions for “killing union organization with kindness” (Hinton 2008: 374) and securing the company town boom (Chapters 3-5), the major issues generating human anxieties, such as the lack of clarity around their processing and futures, and their frustrations at being blocked from moving to Australia continued as before: an anthropocenic explication (Choy and Zee 2015) of the pollutancies attached to this human extractive practice.

In Nauru, the bureaucratic longevities I witnessed in assessment processes elsewhere were by no means to the same extremes. In fact, conversely, as factory protests and high court challenges shook the frontier, there was a push to RSD migrants as quickly as possible through, as the next section will detail, “the best” in Australian fly-in-fly-out determination teams. In October 2015, one particularly high volume month, 393 humans flowed in and off the processing line.¹² But those undergoing assessment were still under a conveyer belt system many months in

¹² At the time, an Australian High Court challenge to Nauru’s offshore sites was underway led by Melbourne’s Human Rights Law Centre, which argued that the government had violated the constitution by funding the operations. The case was unsuccessful as the bench found that amendments to the Migration Act allowed for offshore processing. However, it led the Nauruan government to optimise conveying efficiency by flying in more refugee lawyers from the mainland in case of challenges to the legitimacy of the factory sites themselves.

length, not-to-mention the reality of a curtailed Australian future, all of which compound the tense registers that suffused the offshore environment, producing “socio-atmospherics of power” (Choy and Zee 2015). The natural consequences of enclosing bodies in close quarters were all inevitable results for the Nauruan company town. In the enclaves, feuds took off between different groups, unnaturally brought together through refugee trade. Conflicts based on religious and cultural grounds, sometimes nationalities, became common occurrences. Not only were Nauru’s offshore refugees in the same manufacturing set-up as elsewhere, which became the source of tension, but also they had an especially indeterminate future ahead. High aggression and outbursts were all everyday parts of the pressure cooker industrial environment.

Others were incredibly depressed and did not see the point of going through the labour-intensive effort of refugee assessment, particularly if it meant the end goal of a Nauruan not Australian refugee visa. Many never expected to end up in let alone be assessed as a refugee for Nauru. Maya, a certified refugee, told me how she had taken a boat in Indonesia bound for Australia, told by the broker that she would be assessed as a refugee for and in Australia. She, like so many others I spoke with, was well enchanted in the belief that Australia was the land for refugees, filled with receptive consumers and welfare provisions.¹³ Having spent months hiding out in Jakarta now she was stuck in trading limbo, unable to return, but not keen on moving to Phnom Penh (one of the Australian government’s redistribution offers), she was faced with an unknowable future. It is of little surprise that self-harm, suicide attempts, and riots were endemic to the offshore refugee processing industry. As the processing of the raw mineral limestone rock yields by-product cadmium, by-product phosphogypsum, natural gas liquids, and dust pollutants, in the refugee processing environment, there were 102 recorded incidents of self-harm including 28 attempted hangings/asphyxiations, 5 people who cut their throats, 9 people who had sewn their lips together, and polypharmacy overdoses, cutting, and cigarette burns between the fourteen months of September 2012 and November 2013 (JAC 2014).

The toxic by-products involved in refugee processing are so well recognised that they have become naturalised as casualties endemic to industry operations. In Australia, psychiatrists created a new pathological condition. The human

¹³ The Australian government later funded regional propaganda campaigns to dissuade unregulated maritime arrivals. See Missbach and McNevin (2014).

consequences of refugee processing are widely labelled by mainland clinicians as “protracted asylum seeker syndrome.” The toxic effects of refugee determination, uncertainty of situation, producing documentary evidence, demonstrating past trauma, and refugee racism are all contributors to this industrial condition, characterised by powerlessness, depression, and identity crises (Mental Health Council of Australia 2012). Nauru’s Finance and Justice Minister David Adeang proclaimed the state’s manufacturing superiority, announcing that “rates of murder, manslaughter, sexual assault, rape, all those statistics, are much lower than you in Australia, I am sorry to say.”¹⁴ His comment emphasises how “murder, manslaughter, sexual assault, rape, all those statistics” are part of the commodity culture that go with refugee processing, all of which developed in natural formation in the Nauruan factory district.

The next section turns to the processing operations, which in Nauru were just as, if not more, scrutinising than the mainland. Few Australian Liberal Party politicians wanted the success of a mainland legal challenge that would undo the company town operations, providing political leverage for the Opposition.

Well-Founded Fear



Figure 2.6: Extractive Metallurgy

In Nauru, determining refugee purity relied on the same technologies made popular more globally. All prospective refugees have a “transfer interview” from the different factory hubs of the RPCs and CD-style dwellings to collect biographical information and make a summary of fear. Refugee assessment is conducted on the adjudication of “well-founded fear.” “Well-founded fear” is the industry measure of product quality. In this commodity determination practice, the burden of proof is on the raw material to market its purity. Specific refugee determination personnel, experts in product

¹⁴ See the Australian mainland TV reportage “A Current Affair” (2016) on the Nine Network, invited by the Nauruan government to shoot a report on the Nauru processing and resettlement system. This and other media invitations are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

assessment, then use narratives of persecution and physical attributes in deciding each migrant's "well-founded fear."

In Australia, refugee determination is nationalised through workforces attached to the Australian Immigration Department, who conduct RSD in Nauru. Because crude refugee contamination is not always visible to the naked eye, a number of other industry personnel also collect their own samples at periodic intervals, which are collated at off-site laboratories. Separate physical and mental health tests, for determining "T & T" along with "PTSD," self-harm or other pollutant tendencies, are conducted, and logged into a UNHCR-style RSD Registry in Nauru's Yaren District Government Offices. Most governments that are signatories to the Refugee Convention have nationalised refugee processing operations, conducting their own determinations, and maintaining detailed databanks that collate information on *each* human product: far more bespoke forms of technology than the mass produced quality of Nauru's phosphate minerals. Nauru's processing system operates no differently, and indeed even more attentively.

Following the work of Australian Immigration Department, UNHCR Canberra, and international industry advisors, Nauru now has an RSD Registry, inaugurated in 2013. Nauruan, often Australian, employees log each fresh arrival grain-by-grain into the Registry database, fine tooth-combed by mainland refugee experts. These notes supplement the bio-data collection made during the Pre-Transfer Assessment interviews on Christmas Island.¹⁵ At this stage, prospective refugees are provided with an Australian refugee defence lawyer or "Claims Assistance Provider" so as to refine them into products of value for the official determination. Much to the uproar of the Australian refugee industry sector, the Abbott Liberal government removed mainland refugee legal defence funding from the Federal Budget 2014-15. In Australia, as of March 2014, all prospective refugees without an immigration permit or those undergoing secondary reassessment through a refugee tribunal are no longer given free refugee presentational support through IAAAS.¹⁶ However in Nauru *every* prospective refugee receives a refugee defence lawyer, like in Australia's early days. The refugee lawyers or migration agents are contracted through the Sydney-based

¹⁵ Depending on wi-fi capacity, which can sometimes be erratic in Nauru, refugee assessment databases include medical tests such as those made by IHMS.

¹⁶ Because of the moral outcry around financial cuts to refugee lawyers, most of the refugee representational work continues funded by private donors, through refugee-trained volunteers or as part of the pro bono arm of large commercial firms' work (albeit to reduced extent).

firm, Craddock Murray Neuman, who operate on fly-in-fly out rotation cycles of what in Australia are commonly termed “RSD missions” when conducted at far-flung processing sites in the Australian outback. In the offshore processing sites, CAPs lawyers provide advice on refugee self-commodification including the collation of photos, maps, medical and psychological reports that emphasise purity of fear and persecution. Craddock also has what they term a “shop front” in RPC1, where they lead group information sessions on the mechanics of presenting as a refugee, helping to convert the migrant into a high-value product.

Refugee self-representation is also conducted with the assistance of a contracted interpreter. In Australia the provision of an interpreter is an important part of the Australian *Migration Act* (subsection 427(7)). Depending on location, interpreters from TIS National, the Immigration Department’s contracted firm, have become the norm across Australia’s refugee processing hubs, now extended to Nauru’s offshore district. Many fly-in-fly-out interpreters are specialists in credibility of fear translation work, often well versed in the legal jargon, having worked around Australia and in other offshore contexts. Several are also accredited refugees and morally attached to the system, as much as well-versed in the unit operations required for converting raw materials into products of value.

The Lived Experience of Assessment

Several people I spoke with on Nauru, certified or waiting for refugee decisions, had very similar responses to those on the mainland and elsewhere about their experiences going through these industrial screening procedures. They described the retraumatising effect of having to collate past dreadful experiences into an objectified form. “It was horrible to go through,” Luke said to me, now living in Nauru under a ten-year refugee visa. “I was told visuals were powerful, printing off pictures to show what I’d experienced, getting doctor’s examination records. I had to go through it all again and again.” I could only wholeheartedly agree with Luke and others about the casualties that manufacturing re-rendered. As Fassin and d’Halluin (2005) have argued, for the dominated, the body “has become the place that displays the evidence of truth.” Sometimes, human pollutancies are hallmarks of refugee purity, where the aim is to identify genuine persecution. But in an age of refugee overabundance, RSD practices have become evermore scrutinising to ensure product purity. The

prospective refugee must prove suffering through medical expertise and new forms of scientific rationality (Foucault 1973), in which medical certificates and evidence of psychological and physical scars are accorded greater veracity than the refugee narrative form (Kelly 2012). As Luke made clear, an important aspect of the determination process is the assessment of marks on the human body and psychological suffering. Luke, like others, had to show evidence of mental and bodily scarification to stress the authenticity of suffering, redoubling the amount of harm he had already been through as part of the manufacturing process. “Intense,” “exhausting,” and “scrutinizing” were some of the many words I heard used to describe refugee assessment in Nauru. As in-country screening procedures have become more elaborate, ensuring pure refugees for the consumer market, autobiographical accounts are rendered superfluous to the veracity of physical and psychic signs of accredited violence, what Webb Keane (2003) refers to as a “representational economy.”

Commodity self-representation figures highly in the work that seeks to assess the purity of each raw material. In all mental health screenings, including PTAs on Christmas Island, IHMS, Immigration Department, and other workforces inspect human products for signs of Torture and Trauma. Bodies are read not only as potential carriers of disease but as palimpsests of persecution. The Refugee Torture and Trauma or “T&T” sector, as it is popularly known, has gained incremental authority as a psychological subdiscipline. The T&T sector developed in Australia in the 1980s at the time that the state’s refugee economy was beginning to burgeon. Manned by leading refugee policy advisor Paris Aristotle, a key figure in offshore development, directors from the T&T sector are powerful lobbyists in driving government refugee policy, and industry spending. In Australia, T&T agencies now operate as a body of eight NGOs across each state and territory under the umbrella network, the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT). FASSTT is the government’s contracted network for specialist refugee counselling services for both prospective and certified refugees. It is now standard practice that the Immigration Department provides T&T counselling at each immigration processing site across Australia’s states and territories. Commented one FASSTT CEO:

It's in recognition of the fact that no matter how you view the arrivals, there will be a proportion of those who are genuine who have suffered persecution and trauma ... this is specialist work.

Because of the political authority of T&T, years of cross-over training and capacity building, T&T classification is a standardised part of the assessment process, through which migrants are culturally constituted as "genuine refugees." Sources of refugee torture and trauma can include political repression, living in a situation of war or state terrorism, the escape path, and the experience of living in a refugee camp.¹⁷ For Nauru, FASSTT set-up a specialist offshore counselling agency, Overseas Services to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, run by counsellors experienced in refugee work in offshore sites. Although detailed case files were kept confidential, information on all prospective refugees who attended T&T sessions were shared between IHMS, the Australian Immigration Department, and other interested parties.

Many of those I spoke with undergoing RSD knew that this was the case. They commented on the intensity of life under assessment, pointing towards the particularities of a metallurgical practice that involves a living raw material. Colin, recently certified as a refugee, described to me the importance of clinical evidence in the adjudication of refugee purity, which made the reality of life in and out of assessment "tiring" and "exhausting." "There's always someone looking at you, always. Monitoring what you're doing, where you're at, everything counts," Colin described. Colin's comment that "everything counts" speaks to the behavioural economy induced by the assessment process, in which human bodies *could be* read as sites of refugeeability. It is of course unclear whether psychological distress, scars, and T&T demarcations all noted on the journey to and in Nauru's processing system might help or hinder your refugee assessment, but it makes the assessment belt an exhausting and inescapable experience, which sometimes itself induces psychological trauma. Exhaustive scrutiny and panopticon living is the reality of life on the conveyer belt line when configuring oneself as polluted might be a means of border entry.

Living in Nauru, with prospective and certified refugees circulating around the country, it was all too evident how much scrutiny the prospective and certified refugee was under on a daily basis. Assessment – and then as Chapter 5 will show,

¹⁷ There is also a significant body of literature on the construction of PTSD as a scientific condition (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Young 1995).

living as a “good” and “compliant” refugee – was not just confined to the factory but lived experience. For example, I regularly attended Sunday Assembly of God church services at the Menen Hotel, also attended by Immigration Department administrators, Australian refugee status determiners, and other contracted industry workers. Previously, local or visiting ministers had travelled up to the RPCs to deliver Sunday services. During my fieldwork, Transfield announced that in agreement with the Nauruan government and the Ministry, having somewhat assuaged local fears; prospective refugees could attend the service at the Menen. This expanded the system that had been in place for a small group permitted to attend the Catholic Church at Kayser and Yaren.

Each Sunday morning, a bus service dropped off and collected prospective refugees from the RPCs to the Menen. In Nauru, a number of assessments hinge on religious persecution, in particular those of Iranians, who make up the bulk of the imported populations – of little wider political economic appeal. Persecution from Christian conversion could be punished by death or imprisonment in Iran, which means that if repatriated Nauru and by extension Australia would be at risk of *refoulement*. The Menen Hotel is one of the principle refugee worker hubs. The majority of Australian Immigration Department administrators, refugee determiners, refugee defence lawyers, and Connect social workers live in Menen accommodation. Sunday church held upstairs in the Menen was one of the key company networking events of the weekly calendar. Once the scheme was announced, attendance increased dramatically, filled to the rafters with Sunday best dressed Iranians, all under assessment at the RPCs. One month in, the services became bilingual with an interpreter conveying the Nauruan minister’s messages to Farsi. Not only was attending things like counseling sessions a potential means of “bettering your chances,” but so was showing commitment to Christianity through the commodity trope of Islamic State persecution. This is not to say that many under assessment have not been subjected to discrimination in their region of provenance, had not been through harrowing and often violent experiences, but that self-commodification through persecutorial tropes is the logic of purificational assessment.

Refugee Purity

In Nauru, the actual processing operations are more labour-intensive than mainland processing operations, where the level of scrutiny for checking that product determination complies with relevant laws is far greater. The formal refugee determination is conducted in special assembly line rooms in RPC 1. Assessments are audio-recorded and conducted by Australian DIBP RSD assessors, with occasional elements by Nauruan RSD officers, who inspect individuals or family groups, under close supervision. CAPs lawyers and interpreters are present for marketing each migrant's refugee purity to refugee assessors. Often, mainland refugee legal advisors, UNHCR Canberra, and other non-governmental assurance teams will quality control the procedure, discussed in the next section. During the screening process, usually several hours long, the prospective refugee's purity levels are better established, quizzed on their fear, harm, and threat of persecution. Photos, maps, medical and psychological reports can all be brought in to give evidence of the production trail prior to deep-water arrival: including bodily lacerations and psychotic flashbacks.

As part of the scrutinisation process, it must be proven that there is not an area in the human's home country where they might be safe. Country data includes everything from the conflicts in particular geographical regions to the threats faced by particular social or ethnic groupings. Because of the popularity of refugee work, there are now numerous online databanks that maintain records for emphasising the persecution faced in particular regions by Convention groupings. As a result, a Country of Origin (COI) Information Analysis substantiates this aspect of the assessment that includes state intelligence information to ensure product traceability. Claims of statelessness can also be validated through the COI aspect of the refugee assessment. Country research is also sometimes used by RSD Officers when evaluating possibilities for internal flight alternatives, safe country of origin, and application of the "cessation clause," based on circumstances that no longer exist. Interpreters are often familiar with home regions and at times help or hinder the fear assessment by making clarifications to the refugee determination teams.

Over the years, the extensive lobbying of refugee industry personnel has led to an expansion of many governments' commodity criteria to encompass new forms of refugee product life under "complementary protection." Because of government concerns of product *refoulement*, the refugee processing operations developed for

Nauru brings in “complementary protection,” which expands refugeeability beyond the five Refugee Convention grounds of persecution. For example, risk of arbitrary deprivation of life, the death penalty, torture, cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment might fall within what RSD experts call the “threshold of fear.” A number of exclusion clauses apply to refugee processing. Refugee processing, like phosphate, uses an incredible amount of power and labour. To reduce energy consumption, a prospective refugee can only be processed in one country. If previously processed, for example in Indonesia, traceable through UNHCR RSD Registries, a prospective refugee might be expunged as a crude contaminant from Nauru’s offshore operations. Similarly, refugee assessment procedures also look to ensure a pure product for consumers. Any prospective refugee that has committed a criminal act in the past, often very minor, can be discarded as damaged goods from certification.¹⁸

After receiving all relevant information, RSD officers make an assessment on each product’s purity against their credibility of fear. Because Nauru is so controversial, human determinations are sent to mainland sites for quality assurance, and extensively controlled by industry personnel using enterprise-specific standards, much like the routine phosphate chemist samples sent to mainland laboratories. If adjudicated as exhibiting “well-founded fear,” all certified human goods receive a Nauru refugee certification, including a refugee residence permit for Nauruan market absorption. Nauru is only 21km² and many locals are reticent to have a build-up of certified refugee product. Phosphate dry bin storage sites are heaving over in capacity; land availability is tight. Nor was this refugee supply chain ever envisaged as one of permanent Nauruan distribution. As such, the Australian and Nauruan governments look to persuade certified refugees to move along the chain to new sites of distribution, and prevent stagnant material from collecting.

Being a Nauruan refugee is high-grade, providing marketing appeal for onward moves. If certified, lucrative refugee resettlement packages are available for Nauru refugees to Cambodia, which has fomented new supply chain relations and patterns of exchange. Because of the political currency of the deterrence spectacle, the conditions are negotiable. The Australian government will generally organise an apartment in Phnom Penh with IOM, pay a year of rent, open a bank account, usually with around AU\$10,000 inside, provide a monthly salary, private medical care,

¹⁸ See Bosworth (2011) for a discussion on the popularity of this approach as a method of state selection.

Khmer language classes, and help with sourcing local employment. During my fieldwork, resident Cambodian personnel were in Nauru, attempting to market this package. As of November 2016, six certified refugees took up the Cambodia package. In return, the Cambodian government received AU\$55 million in development aid and AU\$3.5 million went into each person who took up the redistribution deal.

This combined with the work of staff in the state IOM Nauru office, set up on-site in 2013. At all times, the prospective refugee can elect for one of their return home AVRR package deals, marketed throughout the factories in posters (“Missing your family? Talk to IOM”), but also by resident IOM personnel, avidly working to drum up the redistributive trade.¹⁹ But at the time of my fieldwork, the majority of prospective and certified Nauru refugees operated in stand-off with the Australian government in the hopes of achieving their mobility futures; many given hope by mainland and offshore campaigners. Some were also scared about the prospect of life in Phnom Penh. Mainland campaigners projected tropes of “third world abuse” and “human rights violations” around the Cambodian segue to the offshore supply chain. For the majority who stayed, refugee resettlement options, Chapter 5 will detail, looked to sow the refugee into productive union with the Nauruan land. When certified, refugees were assigned resettlement housing around Nauru by Australian contracted caseworkers. As later chapter will make clear, however, all were ultimately interested in furthering Australia mobility future goals. Thus, while Nauru’s certified phosphate products piled up in dry bin silos, a broken cantilever system leading to mineral stagnation, so too did Nauru’s certified refugee products.



Figure 2.7: Certified Product Pileup

The next section turns to look at the impure goods discharged from the processing operations. In Nauru’s refugee system, there are elaborate reassessment rounds far greater than that in Australia. The many screening procedures look to

¹⁹ Between 2012 and 2016, 540 prospective refugees took up this offer (Karlsen 2016).

ensure the certification veracity of the failed refugee in a high-value context where *refoulement* means the threat of company town closure. As other prospective and certified refugees reinforced identities favourable to commoditisation, the expunged crude contaminant met with its own unknown future.

Crude Contaminates

I'm at Nauru's phosphate laboratory, staring intently at a test-tube with Jamie, a local lab technician. Around us, labels are stuck to meticulously lined vessels, each topped neatly to the brim with dusty granules. 'Buada district.' 'Anibare' reads another.

Huddled closely, we pour in a fraction of hydrochloric acid, add a few ammonium oxalate crystals.

The dust bubbles.

"You see the colour here? Look, it's different," Jamie says, pointing to the test-tube excitedly. "You can tell if there's too many pinnacles or if it's pure just by its appearance. The yellow is good quality, not the white, that's got the coral in it. If it's good if it comes out at less than 10%, that's the target."

A foghorn sounds in the distance, buyers bound for Brisbane.

"Ok, pass me those bags," he hurriedly asks. "Bone phosphate of lime test's done, but we still have cadmium to go. That's the really toxic one. We'll package it for Queensland. Australian Laboratory Services will do those tests. Their standards are so high."

We carefully distribute samples into small plastic Ziplocs. Noting my quizzical glances, Jamie explains, "Oh yeah, those extra bags are for the phosphate companies, they also want samples. They like testing it themselves to compare the results against ours. You know it's a AU\$20,000 fine if the quality falls below, it's in the contracts." He pauses, "Why is that? I always wonder. It's checked twice before it gets shipped out." He adds, "But it's important to impress them. Well, really the Geelong buyers, they have such high standards."

Jamie pauses again, sheepishly adding, "I know it looks pretty basic here. I trained at phosphate labs in Melbourne; it was so different, such resources. You know, you can get handheld cadmium testing guns? I used one. S1 TITAN. Touch-screen display. Point and shoot. So accurate, the analytic speed... exceptional.'

7 July, 2015. RONPhos Laboratory, Aiwo District, Republic of Nauru.

Refugee reassessment, under the system of a Refugee Tribunal, is an intrinsic part of processing operations worldwide. Refugee Tribunals proliferate on a global scale, with trained tribunal members involved in international development projects that seek to build multiple processes of beneficence into state refugee processing systems. Under the system known as “merits review,” Refugee Tribunal members “stand in the shoes” of the decision-maker to determine each migrant’s refugee purity afresh (Vrachnas et al. 2012: 324). Australia’s refugee reassessment system is regarded with high authority among refugee professionals: a “world-leading merits review process” that surpasses even UNHCR’s refugee assessment processes in the field, “far less sophisticated or comprehensive” (Crock and Martin 2013: 138). Australia has a statewide Refugee Review Tribunal, established as a statutory body in 1993 under the country’s *Migration Act*, with branches in each of Australia’s states and territories.²⁰ Under the mainland practice of merits review, trained Tribunal Members reassess the once declined crude refugee. If expunged from the processing belt after a Tribunal determination, twice-declined refugees in Australia have a third avenue of assessment through judicial review. Under section 476 of the *Migration Act*, judges at the Federal Circuit Court, Federal Court, or High Court make human reassessments if it is decided that a legal error arose in the tribunal re-determination.

In Nauru’s first processing operations, the Australian Immigration Department staff contracted into refugee determination also reprocessed the declined refugee. There was no external system of refugee tribunalists or judicial courts for conducting merits review. Nauru has an established court system set up under German coconut rule and progressively expanded under phosphate administration. The state judicial structure consists of a district court, family court, and Supreme Court, housed in a courthouse attached to the government buildings. In a country that has relied on extrajudicial authority since colonial rule, lawyers are a handful in number; no one is judicially trained. Following independence, a semi-professional system of Australian Victorian Bar-trained pleaders or “bush lawyers” was established to offer Nauruans more participation in their country’s legal system. Yet few are legally proficient. Instead, the government employs expatriates to do Nauru’s legal work and provide the

²⁰ Since 1 July 2015, the RRT amalgamated into the Administrative Appeals Tribunal with refugee decisions reviewed by a Migration and Refugee Division within the AAT. Other than creating efficiency with staffing and processes, this has not changed the RRT’s legislative responsibilities. The Tribunal retains its own legislation.

judiciary with magistrates and judges. With the support of New Zealand legal funding, judges are recruited from overseas. Respected Australian and Fijian judges sit on Nauru's bench, along with dedicated Fijian professionals who strive to reorganise the country's legal system from virtual abandonment in phosphate heydays. The majority of Nauru's Supreme Court cases relate to phosphate land disputes, with backlogged queues for lodging a decision-making complaint. Before 2012, Nauru did not have Refugee Tribunal courts or judicial court jurisdiction for re-adjudicating refugee purity.

Here was another instance where the company town planners sought to adopt the peak of refugee processing best practice. Like other contexts ripe for social engineering (Wright 1991), the country became a laboratory for operationalising RSD expertise. A "unique opportunity" for establishing a legal system that is "truly world class," Nauru's Australian Deputy Secretary announced in their paper presentation "Establishment of a New National Refugee Determination System: Threats and Opportunities; the Case of Nauru" at the Panel Session "Protection and Decision-making in the Asia Pacific and African regions" for Monash University's Access to Asylum Conference in Italy (Vohra 2014). Neither the Nauruan or Australian governments want to be accused of *refouling* a certifiable refugee, which would potentially scupper the company town operations. In Nauru's phosphate laboratory samples are collected hourly from products as chemists analyse cadmium content, bone phosphate lime, and moisture levels to meet state buyers needs, and evade penalty charges. Here, the international optics leveled on quality controlling operations means that Nauru's processing system required enhanced decision-making, even more so than in Australia.

One cannot exaggerate the physiological characteristics of this particular raw material. Although certainly exploitative, part of the labour politics of refugee processing is that it is largely producer not consumer-driven. The majority of commodity-beings want to put themselves back onto the assessment line, in much the same way that many Nauruans, while acknowledging of phosphate bodily harms, continue to promote extraction of their lands. Nauru's town planners mutually agreed that refugee reassessment would be a popular avenue for those refused the first time through. From the get go, the subject of a Nauru RSRT featured avidly in early discussions. An emerging transnational class of refugee legal and social work professionals found government utility for their expertise. Here, they could distil the

foremost principles of UNHCR's blueprints and Australian manufacturing design to plan and build a refugee processing operation on a state-wide scale. Ideas were discussed in prestigious research centres like the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at Sydney's University of New South Wales and the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre, as well as at industry conventions and more informal fora.

Like latter day Prometheans, refugee professionals found the chance to explore their theories about a refugee processing system's optimum architecture, evolved into directives for the Nauruan project. Little different from eighteenth century impulses, which saw the imperial Pacific as a laboratory for scientific thought, this "unspoiled, living archive ... offered unprecedented opportunities for comparative assessments and the testing of hypotheses" (Howe 2000: 33). They sought to form a just refugee processing system as that concept stemmed from European legal ideas about refugee purity through "credible fear." "RSD is like a diagnostic test. You would not expect doctors to deploy a diagnostic test that did not maximize the chances of making the correct diagnoses and which did not contain the necessary safeguards to do so," one refugee expert said. A modern vision of refugee diagnostic testing that was fair, effective and independent, and sieved out the genuinely persecuted refugee from the economic migrant was the ideal. When they compiled Nauru's *Refugee Convention* (2012), the planners made sure to provide for the establishment of both a Nauruan Refugee Status Review Tribunal and judicial appeal system in the country's new refugee legal system for anyone desiring reassessment. Unlike Australia's tri-part human reassessment, they also added in a *fourth* round of Australian High Court appeal. Later, the design would be championed at legal conferences as a cutting-edge framework, which could contribute to refugee assessments "throughout the region."²¹

Even within the elaborate reassessment cycles, the planners added operational nuances to make Nauru's processing operations far greater than elsewhere. Departing from Anglo conventions, they excitedly trialled a three-member Nauru Refugee Tribunal. Three tribunal members from Australia's Refugee Review Tribunal flew over from Melbourne and Sydney for the second phase of refugee reprocessing. The

²¹ See also "Comparative RSD Systems – Nauru" and "Refugee Processing on Nauru," papers presented at the International Association of Refugee Law Judges 2014 conference in Tunis, and again at the Kaldor Centre for Refugee Law's Annual Conference in 2015 by the Principal Australian Member of Nauru's Refugee Status Review Tribunal (Mackinnon 2014, 2015).

new tripartite system of Nauru was heralded as particularly progressive because most review hearings in Australia and Europe favour one Tribunal Member. In Nauru, if denied the first time through, the once declined crude refugee is afforded the luxury of demonstrating their purity in front of not one but *three* Australian Tribunal Members. The planners believed that having refugee merits review with three independent and professionally trained refugee decision makers ensures maximum operational fairness. To have a tripartite tribunal is to demonstrate that Nauru is governed by fair western ideals. They also included a panel of four barristers contracted to provide refugee defence for the third judicial review stage. For the planners, bolstering Nauru's review tribunal with additional Members and bringing a panel of Australian flown-out barristers for judicial presentation was further proof that technological advancement can be maintained. An even fairer process sought to demonstrate western visions of justice in a place that some of Australia's end offshore campaigners label as operating outside the rule of law.

Operating from a pool of Australian mainland Refugee Review Members, the team of fly-in-fly-out Tribunal Members heard refugee re-representations over two-week sitting periods under contract with the Nauruan government. Rather than making their decision as per the solo Member system in Australia, the tripartite system allowed for the team to caucus each other over the credibility of human fear and potential of *refoulement*. The team completed their refugee reassessment within a period of 90 days, providing written reasons for negative or positive human purity appraisals. If flagged again for quality, all twice-declined refugees have a third recourse to a Supreme Court hearing if granted eligibility by the Tribunal Members, which is often automatic as a health and safety precaution. With New Zealand funding, the Nauruan government has put great efforts into reinvigorating their judicial system in recent years. In January 2014, a high profile ruckus saw the dismissal of the Resident Magistrate and Supreme Court Registrar Peter Law, followed by Chief Justice Geoffrey Eames. Law disputed a government decision to expel two Australian businessmen: one who ran the local radio, both of who trod on the toes of government members in their small town business dealings, running side-lines out of the Menen Hotel bar. At the time, end offshore activists latched onto the decision, even though it was unrelated to the local refugee industry. Campaigners galvanised on the offensive, circulating media reports of failed state savagery that compared Nauru to the Congo (see for example Clarke 2014). These events were at

the point when refugee reassessment was on the horizon, with more humans coming off the commodity belt from the Tribunal stage. A high profile riot at the RPCs in July 2013, discussed in later sections, also saw 153 prospective refugees charged with criminal damage, having burned down RPC 3.

The Supreme Court was backlogged with phosphate land dispute cases, faced with the immensity of taking on the RPC rioters, and now the final refugee reassessment load. To counter end offshore threats and in anticipation of the new workload, in August 2014, the Nauruan government appointed a new Supreme Court bench of not just one but again a *three*-strong judicial team. Fiji's former vice president, Joni Madraiwiwi, who sat on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Solomon Islands in 2008, took up the country's post of Chief Justice. Mohammed Shafi Khan, a former Queensland, Victorian, ACT and Fiji barrister, and Jane Elizabeth Hamilton-White, a former Queensland barrister and principal magistrate of the Solomon Islands, were also appointed to the bench. The following year in October 2015, they then appointed Filimone Jitoko, a senior law lecturer at USP and High Court Judge, as the new Supreme Court Registrar. Shortly before Jitoko's appointment, before expunged refugees had begun to come off the Tribunal belt, an entirely new refugee courthouse was built for the final beneficiation stage, which opened to proud fanfare during my fieldwork. Now, the country has a courthouse dedicated to refugee *and* phosphate extraction disputes. "Despite criticism from some overseas media outlets with no knowledge of our system and the past problems, we have held fast to the commitment we made to the Nauruan people when we were elected, and the result is a more accountable legal system," Nauru's Minister Adeang said at the time (Republic of Nauru 2015a).



Figure 2.8: A New Courthouse

Beginning in 2016, Nauru's Supreme Court judges reheard tribunal certifications in the new refugee dedicated courthouse. Refugee defence lawyers are not usually trained barristers but migration agents specialising in refugee law. They

do not have practice jurisdiction in Supreme Courts nor do their contracts cover them for this third judicial round in offshore or mainland processing. Instead, for Nauru's supply chain, fly-in-fly-out Australian contracted barristers, all well versed in credibility of fear representation, recirculate the twice expunged. Here, receiving a negative decision from the Nauru Supreme Court meets with one final reassessment circuit, unlike the conventional three rounds in Australia. Under Nauru's *Appeals (Amendment) Act 1974* and Australia's *Nauru (High Court Appeals) Act 1976*, Supreme Court appeals are determined by the High Court of Australia and not domestically. Nauruan citizens can lodge an appeal on a lower court decision to the Australian High Court and fly to Canberra for their appeal hearing. If tri-expunged, all prospective refugees have a fourth round of purity assessment through the High Court of Australia.

In Australia, the High Court is the third and final circuit for mainland refugee claimants, but in Nauru this adds a fourth part close to the increased beneficence treatments. During the High Court hearing, conducted in Canberra, no prospective refugee can be physically present, as is the way with those in the mainland factory environments. Instead, contracted mainland barristers provide representation, defending expungements extraterritorially in front of a bench of seven Justices. Decisions of the High Court on appeals are final. There are no further assessment rounds once a matter has been decided by the High Court, and the decision is binding on all other courts throughout Australia. But in meetings and communication, the planners of Nauru's refugee processing operations emphasised that the Nauruan operations required enhanced scrutiny of product decision-making, even more so than in Australia. Layers of appeal mechanisms would ensure the distillation of the genuine refugee from economic migrant, and potentially catch more high-value products that might be otherwise expunged. So too, would individualised refugee quality assurance. The next section turns to look at the role of UNHCR in Nauru, who played an extraordinary hand, as did individual refugee legal academics, in fine-tooth-combing the purity of each product. Here, moral values played an important part of the offshore operations as refugee professionals looked to increase manufacturing capacity.

Quality is Elementary

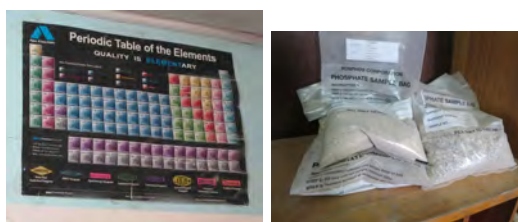


Figure 2.9: RONPhos Laboratory; Phosphate Samples for Mainland Analysis

UNHCR is the major international organisation related to the specifics of refugee processing with offices around the globe in sites of refugee abundance or fresh places of extractive promise.²² Under Article 35 of the Geneva Convention (1951), the organisation has a “monitoring and advisory role” of refugee processing sites, and indeed any extractive site where potential or certified refugees are found. The majority of refugee processing is now undertaken in specific enclaving set-ups: refugee camps, immigration detention centres, and new wave alternative processing environments such as CD. In line with this mandate, teams of UNHCR Protection Staff conduct regular quality control inspections of workplaces where they are alerted that potential refugees may be found, advising on their processing and factory industrial encasement. Often, UNHCR are directly contracted in with governments to carry out RSD. In 2013 for example UNHCR processed migrants into refugees in over fifty countries and co-conducted them parallel to or jointly with governments in another twenty countries (UNHCR 2017b). That year along, the supermajor manufactured 203,200 refugees on a global scale, cementing their status as the world’s largest RSD contractor, and second largest after the South African government, who have nationalised the industrial operations. Sometimes in instances where the government wants to take on the selection process or where UNHCR decide the context is too controversial for involvement, they take on what they term a “quality assurance” role. In these situations, UNHCR assess whether the judgements of refugee purity are carried out “fairly, consistently, and efficiently,” observing the work of industry personnel who move humans in and off the refugee assessment line.²³

²² ICRC was the primary instigator of UNHCR as an international overseer for the globalising refugee trading system. It was Gustav Adler who called for the creation of UNHCR’s early precursor, the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1930 (Loescher 2001).

²³ See research on the analysis of supply chains, which examines how certification systems normalise supply chains (Gibbon et al. 2008).

When it came to Nauru's offshore enterprise, the level of quality control provided by the UNHCR far surpassed the industry standards in Australia. Even if the organisation did not want to be explicitly involved in the offshore trade, protested by many across the refugee sector, they have a statutory requirement to oversee implementation of regional processing districts. It is also by UNHCR's hand that Nauru comes into being as a "third country resettlement" state. Nauru was not what UNHCR staff had in mind in their promotion of "regional cooperative frameworks." However, offshore processing was ultimately the product of UNHCR and its organisational precursors' imaginations, advertised in conferences and government roundtables around the globe. Refuting an entire state's ability to process refugees went against their ultimate publicity drive of encouraging more governments to support and open their lands to refugee manufacturing operations or product trade deals. Similarly, bureaucratic discernment about which states can be industry processing hubs has the danger of postcolonial or racist accusations. These were discourses that ironically UNHCR had used to further its organisational ambitions and expand the commodificational schemata beyond Europe, ultimately leading to the refugee's numerical proliferation, and their current offshore predicament.²⁴ Although it provoked heated closed-door debates, no bureaucrat wanted UNHCR to be alienated as elitist, adversarial or even sidled into irrelevance, particularly when funding is already so tight amid global consumer refugee scares.

Over the years, numerous other refugee industry players have also threatened to usurp UNHCR's contractual authority (Betts 2010). New commercial, NGO, and INGO players have become heavily involved in the industry, willing to carry out work that is appealing for many state governments looking to curb the crude refugee flow, such as the AVR work of IOM. Not only has UNHCR become something of a dwindling "global security actor" (Hammerstad 2014), but the organisation is now often criticised by refugee industry firms for "inefficient" and "ineffective" assessment (Sandvik and Jacobsen 2016). UNHCR is also reliant on government funding. The Australian contracts make up a significant portion of its Asia Pacific offices revenue. Many other governments in the Asia Pacific are little interested in the expense and public anger that packages onto refugee certification. Thus, with their

²⁴ Under expansionist High Commissioners Schnyder and then Aga Khan, UNHCR used discourses of xenophobia and racism to promote expanding refugee determination beyond Europe's borders and beyond the temporal constraints of the First World War. This led to the 1967 Protocol, successively adopted by the majority of shareholder governments (Loescher: 2001).

own financial revenue at stake, UNHCR took the tactical tightrope of trying to improve Nauru's company town operations behind-the-scenes, while appeasing end offshore activists by not taking an industry contract as at the start of the first 2001 industry phase.

In Canberra, UNHCR's office focuses on the entirety of the Pacific. They quality control the refugee trading system on a regional scale. Because the organisation is tasked with checking such expansive operations, they provide little bespoke regulation over the processing steps and purity of the final product. Staff receive overall statistical numbers of processed refugees, what they term "refugee recognition rates." They audit Australia's processing and resettlement environments on a sporadic basis through intermittent Refugee Missions. More often, they liaise with other agencies and government personnel to ensure that industrial operations meet international standards (for example, the right raw materials are made into refugees and good manufacturing practices are met). After the much-criticised contractual role in Nauru, UNHCR refused the same paid involvement in the country's refugee enterprise. Instead, their Canberra office took on a largely behind-the-scenes form of operational enhancement, attentive to the extreme.

In the 2008-2012 refugee industrial lull, UNHCR staff had provided superficial elements of refugee training to Nauruan government employees. During this interim period, the Nauruan government openly expressed their willingness to be reinstated as Australia's offshore processing hub, bemoaning the impact of loss of revenue, aid, and employment to the country. "The closure will have a major impact. If the level of aid is reduced at the same time, it's going to totally cripple us," the then Foreign Affairs and Finance Minister, Kieran Keke, said in 2008 (Marks 2008). Aware that reinstatement might come to pass, UNHCR's Canberra staff endeavoured to build Nauru's industry CV. They encouraged Nauru's bureaucrats, border control, police and prison officials to take workshops and specialised training in the particularities of what makes a human a pure refugee. The Nauruan government strove to show their willingness to be a best practice refugee processing site. In 2010, Nauruan government reps attended a work program with UNHCR divisions around drafting refugee policy and legislation, learning about refugee purity, refugee narratives and needs through refugee awareness-raising workshops. In consultation with UNHCR, they talked through guiding principles and international best practices for responding to refugee health, psychosocial support, law and security. They put

together Standard Operating Procedures to ensure quality control along the entire processing chain. Under UNHCR and other UN organisations' recommendations, the Nauruan government flew to Geneva and signed the Geneva Convention in 2012 when the plan for Malaysia as a processing site was legally curtailed, ratifying the Optional Protocol shortly thereafter.

As detailed, UNHCR staff played an extraordinary hand in building Nauru's refugee processing system into, in the words of one industry advisor, a "robust and consistent operation" that is "truly world class" (Vohra 2014). The Canberra team provide formal quality control of operations on a publicised annual basis. Protection Staff conduct formal three-day audits of Nauru, touring the country and remarking on factory work in an official capacity. Outside these formalities, employees are constant features in Nauru, providing feedback and assisting the processing operations, leading other international refugee industry specialists on tours around the country to identify any areas where industrial operations are not performing at optimum levels. The question of RSD assessment is at the heart of their improvements. Staff who fly to Nauru come from particular specialisms in refugee law and related human rights legal disciplines. They focus on inspecting the human decision-making and welfare procedures, although RSD quality control is their particular level of expertise. The majority of their time is spent observing Nauruan staff who conduct RSD under the guidance of Australian Immigration Department case officers. In an effort to keep the processing system to the highest standard, the Nauruan government also employed Australian refugee lawyers and a RSD quality assurance lawyer who work closely with UNHCR. Quality control is conducted internally and by UNHCR and visiting JAC committee members on a regular basis using industry grading charts that check, for example, whether the threshold of fear is correctly applied, that the persecution or harm claimed is correctly identified, and that an effective credibility analysis is performed by spotting contradictions, inconsistencies, and omissions that might allow for a crude refugee or certifiable product to otherwise slip by. All of this is to ensure the quality of the products at the end of the chain; performance statistics of which are measured against other state refugee recognition rates.

In the phosphate industry, the goal is to maximise production, ensuring more AAA+ products make their way off the assessment line. Here, the goal of the Australian and Nauruan governments is on the one hand to keep manufacturing rates to a minimum, and coax products under assessment to self-expunge from the belt line.

Both governments prefer not to be faced with such a pileup of pure product, which can be difficult to handle in bulk. For the former, it is the spectacle not the material reality of certified deposits that has political economic currency. For the latter, as later chapters will show, the refugee *does* have tremendous use-value – not only in terms of body as financial capital, but also body as *human* capital for Nauru’s new state-building effort. But in the long-term, as Chapter 5 will detail, this particular labour product has not found absorptive utility. Like Nauru’s vast tracts of sterile desert land, unfertilisable by phosphate wealth, none of Nauru’s certified refugee products are keen to fertilise Nauruan lands, but set on Australian mobility futures. However, fears of *refoulement* and the calls of Australian refugee experts to expand the commodity criteria, through for example “complementary protection,” have led efforts to maximise the amount of product designated as pure, even if it piles up, like the stagnant mineral shipments, in trading limbo. Many UNHCR personnel and refugee industry advisors also secretly hoped that lobbying for optimum plant productivity would enable more certified refugees to eventually find absorptive utility – if not in Australia, along an extended supply chain elsewhere in the event that the morally dubious offshore sites eventually closed.²⁵

Extraterritorially, UNHCR staff regulate Nauru on a near round-the-clock basis; regularly abreast of all developments, including statistics on how many humans have been processed as refugees and how many are discharged as non-refugees. They remain in close contact with Nauruan and employed Australian personnel, scouring each judgment made, but also any commodity particularities. “They’re always very helpful,” one Nauruan government representative nodded. “First when it came to “UAMs” [unaccompanied minors] and then statelessness, which was a new one I hadn’t come across before, we had to really think about how to deal with that one.”

Many Nauruans also became experts in how the business should be carried out to meet international standards. Government administrators tacked photos of international training workshops on refugees to office walls, cohorts of smiling Australian and Nauruan employees standing side by side outside a Refugee Child Protection conference in Brisbane. Justice Department staff displayed *Republic of Nauru RSD Handbook Guidelines* and pamphlets reading, “What is Refugee Status Determination” to educate Nauruan citizens on the refugee system and show the

²⁵ See also for example the Kaldor Centre’s Transfer Tracker, which tracks the tonnages of certified refugee and discharged non-refugee products in an effort to promote mass flow. <http://www.kaldorcentre.unsw.edu.au/publication/transfer-tracker>.

quality of their work. In addition to assisting with processing operating procedures, and training Nauruan government teams, which might otherwise result in the waste disposal of a high-value deposit or *refoulement* – a term that made many in the offshore industry noticeably shudder – UNHCR maintain “observer” status on all relevant manufacturing advisory bodies, leading other interest groups to the company town district. Bumping shoulders with UNHCR personnel in Nauru’s airport lounge was not an uncommon occurrence.

The penultimate section here turns to look at the refugee as a human commodity, self-entangled in refugee purificational control, before examining product discards. Humans were imbued with status as refugee or non-refugee, which established lasting discourses of refugee purity that affected social relations. Some were also key trade union figures in lobbying for the optimisation of the productivity of the plant.

Commodity Control

The refugee body is also entangled in the reproduction of capitalist industry and is itself a key contributor to securing the supply chain. It was from migrants in process that I learned most about the offshore operation’s specifics. At times I was corrected on my operational terminology, on what makes a genuine refugee, and the system of refugee selection, all calling into question my simplistic academic assumptions of “expertise.” It was not just the explicit contractor, but also the prospective refugee keen on capitalist absorption, that helped other workers carry out routine operations. Some offshore refugees not only measured, but also advised on the operation’s runnings on a daily basis through industry consultation groups. They worked to achieve operational efficiency including quality refugee output, ensuring that offshore processing complied with industry regulations. On several occasions I heard comments like, “he was an economic migrant, not genuine,” in relation to a recent human disposal. Consultation groups with quality controllers, contractors, and complaints procedures in Nauru but also extraterritorially with organisations like UNHCR, looked to ensure that mainland standards were met.

As has been described, this is an industry that is largely producer-driven. Shortly after the offshore sites reopened, July 2013 saw a high-profile labour riot. The riot was itself a result not of increased manufacturing, but of halts to the factory

processing operations, with prospective refugees demanding improved conveying efficiency. This was not the first time labour riots had erupted but it was certainly the most extreme. Planeloads of prospective refugees had been imported since September 2012, but RSD was slow to get off the ground in Nauru's migrant-rich factories: lawyers to contract and translocate, tribunals to set up, legislation to enact, locals to train to make the operation "regional," and more. With chants of "we're refugees not criminals," "we want to go to Australia, we should be free," and "Nauru Guantanamo," RPC1 was dramatically burnt to the ground, as groups of prospective refugees demanded to know when factory operations would commence. They demanded the start of RSD, the improvement of working conditions, and other standard operating procedures from the mainland such as, at the time, CAPs refugee defence lawyers. The disaster was the greatest catastrophe to happen in Nauru at the time (over AU\$60 million in damage, all uninsured). The casualty figures were not high (5 people sent to hospital, 153 prospective refugees charged with damages, all given community service), but raised the need to optimise productivity of the plant, and prevent stagnant material from collecting. Even though the disaster costs were enormous (refugee legal defenders were flown out from Melbourne for months at exorbitant cost), the value of advancing the frontier far outweighed the blowbacks entangled in offshore processing.

In fact in Australia, the many layers of assessment was in response to complaints by refugee labourers and their refugee advocacy unions across the 2000s. Labour unionists called for more visible systems of quality control of manufacturing operations, which soon insitutionalised into the industrial assemblage that transferred to Nauru. But if said not to fit commodificational definitions, the non-refugee is mechanically disposed of from Nauru to homeward lands or other decided destinations. In the period of July 2014 to November 2016, 967 humans moved out of the processing operations as refugees, certified pure, 230 crude contaminants for disposal (Appendix 6).

Ethical Disposal

In an era of high food anxiety, Freidberg (2003: 29) argues, corporate-level anxiety about the "tarnish" of bad press has led to an ethical turn within supply chains. Now, in press-sensitive supply chains, supermarkets and supplies "must tell all about the

production process: what chemicals are used, how the labour is clothed, housed, fed and supplied with health care; how the environment is protected.” This information is required in addition to general product packaging data to assure “product traceability,” and the sustenance of manufacture. Practices of supply chain cleansing look to “clean up” “morally and hygienically dubious conditions of production and exchange.” A major concern of Nauru’s company town planners was the implication of non-refugee waste disposal. Media and pro refugee coverage of the disposal of the refugee contaminate are trade tools of the refugee fetishisation era. In this age of exploding refugee demand, pro refugee factions and media routinely publicise the return of the purged non-refugee, all of whom they assert are of pure refugee quality. Social media, close industry networks, and ease of travel have ensured contaminate traceability. It is now common practice to trace an expunged refugee’s return and galvanise photo upon photo of bodily torture and harm; definitive evidence, they claim, of refugee *non-refoulement* persecution. The Edmund Rice Centre for example is a Human Rights education and think tank with branches in NSW, QLD, WA, and VIC, manned by the President of the Refugee Council. Under their *Deported to Danger* programme, they lead research teams that monitor the redistribution of the rejected refugee. Rejected refugees also contact mainland divisions, use Facebook groups, send photos of bodily scarification and hostile environments to emphasise the harms of their redistributions.

As part of the curbing the emotional anguish of the final part of the manufacturing operations, the company town planners devised a “holistic and collaborative approach” to ensure the responsible dumping of the non-refugee from the commodity chain. All prospective refugees are provided with extensive emotional preparation before, during, and after the assessment cycle. Case workers, CAPs lawyers, RSD Tribunalists, and mental health clinicians hold group meetings to let declined refugees know what to expect and reduce anxieties about future eventualities. They contacted ground workers in return regions to ensure the ethical discard of offshore contaminates, arranged business or social networks for their return so that neither government was vulnerable to blame for onward eventualities. But despite these preventative measures, and accompaniment provisions for non-refugee return, those who had exhausted the processing cycle were often under medication, to soften the brutalities of human expulsion.

As with the processes of “salvage accumulation” (Tsing 2015) in evidence in Nauru’s phosphate industry, in which pollutant by-products become recycled parts of violent commodity chains, similar schemes were in evidence across Nauru’s refugee processing landscape. On the one hand, industry players like IOM and charter flight agencies found economic profit from the human by-products of assessment, facilitating their onward distributions. On the other hand, within the offshore cycle, new politics also confronted and reinforced refugee production through the expunged human body. As pro refugee divisions broadcast images of *refouled* refugees in publications like *Islands of Despair* (2016) and *Deported to Danger* (2016), they graphically strengthened the authority of the refugee paradigm under an anti-political frame. Using photos of brutality, horrific narratives sent in by or sourced from rejected non-refugees, they reinforced the veracity of the refugee as a suffering victim, and need to make more refugees onshore. This obscures the destructive labour and environmental conditions through which humans are certified as refugees as just described, rather than pulling the narrative back to the uneven mobility geographies and conflicts that fuel the system of refugee production.

As the next chapter will show, anti-political praxis also fuelled new risk spaces that encouraged the prospective refugee to perform. In both phosphate and refugee industrial sectors, activist campaigners were central figures in causing more environmental and human damage. Some of the violence choreographed to show refugee purity was doubly fuelled in Nauru’s offshore context, where refugee certification for Nauru garnered little interest. These self-commodification practices, I argue, obscure the hazardous processing practices through a powerful self-exploitative/end offshore frame. As a result, the offshore processing industry posed incredibly high risks. However, because of the political economic imperatives involved in sustaining the supply chain, risk only created surplus value for recirculating more refugee processing flows.

Chapter Three:

Securing the Offshore Boom



Figure 3.1: Aiwo Driving License Checks; Refugee Corporate Health and Safety Display; Hi-Viz Light Protocol

There were remarkable differences between refugee and non-refugee related environments on Nauru, which made the values as attached to refugees starkly apparent. The former functioned almost as if a city in a city, exuding the sheen of health and safety regulation in contrast to the non-refugee metropolis. I walked around phosphate plants ravaged in dust and rust, sharp and jagged edges teeming with tetanus possibilities. Asbestos coursed through roofs, hangovers from British Phosphate Commission days, and Nauruan capitalist glory years. Food lay out of date in schools and the largely Chinese-run retail shops, with little need or will for firm business regulation. Electrical wiring systems often fizzled, power cuts and electrocutions were all too frequent. But over the course of my time on Nauru, at the cusp of two industry eras when more certified refugees moved from the processing factories across Nauru's urban fringe, I lived through a noticeable shift as the immense attentiveness accorded Nauru's offshore refugees interacted more routinely with non-refugee spheres, transforming the company town state into one preoccupied with risk adversarialism.

Asbestos reparations began in the local church roof and across successive buildings around Nauru's urban hub. Laminates appeared across the dwindling phosphate industry sector and other public service divisions marked with Transfield. "Are there any uncontrolled hazards? Take FIVE to Keep FIVE. Think START: Stop, Think, Assess, Review, Talk." Expat refugee industry personnel led information and industry-training sessions for local public service departments, firefighters, police, and more, on how to meet Australia's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

requirements, write incident reports, and take part in Health and Safety Liaison Inspections, with specific attention to the cultural particularities of working with refugees. Police roadblocks and breathalyser checks became routine under the training guidance of Australian Federal Police; all dramatically out of place on Nauru's main ring road; where common practice is to dexterously juggle a family on one bike, overburdened phosphate lorries swerve at top speeds, drivers with cans of ACE in hand, in utter flagrancy of Phosphate Commissioner-developed laws. A hazard sign "watch out for children playing" went up on the road by the Anibare refugee resettlement dwellings. Another weekday morning, I run around the phosphate extraction fields, circumnavigating the refugee processing fields, before heading back past mined-out limestone pinnacles. A Transfield truck pulls up beside me, distinctively marked with flashing headlights tacked to the side, as per all refugee industry OHS protocol. Two jovial refugee managerial workers stick their heads out. One hands me a luminescent vest, adding, "We have OHS meetings every week. Several people have issued reports about a low visibility runner up here. One driver said he almost hit you. Next time you go running, make sure you have this 'hi-viz' on." Like the oil company town culture Hinton (2008: 370) describes, community life in Nauru "ran according to company rules."

Offshore contexts are frequently depicted and indeed *can be* financially successful because they operate as havens outside of international accountability (Maurer 1998; Palan 2006). In Nauru, the offshore trope has become commonplace. Headlines like "Out of Sight: Out of Mind: Human Rights Abuses at Nauru's Immigration Detention Centre" (Close 2015), and "Nauru, Refugees and Australia's "Torture Complex"" (Kampmark 2016), books such as *Offshore: Behind the wire on Manus and Nauru* (2016), and academic networks like "Researchers Against Pacific Black Sites" conjure a distancing imaginary. However in Nauru, as my opening vignette makes clear, an extreme amount of risk managerialism has gone into attempting to secure the offshore industry project.

In the last chapter I looked at the metallurgical practices that separate pollutant from pure products, arguing that Nauru's refugee processing system operates little differently to the mainland operations, indeed in heightened formation. This chapter draws in my ethnographic fieldwork, moving against simplistic assumptions that depict Nauru as a "black site" outside of international oversight. Instead, I argue that because offshore refugee processing is exceptionally valuable, but also exceptionally

risky – financially, politically, and in terms of human safety – risk managerialism, including an array of inspectorates, has been intrinsic to company town development. Ulrich Beck (1992) talks about uninsurability, writing how some risks are no longer insurable or governable due to the incalculability of the dangers involved. Beck argues that industrial society’s “manufactured uncertainties” such as genetic engineering, nuclear power, and climate change are “too risky” to be insured. Environmental hazards that become extreme or more frequent are uninsurable. Leigh Johnson (2015) moves against Beck’s premise, arguing that the insurance industry attempts to make climate change impacts insurable and a profitable line of business. Rather, the constellations of science, value, and fear – the “political ecology of risk” – enables the industry to reproduce itself. This chapter takes up Johnson’s argument, arguing that the political economic imperatives of advancing the offshore frontier and its 1,355 value-laden commodities have made Nauru the seat of risk adversarialism par excellence. The constellations of law, value(s), and fear – particularly of the curtailment of offshore operations – enables the industry’s perpetuation. Refugee suffering imaginaries only fuel the extension and enhancement of the supply chain.

Another surprising finding of my fieldwork was that this was the case with phosphate processing in the British Phosphate Commission era. An incredible amount of risk managerial practices went into securing the phosphate commercial enterprise – an industrial environment also suffused by ecological, financial, and reputational risks, but wherein lay, for farming enterprise, cut-price phosphate, and overall, the sustenance of the global agricultural economy. The success of phosphate commerce justified the expenditures. Similarly, with refugees. The Australian and Nauruan governments transposed their concerns from losing mineral to mortal commodity wherein lay a much trumpeted political policy. High political economic factors have been at stake for both governments. The Australian political party at the time might lose power as when the Rudd Labour government pulled out in 2008. Billions of dollars have been poured into the industry project to, as later chapters will elaborate, somewhat farcical extent. The Nauruan government might go bankrupt, as from phosphate wealth exhaustion before. Pressingly, Australian refugee industry workers are all employed under Australian contract; their commodities fall under workplace “duty of care.” No firm wanted to be liable for the industry lawsuits that erupt from non-compliance or accidents in the workplace.

Here, it is partially the hazards entangled in commodity self-representation

that results in a risk adverse landscape that goes beyond conventional corporate routines. Political economic imperatives have been high for offshore refugees, keen on furthering their mobility futures' projects, accruing moral capital for attempted Australian moves. Because few certified offshore refugees chose to accept the Phnom Penh package deal, these many factors stimulated an explosion of "riskwork" (Power 2016) practices that sought to regulate the precarious working conditions in the offshore refugee industry. Like the UN Civilisational Trust days of Nauru's phosphate yesteryear, international organisations looked to sustain the global refugee economy, moving from the indigenous Nauruan to the victimised mortal commodity. Nauru's successful prolongation as a phosphate turned refugee processing site owes itself to the immense amount of regulation that came to operate across the company town terrain.

This chapter consists of three main sections. The first historicises Nauru's refugee processing operations against the past system of phosphate processing, examining the corporate practices that came with securing a high-value, but high-risk mineral extractive environment. I then explore how mineral and migrant merge through renewed safety preoccupations. As phosphate regulatory investment has fallen into abandon in favour of protecting the refugee boom, it is the refugee body that is now shielded from phosphate, so as to secure the new boomtown dream.

In the second section I look at the risks of the offshore refugee industry, entangled in the biophysical particularities of a moralised commodity-being. I discuss the ways in which Nauru's hyper-regulation owes itself to commodity self-representation and end offshore campaigns. Ironically, it was partly the scrutinisation of offshore processing by Australian legal firms and refugee industry professionals that not only produced new risks, but also extreme spaces of offshore regulation.

In the third section I examine some of the major regulatory organisations that transferred their work from Geneva and Australia to help manage the adverse impacts from a human ecological resource. In counter to dominant representations, I argue that the management of Nauru's processing sites was far greater than elsewhere. Many Nauruans were also morally and/or financially invested in securing the boom. I discuss some of the local forms of risk management, which were as much a part of the company town everyday as international agency regulation. But ultimately, despite the plethora of risk management practices, I suggest that risks endemic to a human manufacturing industry, riled by the power of the end offshore campaign, can be little

constrained by national or international company regulation.

Part One: Company Town Safety

Traces of health and safety predated the refugee industry on Nauru through the work of the phosphate industry. The later BPC years of the 1950s and 60s was a time when the associated risks of phosphate industrial operations became the subject of international concern. An increasing amount of industry safety standards and regulatory auditors developed worldwide to protect workers on extraction sites. The push behind much of the improvement drive was to minimise workplace errors so as to maximise productivity; to “promote “peace between capital and labor” through “good work” in all spheres of the laborer’s life” (Wright 1983: 178). The parallel rise in trade labour unions, then duty of care legislation and personal injury claims motivated employers to reduce the human and financial cost of workplace injury. Instead, the dominant workplace trend gradually moved towards enhancing industrial practice through an increased focus on safety and other workplace enhancement regimes (Smith and Leggat 2005).

For the BPC administrators, levels of regulation demanded adherence. A large percentage of the workforce was Australian and governed by the mainland occupational health and safety guidelines developing at the time around early mining risks. *Workers Compensation Ordinances* provided for the compensation to workers for injuries sustained on the job. Until 1968, Nauru also remained a League of Nations then UN Civilisational Trust. The Permanent Mandates then Trust Commissions took a particular interest in Nauru because of the “peculiar circumstances” of the mandate (Viviani 1970: 49). At the same time, other countries sought monopoly over the raw materials of the territory – “always on the look-out for opportunities of misrepresenting this country,” said the British MP Sir Maclean at a debate on June 17, 1920 in the British Parliament. The Australian government was sensitive to criticisms of local exploitation, in 1922 making the ministerial statement that:

The working of the phosphate deposits is in no way prejudicial to the interests of the natives, who, on the contrary, have never been so well off as they are under the present Administration (cited in Viviani 1970: 49).

The League and then UN received regular reports from the Administrators, phosphate workers, locals, missionaries, and other visitors in the event of discontent, conducting

annual then triennial Visiting Missions that focused on the health and wellbeing of Nauruans. Outside of individual cases, the phosphate commissioners were often called to task to display the benefits of their administration for locals, and validate the continued mining. This was a time when indigenous rights movements had begun to develop around critiquing imperial practices of resource extraction, here, calling for the nationalisation of mining into the hands of the Nauruan people. By making the company town exceptionally pleasant, replete with social services for locals, phosphate commissioners attempted to deflect attention away from the cut prices they gave themselves – often the subject of UN debate.



Figure 3.2: A Company Town Road Scene

Courtesy of British National Archives, Kew

As the last chapter made clear, phosphate processing comes with a range of pollutant effects, not-to-mention bodily and ecological risks. The British Phosphate administration worked with the World Health Organization (est. 1948) and the South Pacific Commission (est. 1947) around the development of health and safety programmes. They also provided annual reports to the International Labour Organization (est. 1919). The BPC introduced several measures to prevent the leachability and dispersion of hazardous chemical elements abundant in superphosphates. For example, an electrostatic dust precipitator reduced the amount of phosphate dust produced; workers wore fume hoods to protect against associated toxins, which might minimise production rates or worse yet curtail this offshore boom (Commonwealth of Australia 1964-65). Waste management infrastructure controlled the disposal of wastes. The Phosphate Commissions established a state system of rubbish collection, working with the Nauru Local Government Council in the 1950s in arranging inter-district “village pride” competitions to promote cleanliness and hygiene. The BPC Administration carried out regular servicing and repair of

Administration and Nauru Local Government Council buses, trucks, utilities, cars and other plant and heavy equipment. All districts were sprayed regularly with residual insecticides spread by power-driven misting machines. Booster injections against all major diseases were conducted as per mainland protocols, complete with annual x-rays for the entire population at the phosphate administration-built hospital. UN inspectors remarked on the “good health of the inhabitants” and that the amount of cadmium dust associated with phosphate mining was “insignificant” (United Nations 1965). “The extraction and export of phosphate is by efficient modern methods,” assured the Australian administration in response to concerns about the impact of the mining site on Nauruans (Commonwealth of Australia 1959-60). Although the UN Trusteeship consistently critiqued the phosphate administrators’ distribution of funds, and lobbied for greater local inclusion in the project, they drew attention to the “high standard of living and social services available to Nauruans.”



Figure 3.3: Mosquito Control Spray

Commonwealth of Australia 1959-1960, Territory of Nauru Report

I spoke with many of Nauru’s older community who reminisced with fondness over these BPC “Pleasantville” years, making comments like “everything was clean and orderly,” “dust wasn’t an issue,” “the drainage system was state-of-the-art.” “Being aware that almost a million tons of phosphate was mined in the Island every year, we had thought perhaps there would be dust everywhere,” wrote phosphate accountant Roy Vizard (1992) on his arrival in 1957. “We observed later that phosphate dust was pretty well confined to the actual mining sites which were inland on the Island’s ‘crown,’ and also near the end of the huge cantilever arm when ships’ holds were being filled with the mineral. Apart from these areas, the air was clear and fresh.” Beatrice, one of Nauru’s oldest residents, looked almost misty-eyed as she spoke to me of the “village pride-style” competitions across Nauru’s company town quadrants. “Not like now,” she sighed, “the place is a dump. No one cares anymore.”

She swept her arm in a wide arc. Her yard like so many others was littered with refuse and beer cans that characterise the Nauruan landscape. None of the home maintenance is provided by the phosphate administrators as was the case before. Phosphate flumes spout from the factory plants in the distance. Even as we spoke a pack of wild dogs ran past her door. (A problem that refugee industry firms had been trying to sort out.) The stark contrast between the elaborate risk-prevention regulations of the BPC days and the phosphate dangers now encountered in Nauru make the hazardous nature of the business immediately discernable. Making these predictions, a sizeable faction of locals stood against Nauruan independence in 1968, arguing that conditions would be favourable by staying under Australian administration and the Trusteeship mandate.



Figure 3.4: Phosphate Commission Traffic Control

Courtesy of British National Archives, Kew

Subsequently, when the Nauru Phosphate Commission took over the mining, there was little interest in maintaining industrial manufacturing protocols. The BPC pulled out with little in the way of industry transition, leaving the operation at the hands of the newly inaugurated NPC. As many Nauruans became overnight millionaires, in-house regulations slid into abandon. “Aiwo was atrocious in the 70s and 80s it was just dust up to your ankles. There was no legislative requirement and not the people particularly concerned with the environment, economically it was just unimportant,” a RONPhos executive recounts. The electrostatic dust precipitator was very expensive and labour intensive, requiring specific expertise. “Each day you could see the dust slowly, slowly, starting to come out the chimney at the factories. It started accumulating in the water tanks and in the drains,” one of Nauru’s older phosphate hands noted. My neighbour Sean, a phosphate worker, described:

I remember for us as kids, it was like snow. Dust floating down when the

cantilever was in motion. It was up to your ankles. We would play in the stuff. For our parents, it wasn't like that. Growing up right here in Aiwo, people had to close their gutters because they couldn't drink water from the roofs. It was just thick with it. Nauruans, life expectancy, 55. God knows what stuff we've been drinking, inhaling.

I was constantly told how much the RONPhos phosphate factory environment was an improvement to earlier NPC days. However, living in Nauru's Aiwo district it was clear that in-house regulations were not a priority. In a country where phosphate still constitutes the third major revenue sector, where – unlike refugees – the tonnage of land extracted sits firmly within private landowner desires, concerns are often not something to talk about too loudly or financially useful. The majority of Nauruans I spoke with knew all too well the risks of phosphate extraction. Workers knew that they were systematically exposed to dangerous substances while working in the phosphate mines and plants. Buada residents knew that the easy cash afforded by backyard extraction was “killing the land” as much as many locals feared the respirational consequences of living in a factory district even as they benefited from the phosphate wealth. One phosphate executive commented:

People in the environment and medical departments sometimes say, “Oh maybe we should stop mining, look at something else, we've done enough damage, it's time to move on.” They try and carry out a health study. But then the government just shuts them up because they want the money. And everyone else wants the money. So with Nauru, the environmental, the health impact takes a back seat to economic progress. I'm an environmentalist and it breaks my heart because I'm destroying my island. But when it comes to mining, money wins.

Overall, the reliance on phosphate has placed many people in a position where bodily and ecological risks are rendered subservient to capital.

As the last chapter detailed, dust and sewage leakages suffused this environment. During my visits to the phosphate extraction fields, I would be taken up sifting machinery, no hardhat or mask required or even available. But this was definitely not the case with refugee industrial operations. In contrast, like in the BPC years before, the refugee factory district sparkled with the gleam of occupational health and safety and duty of care regulation. Because the offshore refugee operations were to be built to Australian standards, none of the refugee processing factories built

by industry contractors contained asbestos materials. Nor did any of the pre-fabricated housing for offshore industry employees and certified refugees. Indeed, the Australian government made extensive efforts to ensure that the new refugee factory environments met Australian standards of manufacture. Landfills, sewage pump-out facilities, fuel, and other potentially toxic storage and distribution sites were all designed to minimise the seepage of leachates to the environment.

Phosphate and refugees inextricably entangled through new commodity converges. Foliage was planted around the RPCs to shield high-value mortal from mineral extractive environment. Separate water storages and an entire section of the desalination chamber devoted to the RPCs looked to ensure that cadmium-laced phosphate dust did not infuse into refugee water. Even as I spoke with my neighbour Sean a mosquito-misting machine drove past the door, brought over on the basis of securing the offshore refugee boom. End offshore campaigners frequently used the campaign strategy of offshore refugees at risk of dengue fever and malaria as a means of challenging Nauru's operations.¹ Industrial *laissez faire* was rarely ever the case when it came to schemes necessary for sustaining the high-value refugee operations.

It was on this basis that as more refugees moved down the atoll, the Nauruan government commenced an asbestos removal project. A group of workers began to remove the corrugated roofing on the local Protestant church with the support of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme. The ABC headline immediately circulated prominently across the airwaves at the time, "Safety concerns for refugees and workers as asbestos removal program kicks off" (Walsh 2015). Because of the immense amount of political economic value invested in the industry, these points of end offshore argument had the effect of continuously safety saturating offshore operations. The following year, in October 2015, the Nauruan government sent employees for safe removal asbestos training through the PacWaste SPREC Programme. The team learned to set up an asbestos removal zone and safely package asbestos roofing sheets using the correct Personal Protective Equipment and safe removal techniques of international best practice.

The next section turns to look at the end offshore optics that partially led to the company town world of risk regulation that I came across in Nauru. In the BPC era, UN Missions and the Civilisational Trust governing body took a particular interest in

¹ See for example the SBS report, "A physical attack and a Dengue-fever outbreak cause fear among Nauru detainees" (Riman 2017).

Nauru's phosphate town regulation because of the "somewhat unique commercial enterprise" (Ellis 1946: 10). Now, the peculiarity of the refugee business has prompted peak interest among global regulatory players. The amount of on-the-ground regulation of Nauru's "offshore Guantanamo" has been far more extensive than elsewhere.

Part Two: A Corporate Mindset

Everything needs to meet Australian standards because Australia is building it and it's country-funded and might have a liability otherwise. So disability ramps will be installed just like with all things that would be required if this was taking place in Australia.

– Refugee industry contractor, Nauru

There were several reasons for the elaborate risk world I encountered on Nauru. Fieldwork made clear that the many forms of risk adversarialism were partially related to the remaking of Nauru once again as a company town, led by mainland firms for whom risk management has become the mainstay of industrial practice (Power 2016; Strathern 2000). The changes that ensued in Nauru are symptomatic of industry practice that looks to secure smoother conditions for extractive accumulation and enhance workforce productivity. Five step incident prevention drills like "START," health and safety training protocols, and Comcare health and safety quality controllers are just as ubiquitous across other industrial environments from offshore hydrocarbons production to oil sands extraction or wherever the next big commodity boom is found, giving a sense of the refugee's naturalisation in the field of industry practice.

Whereas I thought nothing of jumping on the back of a motorbike or running without wearing a "hi-viz" vest, far outside the optic of my university insurance protocols, for refugee workers, safety rituals are an important part of the "day-to-day sociomaterial practices" of industry (Appel 2015: 266), which allow manufacturing to continue, and provide accountability against hazardous industrial work. It was the resource-rich sector of refugee processing, in some respects little different to other hazardous extractive industries, which enabled one contracted offshore industry executive to say with utter confidence:

We're not doing anything extra special or different offshore other than people

working in that part of the business are very aware that it's under the spotlight but the kind of things that we do there are no different than what we'd do if we were working anywhere else ... the health and safety, the risk and audit, these are all important to the performance and culture of the organisation.

The Executive's comment that "we're not doing anything extra special or different offshore" calls attention to the elaborate safety regimes that go with hazardous industry work, what Appel (2012) shows to be entangled in corporate profit, liability, and risk. It was in some respects only natural that when refugee processing restarted in Nauru, workforces familiar with high-risk offshore oil rig contexts like Transfield, Canstruct, and Wilsons would successfully tender for offshore refugee industry contracts and extrapolate elaborate corporate safety practices to Nauru. The high-risk nature of offshore refugee processing has enabled businesses familiar with other hazardous extractive contexts to expand to this new industry sector, bringing similar workplace procedures not out of place, I was so often told, in their work in offshore mineral processing and oil sands extractive zones. Another industry executive explained:

We recognise that we operate in dangerous areas. The challenges also are that we're operating in countries where the roads aren't great, seatbelts are unheard of, lighting isn't used, driving conditions can be very troubling so we're trying to work against that culture almost to say, "Forget that, if you want to work for us, you've got to wear your helmet, use lights etc. Your vehicles will be checked more often."

I might not have noticed these exacting attentions to detail in Australia but in Nauru the safety culture that became *sine qua non* operated in extreme counterpoint to life outside non-industry spaces. For example, I would catch a lift with expat refugee industry workers who would strictly keep to speed limits, check I was wearing my seatbelt, and all had attachable headlights for trips up through the phosphate turned refugee processing fields. In contrast, catching lifts with locals and often phosphate workers, I would sometimes climb over rusted bumpers, and have trouble even finding a seatbelt, let alone putting one on, as we veered at haphazard speeds.

As I have argued before, Nauru is an "offshore" now "regional processing country" and hence, company town state. Living there was like living on the factory floor once the centres opened for in-and-out movement. Not only are the political economic risks incredibly high – few industry executives wanted the loss of an

offshore contract or the end of the enterprise under their watch – but, so too are the physical risks for workforces and those in the processing stages. In many respects, the safety culture that enveloped Nauru was a reflection of the attention to risk and liability that has grown across the industry in recent years, but particularly in the much riskier offshore industrial environment.

The Spectacle of Risk: “End Offshore Extraction”



Figure 3.5: Refugee Labour Strikes, Nauru and Melbourne

More than anything, offshore risk was firmly entangled in the global spectacle of commodity self-representation. Extensive coverage from media and networks has led to a level of volatility perhaps unmatched in any other human industrial sector. The refugee’s representation and representational spaces are ubiquitous and diverse, which has become key to the choreography of spectacle. With the rise in #RefugeeWelcome movements and media coverage giving refugee suffering publicity, hunger strikes, fires, riots, self-harm, suicidal threats, and worse have become characteristic of the industry sector on a global scale. Pro refugee divisions promote often violent displays of commodity self-representation through apolitical and anti-political discourses of “agency” and opposition to “state violence”, exasperating these dangers (see for example Fiske 2016).

From fieldwork in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Nauru, I observed how hunger strikes in processing centres were fuelled by the support of refugee labour activists. I spoke with impassioned refugee activists (largely of the white liberal middle-classes indebted to refugee consumption) who would encourage people in processing centres to riot or refuse food in order to bring a spotlight their situation. “Agency, it gives them agency, and it’s how to get media attention,” one NGO worker said to me, as they circulated news of a high profile hunger strike to media stations. All the more so in Nauru. Hunger strikers, and most notably the 2016 Omid and Hadon self-immolations – the former filmed by others, and widely aired across

international media – were often given coverage as “martyrs” or purposely riled into action, all of which drove more incidents of self-harm and sudden releases of pressure. It is of little surprise that the publications of these sorts of tragedies drove spates of copycat self-immolations.

The Australian public is very divided between the non-refugee and refugee consumer. The power of the refugee is rooted in its biophysical properties – its abundance, morality, and animacy – endowed with, like the oil Huber (2013) describes, a kind of “magical” addiction. As the moral economy of the refugee skyrocketed in the 2015 crisis era, the refugee has created a politics of mass consumption that operates in paralysis with the more dominant oppositional public scares over refugee importation. Australia has developed a vocal pro refugee movement for whom the idea of welcoming the refugee holds a great deal of moral, and at times financial currency. Refugee campaign groups (made up of incensed citizenry, refugee industry personnel, refugees and non-refugees) like Refugee Action Coalition, Refugee Action Collective, Buddies Refugee Support Group, Welcome to Australia, Grandmothers for Refugees, RISE: Refugees, Survivors, and Ex-detainees, and Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce all organise high profile campaigns and rallies to up mainland industry quotas and demolish import embargos.

Within and alongside these campaign groups come many different strategies and high-profile players. All engage in their own “palace wars” (Dezalay and Garth 2002) around the refugee moral economy.² Australia’s mainland human rights and refugee lawyers are constantly embroiled in High Court challenges to bring refugee processing onshore, including an International Criminal Court submission against the Australian government for crimes against humanity in 2017.³ Emotions run high in this arena. Melbourne human rights lawyer and refugee activist Julian Burnside has tweeted that Immigration Minister Peter Dutton “wants a few more refugees to die” on Nauru or Manus Island as a deterrent. Similarly, journalists in Australia’s liberal media (the ABC, Guardian, and Sydney Morning Herald) are also central campaigners. Some have former refugee camp volunteers in the ranks, indebted to bringing Nauru’s refugees to the mainland. As this and later chapters will show, they

² See O’Neill (2008) for a discussion into conflicting forms of refugee activism in Australia.

³ In August 2016, a PNG Supreme Court ruling, spearheaded by Australian lawyers together with a local PNG lawyer, ruled the Manus processing centre as illegal and unconstitutional because of the significant Australian government involvement. Instead, migrants processing at the facility were moved to a nearby air naval base, also “never to reach Australia.”

pair disaster images of Nauru's refugees with affective rhetorical spin: a campaign model that has been critiqued by other journalists who have been to Nauru as "compassionista campaigning" (Kenny 2016).

Within the government have emerged several key spokespersons that give vocal political backing to the movement. In particular, the Green Party senator Sarah Hanson-Young, is at the prow of the refugee import lobby. Her Facebook page is littered with pictures put up by some of Nauru's more vehement offshore refugees, hoping to advance the compassionista strategy. This is in addition to those inside Liberal and Labour parties. The number of standing committee hearings and commissioned reports on Nauru over the years speaks volumes to the debates that take place within dominant government chambers. Whereas some NGOs or individuals have taken offshore contracts specifically to conduct subversive on-rig activism, others like the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre are more vocal out-not-in of offshore campaign proponents. This is also the case with ecumenical groups – many of who have come together as sanctuary spaces to obstruct the exportation of migrants to Nauru's offshore sites, as have academics through the Academics For Refugees network. Next to all give vocal promotion to the suffering of the at-risk refugee.

Alongside these many overlapping and conflicting players, there are self-labeled professional activists, who have made careers in abolishing offshore extractive sites. These major league activist figures (middle-class white liberals and socialists – thorns in the Australian and Nauruan governments' sides) organise direct action around refugee rights, criticised by some of Australia's more tempered industrial players. Unlike perhaps environmental or animal activist groups, the biophysical properties of this resource are important in the strategies of the more collaborative practices of refugee activist campaigns, vying to secure Nauru's valuable commodities for themselves. As new species become entangled in furthering industrial production (Haraway 2008; Tsing 2012), they also become important biopolitical figures in the extension and maintenance of resource extractive worlds. This particular resource can play a direct part in activist suffering campaigning, and the closure of extractive sites through collaborative choreographic representation.

The more vehement refugee-certified activists I spoke with in Nauru were engaged in battles against the non-refugee consuming public through high profile #RefugeeWelcome #CloseNauru campaigns, in which they worked with some of

Australia's activists using social media to facilitate collective action. In Nauru, several activist refugees described to me how they circulated videos, photos, and narratives to the Australian refugee activists, where they graphically detailed persecution narratives to leverage for moves onshore. They also constructed websites like "Offshore Processing Centre Voice" and the Facebook group "Nauru's Refugees' News," posting on others relevant to furthering mobility endeavors. "Well, what else can we do to get there?" Jamal, a staunch self-labeled activist refugee asked me.

Although none of Australia's more vehement refugee activists were physically present in Nauru, they were perhaps the most omnipresent force in stirring the small country's life world, igniting labour riots across Nauru, which the next chapter will further explore. The impassioned Australian refugee activists were often on the phone with refugees in Nauru, planning campaign strategies to demolish the import embargo, and bring the offshore refugee to Australia. Several of these key individual figures in Australia have been involved since mainland processing days when the industrial operations took place deep in the Australian outback at extractive sites like Woomera and Sherger. This small but devoted vanguard of middle to older aged Australians are vocal media spokespersons, and self-proclaimed "voices of the refugees," passionately indebted to refugee importation. For many of the mainland Australian activists I spoke with, the notion that the prospective refugee is not a criminal, but is in a similar institutional set-up, now offshored to far-flung lands, despite directing their refugee claims to Australia, provoked a great deal of moral anguish, as it did with many prospective refugees within the system's operations. This led to regular protests and popular signage such as "we're refugees not criminals," and "freedom is a right not a crime, we want justice," plastered across Nauru's company town district, in a world made high-risk through mainland instigation, and discursive global frames.⁴

Whistleblowers and snuck in activists were also rife in Nauru. This explains the automatic suspicion that I came under, frequently suspected of furtive activist intentions during my fieldwork attached to Nauru's university. The numbers of "leaks," "whistleblowing," and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests across the years makes clear some of the end offshore efforts at exposing any ways in which the industry fell foul of best practice regulations. A cursory browse through the

⁴ See Pupavac (2008) for a discussion of how "counter-stereotypes" invoked in refugee advocacy present refugees as gifted or traumatised and at arms length from "the criminal."

Australian FOI Disclosure Logs reveals some of the many ways that Australia's many activists have sought to find fault in offshore processing operations against the benchmark of industrial best practice. They would circulate anything that gave authority to the end offshore campaign.

One of my strongest impressions from fieldwork in Nauru was of the invisible yet powerful role the mainland refugee activists played in stirring Nauru's company town world. Nauru faced no shortage of coverage on its refugee processing operations. Threats to offshore manufacturing were in no short supply, which represented potential hurdles to frontier development and the demise of offshore operations. Protests and riots was a constant feature, the frequency of which increased when Nauru was in the spotlight, compounded by end offshore instigation. I experienced – and discussed with my interlocutors – multiple end offshore “exposes” while conducting my fieldwork in Nauru, Australia, and exterritorially during my writing-up phase. It was often the subject of discussion amongst refugee industry workers, who were in constant exasperation as to how to respond. Many industry personnel I spoke with had fears of offshore refugees and what they might do to attract publicity in collusion with mainland refugee propagandists. When Nauru's global publicity was at its height, refugee workers pleaded with people not to self-harm, self-immolate or worse. There were several periods when refugee mental health counselors swamped Nauru, flown in at the instigation of industry firms, in an attempt to soporify offshore refugees, and encourage them to accept supply chain segues to Cambodia.

Other incidents came to be locally termed “Nau-rumours,” denoting their operational frequency. Despite living in Nauru, I – and others – would often “learn of” offshore incidents through mainland Australian and global media, refugee industry newsletters, and listservs. For example, the latest rumour circulated in Australian media about refugee waterboarding and beating. I asked around. It was sometimes an eye rolled reception that greeted the latest media expose of refugee life on Nauru. I'm met with similar responses, “No, the same thing again,” an NGO worker shakes her head. Another clinician referred to the “suicide attention-seeking card.” “You always have the pranksters,” they went on when discussing their work up on Nauru's refugee processing hill:

It's like the boy who cried wolf sometimes of those who resort to desperate means. They tell the Australian newspapers and the activists. You don't want

to take the risk of not believing someone who's threatening suicide but it's often because they get publicity on it in Australia.

"Pregnancy is just a way to get transferred to the mainland," another said, starkly emphasising the inequalities of the labour practices that have become normalised within industry operations. To me, these were clearly horrific events. That particular reproductive choices or bodily self-destruction were "commonplace" to the workplace. But the choreography and reality of risk were part of the manufacturing environments as endemic hazards or strategies for eliciting public sympathy and mobility futures goals.

I discussed some of these issues with one of Australia's more vocal onshore refugee activists, Jenna, at her home on the mainland, which also doubles as her office. Photos of Che Guevara paper the walls; the shelves are lined with books on neoliberalism, anarchism, and socialism. Jenna was characteristic of the refugee activist demographic – the liberal Guardian readership, able to afford the time to devote to refugee campaigns, and incensed at how her country could treat the prospecting migrant refugee. Jenna frequently interrupts our interview to receive texts and calls on her phone from others across the mainland and offshore activist teams. Having moved from oppositional politics elsewhere, she references Angela Davis several times, describing "the prison industrial complex around refugees," and reflects on her collaborational work:

It's really difficult because the media wants certain things. Even with the Guardian and the Sydney Morning Herald it's really tough because if it doesn't fit their agenda, it doesn't get published, you don't get a story. Even with the sympathetic media that does the politics of pity thing. I just got some photographs last night and I sent them on to the media knowing that the media's not going to do anything with them because they don't show the media what the media wants to see. The Vietnamese got hold of a camera and they took selfies - like any other 16, 17-year-old boys - and they have all these selfie photographs. And we're sort of going, "Nooo! Take pictures of guards beating you up." But they took selfies. Selfies of "oh here's me in my room," and "here's me near the fence," you know cos they're kids.

Despite the clear human consequences of imaginary curation, Jenna and others worked with offshore refugees and media to collate photos of self-harm, stories of waterboarding and sexual abuse to leverage for the end offshore campaign.

For Jenna, the moral value of the refugee was paramount. Jenna was certainly not paid in monetary terms. In fact, she and others devoted much of their time and finances to refugee activist work. Ironically, part of the reason why the Australian government has looked to offshore refugee processing operations to extractive sites in far-flung sovereign states is because onshore industrial fields are more accessible to labour organisers. Woomera and Scherger, the government's former processing sites, located in the far-flung outback, but still on Australian territory, were both marred by union-led riots, escapes, and fires (Jupp 2002), making it especially difficult to head off #RefugeeWelcome activity. But even in the Equatorial Pacific, life in Nauru was like life in a panopticon because of the mainland operational gaze, which operated at the extreme of extraterritorial oversight, and suffused the country with insecurity.

Writing of traders in Chicago's Board of Trade Futures market, Zaloom (2006) details how risk managers and company executives can watch traders' transactions from the comfort of screens at their desk. The physical intensity and aggressive affect of risk-taking are lived by traders on the floor. Here, the mainland activists were also insulated against the downside and upside of the market, unlike the offshore mobility speculators. Footage of hanging attempts, updated social media profiles of cuts, bruises, and infected wounds were circulated by offshore refugees to mainland divisions and on their own social media feeds to give continual veracity to the end offshore publicity campaign, and the suffering of the refugee.

For others, forcibly making themselves pregnant or requesting an abortion, which might enable their medical evacuation, was one high risk strategy, promoted by end offshore activists, for #RefugeeWelcome goals. Onshore labour organisers participate in these "romantic understandings" (Zaloom 2006: 109), the norms of which are shaped by the habitus of those on the trading floor. Disconcertedly, as has been described, forms of self-annihilation are presented as crucial trading resources, with refugees depicted as martyrs. However, "refugee agency" operates to the bodily destruction of the self-promoting refugee, further obfuscating the means of production and uneven labour practices that go into migrant to refugee. As Peluso and Nevins (2008: 12) point out, activists hoping to end extractive industries do not generally conceive of their work as modes of commodification – nor do those under assessment. As a result, "primitive accumulation has not disappeared but its forms have become normalized" under an anti-political or subjectivised frame. This as Peluso and Nevins (2008: 2) put it, obscures the "end product – the commodity as a thing – and its profit-

making capacities and exchange value,” which thus enables further accumulation with its attendant violence. It is also rooted in a fetishism that obscures the social relations that produce it as such a vital resource.

A Higher Risk Profile

Price in the ecosystem services marketplace, Morgan Robertson (2007) suggests, reflects the neoliberal preference for governance over government. Commodities are not self-evidentially given value but instead hotly worked out with and between civil society actors. Deciding whether to operate in a context requires calculating components of risk and value. Operational risk, ethical, and financial value all factored into any organisational decision to operate in the mainland and offshore refugee marketplace, be it from NGO or commercial firm. Organisations all conduct “risk assessment profiles” to verify if the money, time, personnel, and reputation of refugee and offshore work is justified. Several industry personnel informed me that the hazards that come with refugee work were firm detractors from pursuing a contract in any processing environment – mainland, offshore or otherwise – even if they did “similar work” elsewhere:

If we’re moving into a new geography or if we’re going into a service area we’ve never done before that is irrelevant of where it is around the globe we look at it through a risk perspective. So what are the risks? The contracts should consider all aspects of risk including ethical risks, potential risk of human rights violations etc. Working in immigration is a no go for us. We do similar work elsewhere, at least in prisons, people pretty much accept prisons, but you don’t have the moral outcry like you do with refugees. And the thing with immigration is that people are being assessed as to whether they’re likely to get visas. Depending upon a country’s policy that will determine how easy it is for different groupings to get visas or not. If government policy changes on that then that will change the risk profile on what you’re managing. If, all of a sudden, the national government turns round and says, “Right, we’re not going to give any more visas out,” then the asylum seekers know it’s simply a waiting game before they get returned to wherever they’re coming from. It becomes a very different sort of scenario.

This official like many others evoked notions of risk. Risk was largely related to the

particular hazards of refugee assessment, and the moral imaginary given global promotion around the refugee. The executive referenced the protracted nature of RSD – “the waiting game” – that leads to higher volatility, what Griffiths (2014) refers to as “temporal uncertainties.” In the context of an uncertain future and a far-flung operational context, the propensity for people to snap is on red alert extreme, which the industry director pointed to as shaping “a very different sort of scenario [that] changed the risk profile.”

When it came to the offshore refugee industry, the high risks attached led many organisations to drop by the wayside or take on behind-the-scenes roles, paving the way for others to enter the industry. Once small firms like Transfield Services Ltd. (now under the distancing name of Broadspectrum), an asset management company not familiar with the sector, bid for the small and controversial offshore contract, AU\$24 million for the initial period. Transfield had found great success over the years, expanding into a multimillion dollar corporation through long-term government contracts in defence, health, and infrastructure in remote and offshore locations. Transfield executives saw the lucrative nature of immigration services from other outsourcing competitors like Serco. However, executives knew they could not compete with businesses already in the mainland sector, deciding the offshore industry might be a good entry point to enter the growing market. The government’s mainland processing contractor, the British outsourcing company Serco, held off from bidding, as did GEO Group, the correctional firm who manage many of Australia’s prisons and immigration centres in the United States. Both had concerns around working in a remote and potentially volatile context. But Transfield went for Nauru’s relatively small and controversial contract. Managing Nauru’s offshore processing sites, the firm earned kudos with both the Australian and Nauruan governments by employing high quotas of local workforces and partially subcontracting security to a newly setup local firm. They recruited specialist refugee workers and cultivated an active company town culture, sponsoring local events and the football team’s jerseys, donating surplus RPC food and loaning equipment and labour, particularly when contracts were up for renewal.

“What Transfield Services did was very very clever,” an Immigration Department official commented. “They put in above and beyond their requirements, demonstrating their ability in the industry, and they’ve made a AU\$24 million contract turn into a one billion dollar contract as a result. We could soon see that these

guys have got the capacity and they're pitching us a product that fits with our political mantra." When G4S lost their offshore contract on Manus Island after highly publicised 2013 refugee labour riots, Transfield expanded their work to both offshore company town sites: taking on a AU\$1.2billion 20-month Manus contract in March 2014. Shares rose 45% with the contract contributing up to 20% of the company's revenue. At the time, like Nauru's BPC days, many refugee industry personnel bought in shares. When Save the Children lost their contract to provide welfare services for children and families following several incidents of promoting refugee activism in Nauru, Transfield expanded their contract to that role in 2016, recruiting former Save the Children employees into their firm.

But while offshore work is extremely profitable, an important factor that reticent tenderers cited is the extensive public and media scrutiny that comes with entering into the offshore environment. At the hands of Australia's pro refugee activists and anti-privatisation movements, taking an offshore contract is a reputational hazard. Protests are held outside organisational premises on a regular basis, in particular, those of contracted commercial firms – largely due to the refugee sector's growth history. Pro refugee groups and campaigners such as Corpwatch, Human Rights and Business, No Business in Abuse, and XBorderOps scour company's business and external activities, lobby shareholders, and showcase any potential areas of disreputable practice that give clout to the end offshore movement. It is popular campaign practice to cite the litany of rape and violent attacks popularised by offshore refugee activists as indisputable evidence of "complicity in gross human rights abuses" (Association with Abuse 2016: 4) and encourage investors to divest shares in contracted companies. Offshore refugee activists on Nauru frequently put together protest banners that paired swastikas alongside emblazoned logos of offshore contractors and the Immigration Department. They took photos, showcased on theirs and others end offshore Facebook pages, circulated through mainland media as evidence of Fascist practice.

Several firms have seen specific campaigns targeted on their business: Transfield Services and their subcontracted security firm, Wilson Security, in particular. NGO reports like *Business in Abuse: Transfield's Complicity in Gross Human Rights Abuses within Australia's Offshore Detention Regime* (2015) and *Association with Abuse* (2016) plague Transfield. Shareholder meetings are

announced through social and published media at the instigation of refugee activist groups:

Transfield Services has its AGM on Wednesday at the Sydney Mint, which was once a hospital for convicts ... rebranded "the Sidney Slaughter House" ... Just the place, then, for a company under siege by activists for running [Immigration Minister] Peter Dutton's detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island" (Glasgow 2015).

On entry, shareholders are met with placards reading things like "Transfield Stop Profiting From Abuse" and "Transylvania profits from rape, torture, immolation and oppression: shame shareholders shame," and routinely interrupted by protestors. On the basis of pro refugee lobbying and the HESTADivest campaign, superannuation fund HESTA sold its 3.5% share in Transfield, valued in excess of AU\$23 million (Rose 2015). This was followed shortly thereafter by NGS Super's divestment, which provides superannuation for private school teachers, both in August 2015. Just one month later, Transfield announced its new name change to BroadSpectrum after losing the licence to the Transfield brand earlier that year. The hashtag #BroadSpectrum immediately started trending:

#BroadSpectrum is quite a fitting new name for you @TransServices given your Broad Spectrum of human rights abuses towards #asylumseekers.

Wilson Security, similarly, has met with its fair share of pro refugee derision. Headlines like "Former Nauru guard says he saw aftermath of waterboarding" (Davidson 2015) and calls for explanations at Senate Inquiries are something of the norm.

The anticipation of these sorts of campaign practices detracted several mainland players from bidding for offshore contracts. The Labour government initially approached Red Cross to take on the contract for offshore management. In many Department officials' eyes, the international NGO had the expertise to take on the offshore contract. Red Cross was already an active player in the mainland refugee industry, discussed in more detail in the third section of this chapter. The Australian Immigration Department contract Red Cross to manage prospective refugees in rented housing across Australia's states and territories. Alongside this, Red Cross fund staff to regulate the human risks in Australia's immigration processing facilities, advising the government on safety improvements. However, despite having the requisite curriculum vitae, Red Cross also has high-level political connections. Senior cabinet

ministers occupy prominent leadership roles in the NGO. Many saw operating offshore as a reputational risk, advising executives against offshore work. It was on this basis that several industry players changed their names created new companies just for offshore. After I conducted my fieldwork, in the wake of the high profile “Nauru Leaks” Guardian campaign, the majority of contracted offshore firms announced their decisions not to renew contracts. Wilson Security, Transfield Services (by then BroadSpectrum), and Connect all abandoned offshore in close succession

For those who held offshore contracts, a lucrative mining district with a higher risk profile and accountability imperatives motivated a world saturated by prudence and foresight. Previous high profile industry disasters like the Nauru Riot of 2013, the death of Reza Barati on Manus Island in February 2014, the loss of high rolling contracts (G4S, Salvation Army, and Save the Children), stories of alleged abuse, shareholder consequences, a refugee drowning, and more were all firm incentives for offshore industrialists to develop an intensive corporate culture of risk regulation. Risk showed itself in contractual bidding but also in the “productive life” (Zaloom 2004) of the Nauruan offshore, as a constitutive element involved in the upkeep of the offshore refugee system.

On one occasion I sat with Travis, an Australian RPC security employee. We were helping to man the Rotary Club’s film screening fundraising event for local tweens. *Finding Nemo* was on in the background, projected on a shambolic put-together canvases; residues from the RPCs, which had their own projector and inflatable cinema screen, then in use for the weekly film club. As with most local events, the food was all donated out-of-date goods, no longer usable at the processing factories as soon as the best before date hit: boxes of mixed leaf salad, white and wholegrain buns, and a selection of pork, veggie, and halal sausages. I ask Travis about this extreme fastidiousness, the expiration date was just two days ago, the food is still fresh, and mixed leaf salad and wholegrain buns are like gold dust, rarely obtainable in Nauru’s spam-filled supermarkets. I think back to one of my regular swimming harbor acquaintances, Tanya, who always shared incredible epicurean delights from her packed lunch when down on open centre days out from the RPCs: kiwis and carrot sticks, often intricately bubble wrapped, all flown in from Australian suppliers, remarkably fresh, never out-of-date. Travis remarks:

You can’t have workers and asylum seekers getting gastro. Companies in

Australia get sued for things like that. I mean our firm, the Immigration Department, will get huge claims directed at them if anyone gets sick. And, you know how it is; it's such a hot environment. That kind of thing will just be picked up on pretty quickly.

Travis' comment calls attention to the extremities of offshore industry regulation, which was made so visible against the lack of business regulation outside of refugee industry spheres. Suing for "gastro" and employee liability culture was all unheard of in local business practice in Nauru. What Travis' comment also signals was the effect of the extraterritorial end offshore campaign in stirring Nauru's refugee company town world, what the industry executive at the beginning of this section referred to as "under the spotlight." As much as the end offshore campaigners were part of making the business higher risk, they were also part of its regulation. The "hot" offshore environment, where nigh a day went by without end offshore media and legal exposes, served to induce a risk adverse culture that operated to the extreme. The biophysical properties of the offshore refugee mean that this particular commodity is entangled in its risk, and risk management, through collaborative choreography.

The final section discusses some of the occupational risks for workers in the industry. This is a business defined by emotional hazards that relate to the morality of the refugee as a commodity form. Because of the high-risk nature of offshore work in Nauru, in combination with its high-value(s) and constellations of legal standards and end offshore fear, ideas of risk justified the need for more financial investment, giving rise to a safety saturated environment that enabled industrialists to advance the company town district.

Australia's Safest Workplaces

Workers deployed to refugee processing sites are exposed to the risks that come with this commodity sector's mortal properties, its mental and physical pressures. As previous sections detailed, increased uncertainties and choreographic attempts are characteristic of manufacturing environments. Humans in process are exposed to institutional confinement, long and protracted bureaucratic waits, restricted visa stipulations and behavioural guidelines, which often leads to sudden releases of pressure. This has led to occupational risks much higher than other sectors. Nowhere are these dangers more acute than in Nauru's offshore context. For some workers,

occupational risks are related to the ethical values attached to refugees, and are psychological and constitutively physical in nature. This was particularly the case for those employed in the main elements of refugee determination work whose daily tasks revolved around preparing people for the assembly line or questioning them about nightmarish pasts so as to determine their product purity. Refugee defence lawyers, doctors, RSD Officers, Tribunalists, and interpreters all referred to the vicarious trauma of collating, listening to, and judging human brutalities: giving the stamp of self-harm veracity, acting as ciphers and relating frightening narratives of harm, producing photos and documents that looked to prove escape from persecution.⁵

“I have to have counselling, I have to, that’s what helps me through,” one Immigration Department RSD worker told me. “If you don’t then you’re a psychopath.” I spoke with interpreters, some from similar regional backgrounds, certified as refugees themselves, who felt deep affinity with people working to be refugees. For them, relating narratives of suffering was no easy feat, nor for many industry personnel was the discharge of the crude non-refugee. “I deal constantly with self-harm and threats of suicide, very much so,” one Transfield worker said. “And when they’ve not been accepted as genuine I have to play a part in helping them accept that reality. Sometimes that’s meant taking someone to be deported after I have built up this trusting relationship.” “People describe it as a moral sickness. I’ve had senior people in the Department of Immigration, asking me for psychiatric advice, saying that they feel that the compromise that they’re in and every day going to work to do bad things to others is making them feel ill,” a mental health advisor in Australia told me. “One woman had breast cancer and said to me, “I believe that I will be punished for what I’m doing by getting my breast cancer back.”” It is no surprise that because of the operation’s high-value, these risks have been naturalised into industry procedures. The Immigration Department’s contracted corporate counselor Davidson Trahaire Corpsych, also a regular in offshore oil and gas rigs, started a fly-in-fly-out service for refugee industry workers in Nauru’s offshore rig. Between October 2011 and December 2015, the Immigration Department spent AU\$17,043,906,75 on corporate counseling contracts, far greater than any other government division (Australian National Audit Office 2016). All offshore industry employees had counseling provision in place, even counselors themselves, following their fly-in-fly-

⁵ See Mares and Newman (2007), a collection of autobiographical accounts of the reasons and challenges behind advocates’ involvement in the refugee sector.

out stints.⁶

As with other human industry sectors, many occupational risks are also physical. In leverage attempts for moving to Australia, physical attacks and destruction to property were the sine qua non of offshore refugee work. Refugee workers, expat and locals, described dealing with protests, physical threats and bodily harm, learning how to administer a “grip and hold” on someone if attacked and industry protocols for dealing with self-harm, lip-sewing, and starvation. Although many locals left phosphate and other employment for better refugee industry conditions and pay, it was not easy work, I was often told. Local workers described how several prospective refugees, not wanting to be in Nauru, took to actively making derogatory comments, gestures, and actions, in the knowledge that they had the global support of the #RefugeeWelcome movement. “It’s horrible doing that kind of work. Some of the asylum seekers were smearing faeces all over the RPC walls, leaving all the taps on to waste the water and make Nauru go into drought. They don’t care. I stopped working there. I couldn’t do it,” one recently resigned Nauruan security worker said to me. Some prospective refugees would taunt refugee workers, I was told, because if touched they could circulate photos to the mainland refugee friends with captions of “Nauru Guantanamo,” “waterboarding,” and “refugee maltreatment.” Another local worker said:

It’s not nice working up there. Some of the things people do. Refugees throw their shit on the wall and say to cleaners clean this it’s your job isn’t it. It’s an easy job, but you get abuse all the time. Many locals have been sacked cause they’ve retaliated. You get abused and you have to step back, you can’t do anything, everyone is in fear of the asylum seekers. They’re pissed off cause they can’t go to Australia and the media laps it up.

In fact, having more locals employed in the industry not only had the advantage of cheaper labour (AU\$4.25 per hour in comparison to the majority of expats on AU\$80,000 - 100,000 per year with air fares, accommodation, and daily living allowance on top, all tax free), but it also reduced the prospect of organisational liability for high-risk industry. Large-scale menial facility employment and lower run

⁶ Several former industry workers, particularly former social workers, have published articles, given interviews or become high profile end offshore spokespersons because of the moral repercussions of offshore work. See the ABC’s radio interview with Save the Children’s CEO, Paul Ronalds in 2015, explaining the NGO’s contractual involvement in Nauru. Similarly, the Australian Financial Review’s 2015 interview with Diane Smith-Gander, the former Chairman of Transfield Services.

administrative positions brought Nauruan employment, later used as a public defence when problems emerged further down the line. For example, after high profile riots on Manus Island in 2014, in which one person was killed, it was local Papua New Guinean security guards who were charged. The tragic event was blamed on the lack of industry professionalism of Manutians, transferring risk to an Othered party under discourses of underdevelopment.

Although expat contracts are lucrative, workers operate on long fly-in-fly-out cycles. During my fieldwork, six weeks on two weeks off was standard among offshore workers. Unless high on the occupational ladder, most employees from refugee security, teaching, and resettlement agencies bunk two in a donga room. Shifts are usually long: forty hours a week with one day off in between. Commonly, most people I spoke with used “off days” to sleep and recharge. Many told me how they would spend their two weeks off surfing in Bali or camping up Brisbane’s Gold Coast to “detox” from the challenges of offshore work. On days off, workers were usually found holed up at the Thursday Ladies Night in the Joules Bar or at the tuna buffets and karaoke nights at the Menen Hotel. Farsi interpreters amped up Arabic bubblegum pop starlets like Fairouz at full blast. Wilson’s Security workers swapped numbers with Save the Children social workers in efforts at escapist diversion. Many frequented the Nauru Hash House Harriers weekly walks, plunged in the harbor for a swim or surf or swapped frothy DVDs to keep themselves busy. “I just come away and want to punch someone. I have to read trashy books, Mills and Boon that kind of stuff. I have to do that, just to make sure that I don’t go mad.” “Britney Spears is my go to,” another social worker said.

Others came from work in refugee encampment sites, military conflict zones, and mainland processing centres and found the work “easy to deal with.” Former Serco workers working for Save the Children, Salvation Army for Transfield Services, Wilson Security, and so forth. Several welfare and resettlement employees said that they were used to working in a securitised factory environment, some familiar with “grip holds” and deescalating self-harm threats including using Hoffman cut-down knives. For some of them, it was a “natural” part of the working day to be on constant alert and know how to “de-escalate volatile situations.” “I’m used to this, I worked in immigration centres on the mainland and on Christmas Island,” an ex-Serco worker now Save the Children told me. “This is nothing like Iraq, nothing,” another ex-army now security worker said, pointing towards some of the

“humanitarian-security complexes” (Duffield 2001) that are a part of this industry. But while the work might be “nothing like Iraq,” that some employees came with CV experience in conflict zones and others versed in grip hold techniques emphasises the routinisation of violence within industry procedures. Zaloom (2004: 366) notes that the daily practices of the working lives of financial traders “encourages the production of subjects who can sustain themselves under high-stakes conditions and thereby draw profit from economic risk.” Like Zaloom’s traders, risk here has also produced subjects who can sustain themselves under high stakes conditions. Although, as the high-risk nature of this business makes apparent, they hardly profit from their practices.

Industry personnel classified Nauru’s refugee processing operations as “high-risk” because of the particularities of future uncertainties and media scares that shaped extreme levels of risk. With the constant threat of media coverage and industry exposes, workforce personnel were monitored so closely that safety-saturation often bordered on the extreme. Security personnel wore cameras on their vests, recording all their actions in case of accusations of abuse. Refugee workers filed minutiae incident and injury reports on anything related or unrelated to the industry, and underwent regular performance reviews. “There are guidelines about everything now. About emergencies and what’s to be done in the case of any event. It’s a very vulnerable environment for protests. The system operates in this ultimate Kafkaesque bureaucracy, there’s organisation to the nth degree, everyone always has their eyes on you. It was very confronting when I first got here,” one industry worker told me. “You can’t put a foot wrong here. The next thing you know it’s on the Australian news.”

Indeed, Nauru’s operation as a Commonwealth workplace was the specific point of argument for groups of legal campaigners hoping to bring the offshore processing site onshore.⁷ Legal firms and networks like the Australian Lawyers Alliance put together class action suits for offshore breach of duty of care, making submissions to the numerous Parliamentary Inquiries that have enveloped the offshore industry over the years. Lawyers from the Melbourne-based Alliance in particular FOI’d incidents reported to Comcare, as the federal workplace health and safety inspectorate, in the hopes of successfully ending offshore processing. Barrister Greg

⁷ See the Australian Lawyers Alliance’s 2016 report *Untold damage: workplace health and safety in immigration detention under the Work, Health and Safety Act 2011*.

Barnes argued:

Nauru is a Commonwealth workplace, it is part of the extended geographical jurisdiction of the Work, Health and Safety Act. There is a duty of care that is owed not only to workers and contractors in Nauru in the detention centre, but also a duty of care owed to any person who comes on to that site, and that of course includes asylum seekers. The Department of Immigration, to be frank, is probably running the most unsafe workplaces in the Commonwealth (Carter 2016).

They argued that many of the incident reports they had received from offshore refugees and industry workers were not notified to Comcare as the Australian regulator of work. Although Comcare health and safety inspectors were regulars on the Nauru company town scene, as the next section will detail, by putting pressure on the Immigration Department and contracted firms to conform to the zenith of health and safety guidelines, the hopes of these end offshore legal teams was that the financial investments required in conforming Nauru's corporate landscape would be too extensive. Ironically, it was partly the scrutinisation of offshore processing by legal firms and refugee industry professionals, who constantly received and publicised statements of offshore refugee suffering, such as those compiled in the "Nauru Leaks" campaign, that not only produced new risks, but also extreme spaces of offshore regulation. Because of the immense amount of political economic value invested in the industry, these points of end offshore argument had the effect of continuously safety saturating offshore operations.

This was also the case with the campaign practices of some of Nauru's more vehement offshore refugees. The refugee body became entangled in the reproduction of capitalist industry as a key contributor to securing the supply chain. As one campaign practice, some offshore refugees in close contact with mainland refugee activists were on the lookout for any ways in which the operations fell amiss. The lack of asbestos removal controls, out-of-date food or medical supplies, which fell outside Australian OHS guidelines, were always picked up on and circulated to give authority to the end offshore movement. The following is an example of the often-terrifying images that would be circulated by end offshore refugees as evidence of medical neglect so as to give power to the end offshore campaign.

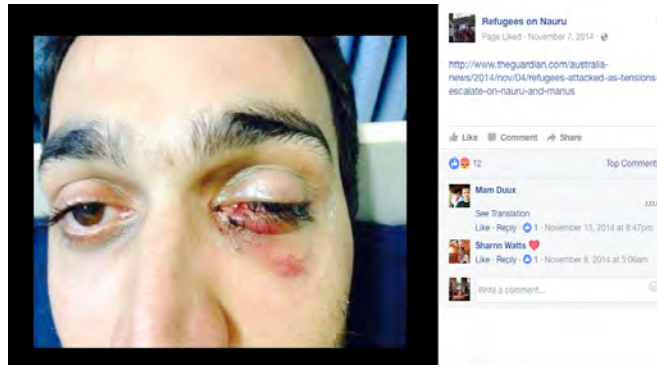


Figure 3.6: Refugees on Nauru Facebook Page

Sourced from Facebook Post. 7 November, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/Refugees-on-Nauru>.

In these sorts of practices, the representation of risk for onward moves was key. But because of the political economic currency of the offshore trade, end offshore campaigns only had the effect of “civilising” the Nauruan processing state in line with mainland industrial operations. Refugee activists only contributed to supply chain sanitisation, continuously flagging ways in which the operations fell short of mainland standards. Like the Egyptian design flaws described by Mitchell (2002: 42), it was an important aspect of the “politics of technical expertise” that the desire of the offshore refugee to be in Australia not Nauru was actively ignored. Instead, industry personnel brought elaborate risk adversarial procedures from the mainland to control the operational risks that might hamper the slick running of the processing operations. Extensive mainland-style policies for self-harm, Food and Fluid Refusal (“FFR”), Voluntary Starvation (“VT”), Psychological Support Programmes (“PSP”) became standard safety features enacted across the company town. The Australian government steadily invested over AU\$26 million in enhancements of Nauru’s medical provisions, continuously expanding Nauru’s operational capacities for when certified refugees entered into the company town district.

In Nauru’s phosphate industrial heyday, local complaints and indigenous rights movements led to the bucolic company town scene. Now, obstetrics and mental health provisions, paediatric, cancer and computerised tomography scans, a surgical wing, seconded and elaborate training systems were some of the development effects of end offshore endeavours. More disturbingly, Nauru’s Minister Adeang, put forward a proposed amendment to the Nauruan Crimes Act to legalise abortion in Nauru, just for prospective and certified refugees. The rationale here was to reduce the propensity

for medivacs of offshore refugees into the Australian moral economy.⁸

But human-made disasters erupted on an everyday basis: some symptomatic to the manufacturing workplace, others to the particularities of the offshore supply chain. Dreadful tragedies in the resettlement districts such as the spate of self-immolations in the summer of 2016, including the death of Omid Masoumali, who set himself alight during a UNHCR Mission, exemplified the inescapable human volatilities of Nauru's offshore business despite the incredible amount of effort to achieve the goal of risk avoidance or reduction. The total number of recorded self-harm incidents rose to 216 at the RPCs between the twenty-month period of 1 July 2013 to 25 May 2015 in addition to 355 prescriptions of psychotropic anti-depressants (Australian Government 2015). But as quickly as risks were produced, they were perennially managed by more industrialists and more institutions, well versed in how to make the company town resistant to human hazards, which might otherwise result in the demise of the offshore operations.

The third section in this chapter looks in more depth at the international inspectorates that extrapolated to Nauru. The firms that I will go on to describe have taken on a fetishistic power as “modes of organizational and regulatory control” (Power 2007) over the risks endemic to the supply chain. The transcontinental trade in humans for processing, distribution, and consumption owes its existence in part to the work of these agencies and their recommendations for minimising the impact of unfortunate events and deliberate disasters. In the offshore refugee supply chain the particular properties and moral appeal of the commodity are central in leading to the solidification of the offshore processing site. Risk creates value for the circulation of more industrial flows.

Part Three: A Transparent Supply Chain

Frontier life,” Watts (2015: 217) writes “is characteristically volatile and turbulent, associated with forced commercialization.” The oil frontiers that Watts describes are risky because of corporate cost-cutting and collapse of government oversight and regulatory authority, writing:

The oil companies in Ecuador and Nigeria had substantial autonomy and

⁸ The amendment was removed after strong criticism in local parliament in fear that it could set a precedent for legalising abortion for Nauruans.

license to do what they wanted and without recourse; they had the backing of the military and indeed had their own security forces; their operations were congruent with a long lineage of local demonic capitalists (whether rubber barons or slavers) and acted rather like authoritarian local governments. In the space created by a history of prior violence and a slick alliance in which enormously powerful companies can act without local or global accountability—the state ensures this unaccountability in-country and the lack of a body of international law at the level of global responsibilities (Watts 2001: 8).

But the distinguishing marks of Nauru's refugee frontier are *increased* industry transparency not secrecy. Higher volatility is related to the mortal and moral authority of the commodity form in which people commodify themselves, but for onshore not offshore processing. As with Nauru's UN Civilisational Trust regulation days before, there was an extreme amount of on-the-ground oversight from the 2012 offshore project beginnings. Because of the controversial nature and significant private sector involvement, the Nauruan company town had to be in line with Australian refugee industrial standards. Having decided to push ahead with the scheme, neither the Australian nor Nauruan governments wanted the political or economic devastation of a High Court challenge that saw its reversal. As per the Expert Panel report and stipulations of numerous industry personnel, representatives from international and state monitoring bodies needed authorisation to enter Nauru and tour the many locations of the refugee processing and settlement operations. The Nauruan government was chief in ensuring that the formula of refugee processing extrapolated to their company town district. Keen to have individuals trained in refugee social work, psychology, and law to firedamp an explosive terrain, they agreed to many of the best manufacturing practices, most from the very beginning. As refugee processing has developed into a high-risk enterprise over the years, more organisations and individuals have come to take an interest in its regulation, helping to strengthen the supply chain. This is even more the case with the offshore refugee industry.

When I arrived in Nauru, the offshore refugee fields had become an object of intense international interest. Medecins sans Frontier, British legal academics, and Australian clinicians all made an appearance during my fieldwork. Fly-in-fly-out factory inspectorates of Comcare health and safety personnel, Commonwealth

Ombudsman, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, the Australian Red Cross, UNHCR, the UN Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture, and more, were all firm fixtures around the company town district. A JRS nun was in permanent residence, as was a Fijian human rights lawyer from the Pacific Islands Lawyers for Human Rights Network, employed by the Nauruan government. Even a Danish parliamentary group requested state entry; later denied with local concerns as to the motives behind their curiosity. The Nauruan government had encountered problems in the past after granting visas indiscriminately, genuinely trustworthy, boastful of the state's design feats, inviting everyone from Amnesty International through to Angelina Jolie. At first, not everyone understood that others outside Nauru might not be as enamoured of their Pleasant Island as a site of refugee processing, and especially resettlement. But years of Nauru "prison island"/"refugee rape" diatribe, snuck in cameras, and sensationalised "refugee exposes" soon made the Nauruan government sensitive to the risks of granting someone access to their company town district, which could jeopardise the boomtown operations. Nor were they particularly willing to grant access to the majority of industry players when waves of offshore refugee suffering nearly always followed in their wake.⁹ It was this culture of trustworthiness that made Nauru subject to phosphate wealth predation, partially leading to their first boom then bust days.¹⁰

Australian government staff, advisors in chief, are all too aware of which agencies the Nauruan government should allow in and which are likely to enter with end offshore pro refugee agendas. Similarly, many Nauruan bureaucrats are now well versed in mainland industry politics, requiring little assistance in identifying the major league proponents of the end offshore campaign. Familiar activist faces of the refugee mainland campaign, only out to destroy the offshore rig site, became blockaded

⁹ See for example Amnesty and Human Rights Watch reports such as the most recent *Australia: Appalling Abuse, Neglect of Refugees on Nauru* (2016) and *Island of Despair: Australia's "Processing" of Refugees on Nauru* (2016), secret filming by the BBC with refugee rights activists in 2002, lambasting Nauru as a dump, then Nick Bryant's BBC Newsnight report (2012), in which Bryant was granted media access in June 2013 but relied on the consultancy of refugee defence lawyers and Nauruan government opposition, producing the standard offshore tirade.

¹⁰ In the phosphate wealth heyday, Nauruans became subject to a vast level of exploitation. For example, real estate agents grossly inflated the prices charged to Nauruan government for investments in Melbourne, making vast profits (Hughes 2004). The Nauruan government was also advised to invest AU\$60 million into banking through the law firm of Allen, Allen and Helmsley who disappeared with the money, most of which was never recovered. Similar examples of wealth predation on the government occurred across Europe, the United States, and the Pacific.

names. Industry personnel that soon took a pious pro refugee/end offshore bent, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Human Rights Commission, were later not granted company town entry.¹¹ “Why would we let them come here?!” one Nauruan government worker said to me. “Look at this stuff they write, they just want to bring everyone to Australia,” as they pointed to headlines like “Nauru, Australia intentionally torturing refugees,” Amnesty reports such as *Nauru Camp a Human Rights Catastrophe With No End In Sight* (2012), and Human Rights Commission publications like *Time to Rethink Offshore Processing of Asylum Seekers* (2014). Even though it only ever worked to their disadvantage, Nauru became synonymous with the words “unaccountability” and “dark island archipelago,” the high-value and risk attached to Nauru’s industry works led the Nauruan government to request the advise of regulators who would only make concerted efforts to develop strategies to manage risks, not deflect the endeavor from the business goals. Because state access was so coveted and the majority of staff so morally invested, the workforces that came to Nauru continually helped reinforce the processing sites through far greater advisory work than elsewhere.

Global Risk Management

It was a natural evolution for organisations to expand into the growing refugee industry sector, and then by extension Nauru. This step was facilitated greatly by the amount of industry firms already rife in Geneva, who have taken on something of “a fetishistic power” (Freidberg 2003) within the refugee supply chain. Although some of these workforces come from prison reform work, the moral economic interest of refugee work has led to more industry personnel than that of prison or other workplace environments. Referred to as “monitors” or “oversight mechanisms,” the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (SPT) are

¹¹ The Human Rights Commission is one of the few of Australia’s major industry regulators embargoed from Nauru’s company town scene, under much publicity from the end offshore lobby. Although the Nauruan government invited staff to tour the district, the Commission’s formal workforce exclusion relates to their public stance against offshore processing. On the mainland, their work around refugees is similar to the Commonwealth Ombudsman in that they audit processing operations, but in line with international not state manufacturing legal guidelines. This has placed them in a somewhat adversarial position to the Australian government. They also, like the Ombudsman, as once with Nauru’s UN phosphate administration, have a consumer complaints branch where they receive complaints from prospective refugees about their processing arrangements. The Commission retains this aspect of their work in Nauru through email or letter, like in Australia. They also manage specific human risks in the PTA aspect of Nauru’s supply chain, which operates in Christmas Island on Australian territory.

the two major international workforces that focus on the risk management of Nauru's offshore refugee processing operations. Comcare Health and Safety regulators, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and the Human Rights Commission are Australia's principle inspectorates attached to the government. Each has a slightly different focus to ensure that threats from project failures, legal liabilities, or events of unpredictable root-cause are managed and avoided. Like the actuarial culture that Michael Power (2007) describes, these organisations are part of the industrial assemblage through which human threats are quantified and then confined so as to optimise industry practice.

Humanising the Battlefield

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the oldest and most regular of the risk management workforces that work on Nauru. Developed between philanthropic Geneva elites and European governments, ICRC was set up as a quasi-public/private government service industry NGO in 1863. The organisation was never meant to be pacifist, but an NGO designed to for "humanising the battlefield" and furthering democratic imperial ambitions (Barnett 2011).¹² Because ICRC started, and largely continues as an arm of state governments, requiring permission to be a part of securitised contexts, the organisation set the policy of keeping its observations confidential. This helped ICRC enormously and the agency soon gained access to all manner of military contexts and securitised institutional environments. The organisation expanded at a rapid rate, at the forefront of the aid industry rush across the early twentieth-century. When ICRC was created, the founding European governments agreed that in addition to deciding whether to allow ICRC to operate as part of the military effort, governments could set up national Red Cross Societies by acts of parliament or similar procedures. This option grew in popularity. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were soon set up to reign in the number of societies that proliferated worldwide. The organisation now consists of (1) the International Committee of the Red Cross, the overall Geneva-based body, (2) the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the collective network that draws together national Red Cross divisions, and (3) National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

¹² See Barnett (2011) for a detailed account of the history of ICRC.

National Red Cross societies are major refugee industry contractual players in Australia and worldwide, including in Australia managing “CD” workplaces, which the Australian Red Cross was at the forefront in advancing. The Australian Red Cross also runs a professionalised scheme of Humanitarian Observers, and the Geneva ICRC headquarters an International Detention Advisory team that provide technical advice on the running of factory environments. This work has a deep history in the ICRC’s growth, stemming from the early days of concentration camp and battlefield safety regulation (Aeschlimann 2005). In Australia, contracted supervisors and expenses-paid volunteers from the national Red Cross divisions make regular visits to Australia’s urban and more far flung immigration processing sites. ICRC Geneva’s Detention Advisory team flies out on field missions three to four times a year to add to the national team’s work. A Geneva ICRC representative represented their work as providing “technical advice.” They continued, “We have the role of expertise and bring another point of view.” The Red Cross work with industry contractors and their human commodities to improve manufacturing practice and identify points along the refugee supply chain where possible hazards may occur. They leverage for factory enhancements, minimising industry risks such as by advocating for improved medical and psychological management of raw materials.

Although there are now 190 Red Cross national societies worldwide, Nauru had no Red Cross Society unlike nearby Kiribati and Tuvalu. Since 2001, ICRC operations in the Pacific have been carried out by the Suva regional delegation. With no state military and little prior reason, the Nauruan government had largely stayed out ICRC’s interventions in the past. Nor was ICRC particularly interested in Nauru at the time, focusing on contexts where they provide added value to the industrial operations. However, in June 2006, when refugee processing was underway in its first operational heyday, the president of Nauru at the time, Ludwig Scotty flew to Geneva and met with ICRC representatives at their head office. Scotty signed the Conventions of 1949, two Additional Protocols of 1977, and Additional Protocol III of 2005, eliciting Red Cross’ assistance for the offshore factory environments.

ICRC offers its work based only on its own right of initiative conferred by the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.¹³ When a government signs the Convention, ICRC can offer its services. However, outside of

¹³ Article 5 of the *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement* establishes ICRC’s mandate to provide assistance and protection to the victims of internal disturbances.

international armed conflict, ICRC is dependent on a government's consent of workforce access to the country and its places of institutional confinement. The Nauruan government, like the Australian Keating government before them, was under no obligation to accept ICRC's work. However, the practical value of having individuals trained in refugee social work, psychology, and law to monitor and control the probability of catastrophic events is a key consideration, not forgetting the favourable image that results from acceptance. Many Nauruan authorities care deeply about their reputational image, maintaining a real pride in their processing operations, despite years of "guano island" now "refugee dark island" diatribe. "Some countries are eager to display a better image, maybe look more professional and we can really work with them," an ICRC representative commented.

For the Nauruan government, the involvement of the ICRC was an important part of securing the offshore refugee business; recognised as a consistent part of refugee industrial best practice. Importantly, the organisation provoked little threat in undermining the offshore business. Red Cross, for whom confidentiality is the operational axiom, has proved their utility across the centuries as a government hand. Over the years ICRC and its Australian Red Cross division have maintained a good relationship with the Australian government.¹⁴ Senior cabinet ministers in the Australian government occupy prominent leadership roles in the Australian Red Cross. Nor is the organisation in a position to critique the offshore processing site and lose coveted access to similar mainland industry contexts, for which they have become so renowned worldwide. "States listen to us. If we jump to criticising them it would undermine our credibility," one ICRC personnel commented.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Australian Red Cross was also on tenterhooks with falling membership and funding. The organisation is contracted to the Australian government for the majority of its work, including both CD factory management and as case workers, facilitating the processing and resettlement of prospective then certified refugees in Australia. Even though Red Cross funds their system of mainland site visits, the Immigration Detention Monitoring Programme, it is run under their overall Migration Support Program. Just after I arrived in Melbourne in August 2014, cuts and austerity budgets had spread across industry sectors from refugee processing to mining-related industries. The government had reduced the Red Cross' resource

¹⁴ The Australian Red Cross was in fact set up by then Governor-General's wife, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson in 1914. See Oppenheimer (2014) for a more detailed history of the Australian Red Cross, commissioned for their 100th anniversary.

quotas from 12,000 to 5,000 prospective refugee lives for the Status Resolution Support Service programme. As a result of the financial cuts, the organisation was forced to reduce its staff on the Migration Support Program from 800 to 300 workers across its state and territory offices. They were in no financial position to take an adversarial stance. For the Nauruan and Australian governments, the involvement of the Red Cross was an ideal way to obtain external advice for improving offshore safety regulations.

Although the organisation declined to take the contract for refugee management, which initially went to the Salvation Army, they did become heavily involved in working with both governments around operational improvements. In fact, for the offshore processing operations, they came to Nauru in far greater number than on the Australian mainland. Tripartite teams of ICRC and Australian Red Cross personnel regularly flew in and out to advise on the management of Nauru's industrial uncertainties, unlike on the mainland where only two forces are active. Since 2001, ICRC operations in the Pacific have been carried out by the Suva regional delegation. Professionals from the Suva-based ICRC *and* Geneva ICRC head office fly in and out of Nauru on a regular basis. These would normally be the Red Cross branches tasked with this work but the Nauruan government also allowed in the Australian Red Cross from the start of offshore manufacturing as a regular in-country and on-call advisor to insulate against any frictions that might come in the way of the company town operations.¹⁵ For example, after the July 2013 labour riot, all Red Cross teams operationalised. ICRC staff flew to Nauru from Geneva and negotiated between labour factions (factory employees, in-process/certified refugees, and locals) about the causes of the riot and what could be done to correct the processing failures. They made operational recommendations to the Immigration Department and Nauruan government on the efficiency of the system. Regular discussion groups with humans in the processing stages would smoothen manufacture, integrating all members in working together to improve working culture. Consultation groups would ensure that grievances were aired before being brought to a head in fires and riots that might damage company town operations. They also worked with the Nauruan government in discussing local forms of risk management to smoothen the local/refugee frictions that soon developed, examined in Chapter 4.

¹⁵ The Australian Red Cross also run a Tracing Service in Nauru, like in Australia, where they link together refugees and those in the processing stages with family members internationally.

Safe Work Nauru

As my opening vignette made clear, the culture of health and safety standardisation that seeped across Nauru was noticeably stark. Traces of health and safety predated the refugee industry, particularly through the work of phosphate commissioners, but now found fruition on the basis of the offshore refugee industry. In Australia, each state and territory has its own health and safety laws administered by regulating agencies. A number of different inspectorates have been created to check Australia's different industries on points of occupational safety. Most are highly specialised and are related to each state and territory's dominant industry sectors. Overall Commonwealth inspectorates focus on state industry. For example, amongst state regulators, inspectors from the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority fly out to check offshore oil rigs in Commonwealth waters. Others from the National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme check high-risk workplace environments where employees handle industrial chemicals.

Comcare is the Australian federal government's general workplace inspectorate for health and safety compliance, established in 1988. Headquartered in Canberra, but with offices spanning Australia's states and territories, staff regulate the workplaces of most self-insured licensees under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. Comcare's inspections fit into two types: liaison inspections, where an Inspector may provide information and advice about health and safety matters, and compliance inspections, where an inspector may be required to use their powers under the WHS Act. As part of their site inspections, they go into federal workplaces, checking that they meet occupational health and safety standards as required by the Act and Safe Work Australia's many regulations, simultaneously helping industrial sectors to mitigate against identified risks through tailored programmes. This includes such tasks as suggesting additional regulations and workforce training, and resolving occupational disputes, all of which seek to craft, as Comcare's motto states, "Australia's safest workplaces." They rarely prosecute under the Act but in place of civil proceedings make enforceable undertakings for government departments to address.

But, as with so many standardised industry procedures, at the dawn of 2012, Nauru did not have a health and safety inspectorate: best before dates often ignored,

and risk adversity not usually a concern, especially in the hazardous phosphate industry. During the Labour offshore closure years however, Comcare had become familiar faces across Australia's mainland processing sites. With the blowouts and spills so common across the industry network (suicide, riots, and employee depression), Comcare had been granted access to Australia's processing centres, including Christmas Island in 2010. They helped the Immigration Department and their contractors identify and control hazards in the workplace, including checking factories not just for general workplace hazards such as asbestos, emergency evacuation and fire hazards procedures, but also the many risks bespoke to the particularities of a human commodity (policies for self-harm and suicide). By the time of Nauru's reopening, they had developed a specific toolkit tailored to the processing workplaces, in which the mental health risks to employees was brought to the fore as were the specifics of a human commodity.

Like Nauru's other more tempered risk management teams, Comcare were allowed in from the beginning of the reinstatement of the offshore enterprise. In 2012, they conducted a liaison visit to Nauru to meet with the Nauruan government, Australian workforces, and prospective refugees in the factories. Comcare employees, familiar with checking Australia's mainland processing sites, observed and spoke with contracted workers and those under assessment about the operations of the RPCs and associated OHS issues. Since that time, fly-in-fly-out inspectors from Comcare's Brisbane office regularly travel to the coral atoll to check that the refugee processing operations meet Australian OHS standards. Sometimes this takes the form of liaison inspections to check the safety of the workplaces. In the wake of the 19 July 2013 riot when so many teams honed in to protect Nauru's offshore deposits, a Comcare team made a visit to assess the offshore processing operations. They used the associated OHS guidelines and subsequent Hamburger report commissioned by the Australian government after the riot.¹⁶ The Brisbane team commended the subsequent improvements made to the offshore operations, identifying "no significant WHS issues," "food safety is to Australian standards," "hi-viz vests are worn."

It was partly at Comcare's behest that the effects of OHS prerogatives were so

¹⁶ After the riot, the Australian government commissioned Keith Hamburger, a former director general of the Queensland Corrective Services Commission, to externally assess the reasons behind the protest. Hamburger (2013) praised the "professionalism, dedication, hard work and courage of DIAC and Nauru RPC service provider staff," but made recommendations for a strict risk management approach for a high-risk operational environment.

palpable to me across the company town district: in stark contrast to the OHS-less phosphate zone. As discussed, OHS is engrained in the contractor practice that spread across Nauru's refugee corporate landscape, producing the spatial phenomenon that Detlef Müller-Mahn (2013) terms a "riscscape." As firefighters and policemen frequently interacted with refugee industrial worlds, Nauru Rescue & Fire Service and Nauru Police Force teams were all given training programmes on how to bring Australian-style health and safety protocols into their practice. Refugee industry firms also gave contracted local tradesmen training on meeting Australia's OHS requirements. They would advertise the value of road safety at local public events, including recommending seat belt usage, not talking on mobile phones, and other practices that make a defensive driver.

Health and Safety has been a new system for Nauruan workforces to get to grips with. Many locals in Nauru I spoke with were at first bewildered by the "traffic management plans" and "food safety management processes" that came to Nauru through the work practices of the offshore refugee industry. During my fieldwork, I would come across corporate health and safety laminates in the most surprising of places. When visiting an acquaintance, Jeanette, at phosphate administration headquarters, the shiny Transfield laminate START: Stop, Think, Assess, Review, Talk leaped out from the dusty documents piled on her table, which otherwise instructed how to reduce high-risk phosphate leachability. Jeanette later told me she had done some work at the RPCs, in which she was required to complete her START right's training before, adding, "It's tough working up there. All those guidelines, ways of doing things I haven't had to do before." As more refugees moved certified across Nauru, industry regulators like Comcare regularly flew over from Brisbane to check the entire state's compliance under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. In fact rather than criticising the processing operations, they recommended similar company town arrangements for handling the industrial complexities across Manus Island.

Risk Managerialism to the Extreme

The other notable international watchdog involvement was that of the UN Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) on the basis of Nauru's ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Prevention Against Torture (OPCAT). OPCAT is the

financial success story of the international NGO, the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT). Founded in 1977 by Jean-Jacques Gautier, a retired Swiss banker and lawyer, and primarily funded through European government support, APT is a powerful lobbyist for the utility of international regulatory enterprise in the form of SPT advisory involvement (Morris 2016a). Now ratified by 76 governments following 2006 UN accreditation, OPCAT requires signatories to allow a small team from the SPT to have unrestricted state access to any site of human storage.

The SPT are much like the Red Cross teams except that they conduct their advisory work on an intermittent basis, usually once every two years, depending on their regional workload. Made up of a pool of twenty-five high profile human rights professionals, lawyers, and psychologists, the SPT are one of the newest additions to what one SPT controller termed, “the monitoring cottage industry.” By the time the SPT workforce was in global jet-set operation in 2007, immigration processing centres had exploded in global popularity. As discussed in the previous chapter, these new holding environments involve lengthy periods of human containment during the assessment process. They have also attracted a huge moral outcry, protested by many refugee industry spokespersons as unsuitable prison-like environments for the prospective refugee. As with other institutional storage sites like mental health asylums, immigration processing centres are significant environments for SPT counsel as they seek to shape an international consistency of standards.

The work of the SPT teams is a bulkhead to the ratification requirements of the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Under CAT, the Committee Against Torture team, made up of ten eminent international professionals, provide similar but more intermittent technical advice on for example human-to-room size ratio (commonly 10m²) or workplace culture and administration. The difference with the OPCAT is that ratification also requires the signatory government to set up a further state inspectorate or “national preventative mechanism” (NPM). Supplementing the SPT, the NPM is an in-country workforce that makes more regular visits to human containment sites, in some cases relatively unannounced. NPM teams report back to the institutional authorities, relevant government divisions, and the SPT on their findings and recommendations for operational improvements. NPMs can either take the form of pre-existing Ombudsman-like workforces, entirely new agencies or local visiting groups. The majority of the Subcommittee’s work is in advising and assisting in the creation of state auditing teams. Similar to the Red Cross, but operational on a

more regular basis, NPM representatives, usually elected or volunteer lawyers, social workers, and medical clinicians, are sent out to tour factory floors, observe and make comments on the running of operations: so as to “prevent” against, not “react to,” industrial risks.

Much to the consternation of the international legal community, Australia is party to CAT but not OPCAT. In 2009 the Rudd Labour government signed OPCAT but never gave it full ratification.¹⁷ Instead, Australia’s many mainland refugee processing sites remain under the regulatory eyes of the majority of other workforces that came to Nauru, including also the active refugee industry network and local visitation schemes. Like Nauru’s BPC yesteryear, in which an incredible amount of work went into protecting the mineral assets, through for example the WHO and SPC, it was now the Nauruan government who elicited the full raft of international advisors to protect their new mortal assets. In order to cushion against financial loss and adverse publicity, they again went one step further than Australia. As soon as the offshore refugee enterprise was reinstated, they ratified CAT in September 2012. Then, in desire to show full industry best practice, in fear that similar offshore activist cases like those that quashed Malaysia might befall their company town dreams, they became the 67th State Party to ratify the OPCAT in January 2013.

When I was in Nauru in 2015, discussion of the SPT and NPMs was in the air. The SPT came to audit the factory town operations (a Bristol human rights lawyer, Manila psychiatrist, and Oslo psychologist), toured around all the state’s places of human containment: the police station, prison, “able disable” centre, RPCs, and refugee resettlement dwellings. Tours of the RPCs are common in the offshore industry. The Nauruan government and Nauruan RPC managers maintain great pride in the workings of what many see as *their* facilities. They often give dignitaries showcasing tours tacked on by – if time allows – a visit to the phosphate factories. The government and factory management are also keen to be guided by international expertise from others well versed in the industry.

End offshore campaigners could find few loopholes to pick with this element of industrial control, particularly as it exceeded mainland standards. Because the SPT’s reports are not made public, neither could offshore campaigners find operational ambiguities in Nauru’s offshore processing sites, and legitimise the

¹⁷ In 2017, Attorney-General George Brandis announced that the government would ratify the OPCAT by the end of 2017.

framing of Nauru as an exceptional risky site. What was quickly picked up on by mainland campaigners was the creation of a Nauruan NPM. Immediately after the SPT's visit, targeted campaigns leaped into action, questioning when the Nauruan government would create an NPM, circulated as evidence of state despotism through mainland media headlines. In Nauru, the creation of another precaution-based inspectorate provoked a great deal more questioning. One government representative pointed to the many management teams already in place – local visiting groups, and refugee buddy schemes, which the final section will describe – questioning the value of another regulatory workforce. However the imaginary of Nauru as a lawless dark land is one that has found popularity in the end offshore campaign. Mainland activists continuously publish statements that accuse the Nauruan government of running an operation with minimal oversight, a stance often unquestionably adopted by global media. The denial of the Human Rights Commission, later Amnesty and Human Rights Watch were already upheld globally as indisputable evidence that Nauru was a dark island of refugee beaters. The Nauruan government recognised that not creating an NPM, even if in name only, could retain a great deal of activist clout even if the processing operations were already fine tooth-combed to the extreme.

A Nauruan Ombudsman

The creation of an NPM intersected with the Nauruan government's move to create a Nauru Ombudsman as a more regular local inspectorate, with the help of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and Pacific Ombudsman Alliance.¹⁸ Under DeRoburt, in Nauru's first wave phosphate independence, the first Nauruan government set up loose legislation for an Ombudsman Act; provisions of which were never enacted as the entire country let loose in spending sprees. The government took on an almost operational façade. In 2004, with the coming of the refugee business, the Nauruan government under Ludwig Scotty looked to constitutional reform (Ratuva 2011). The Scotty government was comprised of a group of young reform-minded politicians. They had just overthrown the Rene Harris government, amid accusations of financial mismanagement. It was Harris who brokered the first refugee processing deal not long after election in 1999, but even when phosphate wealth was squandered, played as if the golden era never ended, commandeering Air Nauru's remaining jet for shopping

¹⁸ The Pacific Ombudsman Alliance is a development network of regional Ombudsman teams, set up under AusAid in 2003.

sprees to New York, and maintaining a Melbourne penthouse. The young politicians, some of who remain in cabinet, including Waqa and Adeang, were determined to re-launch Nauru onto the world stage through a National Sustainable Development Strategy, aimed at achieving government transparency. Many of the Nauruan public were deeply distrustful of the government after the catastrophic phosphate bankruptcy. Many lost their entire savings, blaming government mismanagement for the dramatic crash that was still so evident across the small sovereign state. A major part of the 25-year strategic plan was constitutional reform in a programme sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to provide assurances to the Nauruan public now that the state economy was resurging through refugee wealth.

During the reform consultation process, suggestions included the establishment of an Ombudsman. The inclusion of an Ombudsman as a government checking bureaucracy has become a popular component of liberal democracies (Bokhari 2004). Developing in Sweden in the early eighteenth century, Ombudsman offices proliferate on a global scale: from Canada and the United States, through to Mauritius, Fiji, and Australia. Each of Australia's states and territories have Ombudsman offices, including an overall Commonwealth Ombudsman office, within which is a specific department that supervises the Immigration Department's operations. They focus on regulating the manufacturing-specific threats presented to labour forces, including raw materials along the belt line. They deal with complaints from workers (made up of prospective refugees and industry contractors) about standard operating procedures in the industry environments. Under section 468O of the *Migration Act*, they also check the specifics of any human who remains on the assessment line for a period of more than two years.

When refugee processing restarted in 2012, the Nauruan government had yet to enact the state Ombudsman vision. The constitutional review process initiated in 2003 was shot down by a no confidence public referendum in 2010: wherein lay the bedrock for enacting an Ombudsman inspectorate. For many of the Nauruan public, the government remained associated with lethargy and corruption. At the time, there was also minimal political economic imperative with the refugee trade loss from 2008 to 2012. Little global interest lay in the Nauruan government's affairs or in the welfare of the state population. But despite having no Ombudsman, the government wanted to make the processing operations to as high – or indeed higher – standard than elsewhere. Regulations are much stricter around this particular manufacturing

business when it comes to Nauru. Nauru has become associated with images of dodgy backwater tax haven practices, and now out-of-sight refugee brutality.

Many in the government were also morally invested in this particular human processing enterprise, wanting to bring in the full expanse of institutional procedures. Without a state Ombudsman in place at the time, they permitted an Australian Commonwealth Ombudsman team to regulate Nauru's processing sites. Like their work on the mainland, the Ombudsman team that came to Nauru also audited the different processing and resettlement environments against Australian standards: examining for example the psychological management programmes in place, so as to protect the environment against commodity uncertainties. They do not check individual human assessments as in Australia. In Nauru this purificational phase is already overly combed, as described in the previous chapter. In any event, all prospective refugees are now off the belt before two years elapses, in a system built by the best of Australia's refugee industry professionals, and the help of trade regulators around the globe.

But in Nauru, the Waqa government's resolve is to relaunch the state onto the global stage as part of a second wave independence drive, now with built-in transparency. The majority of Nauru's regional neighbours have state Ombudsman teams including nearby Tuvalu, Samoa, and Papua New Guinea. In their Rebuilding Nauru program, the government created a Leadership Code Select Committee in 2015, again to canvas the public about their leadership expectations and the idea of having an in-house Ombudsman inspectorate. Although many in the public were still disinterested, the imperatives for a state Ombudsman have become more pressing, particularly as the government want to promote themselves as a regional refugee processing site.

In collaboration with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, UNDP's UN Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption consultants, SPT, and other interested parties, the government started to envision what a Nauru Ombudsman would look like in their company town context. It was decided that the new Nauru Ombudsman should be an expatriate appointed by the Chief Justice to avoid charges of nepotism. It was also envisaged that the new Nauruan Ombudsman would take on a supervisory function of not only refugee processing and resettlement environments, but also the entire company town district according to manufacturing and local laws and regulations.

All went submitted as evidence of the processing state's extreme safety manufacturing standards, which met the demands of the Australian refugee consumer. In one of many embattled attempts to address mainland refugee cruelty allegations, Baron Waqa (2015a) wrote in the Australian Daily Telegraph:

The processing centre for asylum seekers is world class and far exceeds the standard of many refugee camps across the world ... Previous governments had let down our people and were rife with cronyism and corruption. This was a major part of the problem that saw our nation squander enormous wealth a number of years ago. Nauru is progressing. In the last two years, as well as reforming the legal system and government-run companies, we have established a future fund with international oversight so that corruption can never again ruin our country.

But the Waqa government's words met with little airtime play when countered with end offshore refugee suffering presentations. In the mainland imaginary, the refugee as a species ranked high for activist salvation, whereas the Nauruan ranked low. Instead, Nauru was made to blame for a wide range of hazards attached to the business, even when regulated to industrial perfection. Nor could governance controls reach into every corner of industrial life, in which mainland activism played such a powerful role. The fetishism of the refugee for mainland importation is – like phosphate fertilising desires – a powerful thing. This speaks volumes to the fragility of offshore extraction sites, but also the subjectivised refugee discourses from which they are given rise.

Neither did the many mainland managerial teams that came to Nauru want to promote their role in perfecting the state's high modernist but morally dubious operations. Ironically, professionalism and image consciousness is the reason why, like the ICRC representative pointed out, many state governments are keen on the involvement of safety teams. Risk management thinking is an “ethical resource of corporate governance” (Power 2007: 137), which enables large organisations to govern their reputation. But few of the risk controllers who came to Nauru agreed with the system of regional processing, not least resettlement. This lead many to conceal their involvement, as did contractual practices of operational secrecy, some to refuse later to assist or still more, keen to actively volunteer their operational expertise, fearful that Nauru's processing system might otherwise fall below par.

Amnesty, for example, assists in the governance of factory sites and refugee

processing operations on the Australian mainland. They work with labour contractors, including prospective refugees, organising worker's complaints-style forums, like the UN Civilisational Trust mechanism through which Nauruans once found phosphate governance utility. Amnesty had helped with improvements of Nauru's system in the early 2012 start-up days. Staff flew to Nauru, posed for photos with government officials, and commended the system's workings, making operational suggestions to control the impact of threats from project failures. But then as Nauru's operations progressed from processing to resettlement, they targeted Nauru, later creating petitions like "Demand the Australian Government Ends The Secret Abuse in Nauru," and releasing reports such as *Islands of Despair* (2016). They later gave interviews in Australia and worldwide where they accused Nauruans of savagery, of substandard and brutal conditions for refugees, to the Nauruan government's perhaps naïve surprise.

These perennial attacks of course provokes questions as to the operation's sustainability, not least the clear supply chain inequalities made possible on the basis of a regional operational framework. But harking back to my overall argument, the "manufactured uncertainties" of Nauru's operations, depicted and self-depicted in terms of refugee suffering/offshore oppositional frames, also enables the cyclical reproduction of the commodity. Instead, industry representations and commodity self-representations of the at-risk refugee feed the resource cycle of law, value(s), and fear that advances offshore commodity worlds. Disaster images of the offshore suffering refugee are entangled in many in the Australian public's compassion fatigue and the Australian government's exasperation, having the counter effect of deepening refugee processing into Nauru's Pacific industrial sites.

At the same time, the extension of the supply chain also riles others deeply invested in the industry's moral economy into advancing the improved handling of downside risks. The explosion of monitoring organisations in recent years into this industry sector, as just described, is part of the commodity's particular appeal, which is driven by an immense moral zeal. Although risk management was often good business, many of the organisational representatives I spoke with came to Nauru because of a Kantian ethics of care. Many were morally wracked about their involvement in the offshore processing sites, handing me books on the oft-cited "humanitarian crux." But rather than conceptualising their work in humanitarian paradox terms, I find it more appropriate to consider their work as part of a global

value chain. The understanding of the industry in humanitarian paradox terms illuminates the abstraction of the refugee as a commodity form, in which moral and financial values play such a large part, and the centrality of global governance within the overall coordination of commodity chains (Gereffi 1994; Morris and Young 2004).

The final section in this chapter discusses some of the local forms of risk management in Nauru. These many local risk management practices were devised and grew on the basis of the risks that developed from a high-value human commodity. The projects here described exemplify how high-value mortal – no longer mineral – deposits now define Nauru's priorities.

On Company Town Responsibility

Local managerial practices made clear how much the elaborate systems of health and safety I encountered tied into the offshore refugee as a high-value but high-risk commodity-being. As my opening vignette detailed, the culture of health and safety standardisation that seeped across Nauru was noticeably stark. As with so many of these industry schemes, they all revolved around the value-laden refugee. The Nauru Lifeguards were one of the more notable local examples. At the time of my fieldwork, Nauru operated on a four-day open centre schedule, but the timings sometimes differed. I often sat at the boat harbor on open centre days, chatting with prospective/certified refugees, some down from the RPCs. Most were not versed in or too excitable to worry about Nauru's maritime terrain. Cannonballing off the boat harbour sides, venturing into uncharted waters was a popular pastime. The chance to jump in and cool off from life at the processing sites put concerns of sharp-edged corals to the background. Several down from the factories had never swum before and I witnessed some narrowly averted catastrophes. The new Nauru Lifeguards team was always quick to work: all learned in CPR and rescue techniques from Australian lifeguard certification, constantly plastering and bandaging everyone's hands, feet and knees.

Nauru did not have a Surf Life Saving Club until the refugee business resurrected. There were no lifeguarding patrols or stations at local swimming spots. This is not to say that drownings or other incidents have not occurred. The currents off Nauru are treacherous. There are only a few spots where locals venture to swim

and even then most people stick close to the shore. However most locals are well versed in the rip tides and corals, the majority strong swimmers. With no local instigation, little prior reason nor financial capital, the Nauruan government had not set up a lifeguard team. When Nauru reopened as a processing site, the then Salvation Army contractors and the Australian Immigration Department decided that it would be more cost effective to task a local group with the guardianship of offshore refugees at Nauru's popular swimming sites. Previously, the Australian government sent security staff with surf lifesaver qualifications to keep watch over the beaches when prospective refugees were out from the State House factory compound.

For the second industry resurgence, the Nauru Surf Club piqued the interest of the Salvation Army, looking to ensure the preservation of the offshore refugee. Started in 2011 in the industry gap years by an expat phosphate worker, the Nauru Surf Club was an informal group of keen locals who met weekly for swimming and surfing. Although made up of adept swimmers, Nauru's surf club was not a lifeguarding squadron but a group of keen trainee surfers who hit the breaks at the end of the day. Lifeguarding or "surf lifesaving" is a firm feature of Australian coastal life. Because the majority of Australia's major towns are coastal, most states and territories have lifeguarding services set up in popular swim spots. Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) is Australia's peak coastal water safety authority. Made up of over 311 affiliated Surf Life Saving clubs that operate across Australia, SLSA is the largest volunteer lifeguarding movement in the world. The entry level qualification to become a SLSA surf lifesaver is the Bronze Medallion in Public Safety. The Bronze Medallion course is tough, usually run over a period of six to eight weeks, involving both theory and practical training, and a final assessment of patrolling and lifesaving skills. Surf lifesavers must be competent swimmers, skilled in rescue techniques, resuscitation and first aid.

When offshore processing restarted in 2012, the Nauru Surf Club had only just begun to blossom. The group had no sponsorship, only a few second-hand boards donated from Australian charities, and an old bus from the Nauru Police Force. In early 2013, the Salvation Army obtained funding through the Immigration Department to fly trainers over from SLSA who trained and assessed over forty locals as professional Australian lifesavers. In April 2013, the Nauru Surfing Club inaugurated as the Nauru Surf Life Saving Club, a SLSA accredited non-profit. Several locals in the club reached the level where they were then able to

professionally train others as Australian lifesavers. Like other SLISA clubs, the Nauru branch soon expanded into other activities including a programme of swimming lessons at the boat harbor through a mainland-style Nipper junior lifesaver program. But while Nauru's new lifeguarding squadron started building steam, it was still a leisurely pastime. There were no lifeguarding patrols or stations at local swimming spots. Everything changed dramatically two years after refugee business arrived.

On 22 June 2014, a newly certified refugee, living in resettlement housing, drowned in the strong undertow currents at the Gabab channel. Two locals ran in to save him; one also drowned in the attempt. Covered by all the mainland papers at the time, the Australian government took quick action to ensure that no similar drownings occurred, which might have repercussions for the offshore processing site. The time of the drowning also coincided with the start of open camp circulation and prospective refugees descending, certified, for resettlement into the company town district. To ensure a regular lifeguarding presence for Nauru's swimming hubs during peak refugee circulation periods, the Immigration Department financed the professionalisation of the Nauru Surf Life Saving Club. In 2015, lifesavers all became paid public servants within the new National Emergency Services Department, setup to merge all safety and emergency agencies, which expanded from Fire and Rescue and Ambulance divisions into Life Saving.



Figure 3.7: Refugee Guardianship

Transfield staff notified the lifeguards each week of open circulation days. Teams of Nauru lifeguards were always stationed from 11am to 7pm at the Gabab channel and boat harbor swimming spots with lifeboards, jet skis, and soon a new umbrella emblazoned "Nauru Lifeguards." I swam most days down at the boat harbor. Lifeguards would usually be present outside of OPC circulation, but on active policing duty at OPC times. This is not to say that the Nauru Lifeguards did not

rescue several young local swimmers. At other times, they ran projects in schools, teaching children on rip current safety and protocols. But refugee safety formed the core of their work – and the reason for their growth. When Nauru was in company town circulation, the lifeguards were busy tending to the constant risks that arose from offshore refugees. Waiting lists were long to become a lifeguard and the dedication and effort that many put in was impressive. I met former government administrative employees, phosphate workers, and even several certified refugees employed as lifeguards. Some completed more specialist certification courses (Ocean Survival and Powercraft Aquatic Rescue training), flown over to Sydney to work with Surf Life Saving New South Wales lifesavers on Bondi Beach. The latter option of course restricted only to locals; offshore refugees strictly barred from Australian entry.

At other times, the refugee risks that lifeguards regulated intersected strongly with the politics of the offshore suffering spectacle. I watched Nauru's young, motorbike-riding refugee contingent jumping off boat harbour sides, venturing into waters that Nauruans, well versed in the currents and corals, had warned them to avoid. With little incentive to follow the regulatory code, some of those in the assertive end offshore movement took the line of "if they put me in prison who cares" and "they can't touch me, I'll contact the Australian papers." On one occasion, I observed three young men, all certified refugees, who arrived at Anibare boat harbour. Wildly jumping and shouting, beer cans in hand, they ignored the lifeguards' pleas to "quieten down." The lifeguards grappled with what to do. "We knew if we called the police they'd just tell the campaigners in Australia that the Nauruan savages took them away and locked them up. Or maybe even that we assaulted them," one lifesaver later told me. "Some of these refugees just think they're above the law," another added. I talked about what happened later with one of my closer informants, James, certified as a refugee. He said, "Yes, for some of them it doesn't really matter. They just want to get to Australia. It's not nice for the Nauruans, but they don't care about that." The event did in fact end with the arrival of the police who took them to the station, shortly released with a verbal reprimand. I mention this ethnographic moment because it was indicative of the particular level of risk that some offshore refugees presented. Even enterprise developed for refugee risk fought to control these sorts of tensions.

The lifeguards were important examples of the amount of regulation that went into ensuring the safety of and thus securing a high-value but high-risk commodity.

They joined other staple mainland regulators such as the Red Cross, Comcare, the SPT, and the Ombudsman as important parts of risk avoidance within the offshore supply chain. In fact, it was because of the Nauru Lifeguards' success in securing the processing site that they also helped develop risk avoidance strategies for other company town regions, helping with the first PNG Lifeguarding Service in Manus Island. Nauru Lifeguards flew out to Manus Island, the seat of the Australian government's other offshore refugee processing site, working to develop their lifeguarding force for refugee company town safety.

Company Town Responsibility II

Not only was every aspect of the mainland industry set up applied to Nauru and more, but also internal controls flourished as "a distinctive mode of organizational uncertainty handling" (Power 2007: 35). A large number of local voluntary regulatory schemes emerged across the industry heyday. Like in other states with entrenched processing systems, Nauru has a number of equivalent visitor's schemes in place of interested locals keen to keep an eye on the handling of Nauru's operations "from the inside." As has been described, many locals took jobs in the industry with the very goal of helping with refugee protection. Resident Kirbati, Fijian, and Marshallese nuns from the local Catholic convent made to and fro visits to the factories, as did often Nauru's President. It was also common for local groups to make regular visits back and forth to the RPCs. Soccer games were held most Friday evenings at RPC 2 with local friendlies between Nauruan and refugee-in-process teams.

As the next chapter will show, global discourses of risk impacted on some locals' commodity perceptions. Some locals were intimidated by the fears that possible Taliban refugees might present, and the very real hotspots of risks that were the product of human-made disasters. As a result, the Nauru Rotary Club attempted to set up a Buddy Scheme between locals and those at the RPCs in the company town district. On notable occasions, the RPCs would break into local life. Nauru Independence Day, 24 January 2015, for example was marked by visits from the Itsi Dance Group and Culture Department Choir. Angam Day on the other hand, the biggest blockbuster of the Nauruan calendar made the RPCs abuzz with local activity. Storytellers, craft weaving, stick dance group, and string figure players all in abundance. I was even asked if there was anything I could contribute to the weekly

corporate calendar, which put me at a loss.

The hazards and harms of the processing operations was of course not explicitly the subject of these projects. Suicidal threats, violence, and self-harm were secondary to the disciplinary whitewash of celebrating refugee art and song through well-orchestrated musical and artistic talent shows, discussed in more depth in Chapter 5. Part of the work of some of these involved individuals, such as church groups, was in furthering risk management, albeit benignly, in the Foucauldian tradition, as a technology of power. For example, I spoke with nuns who would talk at long lengths with processing migrants in the RPCs, recommending that they not self-harm. Company town events were all actively encouraged as ways to assuage the blowouts and spills so common to the refugee manufacturing trade. But with the extreme amount of mainland coverage of Nauru as an “ungoverned territory,” some locals took it upon themselves to investigate the stories circulated by end offshore campaigners, creating their own forms of environmental protection. Writes Benedikt Korf (2013) of Sri Lanka’s civil war aftermath, “landscapes of fear are not only internalized imaginaries, they are also the product of a material re-working of the physical landscape.” Here, locals lived with a higher level of alertness of the uncertainties that their commodities presented in everyday life.

I soon meet Jake, a phosphate truck driver by profession, but self-labelled human rights activist on the side. He tries to keep in touch with Australian refugee activists who inform him when they hear a “Nau-rumour,” which he goes to investigate. Jake described to me how at first he was excited to help out, wanting to make sure that the refugee environment was well protected on-site in light of the many mainland representations. He soon became disillusioned, remarking:

Those activists in Australia aren’t activists. They just take the refugees’ side. A lot of people are pretty angry about the lies that refugees spread. Like one time there was a refugee couple and they crashed their motorbike. Some locals stopped to help them. They told the media that it was the Nauruans who did the scratches to them! The locals said, “We should never have helped them!” That’s when I decided to get in touch with the Australian refugee rights groups to check out any allegations and see if they’re true for myself.

When I remark that I only ever see refugee suffering depictions, he answers with a sigh.

Other locals tried to combat the suffering-scape through social media, setting

up the Facebook group “Refugees on Naoero – Nauru” with the similar intention of responding to prominent mainland media reports:

Most refugee & advocate claims on Nauru fabricated to achieve goal to get to Aust. So called “reports” based solely on these claims #fact.

Fact Check:

-They're not being neglected medically. They have their own psychologists. Medical Personnel are at IHMS. There's also free medical attention from the “inadequate” (As privileged people with 1st world standards put it) RON hospital where they also have to meet the demands of the locals as well. Otherwise you wouldn't be receiving these "leaked" reports.

-They're getting free food, allowances, free electricity (With their own generators for subsequent power cuts), free water even bottled water is provided (Although it's the dry season. They still receive water from the desalination plant. Also apparently the provided bottled water are wasted through procurement management and if they were procured successfully, wasted anyway within the centres. Since workers have been giving them away or selling them to the Chinese)

-They're not locked up. They're free to come in and go as they please since last October. How else do you think they're sending these photos, videos, messages to everyone? (Refugees on Naoero – Nauru 2016).

However, Facebook group responses to offshore suffering claims and government and local “fact checking” Tweets garnered little publicity on the mainland. Rather, discursive practices continued to construct Nauru as a space in which refugees were at high levels of risk exposure from their environmental terrain.

Transparency, Kimberley Coles (2007: 197) argues, is a crucial component of liberal democracy. In the context of election monitoring in Bosnia-Herzegovina, monitors are both supposed guarantors of transparency to demonstrate that “democratic processes are open to societal scrutiny and examination” *and* hands-on mechanisms of democratic design. For people in Australia, Europe, and Nauru, the presence of Australian and European monitors created a more transparent and just

refugee processing operation. In the Expert Panel Report (2012: 34), Australia's refugee planners stressed that "effective oversight and monitoring are critical elements of any regional approach." The presence of management teams may have created a smoother industrial operation in the eyes of many individuals elsewhere, providing an accountability gauze and technical advice for curbing industrial risk. But, even as industry regulation met and often exceeded mainland operations, Nauru's more distant company town met with derision. Ironically, despite the compliance of Nauruan officials in constructing a "civilised" institution, often eating discarded OHS dregs, and bending over with regulatory zeal, Nauruans emerged as villains in the saga. Their efforts to integrate industrial best practice were overshadowed in terms of "under-development" and "the rule of law." Instead, they were blamed for hazards related to the manufacturing business. The exasperation of community tensions and Nauruan resentment were all grasped onto by Australia's end offshore teams, used to reinforce their goal of #RefugeeWelcome Australia.

The presentation of offshore exceptionality of course continues to fetishise the commodity by obscuring the inherently hazardous nature of production. End offshore discourses are part of a market-based political movement, centred on enveloping more human lives in Australia's refugee processing operations, and that of refugee economies of "developed" states elsewhere, also premised on privatisation, social control and regulation, and filled with many of the same transnational industry workforces and human harms as in the company town of Nauru. Even if a politically savvy marketing strategy, end offshore campaigners have the counter-effect of reinforcing the refugee trope that leads to the development of regional processing sites. Outbreaks of natural disasters and human-made risks perceived as global threats also reinforce the Australian public perception that refugees should be extritorially confined, further reproducing cyclical consequences. Refugee activists overshadowed Nauru's aspirational design through anti-civilisational discourses, while fanning the human relational risks of the industry, to which the next chapter turns.

Chapter Four:

Resource Frictions

Massive waste, corruption, and ecological devastation in oil-producing communities was matched by none of the rewards of petro-development ... The oil bust produced a right and proper resentment among oil-producing communities across the delta (Watts 2001: 202).

Dogabo Scotty mentioned on 30 July 1946 "It is hard for one to speak his mind openly here as one is liable get in the bad books with the local authorities." We speak about freedom of speech where democracy rules but it is not so here. Before ... the people were absolutely and unquestionably united. Now they are so divided that it is a very rare thing to find the people agree upon anything (Republic of Nauru 1994: 11).

Culture played an important part in the segregations that arose across the refugee company town district as risk became entangled in the uneasy interactions of locals and refugees. Scandals such as refugee riots and choreographed presentations of refugee suffering brought not only anger but also fear from local residents, government, and industry personnel. The dominant presentation on the global media scene remains the suffering and fearful offshore refugee. In reality, many *locals* I spoke with were scared of offshore refugees and what they might do to attract publicity in collusion with the mainland end offshore campaign. On one occasion, I caught a lift to the USP campus with a local staff administrator. "I don't pick them up anymore," she mutters, pointing at a group of hitchhiking refugees, immediately discernable in tight jeans against the heady Equatorial heat. "Accountability. If something happens and I crash, who knows what the Australian media will say." I get chatting with one of the school caterers, "We don't know what they might do next, so many of them are desperate to get to Australia, they'll do anything. We don't know where they're coming from. They could take us hostage. Make bombs from phosphate." "I'm so worried about having the refugee children in our school," a teacher at Nauru's Secondary School said on another occasion. "We don't want to touch or go too close in case they say we hit refugees. And natural things like kids pushing each other on the playground. The next day it's in the Australian news." But,

as with countless other examples, the teachers' fears were ignited several months later, captured in Australian mainland headlines like "Nauru Government denies refugee children are abused in schools" (Lauder 2016).

Anna Tsing (2005) uses the concept of "friction" as a metaphor for describing the conflicting social interactions that develop from resource extractive projects for distant markets. Tsing discusses the development of environmental movements that arose to defend the Kalimantan rainforests in Indonesia, and the communities of people who live within them, also imbricated within the system of cultural production. Drawing on Tsing, this chapter focuses on the uneasy labour relations that have developed between locals and offshore refugees, and within bounded groupings, from Nauru's latest resource extractive project. The biophysical properties of the resource are important to the particular tensions that arise. The power of the fetish as a trade tool for labour activist refugees in Nauru has made relations all the more conflictual. Mainland end offshore campaigners have played a large hand in stirring the country's social world exterritorially, as have many in the Australian media, sometimes in collusion with offshore activist refugees.

Affective representations are powerful. The tropes of the Nauruan island cannibal versus the suffering offshore refugee have gained widespread global authority, perpetuated the world over with articles splashed across the New York Times, the BBC, AlJazeera, and beyond. Orientalist legacies define both monolithic (mis)representations (Said 1978). The refugee's power derives from this commodity-being's mortality and morality, distorting the realities. The refugee as an objectified suffering third-worlder has clear audience appeal, ripe for mainland moral economies. The Nauruan on the other hand is more easily pathologised as a semi-civilised savage, a postcolonial continuity that reflects the low regard that once defined the early treatment of Nauruans' by phosphate pioneers. However, unlike phosphate days, this particular "primitivist perplex" (Prins 2002) has not worked to the advantage of Nauruans. By contrast, as this chapter will detail, it has been socially devastating.

But in combination with a lack of unbiased ethnographic research, it is unsurprising that headlines such as "We will f*****g kill you: Beaten Nauru refugees fear for their lives" (SBS News 2014) remain popular on the global scene. In reality, as this chapter will go on to detail, many social conflicts that develop in Nauru are the product of refugee and mainland end offshore campaign instigation, given massive global visibility, while riling local tensions. Some social conflicts are the product of

refugee scares, from which Nauru's offshore processing supply was first given rise. The majority of social conflicts are refugee on refugee attacks, distorted by global media, which erases Nauruans' perspectives. When examining the impact of media on people's quotidian lives, Ginsburg et al. (2002) describe how "anthropologists' social mobility ... allows us access to both sides – the reception by subalterns and the production by the powerful ... it can be awkward for those living and working "outside," in the more powerful West, to criticize national projects and the professional elites who participate in them." This chapter takes up this call in respect to the negative impacts of the refugee boom, mapping the social processes of media that have shaped Nauru's "out-of-the-way" (Tsing 1993) manufacturing lands. The appeal of the offshore suffering imaginary lies in its affective power. Reworking back to my overall argument however, the imaginary of middle-class activist intervention is anchored in an identity politics to which many mainland consumers are indifferent. Suffering ideologies only cyclically result in the promotion of the offshore supply chain.

This chapter consists of three main sections. I start by discussing the social tensions that have arisen between locals and refugees from both perspectives. Counter to dominant portrayals, Nauru's offshore refugees were incredibly well treated, but also enveloped in an industrial processing system from which victimised self-representations found mainland marketing appeal. This section examines how Nauruans have come to feel the brunt of rape and sexual assault allegations, which have ultimately worked to the disadvantage of offshore refugees, even as choreographic representations have enlivened mainland moral economies.

The second section describes new refugee community policing schemes that looked to assuage the fractious labour relations that developed in the Nauruan company town. These forms of institution building were devised on the basis of the risks attached to the offshore refugee. However, like so many of Nauru's high-value operations, Nauru's newest refugee workforce team could barely keep ahead of the natural and manmade risks in order to manage them.

The final section turns to the resource wars that have developed in Nauru as Opposition politicians have found funding from the media airtime afforded by this particular high-value commodity. All seek control over Nauru's resource-rich lands or its commodity-beings for export, which has riled internal tensions, while producing narratives ripe for end offshore campaigners. Throughout the chapter, I think through

some of the interplays of phosphate and refugees, through historical continuities and new resource intersectionalities.

Part One: On Commodity Hazards

When I arrived in Nauru, fear and anger at the offshore refugee was at a peak. The refugee riot of 19 July 2013 was firmly imprinted on many locals' minds, even when I conducted my fieldwork two years later. Many in the Nauruan public saw their role as state hosts to potentially persecuted refugees, leasing their land and contributing their labour to a benevolent extractive operation. As much as they were entangled in the financial economy of the offshore supply chain, many were also entangled in its moral economy, in a feel-good belief that they were helping to stop the loss of lives at sea, and protect the genuine refugee. This understanding bore deep parallels to the phosphate heydays when many Nauruans saw themselves as global providers within the food supply chain. For the refugee enterprise, government and industry public relations campaigns firmly encouraged a moral presentation to assuage local reticence of their new backyard extractions. When the operations began, headlines in the Nauru papers read first in 2001, "Australia asks Nauru for help," then in 2012, "Nauru again assist Australia with Asylum Seeker Issue," continuing, "Nauru is supportive of the RPC. Over ten years ago, the then Pacific Solution provided a great deterrent for people smugglers and stopped the unnecessary loss of many innocent lives. The Nauru Government is confident that can happen again" (Mau 2012).

When the refugee riot took place, some locals took to the streets, angered at the ingratitude shown by prospective refugees in the factories, but particularly when it was heard that the refugees had attacked Nauruan workers. Others fearfully watched from vantage points on nearby phosphate outcrops, using iPhones to film the incident to send to mainland media. Ministers went on the local Nauru Radio to calm everyone down and ensure that nothing more serious entailed. "I couldn't understand how they could do this to us. After the kindness we showed," one local said. Others maintained great pride in the RPCs, with their high standards of hygiene, far greater than that across the Nauruan locale. They were angry that prospective refugees would burn down the factories into which they had put a great deal of hard work and care. By the time I arrived almost two years later, Nauru's urban fringe was crammed with a certified refugee populace, over 500-strong, in which suffused a high level of

discontent. Large-scale incidents like the 2013 riot but also others such as protests, self-harm, and suicidal threats intensified as the operations continued. Without the move towards Australian distribution, as so many offshore refugees hoped, Phnom Penh holding little interest, and for some active fear, the number of explosive outbursts symptomatic of this high-risk business was far greater than elsewhere. Blowouts were also encouraged, as Chapter 3 described, by mainland end offshore campaigners, including some working surreptitiously within the industry.

One popular campaign strategy that some offshore refugees took was to circulate narratives of the “squalid conditions” across Nauru’s company town district. They took photos of Nauru’s hospital, its schools, its RPCs, decrying how they were “inhumane,” circulated to mainland end offshore campaigners. They promoted this angle to mainland media outlets and visiting end offshore teams, to which the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch Refugee Mission in 2016 is now to be added, in the hopes of leveraging for Australian moves. These representations were later proclaimed in industry narratives such as “Appalling Abuse, Neglect of Refugees on Nauru: Investigation on Remote Pacific Island Finds Deliberate Abuse Hidden Behind Wall of Secrecy” (Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International 2016) and the subsequent report, *Islands of Despair* (2016):

Around 1,200 men, women, and children who sought refuge in Australia and were forcibly transferred to the remote Pacific island nation of Nauru suffer severe abuse, inhumane treatment, and neglect.

Many Nauruans received these sorts of representations with a great deal of anger when in reality, refugees were something of an “occult” kind of commodity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), treated, like high-grade phosphate deposits, to the operational extreme. Throughout my time in Nauru, I was constantly in awe of the sheer amount of money spent by the Australian government on furthering the offshore operations. Outside of the investments into industrial manufacturing, described in Chapters 2 and 3, boxes of mixed leaf salad and wholegrain bread, halal organic-certified meat, smoked salmon and lobster, fruits and vegetables outlandishly out of place on Nauru’s import-reliant and largely spam-filled shelves were shipped in weekly from Australia for those being processed as refugees and their service industry, reworked by chefs flown out from the Antipodes. The Occupational Health and Safety-rejected dregs found their way into local events as Nauruans were often firmly positioned as second-class citizens, recalling the BPC company town enclaves

that once positioned the European (now the offshore refugee) high above the native.¹ The refugee resettlement houses where certified refugees lived in the Nauruan community all had air conditioning, wireless internet, flat screen televisions, powered by separate Australian serviced generators, which never went out, unlike Nauru's temperamental power systems. Specific refugee water salination tanks and Australian-run delivery services provided all refugee residents with fresh water supplies on a round-the-clock basis. Nauruans relied on the often-erratic arrivals of Nauru Power and Water Services' workforces, running state water needs from a dwindling supply of largely broken down trucks.

Nauru's education and healthcare systems were similarly import-reliant, under-funded, and under-subscribed, largely staffed by newly qualified or retired Fijian and Filipino teachers and clinicians. Teachers, doctors, and nurses worked in haphazard facilities, struggling to juggle multiple wards with dilapidated resources or classes over fifty children in number. But on top of the phosphate atoll, migrants in process were serviced by their own private healthcare and education system, with mosquito vector control systems, and plentiful medication. Everything was bespoke built in Australia to mainland standards and shipped out on cargo freighters. The Australian standardised factories were replete with a brand new football pitch and gym with upright exercise bikes and elliptical trainers, the former in use for weekly "football match friendlies." The processing centre school had interactive whiteboards, and specially contracted teachers from Brisbane, who flew in with lists of differentiation strategies for meeting the needs of diverse and specifically, refugee learners. The medical centre had cardiac protected emergency bays, a separate mental health wing, and family wards. The processing centre, an entire supermarket shop filled with Twix's, Mars Bars, and other Australian flown-out delights. Government ministers or those lucky enough to have factory connections could sneak in to use the facilities, but for the most part they remained purely restricted for the prospective refugee. Those processed as refugees then attended their own private healthcare clinic on the side of Nauru's Phosphate Commission-constructed hospital, replaced by the building of a new hospital that broke ground during my fieldwork. Once children, certified as refugees, entered the Nauruan education system, flown-out Australian

¹ See Appel (2012b), Ferguson (2006), and Vitalis (2007) for important discussions of the construction of company enclaves, which focus on the use of infrastructural power to exert worker control, but also segregate labour in resource extractive landscapes.

teachers – refugee specialists – supplemented every school across Nauru, with a new primary school later adding to the refugee company town growth spurt.

The majority of Nauruans I spoke with were angry at the dissatisfaction shown by their new resources in campaigns such as those incarnated in Nauru Leaks and *Islands of Despair*, through websites like Offshore Processing Centre Voice and the Facebook groups Free the Children NAURU and Nauru's Refugees' News. I heard comments such as, "I would be treated much better if I took a boat to Australia and got sent back here as a refugee." "They're rude about our schools and then look, the Australian teachers fly in. If we complained we'd get nothing!" "It's always the refugee sympathy angle," another local says to me, pointing to the latest books to enter the Nauru paperback press as an example of the ease with which mainland publics took up the suffering refugee line. She continued, "Some of these people have never even been to Nauru! All they care about are refugees!" My first day in Nauru, I head to the state communications provider, Digicel, in the hopes of connecting into the country's phone network. "No, we don't have any sim cards at the moment. You'll have to wait until the next load come in. Might be next week, depends on the flight schedule. They bought up the last batch for the asylum seekers at the RPCs." Every Sunday, refugee industry workers bid their farewells for the weekly Sunday roast up at the factories, again recalling the British Phosphate Commission Clubhouse segregations of Nauru's imperial yesteryear, from which Nauruans were firmly barred. These sorts of instances helped me feel the seething resentment of life as a local.

A major fear of most locals in Nauru was that of accountability as noted in my opening accounts. In contrast to popular media representations, the majority of *locals* had fears of offshore refugees and what they might do to attract publicity in collusion with mainland end offshore movements. Some offshore refugees had taken to staging graphic depictions of refugee beatings, attacking each other and then filming the aftermath, with campaign footage circulated to mainland end offshore teams as evidence of Nauruan on refugee beatings. They would post photos on their locally-maintained Facebook pages or those of others, like the Australian Green party Senator Hansom-Young, the spokesperson of the End Cruel Offshore Detention party campaign. The following is an example of some of the images circulated on the offshore-refugee maintained Facebook page, "Refugees on Nauru," which local accountability teams like Jake looked to investigate:

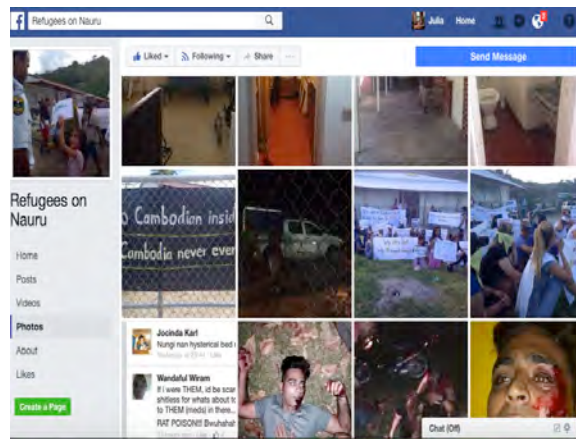


Figure 4.1: Refugees on Nauru Facebook Page

Sourced from Facebook Page. 3 February, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/Refugees-on-Nauru>.

Kathryn Morse (2012: 124) looks at the filmic representations of oil in North America, describing the development of a new repertoire of “oil disaster images,” which moved “beyond gushers and fires to include photographs of oil-soaked birds and other wildlife, crippled, dying, or dead.” This turning point, Morse argues, reflected the rise of modern middle-class environmentalism, characterised by “concerns of pollution,” “the fate of wildlife populations,” and “an oil embargo ... intensifying American anxiety over oil supplies and consumption.” Media environmentalist images, Morse writes, looked to create “narratives of guilt-ridden consumers as rescuers ... through efforts to save the helpless.” Like the image world Morse describes, but here catalysed by a morally fractious embargo, mainland liberal media outlets and impassioned activists promoted the affective imaginary espoused by offshore refugees. Some mainland campaigners that I spoke with were end offshore colluders; others were naïvely misled, all, like Jenna, were embroiled in the feel-good economy of mainland refugee salvation. As a result, the projection of the offshore refugee as a “wounded, powerless victim” gained widespread campaign appeal. Several more vehement campaigners, like Jenna, encouraged offshore refugees not to relent with sending more, greater images that captured the drama of “oil-spilled carnage” in counter to the threatening Nauruan, until salvation occurred. They truly believed that the image of the suffering offshore refugee would find end offshore success, making disinterested mainland consumers supportive of the offshore supply

chain feel guilty of victimising innocents, like the oil-soaked grebes that Morse describes.

When faced with these sorts of public relations strategies, many Nauruans feared that some offshore refugees might attack the fuel farms, attack their families or far worse, in the knowledge that the trope of refugee suffering held immense global sway. On one occasion, I sat at the phosphate administration offices, the conversation took the usual refugee turn, with the civilisational discourses levelled on Nauru again raised, “Fat. Lazy. Refugee beaters. That’s all they say. I get so angry at the refugees they just spread lies about us.” “I used to give them free clothes, buy anything they’d sell. Then look what they did to us. Telling lies. Saying we’re all rapists. The riots and fires, I don’t want anything to do with them. And we don’t know what they might do next. They’re dangerous. We just don’t know. It doesn’t matter to them.” “Fuck the refugees,” a group of teenagers shouted more dramatically, as they cycled down the street, which transfigured me back to Melbourne and the cries of people fed up with refugee evangelism at the side of a pro industry import rally. The litany of accusations of abuse and anti-civilisational diatribe targeted at Nauru blighted the mining metropolis with a higher disaster rate as tensions escalated between some locals and end offshore refugee activists.

Campaigners always leaped onto commonplace incidents such as schoolchildren playfights or drunken brawls as evidence of offshore refugee suffering. Whenever an incident involving a refugee, certified or otherwise, occurred in the factories or company town district, it was widely circulated by mainland campaign teams or other unquestioning divisions. Several incidents that did occur, “commonplace hazards” of refugee processing, such as sexual assaults between refugees in and outside the RPCs, were circulated by mainland media reports that obfuscated the perpetrator, insinuating that it was a Nauruan. In reality, few locals wanted to go near offshore refugees, scared as to what might eventuate, like the Nauru Secondary School teacher of whom I made opening reference. Even locals employed to manage human risk, such as the Lifeguards, referenced accountability relating to the hazards of offshore curation. A local lifeguard commented:

We wanted to offer swimming lessons to children from the RPCs but are so worried about what will happen with the whole “get to Australia” thing. We’re trying to get one of the refugee contractors to supply a carer. Many of the kids at the RPCs want to be a part of it but if they get bullied or bashed surfing it

could create problems when there's all these other mainland agendas. We have to be so mindful of politics here. Nauruans are often used as levers for another purpose. It's always, "look what the Nauruan did to me." We don't want the club tainted with that.

In interview with another local:

I'm also worried about refugees having access to materials to make bombs. They come from fighting areas we heard and we've seen these places on TV. We know they can do things and don't know what they might do here. If they're released and they have access to other material from the shops, they can mix it, and make their own bombs. There's a lot of real fear with that. We don't know these people and they don't know us.

As the latter comment signals, resource frictions also related to the particular narratives fixated on the commodity form. When it comes to phosphate, many Nauruans hold a mixture of feelings about prolonging extraction, attached to understandings of the pollutancies attached to the molecular form. Fears of cadmium emissions combine with the very real dust flares that envelop local backyards. In the refugee industry, fears of human pollutancy, Chapter 2 detailed, have brought refugee racial politics to the fore. The notion of the refugee as a Taliban threat or deviant attached to the human commodity form combined with the particularities of the offshore refugee futures trade, resulting in deep social segregations.

This is not to say that firm friendships did not develop on an individual basis: Nauruans entangled in a love-hate relationship with their now mortal resource. Many locals and refugees in and outside the RPCS became close friends through working or other social contexts. I often encountered deep acts of kindness between locals and refugees, sharing home-cooked cuisine, helping out with community projects. Some people would hang out at the boat harbor together, host dinners, and invite each other round for birthday parties, genuinely enjoying each other's company. Several locals purposely bought refugee-sold wares on the market, even when far more expensive than in the stores. On one occasion, I went to the small market in front of the Civic Centre hub for my Saturday afternoon shop. I get chatting with Sarah, a local political figure, but also an incredibly good cook, found as much in government corridors as selling freshly baked goods on the market. She excitedly tells me about a new project she has going, waving over Aisha, also a regular market vendor, living in Nauru down from the RPCs as of several months before. They animatedly tell me about their plans

to launch an Iranian Sangak flatbread project on the country's taste buds, but this one made, Nauruan-refugee style. With a bit more sugar added to the whole-wheat, they tell me, "we're sure to turn Nauruans round to a more healthy lifestyle," referencing the processed white loaves popular across Nauru. As Chapter 5 will detail, industry personnel, employed to improve company town culture, actively encouraged these sorts of relations. They would include "positive refugee community stories" in the local company town newsletter, much like the company town gloss of BPC old; the former of which, I will later argue, had the reverse effect of reinforcing refugee/non-refugee differentiation. Sadly, warm friendships were constantly distorted by the politics of the more vehement end offshore activists. They were also starkly ephemeral. Even when relationships developed I always questioned how long they would last. The in-country ruptures made clear the Australian capitalist interests of Nauru's refugees, and the fragility of the offshore industrial project as a whole.

Tragically, because of campaign choreographic practices, and unremitting "Nauru cannibal" taunts, conflicts did sometimes develop between some offshore refugees and locals. Often these were in anger at the end offshore campaign, which constantly stirred and shaped Nauru's waters. Locals always reminded each other never to rise to the bait because of the media distortions that would predictably eventuate, but for some, restraint was not always easy to manage. Some conflicts were also in relation to small town/new labour occurrences. For example, several of Nauru's new refugee residents slept with locals' partners; others trespassed on private property, picking coconuts from private groves, which angered many locals. The advantages afforded the offshore refugee made for further ruckus. A young motorbike-riding refugee contingent took to revving around Nauru's ring road at high speeds, doing wheelies in other's drives, in the knowledge that the refugee suffering line had incremental authority over anything local police officers could do. All conflicts were depicted as evidence of offshore refugee suffering in the global media amid the trope of island savagery:

Refugees attacked 'on a daily basis' on Nauru, human rights groups say – The Guardian (Davidson 2016)

Nauru refugee left with horrific head wound in attack dismissed by police – The Guardian (Doherty 2016)

"Be nice to the refugees, the government's always saying this, don't touch them, they'll just contact the Australian media and you know what they'll say. But why do

they have to be nasty about us!?” another local angrily raged to me, pointing both towards how refugee suffering representations mediated people’s relations, and the ways in which locals felt most sharply the reprisals of the government-sustained extractions.

On another occasion, I take a hike to a swimming hole in Nauru’s interior. Three well-intoxicated locals float about with cans of beer in their hands. Mosquitos and the stench of liquor quickly ward me away. “You’re not going to stay!? It’s because we’re savages right?” one calls out. “I’m a savage, I’m a savage, that’s what they always say,” another choruses in. I use this example to emphasise how some people embodied the imaginary narratives that operate on the global stage as much as refugee/non-refugee relations became infected with offshore representations. In his classic study on the impact of the media on Eskimos and on local communities in Papua New Guinea, Edmund Carpenter (1973) makes similar findings. He describes the destructive potential of “media myths,” which can lead to “media-induced distortions of human behavior.” Here too, locals became imbricated in the discursive universe that shaped their resource rich lands. It was not just the case that the media shaped labour relations, and at times embodied behaviour, but, in turn, the trope of island savagery also impacted on the feelings of offshore refugees in and outside the factories, and affected their internal social relations.

On Self-Commodification Anger

Several people I spoke with, newly certified or in process as refugees, also voiced concerns of living in a new and unknown locale, suffused by the media-scare imaginary. The popular media narratives and civilisational depictions of Nauruans promoted by mainland and offshore activists exasperated these fears. I speak with Frieda, streetwise enough, having lived for months in Jakarta, Tehran before, who captures something of these fears. She asks, “You walk alone? Outside? Really? Even at night? Have you heard some of what’s said about Nauruans?” Frieda, like others, knew little about the place she found herself in on the basis of the third country trading system. She was also fed mainland media narratives of Nauruans as threats, which mediated her and others’ social relations. Some of Nauru’s new refugee residents were far less experienced in living in a new place, particularly one far off the territorial grid, suffused with “torture complex” and “dark site” scares. They feared

venturing into Nauru's urban hubs once it was time to leave the RPCs as certified refugees. I met a group of young girls, Iranian, probably late teens, wide-eyed and excitable, down from the RPCs, always asking me to take their photos at local events. "I didn't want to come out to Nauru for a long time. I didn't know what they'd be like with everything I've heard." On another occasion I help Nastja, one of my close interlocutors, buy a freshly caught tuna from a local fisherman. "I never knew I could do this!" she exclaimed. "I've been so scared of approaching locals." Despite the many company town publicity schemes described in the following chapter, Nastja had read headlines like "Refugees attacked 'on a daily basis'" on the computers at the RPCs. Civilisational narratives impinged on and shaped her encounters.

Neither was being a refugee quite the resource dream many envisaged. No one I spoke with had factored in or indeed heard of UNHCR's system of "third country refugee resettlement": the supply chain segue that found them exported to Nauru. As Nastja makes clear, those certified as refugees found themselves in a complete unknown on the basis of saying they were refugees to Australian coastguards. "I didn't think that if I said I was a refugee I would end up here," I often heard. Jamal said:

When I took a boat it was directed towards Australia and I was told, say you're a refugee then you'll go through the procedures there. If they decide you're a refugee then your visa is for Australia.

The idea of "international human rights law" accorded a great deal of utopian authority. Many felt a strong sense of entitlement and notions of social justice around the idea of being a refugee. Some spoke of terrifying experiences, which should "by law" they said, make them refugees. They thought it woefully unfair that despite being certified as refugees, by the same Australian Immigration Department officials, represented by the same Australian defence lawyers, managed by the same contracted organisations, in an industrial enterprise extrapolated from Australia, their geographies of distribution tied them to Cambodia or Nauru. Watching twice weekly jets bound for Brisbane, eating Australian flown in cuisine, being told about expat workers breaks up the Gold Coast, sometimes even brought back souvenirs, rubbed salt in the wound of crushed mobility dreams. I was often quizzed about life in Australia and could tell by my interviewers' eyes the sense of unrequited aggravation as I answered their questions.

Many offshore refugees I spoke with had been living in Nauru for several

years, hedging their bets on mobility trading futures in stand off with the Australian government. They held out hope that the political party at the time might cave, and slip them in under the radar (as in the first 2001-2008 phase) or that the end offshore campaign would succeed. Each month then year that passed, they were sick and tired of the unknowns, unable to acquire visas elsewhere, even for a short visitation. Many were also cosmopolitanites, used to living in urban climes like Jakarta, Tehran, and Colombo. The majority placed a great deal of importance on their everyday appearance, contrastingly strongly, several locals also remarked, against the populace. Most looked as if they were expectantly about to emerge onto the Sydney Pitt Street shopping strip: immaculately dressed with slick hairdos, pencilled eyebrows, the best in Dubai air freighted fashion, mail-ordered or sent in via care packages.

I was often told by offshore refugees how there was nothing for them to do in Nauru. There was no cinema. There was no shopping mall. The gym outside of the RPCs was of poor quality. Fruits and vegetables were extortionate. They had to mail order in particular cuisine unavailable in the local stores, which sometimes took months to arrive. Frankly, the place was, in the words of one refugee, “a dump.” Meanwhile, many Nauruans flew in and out to visit relatives in Brisbane and Fiji, picked up goods un-purchasable on Nauru’s shelves, returned clutching stacks of shopping bags, as a result of refugee wealth. Expat workers operated on fly-in-fly out cycles, often of six weeks on/two weeks off paid leave, to which the majority frequently complained. It was common to overhear offshore workers moan about the trying nature of those six weeks in Nauru. Brought over bags of Maltesers and Skittles made life more bearable as did the “hardship allowances.” Usually, these conversations were purposely conducted out of earshot of refugees, but this was not always the case.

Many offshore refugees held onto a utopian vision of life in Australia as per the salvational imaginary promoted by Welcome Refugee campaigners. The majority saw Australia as something of a golden land of beautiful landscapes and experiences where, on arrival, the mainland refugee evangelists would support them in many of their endeavours. I was often asked about the quality of Nauru’s USP Campus. My interviewers rolled their eyes, asking what was the point of a second-rate education, not like... Australia. “Nauruans are unclean, obese, don’t know how to keep fit, not like on Bondi Beach,” I heard on several occasions. Several people I spoke with firmly believed that refugee welfare provisions in Australia were astounding, that they

would be supported in achieving their goals by their friends: the concerned Australian middle class activists. When I commented that I actually found Australia to generally be a bit misogynist and racist, particularly when it came to refugees, I was looked at aghast and corrected. It was clear that the #RefugeeWelcome utopia accorded a great deal of sway, as did the honeypot dream of the Australian refugee life. It was less clear about what that consumptive reality would be if it were ever attained nor what reactions might be to the reality of the rose-tinted dream: scanty welfare support, far-flung resettlement housing, waiting lists several years long, and a refugee racial politics similar to that in Nauru.

Some frustrations related to the power structure of vulnerability and welfare dependency that is part of refugee citizenship. Several refugees I spoke with were angered at the resettlement housing choices made by Australian contracted caseworkers. They wanted to be on particular sides of the country or with friends as requested. In Nauru, land is tight. High bartering value with the Australian Immigration Department enticed several entrepreneurial locals into leasing once coconut or phosphate land for refugee extractive projects. (For some persistent hagglers up to AU\$8.50/sq metre.) But with the refugee scares that envelop the community, few locals were interested in the prospect of a refugee living next door. As Chapter 2 detailed, fears of pollutancy resulted in the segregation of refugee bodies, relegating the human commodity into their own offshored in-country sites. Some leasing properties were enclaved in far-flung locations, one soon beside a new phosphate extraction zone. Fears of phosphate depletion encroached mining into new areas of once fecundity, where refugees resided, resulting in resource intersectional conflicts.



Figure 4.2: Resource Intersectionality

I observed outbursts of sheer frustration, once at the annual World Refugee

Day celebration, which was marked by a newly certified refugee throwing a chair across the room, angered at the accommodation allocation given to him by his resettlement caseworker when moving from RPC to atoll. This was but one example of some of the pressure cooker flare-ups that enveloped the offshore refugee industry. Being in a position of vulnerability was not an easy situation to deal with, particularly for parents, wanting to be seen as in control of sustaining their family, now having to, one older certified refugee said, “be nannied” by refugee welfare schemes. As the following chapter goes on to detail, many people also resented the Refugee Buddy Schemes, World Refugee Days, and refugee art displays that placed them in infantilising positions as suffering or empowered refugee victims, even as others used these commodity tropes to accrue capital for mobility futures Australia. Samuel said to me how he appreciated how warm so many people in Nauru had been to him, providing him with new clothes, bringing round nice foods, but he resented having to be reliant on others and unable to set himself up in the way he envisaged. He felt like he was constantly tiptoed around or talked to as if he was a victim.

For others, being a refugee was a constant source of embarrassment, particularly after having assured relatives that they were going to “make it big” in the Lucky Country. Having to request care packages c/o RPC Nauru was a complete reversal of the assurances made to relatives of their upwardly mobile trajectories when they left bound for Australia. Although, as the next chapter will detail, employment was fairly easy to come by, it was not in quite the form that several I spoke with had envisaged. Many questioned the point, unsure of where it would lead, particularly as so much of the refugee business just catered to the expat workers contracted to service them. Everyone received weekly refugee welfare cheques from the Australian government, unless in employment, but for some, this was insufficient to send home the envisaged remittances, and for almost all, the goals of building up a future life. “How can I build a livelihood here for my children?” Ruben, a middle-aged man, certified and now living in Nibok, asks me. “The education system is awful and what am I supposed to do? Deliver Rohingya takeaway each day to the Immigration Department?” His daughter looks on blankly in the background, unfortunately probably used to seeing her dad’s parental frustrations. Many Nauruans I spoke with also echoed these future uncertainties behind closed doors, saying that, “the refugees should be in Australia,” “that’s where they would fit in.” There were not enough possibilities for them here, and it was never supposed to be the intention that

refugees actually be absorbed permanently into their lands. But at the time, the Australian and Nauruan governments pushed against this onward supply chain actuality.

Outside of Australian placational efforts (the flat screen TVs, the air conditioning, the sim cards, and other high value nuances), those certified as refugees were also sometimes afforded lesser rights as refugee citizens. Most of the refugee discrimination related to the public anger or – as with the hitchhiking instances – accountability fear many Nauruans felt against refugees as a generalised entity. On several occasions, I observed Nauruan employees apply “no refugee” segregations on a discretionary whim. In one notable instance, I sat patiently at the Nauru Police Station, awaiting the printing of my Nauru driving license. A refugee walks in, always so easy to make out: well coiffured, elaborate eyeliner, dressed to the nines. She requests the same procedure I’ve just been through, theory test, and an application to drive a car, sliding over her refugee visa. The officer at the desk looks her up and down and says, “You know refugees can’t drive cars on Nauru. You can have a motorbike, that’s allowed, but not cars.” She looks aghast and produces her Iranian driving license. “But look how far back it goes!” Firm evidence, she says, of her driving proficiency. The officer refuses to budge on the matter despite her argument that she knew other refugees with Nauru driving licenses, all eligible to drive cars. I later speak about this with a refugee resettlement worker who shakes her head, telling me that refugees can in fact drive cars in Nauru. They have had a lot of trouble with police officers refusing people because of their refugee status, something the Australian workers are trying to sort out.

On another occasion, I’m at the Post Office, in front of me a refugee is being served, requesting if her package has arrived from Dubai. It’s from her family she tells me, products unavailable in Nauru. The post office employee is long in the search. Five minutes go by. “I think they hide our packages, I’m sure of it. So many times we get second-class service here. They’re so quick when it comes to others. Just wait when it’s your turn,” she whispers to me. Later, she adds, rolling her eyes, and giving me a conspiratorial nod, “Nauruans are so fat and lazy.” As the latter part of this encounter makes clear, several offshore refugees ended up directing their anger not at the refugee industry and commodificational schema on which they were reliant, nor at the mainland campaigners who were their hopeful salvationists, but predominately at Nauruans.

To counter this, as the next chapter will detail, she and others were plied with Nauru buddy schemes, cultural presentations and documentary screenings, and other industry marketing strategies used to promote refugee and non-refugee integration. But the crises and conflicts curated extritoriality – that characterised refugees and Nauruans as threats or refugees in suffering terms – played an important part in the formation of the new frictitious frontier as did the industry resettlement geographies in which they were enveloped. In all of the above instances individuals differentiated themselves and each other as “refugees” or “locals,” as per the industrial framework in which they were embedded. Enclaving practices segregated refugee from non-refugee through specific refugee dwellings. Curated offshore imaginaries relied on the presentation of refugee suffering at the hands of Nauruans. Outside boundary setting, close relationships certainly developed between individuals, but on a day-to-day basis, Nauruan lives revolved around refugee industry, and refugee lives revolved around the everyday reality of self-commodification, and the ever-present dream of mobility speculation.

“Media myths,” Harald Prins (2002: 58) argues, can become a key element in the rhetoric of self-fashioning, serving as “a persuasive device in the collective quest for biological and cultural survival.” The disaster-image campaign was the response that some people took in frustrative attempts to leverage for mainland futures. They choreographed themselves through refugee tropes, staging videos and photographs, often using children, who were instructed to plead for Australian safety from Taliban persecution. On several occasions, I encountered some of Nauru’s more vehement end offshore campaigners on the phone with mainland refugee activists or high profile refugee and human rights lawyers. Several months prior, I had been in interviews with refugee activists and legal teams in Australia, who were also on call or texting offshore refugees in Nauru. Some mainland activists had asked me to take a camera phone if I went to Nauru that could be passed over to offshore refugees. I declined the request.

But self-commodification and consumer taste for refugees are also implicated in furthering exploitative labour practices. Although their collaborative media curation could be read as a system of resistance (Ginsburg 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998), counter-hegemonic it was most certainly not. Rather, in the reproduction and self-reproduction of refugee culture, mainland and offshore refugee industrialists strengthened the ideology of the suffering refugee on a vast and global scale. By

objectifying themselves through representations presented in critical terms, refugee activists reaped value for the expansion of the global refugee industry, which results in, builds, and refutes refugee company towns on a never-ending cyclical basis. Instead, presentations of the suffering refugee reinforce mainland consumer disinterest, while simultaneously stirring Nauru's social geographies.

As well as creating social conflicts between refugees and locals, the practices of media curation, devised to accumulate moral capital for mobility futures, also created internal frictions within the enclaves. Maclean (2008) also describes the competing modes of governance that emerge in extractive enclaves, which look to erode centralised control over commodities and populations. "These contradictions are made possible by competing networks of regulatory authority and wealth accumulation that have emerged in the enclaves, but now extend far beyond their boundaries" (Maclean 2008: 141). In Nauru's extractive enclaves, many offshore activist refugees targeted other refugees who refused to take part in refugee suffering campaigns. I spoke with some people, refugee certified, who did not agree with activist public relations moves. Matthew said, "I try and keep away from those guys, stay working, keep my head down. I don't want the Australian government to see me doing that." Sonia also commented, "No, it's no good. I think the best thing is work hard, build up my CV, take advantage of the English classes, wait and just hope things will change." Some of these individuals had to be moved into separate housing and hotel rooms for their protection. Those who refused to participate in refugee protests were seen as weakening the standoff with the Australian government. Others who chose to accept a Cambodian package or IOM return deal also had to be moved to other accommodation because of the strength of the offshore refugee campaign.

The next section turns to look at some of the new forms of law and governance that overtook Nauru's streets in an effort to transform fractious refugee/non-refugee relations. For Tsing (2009), the work of commodity production is partly accomplished by uneasy cultural interactions between participants in the supply chain, writing that economic processes are never frictionless but can support the business of economic turnover. Here, the risks attached to two homogenised cultures, segregated by refugee commerce and media (mis)representations, did not diminish industrial operations, rather, the amount of industry workforces increased, producing new structures of accumulation. However I argue that community policing forms only served to articulate the dichotomous conceptions of the refugee and the local,

separating the territory in terms of market zoning. The power of the panoramic spectacle also constantly called their efficacy into question. “Government officials could barely keep ahead of the oil disasters ... or of pictures of ... avian victims” (Morse 2012).

Part Two: Safe Communities

Like the Nauru Lifeguards, the Community Liaison Officers were one of the most visible of the local workforces that began during my fieldwork. Commonly seen weaving along the main road on their new courtesy motorbikes, but also in undercover operation, the CLOs as they’re otherwise known, became a pervasive feature around the country’s urban fringe. The Australian and Nauruan governments developed the new Nauruan Police Force (NPF) sub-profession in early 2015 with growing local concerns over the move of more certified refugees across the districts, and the prospect of open centre circulation. Security firms had already become a popular mode of income in the company town. Ten security firms were in operation on the small atoll during my fieldwork, in addition to privately contracted individuals. Many of these firms were either contracted into refugee management or kept an eye on refugees on the side of regular roundchecks as commodity scares grew in prime rioting seasons. “Are they buying nails?” “Is it possible to make bombs from phosphate?” “Could they attack the fuel farms?” were some concerns I heard regularly. Because of the fears attached to end offshore activism, several security workers took to passing by refugee resettlement dwellings on their roundchecks so as to ensure that no potentially destructive plans were being made against Nauruans for hopeful onward Australian moves.



Figure 4.3: CLOs on Patrol

At this stage, phosphate and refugee company town growth shared more

historical continuities. Migrant met mineral in the protection of new commodities. Before the phosphate trade, Nauru had early forms of community policing in the form of control of the wrongdoers by the chieftains of the fourteen state districts (Itsimaera 1992). But it was under German coconut rule, in the year prior to phosphate discovery, that a formal police force was first set-up. Three locals were tasked with company town management across Nauru's districts. As coconut moved to the higher-value phosphate trade, the policing scheme soon flourished, growing in strength and number. The incoming phosphate administrators looked to ensure that local frictions did not obstruct the mining operations. In 1910 the Force was formally introduced as a Crime and Trouble Prevention Force. Under the later Mandate then Trust terms, the phosphate administrators were also tasked with developing Nauru's system of law and governance, a major part of which is effective operational policing.

During the phosphate growth years, the renamed Nauru Police Force met with a further policing scheme in 1951, still retained to this day, of district constabulary. District Constables functioned in addition to the Police Force to assist in the enforcement of the rules and authority of the local governing body, the Nauru Local Government Council. They were deployed by the Council on Watch and Ward duties at important and vulnerable locations of the Community institutions, particularly around security watch and school truancy. By 1959 Nauru had seven District Constables, the Nauru Police Force had a total establishment of 53 under the command of a European Director recruited in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 1959-60). The force trained in Australian mainland enforcement practice, wore brass-button uniforms, and rode shiny imported bicycles, maintaining peace, governance, and order to what BPC officials described as "the lasting credit of British enterprise."

The CLOs were the newest addition to the company town governance teams, developed as a refugee policing subdivision of the NPF when it was decided that more manpower was needed to help manage the certified commodity. In the first 2001-2008 manufacturing phase, the NPF had little involvement with offshore refugees. At that time, refugee processing operations were not under regional partnership but operated under Australian jurisdiction. Nor had the system moved into open centre circulation or into the second phase of statewide refugee distribution. In the early days, the Australian government largely took on the entirety of the operations, deploying security personnel from their contracted firms. Neither in this period was the company town plagued with the same panoramic spectacle of the imperiled refugee. The CLO

creation was the effect of several major refugee business developments that hit the country. In May 2014, the system of refugee processing had reached the point that positively certified refugees were leaving the factories and moving into resettlement housing across the districts. Shortly thereafter, in February 2015, the Nauruan government opened the RPCs to in and out movement, as the company town planners initially envisaged.

The open centre decision was the result of end offshore challenges that continued to threaten the company town's sustainability. Notably, in Fall 2014, shortly after the announcement of the Cambodian supply chain segue, under the then Australian Green Party campaign push, MP Hanson-Young reiterated how Nauru's offshore refugees had told her that "women were regularly required to strip and exchange sexual favours with guards so they could shower" and "children were forced to perform sexual acts in front of guards" (Fletcher 2014). Then, in January 2015, the Human Rights Commission released their *Forgotten Children* report, which detailed the litany of harm that comes from processing children in the mainland workplace environments. Nauru did not explicitly figure in the report. Instead, written statements were taken exterritorially that denounced the harms of processing children in offshore and mainland holding sites. "This damning report reveals the truth of Nauru and the horrific conditions that children are being exposed to on a daily basis," said MP Hanson-Young (2014).

On several occasions the government had broached the subject of an open centre among the public, as discussed in Chapter 2, but many locals feared the prospect of permitting in and out movement of rioters and others like them. Local fears continued to surge around the asylum seeker and the refugee as dangerous commodity forms ("We don't know who these people are"; "They could be Taliban for all we know"; "I had one of my old relatives worried that they were going to sneak in through the pinnacles and rape us in the night") combined with concerns at to what the offshore refugees might do to attract attention to their mobility crusades. However, the Australian government's decision to sustain the Nauruan processing site, unless offshore refugees chose segue supply chain veers, combined with legal challenges and industry recommendations, inducing the Nauruan government to move against their public's fears and agree to prospective refugee circulation.

At first, the Nauruan government announced that only twenty to thirty prospective refugees would participate in the Open Centre Program per day, initially

for three days a week. Government MPs and industry workers held meetings with Nauru's district council representatives and published details in the local paper to alleviate public anxieties. Meanwhile, Australian mainland headlines at the time published a somewhat different narrative:

Nauru's move to open its detention centre makes it “more dangerous” for asylum seekers – The Sydney Morning Herald (Allard 2015)

Changes on Nauru No Guarantee of Safety – Pro Bono Australia (Cooper 2015)

Australia asylum: Dutton says Nauru is ‘safe’ for refugees – BBC News (2015)

The *Mwinen Ko* Nauru Community Newspaper, on the other hand, offers an understanding of many of the *Nauruan* public's fears about the move of prospective refugees into and around the country. The paper notified all local residents of the hours of refugee circulation, emphasising that “the purpose of the Open Centre Arrangement is to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of the Asylum Seekers in Nauru and to assist their integration into the *Nauruan* Communities” (Appi 2015). The published government statements also stressed the eligibility requirements and low risk presented by all participants:

Arrangements will be available to families with children and single adult females only, but will be expanded over time to include all cohorts, including single male adults.

Key eligibility requirements will be in place to ensure all participating Asylum Seekers have:

A current Security Risk Clearance Level Assessment provided by service providers, which demonstrates that the Asylum Seeker is suitable to participate in the Open Centre Program.

A Good Character and meet Good Behavioural Standards, including no outstanding criminal matters or convictions, whilst in the NRPC.

No Asylum Seeker will be allowed to participate if they are currently under a Behavioural Management Plan (BMP) or deemed to be at risk by security providers.

A completed Medical Assessment and Clearance (as advised by IHMS) to ensure they:

- are suitable to participate

- do not pose a public health risk

The Nauruan government also sought to emphasise the commodity trope of the suffering refugee, but angled towards the moral contribution that Nauruans were making through their new extractive economy. “Who is a refugee,” “Why are refugees in Nauru?” “What are some of the things experienced by refugees?” were consistently reiterated in marketing material. On one occasion, the RPC Community Newsletter (2014) read:

Refugees have a variety of experiences, and every individual’s ‘refugee journey’ is different. Most have faced deeply distressing and harrowing experiences and many have survived a range of physical, psychological and emotional traumas.

Some common experiences of persecution include torture, beatings, rape, disappearance or killing of loved ones, imprisonment without trial, severe harassment by authorities, land confiscation, conflict-related injuries and months, years or even decades spent living in refugee camps or urban slums.

Rarely do refugees have the chance to make plans for their departure: to pack their belongings, to say fare- well to their friends and families. Some refugees have to flee with no notice, taking with them only the clothes on their backs.

The motivating factor for refugees is safety and protection from persecution and human rights abuse, not economic advantage.

The government constantly promoted the more general benefits of backyard extraction, publicising the many industry corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that took over the company town. They painted a rosy picture of refugee modernisation that avoided depictions of the anger and fear that filled the township. These CSR initiatives recalled the BPC tactics of old, in which the phosphate administrators and administering governments also projected the gloss of Pleasantville life. Then, phosphate barons promoted the modernising practices that brought Nauru into “sophistication” from “a more primitive mode of life,” such as the “modern conveniences and comforts” (BPC 1929) of hospitals and schools to divertive amusements, including “ice-cream every Tuesday!” (Collinson 1923: 249), steering well clear of references to labour strikes or phosphate toxins.

Now, Transfield sausage sizzle donations for the Rotary Club’s Mental Health Unit, new Reverse Osmosis units donated by the Immigration Department, Nauru

Live Savers equipment, along with later the new hospital, new primary school, all found inclusion in refugee company town news, advertised across the *Mwinen Ko* newspaper and sometimes inflight Air Nauru magazine. President Baron Waqa also continued to attempt to warm the country to the company town business. In his 47th Independence Day Speech on 31st January 2015 he announced:

Ladies and gentlemen, the Regional Processing Centre for asylum seekers was established nearly three years ago. Since then, it has become a significant employer of Nauruans with 922 locals employed as of to date. The wages from the employees and the benefits generated throughout the economy is enormous ... My fellow Nauruans, we have a history and culture of welcoming strangers in our land. The suffering some of these refugees endured must have been unbearable, especially those who travelled long distances with young children. Let us make their stay with us to be as welcoming as possible. Treat them as you would treat your friends and families. After all, we were once a people who were deported and dwelled in a foreign land. Let us repay the hardships our forefathers endured, with love – as love begets love.

Few locals were convinced of the value of operating this high-risk manufacturing project, particularly when offshore refugee flare-ups occurred on a nigh on daily basis. Several also thought that it would be better if certified refugees resettled in Australia. “People are just rude about Nauru, whatever we try and do.” “They should go to Australia. It’s their problem.” “Not in our backyard.” But despite the commonalities shared with the end offshore campaign, no collaborative activism took place between locals and mainland activists around exporting the resource to Australia. Similarly, in the colonial then independence phosphate years, there was no environmental activism to fully stop mineral extraction. The majority of locals have never been interested in actually *ending* the state-wide mining project, even though many hold deep concerns as to the country’s environmental destructions. The pressures of capitalist interests make ending mining an unfathomable concept. The closest to phosphate campaigning that has taken place are the demands of Aiwo residents to relocate the processing factories to the windward side of the country. The closest to *global* campaigning that has taken place was when the Nauruan government worked with the human rights lawyer Christopher Weeramantry to construct a portrayal of land-grabbing phosphate corporates, participating in their own histories of global capitalism (Wolf 1999). In this period, phosphate constituted the only rich

economic resource of the country.

Now, Nauru relies on a refugee economy. Many disagreed with the prolongation of the supply chain for a variety of moral and practical explosive reasons. However, in this new industrial era, local concerns of *human* ecological destructions came subservient to state economic interests. “I can’t speak out even though I don’t agree,” one Nauruan public servant said to me. “I’d lose my job.”² Nor did the mainland activist campaign practices that took a Nauru cannibal frame warm many locals into collaborative resource export campaigning, as Jake found with his Nau-rumour-sleuthing efforts. Because supply chain extensions to Cambodia could not persuade the material to flow outside the processing state, the Australian with the Nauruan government decided to advance the project for the sake of the boat-fearing Australian consumer. Thus, new institutions were created to assuage the resource frictions that developed from the new extractive project.

Prior to the open factory launch, community consultation groups spoke with local district representatives to put together ideas for mitigating local fears. The Nauruan and Australian governments held meetings in Canberra with the many town planning divisions concerning the sort of workforce that could assuage the mining tensions, and protect extractive interests. Shortly before open centre began, a new police force position was advertised across Nauru, now on the basis of protecting refugee extractive interests, and specifically tasked with resource control. Posters went up in most of the social hubs, the supermarkets and Civic Centre, and announcements across the papers read:

The Government of Australia in collaboration with the Government of Nauru has initiated a special training program in Nauru to train locals to be Community Liaison Officers (CLO). The training will be conducted by the Nauru Police Force (NPF) with assistance from Nauru service providers, Connect Settlement Services (CSS). It is a four day training program that basically prepares each CLO for the Open Centre Arrangement Program, which is expected to take place on the 25th of February, 2015.

Many locals took up the new job, 130 at first count as the new policing scheme now

² Interestingly, in the first refugee operational phase under Rene Harris, Nauru’s President Baron Waqa and Finance Minister David Adeang took part in protests against refugee import embargoes on Afghanis into Australia, and against the Harris government’s refusal to allow a refugee activist-manned boat, the Flotilla of Hope, to land on Nauruan territory. Both lost their government positions and were threatened with jail sentences. They were later reappointed upon Ludwig Scotty’s presidency (2004-07), with all charges dropped.

set up under Australian *refugee* rule flourished, growing in size and number. Several I spoke with expressed their desire to dispel the mainland media representation of Nauruans as savages. Others were enticed by the good wages, brand-new motorbike, paid-for petrol, mobile phone (Alcatel One Touch, three hours credit, and forty SMS messages a week), all Australian government-funded. The political capital earned by sustaining the refugee company town operations was clearly, as with phosphate, once again enormous.

Commodity Custodianship

Peace and order, as also the future prosperity of the settlement, will depend first and foremost on the immediate reduction to an absolute minimum of the large quantity of firearms at present in the possession of the natives - Godeffroy, Weber and Robertson and Hershheim, representatives from dominant coconut firms in Nauru, joint letter to von Kusserow, the Prussian Minister, dated 1 October 1887 (Fabricius 1895).

The CLOs consisted of two branches: the CLO Specials, visually distinctive in luminescent vests and matching baseball caps, and the CLO Normals, an undercover police force stationed in each district. CLO Specials were specifically tasked with refugee guardianship, covering open centre hours. CLO Normals were more widespread and maintained a regular undercover presence in the event of any altercations. CLO Normals and Specials attached to certain districts, although CLO Specials moved across district demarcations, as they followed the refugee in national circulation. All CLOs were trained in patrolling and supervisory protocols by the NPF, such as how to conduct roundchecks, write incident reports, and deal with altercations. All CLOs were also given refugee sensitivity training by expat refugee workers around the specifics of the refugee such as:

the definition of a refugee (fleeing persecution),
the vulnerabilities of a refugee (traumatised and vulnerable),
the culture of a refugee (their different religions and nationalities),
and how to handle Nauru's particular offshore refugees.

On open centre days, the CLO Specials assisted, guided and escorted any eligible participants down from the RPCs. On one occasion I sat at the boat harbor, a group of guys from the RPCs wildly cannonballed into the surf. The Lifeguards ran in all directions, "We told you guys about the corals! Don't swim around there!" The

Lifeguards bandage one guy's hand, badly cut. A CLO, stationed on duty at the side, quickly steps in and takes him back up the RPC for a clinical check before anything more dramatic occurs. As the CLO's quick thinking makes manifest, dispelling or policing refugee public relations attempts are an important task of both CLO branches. Cindy, a CLO Special, described this aspect of her daily work to me, which intersects strongly with the manmade risks of the commodity:

There was one time when a refugee pinched a child and took a video of the kid crying and said it was Nauruans, they're all bad, the usual stuff. He got the kid to say, "I want to go to Australia." Another time, two refugees punched each another and said the Nauruans did it. Me and my friend saw what went on. We wrote an incident report and filed it with the line manager.

CLO Specials held weekly refugee intelligence sharing meetings at the police station. Industry workers provided updates on information relating to refugee determination progress, behaviour at the RPC and resettlement houses, and news on potential labour riots. In turn, CLOs also shared their refugee intel regarding human movements.

All CLOs were trained in refugee runaway detection. They learned to navigate the many side roads that wind through Nauru's phosphate extraction fields in case of a RPC riot or similar incident where they needed to be quick on hand. Also, I am told, this navigational know how comes in handy for tracing open centre participants' whereabouts after hours. Hiding in the pinnacles became a popular pastime as had staying in other friends' resettlement houses beyond the 5pm open centre cut-off hour. "I don't know their faces yet so I can't find the asylum seekers too well but we're trying to find a way to give them ID cards. That will make it easier," Jonah tells me.

In addition to these sorts of tasks, CLO Specials also advise new residents on appropriate behavioural conduct, particularly with the influx of younger certified and prospective refugees from the camps, for whom revving motorbikes, wheelies, and coconut scrumping became common entertainment. "The asylum seekers are always touching the coconuts. Some residents don't like them doing that. That's a big thing we're always on call for," Tracy, another CLO, says. "The problem is also that some of them don't really care," Jonah adds. "They just want to be in Australia so there's no respect for Nauru. We're just the fall guys when anything goes wrong." Jonah's comment points to one of the major paradoxes in the CLO policing scheme. Although developed for refugee accountability, the CLOs are in reality the ones subject to refugee liability. CLOs are all well versed in approaching refugees, not touching, and

making sure to record any altercation in the event of refugee beating accusations.

A Peaceful Refugee Protest

One of the main responsibilities of the CLOs is enforcing new refugee rules developed in the wake of a series of high profile labour protests in February and March 2015. Protests have certainly happened across the course of Nauru's industrial history. In the BPC phosphate extraction years, labour strikes among the Gilbert and Ellice islanders and Chinese workers imported for mining the phosphate lands were not uncommon occurrences. Now, with new human imports for backyard extraction, fires and riots have plagued the country on a regular basis. Labour riots are common actions in processing centres in Australia and worldwide, and now no less in Nauru. As more refugees moved into resettlement housing, protests became a regular feature of company town life. The protests of February and March 2015 were some of the more high profile staged by certified refugees at their blockade from Australian living. At the first protest, a group 150 strong walked down the main road in Nauru's Nibok district with banners and mainland activists on speed dial. They blocked the road, turning back cars. The Nauru Police Force was called in for unlawful assembly.

In the phosphate years, policemen were sent on regional training programmes to Narsove Police College in Fiji, then the Australian Police College in Manly, New South Wales, learning about fingerprinting, photography, first aid, and court procedures. Now, in the refugee years, policemen's training has been revamped and adjusted to the specific threats that their new now animate assets present. By the time of the first refugee protest, the NPF were well trained in riot and disorder management, personal protection, and sexual assault investigation from Australian and regional development programmes.³ They knew about the protests beforehand from their refugee intelligence sharing networks. They had also practised how to escort protestors and conduct crowd control in police training camps in Honiara. They had constructed guidelines on peaceful protest protocol, requesting a written

³ The Australian Federal Police (AFP) is stationed to provide direct in-count support to the majority of smaller island states such as Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, and the Marshalls. Not long after the refugee trade first arrived on Nauru in 2001, the Australian and Nauruan governments established a Nauru Police Force Police Capacity Program. The police training programme was at the Nauruan government's request when brokering the development projects attached to the refugee deal. Like the legal governance interests advanced by once the BPC, the Nauruan government were now keen to rebuild their police force structures, resurging from the phosphate crash a few years before. The AFP now maintains a permanent residency in Nauru where staff assist in training projects as elicited by the Nauru Police Force. They also fund equipment for the Force.

submission that alerted the police force as to the number of people that intended to participate, the venue, the time, and date. Ignoring the protest protocol, refugees took to the streets from the resettlement dwellings. Some threw rocks at the police, injuring three officers, and one of the new Australian-funded NPF Land Rover jeeps, goading local police to arrest them. Others took photos with banners reading, “we are refugees not slaves” and “end the discrimination,” and a young girl holding a cardboard cross with “Freedom or die” written on it, circulated to mainland and offshore teams.

I spoke with Jason and Katerina, both certified as refugees, about the refugee protests. Both had taken jobs in Nauru, refusing to take part in the protests and refusing to quit their jobs on offshore activists’ insistence. Jason described receiving threats from others in the housing block when he refused to take part in protest activity or quit his job. Katerina similarly said that she tried to keep away from the activist refugees. As detailed, for some, the threats of physical assault were so bad, that the Australian government funded hotel rooms to segregate pacifists from activists.

At the second labour riot, the following month, a much larger group of certified refugees took to the streets. Some placed children in front of them as human shields, taking photos of scratches and bruises to support the end offshore/refugee welcome cause. They staged videos where they turned the cameras on after they goaded and attacked police and locals. They recorded the subsequent retaliations of locals, some of who put up their hands to defend their faces, while offshore protestors shouted things like “They’re attacking us!” “Refugee beaters!” These videos were later uploaded by end offshore activists from the Refugee Action Coalition Sydney and circulated around often-unquestioning mainland media teams, catapulted to new heights of visibility as evidence of Nauruan on refugee attacks.

“Government urges community to be calm amidst refugee protests,” read the local *Mwinen Ko* paper headline in March 2015. Nauru’s Minister for Justice David Adeang appealed on the local radio:

These troublemakers are not innocent victims and should not be portrayed as such. They are trying to manipulate the media and public, and we will not play their game.

Meanwhile, the Refugee Action Coalition Sydney released the following statement as “the voice of the refugees”:

Up to 300 refugees, women, men and children, from all refugee camps across Nauru have defied the Nauruan government and police attempts to ban refugee protests and staged a peaceful protest this afternoon (RAC 2015).

They said that the refugees were “punched in the face or pushed to the ground” (Solah 2015), announcing that more rallies were planned. Later that day, the Guardian Australia read, “Almost 200 refugees, including several children, have been arrested on Nauru for protesting in the island’s capital, as video has emerged showing refugees being assaulted as they protested peacefully at the weekend” (Doherty 2015). Others soon followed: “Refugees have staged demonstrations in recent days to protest against conditions on Nauru and their treatment at the hands of locals” (Fox and Bolitho 2015).

At the end of the protests, 183 refugee rioters were arrested for assaulting local police, damaging property, and unlawful assembly. One Nauruan was charged with assaulting a refugee. The protesters were all later released on bail. Arrest and the threat of imprisonment held little utility over the refugees. The arrest of any refugee, certified or otherwise, was always closely followed by end offshore activists, construed in the global media as evidence of refugee cruelty. In the wake of the refugee protests, the CLOs were charged with new tasks. Not only did they continue policing refugee public relations attempts but also all refugees must alert a CLO when they need to refuel their motorbike. None can go near the fuel farm or power station in case they try something more serious as part of the offshore curational imaginary.

The community policing was an important example of the amount of symbolic capital that sustaining the operations held for the Australian government vis-a-vis relenting by importing the maritime tonnage. Although the Nauruan environment was soon suffused with industrial hazards, which spread from the RPCs across the township, the value of the deterrence spectacle far outweighed the exorbitant financial, and clear human costs. This was particularly the case for the Nauruan government, who ignored their publics’ calls to redistribute the offshore refugee to onward lands. As a result, like the many health and safety schemes, the amount of regulation that went into Nauru’s company town world was extreme. Indeed, an entire community policing division was devised and grew, as with the phosphate years, on the basis of the risks attached to the offshore refugee.

Certainly, as practices of accountability, none of the policing practices or elaborate incident writing report systems, such as those of CLOS like Cindy, had

much effect in combatting the refugee suffering spectacle that popularly appealed on the global stage. The Nauru Police Force, on the other hand, was given widespread publicity, figured in terms of police brutality and as evidence of Nauruan savagery:

Police Attack Refugees on Nauru Protesting for Freedom

“The Nauruan police told the refugees to stop protesting, however after they refused and continued the peaceful protest they were attacked. As violence broke out, the Nauruan police and locals began pushing and punching the refugees. One male refugee was punched in the face by a Nauruan police officer wearing hard knuckle gloves and then later dragged away by another police officer,” the refugees stated (teleSUR 2015).

Many police officers were incredibly upset over these global representations. Several I spoke with resented the amount of work they put into the fractious company town operations. They were always on call at the RPCs and across the resettlement districts in relation to refugee-on-refugee attacks or other blowouts and spills common in the workplace environments. To address allegations that they had assaulted refugees, they gave local and mainland media interviews. They released public statements that told how they were “sick of the lies told about them and the fabricated allegations of refugees” (Nauru Police Force 2016). In an Australian Daily Telegraph Opinion Piece, President Waqa (2015a) wrote:

Our police and people have been wrongly accused of being violent towards refugees. Anyone who knows the spirit of the Nauruan people knows that we are a peaceful people; yet driven by the political agenda of refugee advocacy groups and so-called human rights lawyers, these lies have been spread by certain journalists who relish the opportunity to use Nauru as a punching bag.

But few of these perspectives achieved airtime, all consumed by the power of the victimised refugee seeking to raise capital for onward moves.

Other mainland industry teams took to finding developmental loopholes that might end the operations. “The Nauruan police force does not have the capacity, experience or resources to prosecute incidents of child abuse,” wrote refugee legal academics from the Kaldor Centre in Sydney in response to the later Nauru Leaks campaign push (Hoang and Gleeson 2016). However, because of the political capital of disallowing maritime self-importers’ futures, backed by a disinterested public in the Australian hinterlands, these sorts of allegations only led to an ever-rolling cycle of more NPF Australian training programmes that met mainland accreditational

standards. After riot and disorder management, personal protection, sexual assault investigation, and forensic photography, Australian standard child protection training sessions soon extended across the company town district.⁴

Nor did implementing a company town police force particularly improve human relations. Conversely, the policing scheme created more spaces of control for governing people's lives within the conflictual labour relations in which the market town was developed. Although one of the shared goals was to unite refugee and non-refugee through a local liaison team, refugee policing solidified hierarchical relations of power and boundary-setting that disrupted human relations. The refugee was positioned as vulnerable or as dangerous, which was simultaneously reinforced through the self-curational actions of many offshore refugees, and the publicity narratives of mainland end offshore campaigners. At best, the CLOs, as with other regulators like them, were also a part of securing and reproducing the hazards attached to the refugee boom.

The Militarisation of City Life

Not only did the economic force of the refugee dominate everything in Nauru, but the refugee also produced new spaces of governance as a result of its resource curse effects. This led to what Mike Davis (1990) discusses in the Los Angeles suburbs as the “militarization of city life,” which operated beneath the sunny magical state façade. With the popularity of the CLOs, the Nauru Police Force expanded the roundchecks of CLO Normals to focus on assisting them with some of the consequences of refugee wealth: more locals and expats with money to burn, and angry wealth disparities in the community. Several of my expat and local acquaintances had their houses broken into or vandalised, the increase in petty theft a noticeable occurrence. Since the decades of the refugee boom, new cars and motorbikes also speed around the atoll. I spot a sports convertible on one occasion, then a Harley and Mini Cooper on others. In combination with a reignited booze party scene, boomtown consequences discussed in more depth in the final chapter, vehicles swerve at high speeds. President Waqa (2015b) attempted to reduce some of these younger predilections, beseeching his wayward public:

⁴ Nauru also enacted new child protection legislation (*Child Protection and Welfare Act 2016*), drawing on regional assistance funding under the UNICEF-Pacific Child Protection Programme.

Today we face many challenges with lawlessness creeping into our society. Crime is on the rise. Stealing, public disorder, drunkenness, driving without a license, dissemination of obscene pictures and articles, rape, among others is destroying the fabric of our society. Coupled with our lack of care for our environment by openly littering in public, we indeed have a very challenging future if we as individuals do not sit together and address these issues.

In an attempt to reignite the governance days of the phosphate era, new regulations become enforced, and old BPC laws resurge. Nauru's 40mph speed limit was one instated in colonial phosphate days, as were liquor prohibition and motor traffic ordinances, at the instigation of local chieftains, concerned over the marked influence of overindulgence in the local community (Vizard 1992). Until 1967 it was unlawful for a Nauruan to consume or have in possession any intoxicating liquors. The vast majority of cases tried before the courts of Nauru prior to 1967 were liquor-related offences. Now in the refugee industrial heyday, customs taxes and tariffs have been placed on alcoholic beverages. The AFP and Transfield assisted with breathalyser training, requested by local police. If CLOs see someone speeding or driving under the influence they make note of the culprit or car number plate, leading to a possible fine or court order. CLO's daily work also includes writing incident reports or calling the police, particularly around accidents, fights, drunken behaviour, and commotions that happen among locals. The CLOs also police other regulations instated post-refugee boom, including motor vehicle registration and inspections under the *Motor Traffic Act 2014*.

The final section turns to look at the propaganda potential of mainland media for the Nauruan government Opposition in seeking resource control over the company town district. In turn, the Opposition factions provided moral capital for the end offshore campaigners seeking resource control over Nauru's high value refugees.

Part Three: Resource Wars

Jason Switzer (2001: 3) shows how mining can "cause or be affected by conflict, dramatically reducing the profitability of their operations, and negatively affecting the contribution of mineral wealth towards sustainable development." Conflicts and sustainability revolve around the resource that is exploited, resulting in what is often referred to as an aspect of the resource curse (Le Billon 2001). What was striking was

how the offshore refugee, as a figure of intense global interest, exasperated, and then further securitised the body politic. In Nauru, the refugee presented an opportunity for local oppositional movements to flourish. Nauru's small town politics have found immense interest in the short time since 2012 when processing began. As previous chapters detailed, political instability characterises Nauru's ever-rotating government chambers. But under President Waqa and Minister Adeang, and developmental and resource protective interests, the political system has remained stable, even if the extractive environment has seen regular upheavals. However now, with the incremental growth in the end offshore movement, Opposition MPs have waged wars through Australian media, utilising the moral capital of the resource in their seizure for power. They are given the backing of refugee media interest who reinforce their presentation as noble human rights defenders and the Waqa government as corrupt, a "dictatorship of fear" of immense proportions. "I wish they would stop this, using the Australian media to fight each other. It's not like us Nauruans, that's the white man's way," one older former politician said to me. "When I was in Cabinet we would threaten, but we were always joking. Inside the arena you show-off, but outside you don't hold a grudge." In particular, this former government MP was making reference to a series of high-profile local protests that broke out across the company town in 2015 during my fieldwork. These local protests added to the refugee labour protests earlier that year. With the prolongation of the offshore supply chain, Opposition MPs, of which there are always shifting alliances, started using the mainland media interest in offshore refugees to encourage Australian mainland and local support.

In Nauru, with only one media station, the majority of the public rely on Australian news. In 2014, the Opposition MPs at the time, Roland Kun, Matthew Batsuia, and Kieran Keke, threw accusations of Waqa government corruption across ABC Pacific Beat and Sky News. Giving phone interviews from Nauru or their Australian and New Zealand residencies, they criticised the January 2014 dismissals of Chief Magistrate Peter Law and Chief Justice Geoffrey Eames, accusing the government of "gagging members of parliament" (ABC 2014a).⁵ "They don't want criticism, they don't want scrutiny - they want to turn Nauru into something like North Korea," said Keke to the ABC, by then firm end offshore campaigners. In a chaotic parliamentary standoff in May 2014, the Waqa government suspended the three MPs

⁵ Waqa survived a no-confidence motion against the deportations in January 2014.

for using foreign media not parliamentary debate to criticise local decision-making. Then in early June, two more opposition members of the 19-seat legislature were suspended, Squire Jeremiah and former president Sprent Dabwido, after becoming unruly in Parliament, and calling for Waqa and Adeang's resignations. An Australian media battle waged between the ousted Nauruan MPs and the government, given widespread mainland coverage at the time as evidence of the Waqa government's repression, and the need to export offshore refugees to the mainland.⁶

In May 2015, when I arrived in Nauru, the MPs remained suspended. The government had made the controversial move of blocking Facebook. Rumour had it that several teens had taken to circulating lewd pictures through Facebook forums. Until the development of net child protection protocols and more police training, now in cyber security, the ban would stay in place. Others thought that it was to stop the offshore refugee media curations. Neither rationale was quite clear, but the ban had little effect as everyone soon circumnavigated the flimsy firewall. The mainland end offshore movement on the other hand asserted that it was evidence of Nauru's Guantanamo operations, as did the Opposition MPs. Around the same time, the Nauruan Opposition fed the ABC widely aired corruption allegations against the Waqa government, released in an ABC 7.30 Report. They contended that mainland phosphate barons had helped Adeang and Waqa in their seizure of power, seeking control over the state's remaining mineral resource supply.⁷ In collaboration with mainland *refugee* barons, the five ousted MPs alleged that the Nauruan government had created "a culture of secrecy" and called for resignations. The resource spectacle feuds came to a head in June 2015.

The Opposition MPs organised a group of young supporters to blockade the Parliament buildings, where I was watching a Parliament sitting at the time. Everyone excitedly looked through the curtains at the drama that was unfolding outside. A fire extinguisher was let off followed by a firework cracker as Squire Jeremiah led the charge. Earlier that morning I had seen Dabwido and Jeremiah in the Meneng District, lobbying together a small group of district supporters. Both Dabwido and Jeremiah had been former parliamentary members for the Meneng Constituency before their

⁶ See for example "Nauru opposition MP Roland Kun labels government a dictatorship after suspensions upheld" (ABC 2014b).

⁷ The accusations were that Adeang and Waqa had received bribes by Getax, one of Australia's leading phosphate firms, in exchange for promoting the privatisation of Nauru's national phosphate mining corporation, and selling Getax phosphate at lower than market rates.

suspensions. In Nauru, a culture of tongue-in-cheek rivalry continues between the district constituencies. School and sporting fixtures, parties, and other local events all play around with district competitive pride. The majority of politicians are descended from district chiefly clans, from which political rivalries are more acute, but often no less jovial. Now that the Meneng District had only one parliamentary representative in counter to other constituencies, the suspended Opposition MPs, keen on regaining power, organised a group of younger male supporters from Meneng to blockade the parliament. They used familiar tropes that appealed to western audiences, such as abuses of human rights and a culture of secrecy.⁸ Wearing T-shirts that read “Meneng Boyz,” they turned up at the Parliament during the sitting and demanded Waqa and Adeang’s resignations.



Figure 4.4: The Protest Imaginary

All CLOs were enlisted over from regulating refugee relations to the new high-risk spaces, along with the NPF, by then well versed in protest protocol. I, and many locals, went outside to watch the happenings, which later became the talk of the town. Protests have certainly happened across Nauru’s extractive history – teachers blocking the runway for the 1994 *Leonardo: A Portrait of Love* premier-bound jet, the ousting of Rene Harris in 2002, and frequent protests from Aiwo residents at the phosphate dust blowbacks – however they are relatively uncommon. Nauru has a reputation among other Pacific island states as one of Pleasant Island benignness, known under the acronym “NAURU: Not Angered Unless Really Upset.” Today, the small town excitement was palpable. iPhones and iPads were out. Several members of

⁸ See Macintyre and Foale (2002) for a discussion of how locals in mining districts use civilisational disources that might be seen as racist and paternalistic as a strategy in conflicts with mining companies.

the Opposition were on speed-dial with mainland media teams, shouting things like, “Step down corruption,” which was later splashed across the mainland news as evidence of Nauru’s lawlessness. The event was a spectacle of Australian media proportions, of which I later received mainland refugee industry listserv notifications, alerting me of fears for refugee safety.

The Australian government stayed publically out of the small town disputes, refusing to give mainland media statements, except to say that it was a matter for the Nauruan government, and that President Waqa assured them that the rule of law would be followed. Behind-the-scenes, Australian government officials were rather less calm, anxiously focused on securing “the future prosperity of the settlement” as with the ten-year coconut war of Nauru’s district clan rivalry of yesteryear. During the protest wave, Canberra personnel were constantly on the phone with Nauruan government and industry workers, checking the situation, worried that they might have to export the self-immobilised resources to the mainland. In the event of prolonged national instability, even with the semblance of “regional cooperation,” the human deposits would come under the Australian government’s full responsibility. They might be forced to revert the supply chain to the mainland, as the offshore refugees’ envisaged, making them look like fools. This was what all offshore refugees secretly hoped, knowing that even if the supply chain deviated back to Christmas Island, although excised Australian territory, and still over 1500km from the Northwest Cape, they would be submerged in the evangelical arms of mainland consumers.

Another major concern of the Australian government was that the families of the Opposition MPs owned the Meneng District land, where a great deal of company town housing was located. In the weeks after the protest, tensions were at a height. Across the Meneng District, signs read things like “Human Rights Abuses” and “Waqa Government Corrupt.” In and beside the Meneng Hotel reside the majority of Immigration Department refugee assessors, defence lawyers, teachers, social workers, visiting quality control teams, and international dignitaries. Many offshore workers I spoke with were petrified that discontented landowners might try to reclaim the company land in an attempt to rile the Waqa Government into abdication. At the time of the protests, all labour industrialists, including expat workforces and refugees alike, had meetings about the political situation. The offshore companies enacted strict curfews, particularly within the Meneng District, from which the Opposition MPs

mounted their coup d'état push. Some industry workers moved into housing inside the extractive enclaves themselves. In-country Australian administrators constantly liaised with Canberra and the many interested internationals about the on-the-ground situation.

The Nauruan government was worried that the Oppositional factions would unhinge their state rebuilding endeavours, with the Australian government forced to export the human resource tonnage elsewhere. In order to secure the threat to their capital stock, and in anger at the Opposition's use of mainland media, the Waqa government revoked the passports of Kun and Dabwido.⁹ Dabwido and Squire were temporarily arrested, and Batsuia charged for vandalism. But in close succession, the responses to limit the airtime afforded the Opposition from refugee tycoon players were only leaped onto by mainland campaigners, and others morally aggrieved, reinforced through subsequent (mis)representations.¹⁰ All of the events were displayed as evidence of Nauruan state despotism. In the aftermath, the MPs and their supporters waged an extraterritorial campaign, circulating photos of the blockade, and speaking on mainland media airwaves about the lack of democracy and culture of fear in Nauru. The Opposition MPs quickly became heavily utilised by the end offshore campaign as evidence of Nauru's lawlessness, reinforcing the presentation of Nauru as "unsafe for refugees." Liberal media outlets called on the Australian government to "get these refugees off Nauru fast." The mainland media ignored the fact that the Opposition MPs also supported offshore extraction, on which the state economy was reliant. It was after all Dabwido who had renegotiated the 2012 import deal.¹¹ Rather, they focused on amplifying the presentation of Nauru as a site of lawlessness and darkness, enlisting the Oppositional MPs as part of their strategies of accumulation for gaining resource control over the offshore refugees. These tactics combined with the utilisation of former Chief Justice Geoffrey Eames, by then residing back in Melbourne, and resentful of his unglamorous judicial dismissal: "Nauru rule of law 'nonexistent,' former magistrate says" (ABC 2015).

⁹ Kun was eventually given refugee status in July 2016 by the New Zealand government after his attempts to return to New Zealand were buttressed.

¹⁰ See for example "Nauru must be held to account for its human rights abuses" (Johnson 2015).

¹¹ In the first refugee operational phase under Rene Harris, Adeang and Waqa had taken part in protests against refugee import embargoes on Afghans into Australia, and against the Harris government's refusal to allow a refugee activist-manned boat, the *Flotilla of Hope*, to land on Nauruan territory. Both lost their government positions and were threatened with jail sentences. They were later reappointed upon Ludwig Scotty's presidency (2004-07), with all charges dropped.

Both the power of insurgents and political placeholders can be found not in the causes that the two factions claim to espouse, but in the value accorded this particular commodity. As much as liberal mainland media outlets and Nauruan Opposition found reciprocal utility, the Australian government looked to conflict management approaches, seeking stability over the offshore deposits. Paul Collier (2000: 9) argues that raw materials are “especially vulnerable to looting and taxation because their production relies heavily on assets which are long-lasting and immobile.” Here, the self-immobilisation of the refugee sustained the morally fractious operations. For the Australian and Nauruan governments, the immense capital obtained from furthering offshore processing and outlasting the dissenting refugee prolonged the supply chain. As a result, the resource-allure of Nauru’s new mineral deposits made the small state more vulnerable to mainland predation and political instability. Nor were mainland media portrayals effective in achieving the immediate goals of exporting the refugee to the mainland, whether tactical or no. However, mainland media outlets did solidify a primitivist ideology around Nauru, accumulating capital that made the offshore operations more tentative. In July 2015, under the wave of Nauruan government retaliatory moves, the New Zealand parliament passed a motion moved by New Zealand’s Green Party that expressed concern about Nauru’s political situation. Two months later, the government suspended their state funding of Nauru’s justice sector, to which they contribute AU\$1.1 million per year, citing diminishing rule of law and human rights. Although eventually reinstated, the suspension was given widespread coverage at the time as evidence of Nauru’s disintegration into human rights lawlessness. The reinstatement was not.

Although the popular presentation is of the refugee as the downtrodden, Nauruans have clearly borne the brunt of much of the social costs associated with the boom. The log of refugee-related grievances endured by Nauruans is remarkable, with countless instances of refugee rape, assault, child molestation, and the stirring of the body politic. While the refugee has greatly enriched its beneficiaries, Nauruans have retained the offcuts of the processes. A world of discontentment is thus harboured by local communities attached to the operations of refugee processing in their country. The next chapter turns to look at some of the many industry marketing campaigns that took over Nauru in an effort to warm the populace to the grand project of offshore extraction. These sorts of industry events enjoy widespread promotion the world over

to dispel similar resource frictions that envelop other refugee state economies, but perhaps not so extreme.

Chapter Five:

Ekamawir Omo: Connecting Communities

Eid Celebration:

Everyone Welcome

Market stalls – Food, Crafts etc.

Listen to music and try food from all over the world

Performances

Where: Civic Centre Conference Hall

When: July 25, 3pm – 7pm

Come together and celebrate Nauru's diversity

See you there

Connect Settlement Services

It's 3pm and the Civic Centre is a hive of activity. Nauru's CLO Specials, wearing their luminescent vests and matching baseball hats, are in abundance. But today is not just your average company town event. Hours have been extended and extra buses are on hand for the Eid celebrations put together by Connect, the newest contractor on the state scene, tasked with refugee integration. Posters have been appearing in most of Nauru's social hubs over the last week. Capelle's Supermarket, the Meneng Hotel lobby, school staff rooms and corridors all bring tidings of the latest event on Nauru's bustling new multicultural calendar. Thanks to Connect's proactivity, most weeks are usually accompanied by some sort of industry-led entertainment. Movie nights and sporting activities are the mainstream fare, although now, Diwali and Nayrouz are all marked with yearly state-wide celebrations and attempts to encourage Nauruans to learn about and participate with their new commodities.

"Nauru really has become a multicultural community and it's important we celebrate that," a social worker smiles at me, henna decorating her hands, and a multi-coloured frangipani artfully tucked into the side of her loosely pinned bun. "Nauruans can really benefit so much from the refugees. Their cultures and skills are so valuable here." She goes on to add, "Now they're underway with building the new hospital, a

couple of us have been trying to arrange for some of the refugees to decorate a wall or two. Something bright, colourful, something that expresses the rich cultural backgrounds we have here. Many of them love drawing.”

She’s obviously had a hand with the Civic Centre’s new décor. For this Eid celebration, refugee art is in abundance, tacked onto freestanding billboards arranged around the room. But overall, there has been a definite organisational effort with today’s event. World Refugee Day, just a few months before, was a bit of a washout. Attendance was poor, a few dribs and drabs, notably marked by the chair thrown by the angered refugee across the room. Many people hightailed it, screaming in panic. “Last year was much better,” Connect staff assured me. “This year we just didn’t plan it in enough advance.”

The Eid organisational committee must have taken some of this on board. Since the beginning of Ramadan, Ramadan Information Sheets have papered town noticeboards, instructing locals of its significance. “Ramadan, the month of fasting for Muslims, is a special month of the year for over one billion Muslims throughout the world. It is a time for inner reflection, devotion to God, and self-control,” Connect’s multi-coloured font face informs.

Over the last few weeks, corporate engagement officers from Connect, Transfield, and the Australian Immigration Department have also been driving around the country, trying to encourage Nauru’s diasporic communities to put together displays that celebrate ethnonational ties in the spirit of company town conviviality. It appears their work was fairly successful, even if the majority of attendees are industry contractors and refugees: the former snapping on camera phones, queuing for elaborate henna designs or buying souvenir gifts to take back to the mainland; the latter clearly bored, others keen to show their proactivity and earn capital for onward moves, painstakingly painting industry workers hands or manning market stalls.



Elsewhere, circular tables filled with nationally representative wares dot the carpeted space. On a table labelled “Nauru,” a coconut-bra mannequin and a string figure collection feature; postcards of smiling faces on sunset beaches and a plastic package of kava on one marked “Fiji.”

Figure 5.1: A Save the Children Worker Getting Henna-ed” Outside, a halal friendly barby is manned by an Australian High Commission employee. The

Taiwanese prepare papaya salad samplers, advertisements for their Healthy Nauru campaign. Kiribati was a bit late on the action. “Kiribati! I forgot Kiribati” an Immigration Department Eid planner later exclaimed after I remarked on attending the Kiribati community’s Independence Day celebrations, later panicking at my unconscious company town role.

Clusters of tables hold piles of information booklets “What is Eid?” “Where are Nauru’s new communities coming from?” A quick flick inside, glossary definitions for “Internally Displaced Persons,” “Taliban,” “Islamist Rebels,” and “Warlords” provide further insight. An excitable Save the Children worker stands nearby, breathlessly waving at any of her charges she recognises. Balloons and flags litter the room. At the back of the hall is a world map, “Where are Nauru’s new communities coming from?” written at the top. Pin markers are tacked around to denote import origins. A colourful wall hanging is festooned in the background “*Ekamawir Omo: Connecting Communities.*”

I start wandering around the hall with Tessa, certified as a refugee two years before. She’s been tasked with introducing the concept of Eid to interested locals. The Connect team have been gradually recruiting more refugees and Nauruans into their workforce as Cultural Liaison personnel. Several offshore workers have told me this local recruitment practice is very helpful in mediating between sometimes fractious labour relations, reminding me starkly of the practice of indigenous collaboration of the phosphate commissioners.

A video screen cycles PowerPoint images of Iraqi sweets, Muslims at prayer, a map of Mecca’s whereabouts. We stand and watch. Tessa is a bit more doubtful about her role in company town cohesion.

“I’m just doing this because otherwise I’ll go crazy, get stuck in my thoughts,” she whispers. “And it looks good on my CV for Australia.”

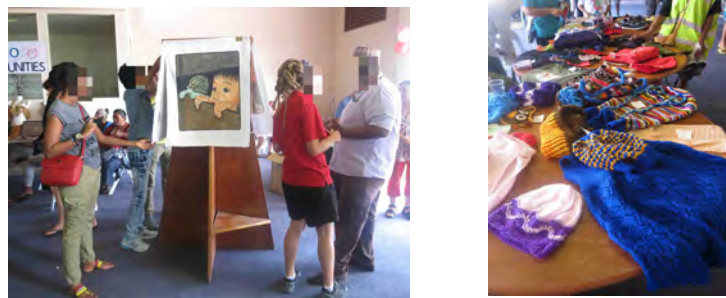
We do a round of the room, investigating the cuisine on offer. There’s a fair amount about. Signs labelled Iraq Food, Rohingya Food, Afghani Food, and Arabic Food are taped onto large wooden tables. The food all looks suspiciously similar: samosas, roti, and curry are heavily represented. Other tables heave under the weight of shiny plastic women’s high heels and flats, the latest perfumes, Victoria Beckham and Prada handbags: mail-ordered in from Dubai.

One of Connect’s main projects has been encouraging refugee integration not just through photography and film, but also through employment services, financing

local refugee enterprise through the Australian Immigration Department. Catering is the most common venture as refugees have scattered across public and private places through new forms of consumption. It is now standard practice for larger government events to feature Rohingya cuisine alongside the usual coconut fish, meat pile, and chow mein selection plates. Instead of BBQ or Chinese takeaway, Nauru's Hash House Harriers might be seen feasting on lamb shwarma and akhrot chutney at their post-hash circles. Connect staff usually hiss a close reminder; they are more often than not seated on every one of the country's event organisational committees. "Here, take some menus, share them with your friends." Takeaway delivery direct from the Fly Camp refugee housing means that falafel and kofte are only a phone call away.



Figure 5.2 Market Wares



A few pert taps on a microphone directs attention to the front of the room. Connect's long-skirted multicultural coordinator announces the day. A garland of brightly coloured pipe cleaners crowns her head, "Hello, everyone, thank you for coming, we're so pleased that it's such a great turnout, where we're all here together to celebrate what a diverse place Nauru has become." She proceeds to continue, relating the benefits that Nauru's new refugees have brought to the country. An elderly man approaches the microphone, *taqiyah* atop his head; he softly begins recounting the history of Eid. Hardly audible, he recites a monotonous and all too dry monologue, his words barely discernable, people quickly lose interest, starting to chatter.

A young Connect worker catches my eye and sidles over. Young, bright eyed, mid-20s, she's fairly representative of the NGO demographic that coexists alongside the older maternal contingent. Connect's workforce has rapidly expanded over the last few months with the steady flow of refugees into the lowlands: the effect of more certifications and open centre circulation. She's one of the many case managers employed in transitioning the refugee from RPC to Nauru. She happily chats away, obviously keen to interact with a different face outside of the team:

Lots more asylum seekers are being processed now so there are plenty of job openings here, but many of my colleagues in Australia don't want to do it. They don't agree with offshore processing. It's pretty ethically compromising. Connect are letting me try it out for a few weeks. Working in Nauru definitely isn't for everyone. I'm going to see how I cope with the emotional side of it. But my family were refugees, working with refugees is really important to me. I want to help.

Our conversation tails off as the boom box kicks in, signalling the start of the afternoon's official entertainment. The young Nauruan DJ shifts to a thumping beat as he mixes from an electronic set up to rival any mainland player. Youth music engagement is another major vehicle for refugee and non-refugee integration. Connect has arranged funding through the Australian Immigration Department for a few young Nauruans to buy flat screen Macs, music and video editing software. A small group of Nauruan and refugee teenagers have gotten pretty into it. With the encouragement of youth-engaged offshore workers – the types normally nicknamed something onomatopoeic, Rizzo or Snap – the group has already put together several tracks that express refugee hardship in rap and song. Their efforts are impressive, visually backed by music videos featuring some of Connect's more harmonious workers seductively dancing in the sea breeze, chiming in with the choruses. The young rappers are out in force for today's live performances, patiently waiting their turn at the side as Nauru's dancers get first dibs in the programme.

A group of young girls wearing hula skirts and bikini tops step onto the makeshift stage. The three teens form part of a troupe who often feature at local events as Nauru's cultural dance ensemble. They sashay across the hall with generic Polynesian movements and others derived from Kiribati stylistic nuances, suppressing the occasional smile. Most dance styles were wiped out when missionaries came to Nauru, who encouraged the German colonialists to pass a series of laws that stamped

out lurid movement (Delaporte 1920). The British Phosphate Commission sought to change this somewhat to display the benevolence of company town administration. Under the recommendation of anthropologists Paul Hambruch, Camilla Wedgewood, and Honor Maude, they encouraged the revival of dance and craftwork. Post-independence, the Nauruan government then worked with the anthropologist Solange Petit-Skinner on similar projects, concerned that phosphate wealth had stamped out any vestiges of Nauruan tradition. Tropes of indigeneity and islander innocence were later used for phosphate reparation leverage.

The coconut-bra mannequin and string figure collection are always brought out from the dusty vaults of Nauru's beleaguered Culture Department, as are the group of young girls at corporate events like today. In fact, since Nauru has re-emerged through the refugee business, dance offerings have seen a revival and the emergence of new fora outside of Independence Day and the odd birthday celebration, reworked and reinvigorated from phosphate for *refugee* company town pride. These sorts of cultural displays never fail to be followed by a nostalgic moan among local residents about Nauru's lack of culture. "You really notice it against the vibrancy of the refugees," is a comment I often hear.

As the hula dance reaches a close to a chorus of camera flashes and applause, the beat boxing teens get their moment, crouching low as they rap to the turntable's beats. Connect's dynamic youth coordinator leads them in a James Brown-style number. The lyrics focus on strength and empowerment. Each of the teens showcase their breakdancing moves to wild applause. As the music sidles into Arabic pop, a group of men are encouraged to take to the stage in an elaborate circular dance. Closely flanking one another, they progressively speed up to the rhythmic cycles, a few whoops thrown in for good measure.

"It's great to see them all enjoying themselves," a voice whispers in my ear. "Their faces are so similar to those guys I work with back at Diversifat in Brizzy. I recognise this dance from our Eid celebrations." She sighs, "Their hand movements are so gentle, don't you think? Beautiful, just beautiful."

23 July, 2015. Eid Celebration, Civic Centre Conference Hall, Aiwo District.



Figure 5.3: Connecting Communities

In this chapter, I draw in my observations from the field to look at industry marketing events designed to promote the refugee to a new country of public consumers. Events like the Nauru Eid Celebration look to reconcile the public and its discontented commodity to the offshore supply chain. As previous chapters made clear, resource frictions envelop the company town district. In close succession, similar marketing projects around refugee and multicultural celebration as those on the mainland have been made relevant to the nuances of Nauru's 21km² terrain. In looking at the photographs and films crafted by oil giants in the Middle East, Mona Damluji (2015: 156) details how the production of culture is central to the expansion of the petroleum industry into new extractive zones. Petrofictions are important public relations tools "to produce a coherent and controlled story about oil and its effects, associating the image of a prospering petroleum industry with the promise of modernization and national development in the oil-producing state." Diana Davids Hinton (2004: 374) also emphasises the importance of the creation of company town culture, particularly in oil fields that see labour unrest. Company managers sought networking strategies to head off union activity when confronted with organised labour. Walkouts of organised field workers might mean loss of production, which company managers sought to "kill ... with kindness."

The refugee imaginary strategies developed to sustain offshore processing can be read in close parallel. Industry marketing events like Eid and World Refugee Day are powerful public relations strategies for refugee corporates' work in the refugee-rich territories of Nauru and other consumptive economies beyond. In Nauru, the construction of an industry imaginary of refugee harmony has been key to the storytelling strategies designed to reconcile the manufacturing business to discontented consumers and their human resources. The sorts of refugee marketing events here described have been made popular the world over, overshadowing the human consequences of extraction, while feeding into their perpetuation.

Valuable work has certainly detailed how visual representations of refugees have become "a key vehicle in the elaboration of a transnational social imagination of refugees" (Malkki 1996: 386).¹ This chapter builds on Malkki's contention that the image world of the refugee is essential to understanding the assemblage that constructs and expresses a worldview of humans as refugees for industry survival.

¹ See also for example Rajaram (2002).

However, rather than presenting the refugee as a “passive” object of “humanitarian” construction, I argue that the biophysical makeup of the refugee makes this collective imaginary possible. As I have argued throughout, a major feature of this extractive sector is that it revolves around an animate commodity that represents itself – sometimes publically – in suffering terms. Self-representation through tropes of persecution and democratic state gratitude makes the human commodity integral to the public relations work that drives the global refugee industry’s expansion. Certainly not an exemplar of false consciousness, this powerful form of living propaganda is as much a mobility futures trading strategy as it is for the industry’s cultural reproduction.

Refugee industry personnel refer to these sorts of events as “cultural” events. Culture in this sense conforms to the popular conception of culture as “the received humanistic canon of ‘art’, music and texts of a ‘literary’ character” (Turner 1993: 416). Industry professionals also refer to culture when describing people through generalised categorisations (refugees, expats, and locals) or ethnoracial and national distinctions (for example, Arabic, Australian, Iranian, Nauruan, and now refugee). This determinist invocation of culture refers to the system of organising people based on broad configurations united by shared “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973: 5). Although I use the term culture as per the references of industry personnel, my definition of culture is much more broadly defined. Instead, following Freidberg (2004: 10), I see culture as referring to “the norms, practices, and social institutions that revolve around commerce but encompass many activities besides the basic negotiations and transaction of commodity trade.” Taking this sort of approach emphasises how cultural events constitute part of industry marketing operations. Rather, refugee marketing campaigns are integral to the running of the manufacturing enterprise and sedimentation of refugee corporate power.

In the first half of the chapter I look at the marketing efforts for offshore refugees through the birth one of the world’s newest refugee celebrations, World Refugee Day Nauru. I describe some of the many public relations strategies that look to warm Nauruans to the offshore refugee industry, before moving to the direct connectivity efforts that attempt to bring refugee and local into productive union. The second half of the chapter turns to look at the efforts of multiculturalists in sowing the refugee into the Nauruan labour force. As few refugees chose distribution to Cambodia, Nauru’s refugee operations instead moved towards refugee-human capital

absorption. But, this section will go on to detail, offshore refugees did not want to bring their commoditisation to a close in Nauru, producing themselves in relation to commodifications for the Australian market economy.

Overall, I argue that the spectacular failures that plague the offshore business are down to two main cruxes. First, these types of industry events structure individuals' interactions in relation to the very segregational schema of the refugee that enflames public anger, fear, and compassion fatigue. Unfortunately the schema is also what binds the industry and self-promoting refugees, making refugee publicity a systemically brick walled endeavour. Second, the refugee relations projects in Nauru's small town context are entangled in flaws that develop from the curtailed mobility dreams of offshore refugees. The desire of offshore refugees to be in Australia and not in the imagined community of Nauru has led to ever-rolling operational failures. But in marketing offshore exceptionality, offshore public relations campaigns accrue more industry capital, spectacularly reinforcing the commodificational schema that gives rise to and refutes refugee company towns like Nauru from within the same complex.

Part One: World Refugee Day Goes Offshore

At the instigation of mainland contractors, well versed in the resource frictions that plague the business, "it's just like what I encounter in Brisbane," World Refugee Day founds its way to Nauru in 2014. Initially, when the first migrant imports flowed into Nauru in 2001, the government ran many of their own public relations strategies to win the local populace over to fears of their new backyard extractions. When HMS Moonera came to port carrying its preliminary cargo, the Nauruan government organised for flower-decked dancing troupes to sing in traditional costume. Later, government personnel and community groups crammed school, scouting, and visitor's trips to the processing facility in the former State House buildings, all of which sought to dispel local fears, and satiate some avid curiosity. At this point, the operations remained on an import-export setup with no move towards integration into the local social economy. Rene Harris stressed that "these people will be staying for around three months, not exceeding 4 months ... and will reside at the topside or other areas that have been chosen ... our foreign friends are undoing medical check-ups and there is no serious or contagious illness that will affect or be a threat to us ... the people are

all definitely leaving Nauru to go to other places and none are allowed to stay in Nauru. These people will not be of harm to our daily lives” (Republic of Nauru 2001). At the time, there was no need for much in the way of refugee public relations for a largely factory-contained export commodity. Nor were there the same resource frictions that enveloped the metropolis in the second import phase from 2012: the effect of the maritime import embargo that made many of the offshore refugees incensed. In Nauru Round Two, the standoff between the Australian government and offshore refugees saw those certified at the factories trickle into Nauru’s social economy from May 2014.

To make refugee resettlement a viable prospect, the Nauruan government introduced the celebration of World Refugee Day as an annual event one month after refugee absorption commenced. World Refugee Day is the industry’s biggest marketing event of the year, in which the refugee finds visual and oral definition. World Refugee Day developed out of World Refugee Year; a year-long global publicity drive in 1959, designed to whet public palates for refugee consumption at a time when interest and awareness was low.² Most major refugee importers now commemorate World Refugee Day; keen to celebrate the benefits of refugees to drum up consumer demand. The United Nations officially inaugurated World Refugee Day as a global celebration in 2000 on June 20, drawing together UNHCR’s global marketing work with that of state players worldwide. Some states, particularly those with strong refugee industry lobbies, such as Australia, also celebrate Refugee Week, which encases the Day in a weeklong publicity whirl. From the USA to Kenya to Taiwan, refugee cultural celebrations have gained popular middle-class marketing appeal the world over.

At the time of World Refugee Day Nauru’s first inauguration, refugee anger and fear was beginning to mount, blowback from the RPC riot of July 2013. Following the recommendations of mainland industry workers well versed in refugee publicity, the Nauruan government first instated World Refugee Day in June 2014, keen to deflect public attention away from the business’ otherwise shaky legitimacy. The first World Refugee Day Nauru was marked by a public holiday, just one week before Phosphate Commemoration Day. Phosphate Commemoration Day, celebrated on 1 July, commemorates when the Nauru Phosphate Corporation took over

² See Gatrell (2011) for a good discussion of the development of World Refugee Year as a global industry promotional campaign.

phosphate mining from the British Phosphate Commission. Nauru's airport lounge and hotel lobbies herald phosphate as a marker of national pride. Wall hangings and murals across government corridors all attest to the miracle of phosphate. The day is crowned by a state holiday, an official dinner for phosphate industry workers, and company awards ceremony.

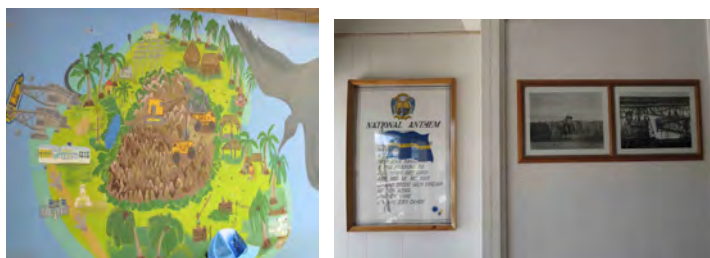


Figure 5.4: Phosphate Commemorations

From phosphate to refugee, annual celebrations soon heralded a new living product and marker of national pride. For Refugee Day, an elaborate programme was organised by the Nauruan government in collaboration with refugee contractors to now celebrate the refugee. In the lead-up, local schoolchildren were encouraged to write refugee poetry in competitions run across the school districts, recalling the specific narratives attached to the formation of refugees in their prose. Some teachers took time off from Earth Sciences classes focused on how Nauru phosphate was formed, putting together lessons where they discussed the commodity trail of the offshore refugee to Nauru. On the day itself, a full day program of events opened with a morning refugee commemoration parade around the airstrip, in which company town attendees processed with a banner reading “World Refugee Day” out in front. The Minister for Education, Charmaine Scotty, handed out specially printed T-shirts to the procession participants that read “World Refugee Day Nauru 2014.” A small display of marketing material was put together at the Civic Centre. Transfield Services and Save the Children workers compiled a selection of refugee art from the RPCs, which bore a striking resemblance to the state murals heralding phosphate modernity. Locals and certified refugees were all invited to attend the Day, with extra company bus services available for Nauru's living forms of propaganda. Afterwards, a soccer match was held at the oval in Denig between a refugee and Nauruan team, given widespread local press coverage direct to the point-of-sale.

Following the daytime events, industry workers organised an official dinner at the Centennial Hall commemorating the refugee, attended by local luminaries, offshore workers, and certified refugees from the resettlement districts. After the

playing of the national anthem and opening prayer, Minister Adeang delivered a welcoming speech on behalf of the Government of Nauru, emphasising the significance of World Refugee Day. He recognised and welcomed Nauru's newly certified refugees into the company town district, echoed by the Acting Australian High Commissioner. Adeang discussed his friendship with a local refugee couple, who had helped him in his household construction. He stressed the importance for everyone to extend their warmest welcome to the certifying refugees flowing into Nauru. Adeang also reiterated why the government decided to bring the processing operations to Nauru. He focused not on Nauru's economic desperation, but on their desire to help Australia combat the people smugglers and save more lives at sea. Adeang also mentioned the upcoming celebrity visit of Angelina Jolie, who had accepted President Waqa's invitation to tour Nauru, of which many were already excited. Following the speech, two certified refugees gave self-representational veracity to Nauru's new processing operations. They discussed their journeys to Nauru, thanking the government and its people for their hospitality. The Day closed with a musical finale of local dancers and a refugee song.

World Refugee Day II

Nauru's second World Refugee Day was a bit more lacklustre than the first. At the first World Refugee Day, there were only 41 certified refugees in Nauru, 29 families, and 12 under eighteens. The anger and fear that overtook the country was not yet at its peak. But as more refugees flooded into the township, bubbling up to 278 certified in November 2014, 456 by February 2015, then 506 in June 2015, resource frictions coursed through the company town district. In this context, marked by stark unpredictability, and human flare-ups, local and refugee discontent was at a peak. Neither the majority of locals or refugees felt well disposed towards celebrating the refugee as it permeated Nauruan life. Nor did World Refugee Day Nauru 2014, 2015, and then 2016 earn the moral capital the Nauruan government envisaged.

Under the marketing power of a vast refugee industry sector, Australia celebrates an entire Refugee Week. At this time of year, Australian public relations teams gear their refugee marketing work to waging battle against public apathy and resentment by stressing key angles such as the value of diversity and the economic benefits of consumption. Similar forms of marketing material that illuminate more of

the commodity trail with its nightmares and perils express visibly the value of giving money and supporting mainland refugee extraction to the well-meaning consumer. But at the Australian Refugee Week time of year, a great deal of the publicity focus is orchestrated around the curation of offshore refugee pathos. Dioramas of boats and self-representational offshore suffering tales are all used to warm non-receptive publics to lifting maritime self-import embargos that brings the supply chain to Nauruan lands.³ In this context, Nauru was unable to celebrate the offshore refugee alongside other state importers, even though the country's operations were built and run by many of the same firms at work in Australia, architected by its leading refugee policy experts and legal academics. Many leading experts flew in and out under the radar but none gave endorsement to the offshore extractive business. None of the celebrities that stand by the global refugee lobby endorsed higher import quotas for the small best practice state. Schoolchildren wrote poems about the war-torn journey of the refugee to the safety of Nauru in excitable preparation, but Angelina Jolie never did show. UNHCR personnel, instrumental in crafting Nauru's processing operations, advised against the visit. They knew that their Goodwill Ambassador would be subject to mainland refugee activist attacks if she acknowledged Nauru's high standards, potentially tarnishing their and her brand. UNHCR themselves only begrudgingly added a brief website acknowledgment to the global industry's newest corporate celebration hitting the equatorial Pacific. Like with the regalia of best practice provisions, the operational addition of World Refugee Day Nauru only garnered critique on the global refugee scene, here more sarcastic in tone.

@Republic_Nauru @MSMWatchdog2013 ^^If only "celebrating World Refugee Day" meant no more refugees incarcerated on Nauru...you could do this

@Republic_Nauru stop assisting Australia in violating refugee rights. Then we can celebrate together.

were some of the immediate responses to the Nauruan government's proud Happy World Refugee Day 2016 tweet (Republic of Nauru 2016a).

While Refugee Week Australia 2015 focused on ending offshore extraction and celebrating the benefits of the refugee to the Australian socio-economy, World Refugee Day Nauru II was a bit of a washout. The country still had a public holiday

³ Since 2013, Melbourne's RISE: Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees have staged a public boycott over celebrating Refugee Week because of offshore processing.

one week before Phosphate Commemoration Day. But on the day itself, no refugee commemoration parade or elaborate full-day programme was organised. There was no crowning dinner for the refugee or invited dignitaries. Connect and Transfield industry workers quickly put together a small display of refugee art at the Centennial Hall. Booklets that displayed Nauru's offshore refugee makeup were stockpiled on the side. The map with major refugee production sites was tacked to the back of the room. But attendance was poor. Groups of local children ran riot in the hopes of pilfering the free food. (Iranian refugee takeaway samples.) "Last year was much better," a Connect employee assured me. "This year we just didn't plan it in enough advance." She continued, "And we're trying to empower people not as refugees but as part of the *Nauruan* community. Nauru really is a multicultural community and it's important we celebrate that." It was with this goal of "empowering people not as refugees but as part of the *Nauruan* community" that formed an important part of Nauru's new marketing strategies.

Celebrating Diversity

The move towards multicultural diversity was a trend that developed since refugee/non-refugee tensions mounted, but also as the tail end of the commodity process reached fruition. Australia has an elaborate industry sector of organisations tasked with refugee absorption (known as "refugee resettlement providers") in an effort to push the refugee into the labour market and bring commoditisation to a "cessational clause" close. Because negative refugee sentiments are commonplace in Australia, mainland services providers are also well versed in refugee consumer relations. They make efforts to configure people not just as refugees but also as carriers of "cultural diversity," moving them towards the transitional stage of refugee to form of human capital for economic absorption. In December 2014, when more certified refugees moved down the atoll into the Nauruan metropolis, the Australian Immigration Department awarded the AU\$32 million contract to the newly formed Australian NGO consortium, Connect Settlement Services. Following a merger between Melbourne's Australian Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Brisbane-based Multicultural Development Association Ltd. (MDA), Connect became the newest offshore contractor tasked with "a new corporate profile as the expert in

managing cultural diversity,” delivering “meaningful individual and community outcomes for refugees starting a new life on Nauru.”

For explaining the tensions that arose from offshore industry, the mainland diversity experts decided to try something different after the clear failures of straightforward refugee exaltation. In an effort to facilitate the absorption of the offshore refugee into the Nauruan land, they drew on popular Australian imaginaries to configure Nauru as a “multicultural” country as they imagined it to be in full harmony, drawing on mainland strategies made popular on the basis of refugee industry.

The newly formed NGO consortium for offshore refugee resettlement, Connect Settlement Services, was made up of two industry giants, AMES and MDA Ltd. AMES in particular played a seminal part from the very beginning of the Australian government’s postwar refugee resettlement operations, growing into the largest state provider of refugee settlement services. Competition is fierce at the tail end of the commodity trail; the transition of refugee to labour unit is one that the government seeks to expedite. The Australian government also proudly upholds this aspect of their refugee to market operations. Refugee professionals consistently cite Australia as a global leader in refugee services that other countries should emulate, a key part of being a refugee resettlement state: the honeypot dream that had attracted many of Nauru’s raw materials to Australia.

AMES was a major player in the early industry surge. In the 1950s, Australia’s nascent Immigration Department initially placed the emphasis on the assimilation of new human capital, with little in the way of labour market absorption programmes. People were expected to clone themselves into the ““Australian way of life”” (Stratton and Ang 1994: 18) largely under their own steam. Early arrivals were placed in Migrant Reception and Training Centres and given some language tuition, of which AMES played a part: a small volunteer teaching agency housed in dongas in Melbourne. As global circuits of human movement increased and the refugee morphed outside of the white European varietal, the Fraser Government introduced multicultural policies in the 1970s (Castles 1992). An increasing number of refugee settlement services and life skills programmes sought to mould new forms of human capital, unused to the “Australian way of life,” into the labour market system. AMES soon grew into AMES Australia, the lead partner of the Humanitarian Settlement Services Consortium in Melbourne with over 2000 volunteers and 1000 staff across

the metropolitan region. MDA Ltd. is a rather more recent arrival on the scene, developed in the late nineties, but now contracted for all refugee transition work across Queensland, in addition to management of the new wave CDs. Directors of both organisations are prominent figures in shaping government refugee and multicultural policy. Along with contracted schemes such as English language tuition, employment, and housing services, both organisations lead community events around phrase goals of multicultural celebration.

When operationalised for the offshore enterprise, the partner contractors brought the same schemata for marketing the refugee to Nauruans, extolling the virtues of the refugee as a carrier of diversity. As with their work in Australia, the second part of AMES and MDA's joint offshore contract focused on the market absorption of the refugee into Nauru. In announcing the newest addition to the industry firms, Nauru's Secretary for Justice Lionel Aingmea said:

We believe we should assist refugees to become resilient and independent of services as soon as practicable. Connect partner, AMES has over 50 years' experience in teaching English and vocational skills to refugees. Connect will work more collaboratively with the Nauru Government settlement team to ensure both refugee and Nauruan communities are working in harmony (Republic of Nauru 2015b).

In meetings with members from the major mainland refugee firms and the Australian government, Minister Adeang echoed Secretary Aingmea's sentiments, stressing the significance of the task ahead, but that Nauru was willing to be guided by Australian expertise.

By the time Connect arrived into the offshore business in December 2014, everyone in Nauru had been subject to extensive public relations efforts designed to communicate the moral values of the operations. Many locals were initially keen to find out more about their backyard extraction, which had been on and off again since 2001. Those who had not worked in or had relatives working in the industry, of which there were few, had extensively Googled the word "refugee." They had come across the substantial public relations outputs, legal and regulatory texts, publicity funding drives, and other peak industry narratives that defines refugee commodity culture. Many were also enveloped in the mainland public relations schemes of refugee supermajors from time spent in Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney, which were all the site of end offshore protests, as much as refugee racial scares. Everyone had heard the

constant state and international broadcasting streams of mainland refugee publicity not-to-mention the prominent public relations attempts of offshore refugees inside their country. Banners and slogans painted across resettlement dwellings read things like “we’re refugees not criminals” and “freedom is a right not a crime.”

At the same time, many locals had forged firm friendships with the processing refugees in the factories and the newly certified in their district makeup, who shared their production stories on an individual basis. Local departments involved more closely with the extractive project also projected the industry’s operations to the public. On Public Service Day, for example, Nauru’s Justice Department put together flow charts that mapped out the RSD and resettlement system in Nauru. Interested locals and busloads of schoolchildren were brought in to learn about the routinised work of government divisions. Local maps covering the locations of the different manufacturing and resettlement sites flanked posters of the global production wells from whence Nauru’s refugees came. Country conditions reports listed the particular persecutions faced in home regions alongside UNHCR “Spot the Refugee” Lego wall charts. All emphasised the moral value of the new manufacturing enterprise, which gave the certified refugee the chance to live in safety in Nauru.



Figure 5.5: Learning about Refugee Processing

From the initial concept to move processing to resettlement, in-house planning units set up a Community Consultation Committee (CCC), recognising that firm local support was needed to make refugee absorption a success. The CCC was made up of a small group of locals, who attended all major Australian-Nauruan government meetings in Canberra and Nauru. They participated in some of the RSD training, and were instructed on Australian style integration programs. They were toured around AMES’ refugee resettlement housing in Melbourne and MDA’s similar facilities in Brisbane: both of which had already been showcased on multiple occasions to leaders of government and non-government resettlement programs around the world. Like the

CLOs, the CCC members were tasked with indigenous public relations. They spoke with concerned locals on a regular basis about the resettlement specificities, provided them with country of origin information on the new certified refugees, including why they had fled. However, as the operations progressed, and offshore refugees became increasingly incensed, many locals remained less and less convinced: “If they’re fleeing persecution why are they so picky?!” “Why are they rude about Nauruans when we’re providing protection!?” were the common refrains.

When Connect arrived in the picture, marketing schemes on the benefits of the refugee expanded full throttle. As Nauru’s local market grew with 506 certified refugees in the township by June 2015, 655 in process in the factories, many on open centre circulation, Connect began to regularly display not only the production of the refugee, but also the diversity of the refugee. For explaining the tensions that arose from the offshore operations, the mainland diversity experts drew on popular Australian imaginaries to reproduce a fairy-tale narrative of the refugee’s promise to diversify. Instead, they worked to build an imagined community where refugee and non-refugee could live in harmony, culturally assimilating labour segregations into the ideals of the company town ecology. As soon as Connect entered the scene at this end of the commodity trail, events like World Refugee Day met with Eid, Diwali, and Nayrouz, all marked with yearly state celebrations, which attempted to encourage Nauruans and refugees to learn about and participate with each other through the language of “multicultural diversity.”

Posters went up across Nauru’s districts whenever a festival or date of significance hit, inviting locals to partake in not only World Refugee Day, but also an extensive programme of public celebrations, which Connect made into public blockbuster “diversity celebration” events. Even at Nauru’s World Refugee Day 2015, when Connect workers were firmly on the industry scene, mention of refugees was noticeably absent from marketing materials and the event itself, instead advertised as a Cultural Connection Event. The only public mention of World Refugee Day was in the public service text sent by the government on the day itself, and a smiley face at the bottom of a company town email, “Happy World Refugee Day you guys 😊.” Instead, the mainland multiculturalists moved the emphasis towards diversity celebration in an effort to gloss over the problematic aspects of the offshore supply chain: the demands of suffering presentation, the human control and segregation, and

and now online UNHCR simulation games are prominent fare, designed to entertain and educate a generation of new consumers, particularly in areas of high import density or refugee scares.⁴ As a legacy of phosphate colonial days, Nauru still uses the Queensland Education System. Years of educational consultancy has led to a state curriculum remarkably similar to Australia, but made specific to Nauru through for example a focus on the dominant local industries – in particular, the processing of phosphate for export consumption. Now, in Nauru’s new industrial era, educational consultancy has further developed Nauru’s curriculum in line with the state’s new dominant industry sector – refugees for import consumption. Educational tools herald Nauru’s new commodities across a country of high import density *and* refugee scares.

In 2014, before refugee children entered the public school system, Nauru’s Year 7s learned about the historical development of phosphate mining in their backyard, taken on a fieldtrip to the extraction sites atop phosphate hill as part of the Social Studies unit “From Rock to Resources.” Year 6s, on the other hand, studied the processes of production, manufacture, and distribution that makes a refugee, charting the historical development of their industry operations from the first 2001 Tampa cargo, taking fieldtrips to the RPCs. In their Social Studies unit “Forced to Go,” they learned about the commodity trail of persecution to protection from a case study of the refugee’s journey to Nauru. They practiced self-commodification exercises where they imagined themselves as a refugee moving along the trail towards salvation in Nauru. The previous term they focused on Human Rights, discussing some of the laws and supermajors that have grown to shape different business sectors over the years. In the refugee education unit, students drew on this industry knowledge but now made relevant to the morality of the refugee business. Teachers spoke through Geneva players, referenced processing rulebooks, manufacturing criteria, country statistics, refugee self-accounts, and examples of production sites around the world, as made popular in online refugee lesson plan schemes. Students drew on their own refugee understandings, referencing their exposure to first-hand refugee accounts and industry corporates, including some of the work of their parents in their backyard. Teachers passed around photos and industry ephemera collated in the first and second manufacturing heydays to ensure that students identified with the suffering intrinsic to the refugee. They did not discuss the disposal of the non-refugee, the human

⁴ See for example UNHCR’s online refugee experience game, *Against All Odds*, developed in 2006.
<http://www.unhcr.org/against-all-odds.html>

consequences attached to the manufacturing sector, the resource frictions that enveloped Nauru. Instead, they focused on the fairy-tale narrative of persecution to protection made popular in refugee curricula around the world.

Before certified refugee children moved from the private factory schools into the public education system, an incredible amount of work went into Nauru's educational reinvigoration. Employees in Nauru's education department were flown over to Australia for refugee training sessions and curriculum consultancy in advance of the RPC-local resettlement operations. In scoping through the curriculum, the many mainland refugee education experts recommended the removal of the refugee curriculum unit for the 2015 academic year. Like their parents, children at the RPCs had lived through the realities of the manufacturing business, including the self-harm that took place on a regular basis. In particular, they also had their eyes set on Australian mobility futures, not the promise of salvation in Nauru. It was decided that, with this cohort entering into the schools, a focus on the intricacies of Nauru's backyard operations and the salvational promise of Nauru safety might not produce the desired effect. Instead, the "Forced to Go" unit was scrapped from 2015, and the refugee poetry competitions downscaled. The Year 10s had a course unit on Multicultural Studies.

It was partly because offshore multiculturalists sought to emphasise people "not as refugees" but as part of a harmonious imagined community, opiated and censored, that industry projects like Eid garnered the organisational focus. But the smokescreening strategy was somewhat irrelevant in that local schoolchildren were already exposed to the commodificational realities of the offshore refugee, the self-harming and self-representation, often shared by their parents, but also made so visible through choreographic displays online and across their backyard. It was this representational knowing that constantly unhinged multiculturalists' efforts as they sought to gloss over the deep labour segregations and rifts that charged through Nauru.

For Benedict Anderson (1991: 6), the nation is part of an imagined political community precisely because "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them." What was peculiar about the refugee imagineering project was that the notion of imagined community was being created in a company town context where people did know each other, at least through generalised industry categorisations that segregated refugee from non-

refugee, which overshadowed individual relations. People were segregated as refugees through most other means, including visas, policing, specialist housing, industry services, and workforce refugee training sessions: some of which was far greater for offshore refugees at company expense, and some of which was far more unequal. Certified refugees who one month before had been under the watch of the local security guard next door, then under the charges of CLO police forces, were expected to celebrate their combined diversity. Vitalis (2007: 23) points to similar conflicts of segregation in the labour system in the oil camps of Dharan, writing that:

A firm's protection of the bottom line, the unreconstructed paternalism of its white executives, and the segregation of the campsites themselves all trumped equality.

Here, the goal of multiculturalists was to forge a collective identity that dispelled the deeply rooted labour segregations. They did so by denying the institutionalised structures of inequality and exploitation that undergirded extraction, and refusal of offshore refugees to be part of the Nauruan imagined community. The politics of denial lent an uneasy air to imagined community life in Nauru and only discursively censored people's mobility desires and differentiation as refugees, which was given propulsion elsewhere.

The final section in this chapter's first half turns to some of the regular events organised by Connect that looked to advance the Nauruan imagined community.

The Beach House



Figure 5.7: The Beach House

Mirroring their multicultural welcome hubs in Brisbane and Melbourne, the Connect consortium put together “The Beach House,” a rented Nauruan property near Anibare Bay. At the Beach House, Connect replicated their mainland work, attempting to organise “community connection events” for refugees and non-refugees to unite. A long list of sporting fixtures, swimming, basketball, volleyball, youth soccer, cricket,

aerobics, and film nights were some of the projects that Connect staff devised to integrate refugee and non-refugee worlds.

Every fortnight, Connect workers organised a Family Film Night. In the phosphate years, Nauru had two cinemas set up by the BPC: one for offshore workers, the other for locals. Both fell into abandon when Nauruan independence hit and the BPC lost their ability to mine. The newly instated Nauruan government, flush with phosphate wealth, later built a brand new cinema at the Civic Centre. However, in the phosphate bankruptcy years, the doors of the new Republic of Nauru cinema closed. Apart from the odd Digicel screening at the top of the Civic Centre – a phone company brought to Nauru in the refugee resurgence years – the country did not have a programme of film night events. But thanks to the refugee business, the movie night trend firmly reignited from the British Phosphate Commissioner days of old.

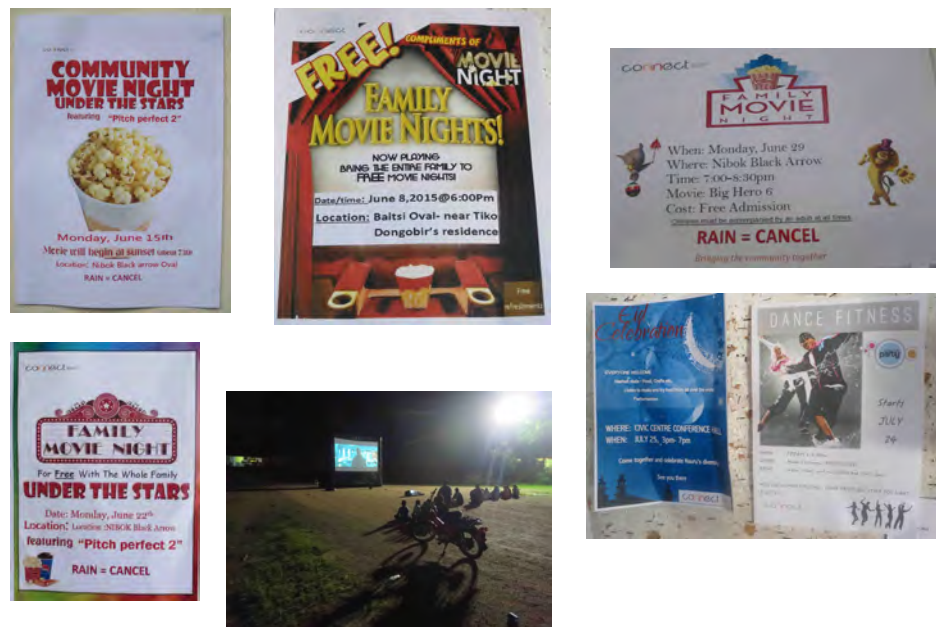


Figure 5.8: Bringing the Community Together

Brightly coloured posters went up like clockwork on the major display boards outside supermarkets and shops across Nauru. “For Free with the whole family,” “free refreshments,” “bringing the community together” the posters enthusiastically proclaimed. A blow-up screen and surround sound-system was inflated weekly at different sporting ovals across Nauru’s districts in an effort to bring together refugee and non-refugee in multicultural harmony. Few locals or refugees attended. Bored children might amble over for free popcorn if nothing better to do, as a desultory air passed through the palm trees. But Connect staff were undeterred and indeed, remarkably enthusiastic.

Aerobics nights soon added to the busy schedule of community connection events. Organised on Friday evenings, the aerobics classes also recalled the colonial phosphate aerobics years. In the BPC days, “keep fit” classes were organised for locals at the phosphate built hospital. This time round, through the proactivity of refugee industry workers, aerobics classes sought to warm locals to a new extractive project, but by bringing together locals with their animate commodity. Weekly, Madonna and 1980s disco pop blared from Connect’s educational hub in the Meneng Hotel. Posters decorated the room, “Join the Party,” “Connecting communities,” always the tagline. Eager multiculturalists practiced high kicks and star jumps in leotards at the front of the room, expectantly waiting for their target markets to appear to create the Nauru imagined community. No locals ever showed. Occasionally one or two refugees stopped by. The former were sick and tired of pro refugee schemes: their kindness efforts only ever met with critique. The few refugees that turned up did so to take their mind off of Australian futures. “It keeps me busy,” “It’s something different to do from sitting with everyone else talking about the future,” were two responses told to me.

On the other hand, some of Connect’s refugee consumer relations projects were incredibly “successful,” albeit not in the way, certainly the Australian government, envisaged. In attempting to warm locals to the refugee project, their consumer relations work with young teens had the effect of local politicisation into the end offshore movement. The youth music project I encountered at the Eid celebrations was one of the most popular of Connect’s many endeavours. In one of their wilder efforts to induce refugee/non-refugee integration, Connect arranged for the Immigration Department to fund an impressive flat screen Mac and video recording setup for some of Nauru’s musically talented youths to collaborate with refugee-certified teens. Under the guidance of a youth engagement practitioner, well versed in music integration projects from similar mediation work on the mainland, the group put together several collaborative tracks complete with high quality videos, shot down at Anibare boat harbour. Local musicians contributed backing beats overlaid by lyrics composed by a group of resettled refugee teens, all keen rappers and beatboxers. Each of the tracks focused not on the new harmonious Nauruan refugee town, but on refugee suffering and Australian exclusion. Words like “persecution,” “Taliban threats,” and discourses of victimisation punctuated the verses. Close-up shots projected pained expressions together with the wistful dancing of local and

refugee youths and Connect workers, all staring out to sea at the envisaged refugee paradise, somewhere in the vicinity of Australia. Firm friendships were forged through the project and their work was impressively high quality. But instead of “killing union organization with kindness ... creating an attractive way of company life” (Hinton 2008: 374), all of the local teens became deeply committed to the injustices attached to their compatriots’ Australian exclusion, wanting to participate in their friends’ labour struggles. “I just hope Australia can see this,” one of the refugee certified teens excitedly said to me. One of his Nauruan DJs friends adds, “I really hope we can help them get there, make the Australian government change their minds.” Unfortunately for the group, these sorts of consumer relation techniques remained caught up in the cycle of refugee deterrence, and could not be given airplay on the mainland.

Damluji (2015: 160) speaks of a similar focus in the public relations efforts of oil giants in Iraq. Damluji describes how the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) took a new public relations approach that differed from other oil companies operating in the production fields. Instead, IPC put together films to “reconcile the oil company to the population, much more than to describe its operations to the English speaking audiences in Europe.” The goal, Damluji writes, was part of an “explicitly political strategy”:

to create a favourable attitude towards the oil industry as a whole, and to make the Operating Companies seem a more natural and useful part of the economy ... Irrational, emotional attitudes will be damped down and criticism directed into informed and constructive channels” (Arthur Elton cited in Damluji 2015: 160).

As with the in-country petro-films that Damluji describes, the purpose of the refugee public relations attempts was to reduce in-country company hazards as a form of social control. The motivation behind the work was to distract certified refugees from curtailed mobility futures and locals from resource curse realities, in the process warming them both to the integration of the refugee into the Nauruan socio-economy: at least until offshore refugees relented to Cambodia redistribution or the Australian government could devise a more popular extension to the offshore supply chain.

But the young teens were all keen to upload the music videos to YouTube to show the world the fruits of their efforts, into which went weeks of work, thousands of Australian dollars, and of which they maintained great pride. Yet despite the

success of the project in engaging local youths with the moral value of refugee integration – for Australia not Nauru – the Immigration Department could not authorise the uploading of the videos. The Australian government brought offshore processing to Nauru in the first place as a Debordian spectacle – a “circuit breaker” (Expert Panel Report 2012: 12) – that would dissuade future boat arrivals, which is what garnered their electorate’s support. Funding refugee music collaborations that voiced the injustices of mainland exclusion, not to mention sound systems for Eid celebrations, Madonna pop aerobics classes, yoga, and the like sat uneasily with the choreographic presentation of maritime deterrence. The discourse of deterrence served a powerful purpose for the Australian government’s cruelty spectacle goals. Instead, the videos only stayed within Nauru’s circumference, with the unified images not aired on the mainland. Ironically, it was the obfuscation of resource integration that also fed into the global pro refugee sphere and back into the enlargement of offshore industry. Mainland refugee activists continuously latched onto the presentation of Nauruans’ cruelty of offshore refugees, using the choreographic spectacle to fuel support of their end offshore movement. In turn, their offshore imaginaries cyclically exasperated local and refugee resentments that underpinned the rationales behind the barrage of multicultural reengineering projects.

The second section turns to look at the efforts of multiculturalists in sowing the refugee into the Nauruan labour force. While the previous efforts described were designed for Nauruan and refugee social marketing appeal, the final part of Connect’s public relations work was designed to communicate to both refugee and non-refugee that the refugee could create opportunities to industrialise Nauru. This work sought to solidify the productive union of the refugee not just with the non-refugee but also as embedded into the Nauruan market economy. Unfortunately as I go on to detail, offshore refugees did not want to bring their commoditisation to a close in Nauru, producing themselves in relation to commodifications for the Australian market economy.

Part Two: Sowing the Refugee

If we were to propose a motto for our economic policy, we would suggest the following one, which dramatically sums up the need to invest the wealth produced by the destructive mining system in order to create reproductive and productive

agricultural wealth: “sow the oil (sembrar el petroleo)” - Suarez Figueroa (Coronil 1997: 105).

In his account of Venezuela's oil boom, Coronil (1997: 134) refers to the state's metaphor of “sowing the oil” so as to turn oil money produced by the destructive mining system into “productive agricultural and industrial investments and, thus ... transform Venezuela's vast but exhaustible oil wealth into permanent social wealth.” Coronil suggests that the “oil illusions” produced by state leaders are tied to the particular qualities of the commodity. The vision of the oil economy's “petromagical” effects that Coronil identifies was here adapted to the particularities of a human commodity. Like the oil development initiatives, the Nauruan government sought to turn the refugee not just into refugee money but also transform the human capital derived from extraction into productive developmental wealth. A principle part of the work of refugee resettlement firms, in particular the offshore contractors that came to Nauru, is to transition the newly certified refugee that emerges off the processing belt into a unit of human capital. It is this human resources work that makes not just a refugee processing but fully-fledged refugee industrialised state. However, unlike in Australia, where the majority of refugees are keen to impregnate themselves into the Australian economy, the offshore refugee resettlement workers encountered a new problem, of a certified population not keen to fertilise Nauruan pastures, but the country from which the contractors had just arrived – ironically one whose Dionysian bounties were cultivated through Nauru fertiliser. Thus, the offshore refugee resettlement firms flown out from Australia had to also take on the task of marketing life in Nauru to a resource determined to be exported, and leave Nauru's pinnacle fields again export dry.

From the initial concept to move the certified refugee from factory assessment into the Nauruan metropolis, the Australian government hired mainland refugee resettlement experts to prepare for the refugee's transition. None of the offshore resettlement workers had been to Nauru before but were faced with integrating the Nauruan refugee into an unbeknownst country, and marketing the move across discontented labour factions. Thus, the Nauruan government put together a Government of Nauru Settlement Team that along with the Community Consultation Team would better indigenise the endeavour and encourage locals to be more invested in their backyard extractions. Like the Consultation Team, the Settlement Team were trained by AMES and MDA Ltd., toured around Australia's principle refugee

resettlement sites, observing Australian Life Skills programmes. They were soon well versed in the nuances of refugee integration, applying the design framework to life in the once phosphate isle. Mirroring the Australian multicultural style, the Nauruan government also created an entirely new state department tasked with overseeing the booming refugee metropolis, the Department of Multicultural Affairs. With the flood of certified refugees into Nauru from the factories before, Minister Adeang’s portfolio expanded. He became not only the Minister for Finance and Minister for Justice & Border Control, but also the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. In his new portfolio now lay the community consultative committee, the settlement team, and the CLOs in addition to the manufacturing operations in the factories.

Connect also employed a number of local staff along with their fly-in-fly-out expat labour force to assist with the public relations of promoting the refugee’s integration into Nauru. “Connect is working closely with the Government of Nauru Settlement Team and other service providers to offer a solid foundation of cultural knowledge for refugees living in Nauru to equip them for productive, positive and integrated settlement experiences,” Connect’s Community Engagement Manager said (Republic of Nauru 2015c). Because the refugee would soon be circulating through Nauru’s state institutions on an everyday basis, Connect also led education and information sessions on the refugee across the townships. Connect and other fly-in-fly out experts with specific expertise provided refugee sensitisation training to teachers, clinicians, local law enforcement, and others on the particular vulnerabilities attached



to refugees so as to “assist with refugee’s integration and awareness about their new surrounding” (ibid). This work was in addition to the previous efforts around open centre circulation, here directed specifically for a more permanent refugee resettlement – at least until Nauru’s refugees relented or more enticing onward supply chain segues could be devised.

Figure 5.9: Training in Refugee Work

An integration programme was developed for the certified refugee out of Australian refugee-to-market design schemes. Like the Australian Cultural Orientations and Life Skills programmes at work on the mainland and in principle refugee export sites, all positively certified refugees went through a Nauruan Cultural

Orientation program in their factory district. The three-part induction package led by the local settlement and Connect workforces was designed to provide an introduction to aspects of Nauruan life. By now, next to all refugees were familiar with life in Nauru from open centre circulation, which looked to warm them to their new resettlement destination. Many took the RPC company buses, were picked up by friends on motorbikes, spent time coasting the country, took part in events like the annual Coca-Cola 10k, but the integration programmes were an extra precaution to ensure a smooth factory to market transition as per Australian standard operating procedures.

All new refugees were taken on a household induction of their refugee resettlement dwellings as allocated by Connect personnel. They were given home safety demonstrations on electrical fittings, how to function the TV remotes and air-conditioning; although all utilities and wifi bills came pre-paid. A bus tour around the country followed where Nauru's newly certified resources were shown key institutions of everyday interaction such as the supermarkets, post office, hospital, government buildings, schools, university campus, childcare and nursery facilities with tips and hints for life in Nauru. They were made familiar with the public and private transport networks of which they could be availed including the private refugee company bus service that operated alongside phosphate company transport. Along with the country's Christian churches, which some people already frequented through open centre circulation, Nauru's refugees were also shown the new mosques that had been set-up within the resettlement dwellings complete with multilingual signage as part of the new state multicultural commitment.

An optional three-day Settlement Lifeskills Orientation capped the absorption scheme. During the Lifeskills Orientation, industry professionals from across Nauru came together to deliver presentations to all newly certified refugees. An enthusiastic team led the Nauru publicity efforts, to convince the offshore refugees of the value of becoming part of the Nauruan socio-economy, and the responsibilities that it entailed. The certified refugee remained a high-value commodity, at risk of ever-heated Australian activist campaign threats, even if no longer under full corporate liability. The talks featured local subjects made popular on the basis of refugees including health and safety hazards such as tidal currents, food sanitisation, and traffic safety. The Nauru Police Force spoke on the rights of Nauru's new citizens, the role of the police, the CLOs, local laws and customs. They detailed the new speeding and driving

safety policies, including the breathalyser and driving license checks that had become sine qua non in the risk adverse country. Refugees would predominately use the public medical system, but they also had access to a specialist private refugee clinic, which operated in a renovated ward, run by IHMS under a second contract for certified refugee healthcare. Healthcare workers also presented the plans for the brand new AU\$27 million hospital funded by the Australian government to Australian standard.

Educators from the school districts explained the state educational system, which had been bulked up by Australian teachers, chosen because of their refugee specialties. Refugee transition programmes in advance of students' arrivals ensured that the school environment and curriculum would be well adapted to suit their needs. USP administrators spoke on the higher educational courses on offer, now made subsidised for refugees. Women's Affairs representatives discussed women's connection programmes including links to the community, childcare, volunteering and work experience possibilities. Connect and all personnel stressed the employment prospects for refugees in the Nauruan labour market, providing details on the various Nauruan workplace environments and small business packages available.

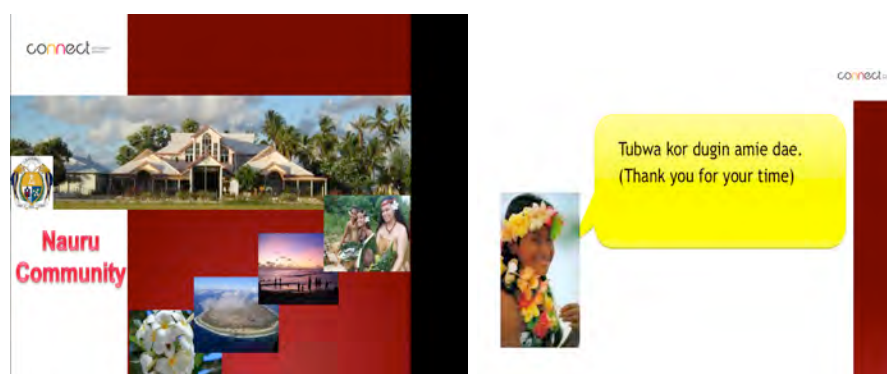


Figure 5.10: Nauru Lifeskills

The absorption programme added to the increased factory visits that took place from 2014 with local groups, in particular women's groups, school refugee awareness raising trips, and men's football friendlies. In the RPCs, in the move towards refugee market absorption, cultural, and language sessions and Nauru documentary film screenings also occurred on a more regular basis to acclimatise the processing refugee to life outside the factories. "We will do our best as Nauru Government representatives and work alongside Connect to assist the refugees in any

way, to make them feel welcome and know that they are safe here on Nauru. The Nauru Community are keen to welcome refugees who can contribute to the community in a positive way,” the local Settlement Manager for the Nauruan Government said (Republic of Nauru 2015c).

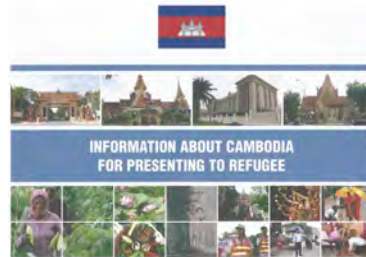
Mobility Futures Australia

The majority of offshore refugees were not so convinced, continuing to stress their demands of moving to Australia, and being *Australian* not Nauruan refugees. Many cared little about the safety regulations and responsabilising themselves as Nauruan subjects. No refugees I spoke with were enticed by the public relations work that looked to market Nauru as their resettlement destination. Several mocked the Nauru marketing attempts behind-the-scenes, making comments such as the last chapter described, like, “In Australia people are fit, they work out, they eat healthily. Everyone here’s diabetic and fat.” “The place is a dump. How can they tell us to keep ourselves clean!?” Rather, those who took the Nauru Orientation package did so for their own public relations presentations for envisioned life in Australia. Marcus, a newly certified refugee I spoke with said, “it’s all Australian firms who are leading it so it’s sort of the same.” Almost all went through the Orientation to complete the “hard workers” image that might enable their life in Australia, obtaining a completion certificate that could be added to their Australian onward CVs. “You never know who can help you with reaching Australia. It’s better to do everything you can and show you want to contribute,” Alessandro, a certified refugee, employed in Nauru, told me.

Several also went through the programme to show evidence of their Nauruan cultural sensitivity, sometimes a prerequisite for job applications that would look good down the line for Australian moves. Job specifications in Nauru, particularly with Australian firms, willing to employ certified refugees back into the industry, often read “have a demonstrated ability to engage with community members from refugee and local communities” and “have a strong understanding of Nauruan culture and respects the local people and their practices.” Thus, while the programme was a Nauruan Orientation, offshore refugees effectively shaped the package into an Australian Orientation. No refugee ever attended the Cambodia marketing presentations led by flown over Phnom Penh teams, later a resident young Cambodian promoter. These promotional attempts were capped by a locally screened video of

Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, who stressed the "wealth of opportunities" of life in "fast-paced and vibrant" Cambodia.

Like with the IOM redistribution offers marketed around the factories, these deals were only clandestinely taken by a few offshore refugees, who had to be moved



away from others for their own safety, targeted as weakening the Australian public relations offensive. For many certified refugees, the Nauruan Orientation on the other hand held tactical value as marketing appeal for Australia as did Nauruan employment.

Figure 5.11: Marketing Cambodia

Refugee Industrialisation

The Beach Office also acted as a Job Seekers agency for certified refugees entering the Nauruan marketplace. Connect case managers individually discussed with each person their financial situation and employment backgrounds, putting together their employment prospects. Australian-funded micro-finance packages were available for setting up a small business in Nauru. Job advertisements also regularly went up in the Connect offices for positions that might be of interest. Connect teams visited local businesses to encourage them about the benefits of employing a refugee. Part of the rationale behind the general refugee awareness-raising campaigns was to encourage local employers to consider hiring recently certified refugees out from the factories. Connect, other industry contractors, and government departments often promoted positive examples of refugees making a successful transition to the Nauruan workforce. They stressed the enthusiastic attitude of Nauru's refugees through regular segments in the state papers like "Refugees In the Workplace" in the RPC company town newsletter.

Local workforce reception differed around refugee integration. The dwindling phosphate sector was not so keen to exchange phosphate wealth for refugees. Nauruans retain great pride in their phosphate operations. Along with the refugee industry, the phosphate sector is the one workforce where locals are guaranteed a job. Phosphate industrialists maintain a high local employment rate in keeping with government directives in a postcolonial reversal from when next to no Nauruans were employed: of the total workforce employed at RONPhos in 2015, 93.5% were

Nauruans.⁵ Although refugees were not counted as expats, part of Minister Adeang's approach for finding employment for all interested refugees, some locals were scared of refugees taking their jobs. Phosphate executives would only approach refugees in the event of no local takers. While some refugees were seen as "guaranteed hard workers," other refugees were also viewed as coming with demanding expectations from rosy-tinted visions of Australia or life in cosmopolitan metropolises before. One phosphate executive remarked:

There was this one guy we had, he wanted an office, 24/7 internet access, a car, a satellite phone, and a secretary. And he was adamant about it! I told him others with the same job just take the RONPhos bus. I mean, I don't even have that stuff. You get these over the top expectations from some of the refugees who see themselves as above others because they're treated like that here. The air con and private healthcare, and all that, the "Australian standard."

Another company manager described refugees as "drifters," "shopping about" with little firm interest in Nauru's industrial growth. He described how in the instances that he had hired a refugee, they moved to a different job a few weeks later without the incentive for future prolongation.

Rather starkly, the one phosphate industrial zone where mineral and migrant did meet more commonly was in Nauru's beleaguered attempts at environmental rejuvenation. Several refugees took jobs at the Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation's half-hearted garden centre allotment – the partial effect of the Weeramaantry lawsuit, designed to bring about agricultural fecundity. A few potted plants and bored-looking refugees, wishing to be elsewhere, represented the ironies of Nauru's abortive agricultural and human developmental endeavours. As this signals, some of Connect's germination efforts were highly successful, albeit superficial, as no refugee ever wanted to lay roots in Nauru. The Taiwanese for example preferred hiring refugees at their agricultural farms, deciding that they were much harder workers than Nauruans, who often showed up late or sometimes not at all. Many Nauruans have a general *laissez faire* attitude to work: "that's island life," I was often told, "we take it slow here" as one local laughingly made references to some of the truisms of "lazy islander" colonial tropes. Families are close knit in Nauru, and for the majority, where a great deal of importance is placed. It is not uncommon for a local to take a week off

⁵ Statistics obtained during my fieldwork.

work to prepare for a child's birthday celebration or support a family member in the event of an illness or other pressing circumstances. For some industry sectors, like the Taiwanese agricultural development, and other forms of low wage menial employment, such as cleaning, laundering, cooking, and construction, staffed predominately by Kiribati workers, refugee labour represented a potential boon to the workforce. Many of the new refugee labour hands were classed as low-skilled economic migrants. Unable to obtain an Australian visa through other means, they had attempted to insert themselves into the Australian economy outside of the regulated operations. Their labour was ripe for maximising Nauru's growth as much as their bodily currency brought the rebuilding efforts into fruition.

Some refugees circulated more explicitly back into refugee industry firms, tasked with securitising other prospective refugees along the commodity belt. A few months in, Transfield and Wilsons both employed a small number of refugees back at the RPCs in refugee welfare and security, who helped produce and reproduce the offshore commodity. Like with the phosphate industry, offshore refugee workforces maintained local employment quotas.⁶ However, many locals I spoke with found the arduous schedule of on-call refugee industry work difficult, unused to the strict regime of Australian requirements or, as Chapter 3 detailed, simply unpleasant. Transfield line managers were always exasperated at the no shows and late arrivals of local workers. They soon offered financial incentives to locals who completed a full week of work, but struggled to maintain a reliable consistency. In counter, the refugee represented a productive labour unit, on time and efficient. The power imbalances attached to presentation for hopeful onward Australian moves, meant that some refugees were seen as – and indeed were – “hard workers, always on time.”

Other certified refugees acted as human relations personnel for Nauru's refugee reconstruction. Connect's employment offices were soon heaving with employed refugees, who advised other refugees on appropriate work in Nauru, producing and reproducing the refugee economy. As more refugees filled Nauru's metropolis, not only refugee revenues but also the labour of refugee bodies redoubled state growth: working in the reinvigorated government offices, now busy supermarkets and hotel launderettes, many of which catered to and re-circulated through the bodies of offshore fly-in-fly-out workers.

⁶ In 2015, 817 locals were employed at the RPCs in comparison to 658 expats.

In Australia, refugee welfare support is scanty and determined on a strict eligibility basis. In Nauru's best practice environment, however, this was again far from the case. The micro finance option took off in popularity, with the Australian government providing credit loans to anyone interested in entrepreneurial ventures. Nauru's system of landownership is such that 75% of family members must agree for any new form of land development. With lengthy family genealogies, this can mean obtaining the agreement of hundreds of people. Internal disputes make local business ventures difficult to get off the ground, particularly when land has become such a precious commodity from phosphate now refugee land leasing. Instead, it is popular local practice to lease land to expat business holders, in particular Chinese retailers, who maintain a strong presence in Nauru from the phosphate colonial labour days. At the encouragement of offshore resettlement workers, some locals leased their land for refugee business ventures. Rohingya and Iranian takeaway, beauty salons, and a Persian restaurant became new features across the country. On several occasions, I was handed flyers with prices for eyebrow threading, waxing, facials, and other beauty treats never before seen in Nauru: at least not since the phosphate boom days. Sewing machines were available at the Beach House on Thursdays and Fridays with wool shipped in from Australia. Some certified refugees interested in small-scale self-employment took knitting classes with Australian Connect workers. A small group of women knitted blankets, hats, hand warmers, and toys, which they sold at the weekly Saturday market or at the side of company town events.

The social and physical landscape was daily transformed not only by refugee money then refugee bodies but also gave way to new refugee ecologies. Supermarket shelves were soon stocked with foods for refugee palettes that added to the company town demographic (a kaleidoscope of spices, tahini, lentils, and halal meat) in addition to Australian offshore worker-gearred delights like quinoa and whole wheat bread. Several refugees took to gardening beside their resettlement dwellings, growing different varieties of herbs that reflected a new commodity culture. Nauruan and Farsi phrases converged on the streets, shaping new company town lexicons, and a "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986). But while these ecological patchworks made visible Nauru's refugee industrialisation, no offshore refugee was truly interested in their Nauruan impregnation. Rather, the magical reality of turning "black oil" into sparkling multicultural diversity glossed over the uneven labour relations on which the wealth was founded.



At the same time, the majority of the refugee-run enterprises predominately serviced the refugee industrialists employed to serve them. Few Nauruans had a taste for spicy cuisine, preferring the cheap Chinese takeaways that proliferated elsewhere. Nor did they have utility for knitted hand warmers, better suited to – and bought by offshore workers for – Australian winter climes. Rather, the skills of offshore resettlement workers flown out to Nauru were more suited to the Australia from whence they came. The food of refugees to the Australian multicultural land the offshore workers envisaged, where samosas and dhal were already everyday fare. Several refugees integrated chips and other local preferences into their cuisine, made their food milder, so as to cater to the local demographic, or as with the Sangak flatbread project, worked to create new enterprising fare, but prices could never rival the Chinese greasy spoons, which always undercut – and shaped the majority of local palettes – any business in town. Many locals purposely frequented refugee businesses in sympathy, bought refugee-cooked cuisine and knitted hand-warmers. However, this gesture dwindled as more refugee labour strikes overtook the township.

Flexible Subjects

In looking at conservation contestations in Sulawesi, Tania Murray Li (2008: 139) shows how park border villagers see the forest as a source of commodities, projecting “their own profit-seeking agendas onto the various parties who speak in the name of conservation.” Villagers project themselves as the right kind of nature-loving native in order to fit the market niche, and involve themselves more fully in the forest’s market economy. While the resettlement teams worked to reinforce identities and practices favourable to Nauru’s industrialisation, many certified refugees took advantage of employment opportunities in relation to new commoditisations through “counterprojects” like those Li describes. Employment in Nauru was only ever an individual human relations scheme for certified refugees working to achieve their own economic gains, used for self-marketing as a hard worker for the mobility futures Australia trade. All refugees I spoke with employed in Nauru did so because their positions were with accredited Australian companies or helped with onward trajectories, which, I was informed, “looked good” for envisaged Australian moves. Although it appeared rather chilling, one newly certified refugee, Isaac, now working for Transfield, told me how he knew it looked disturbing working back at the

factories, but that Transfield was a globally – and particularly – *Australian* recognised firm. He could build up firm CV potential by taking a job back in the industry sector. This was the same rationale explained to me by a refugee working for Wilson's Security, also echoed by Tessa who worked for Connect. "Australian company," "Australian workforce qualifications" were always the responses.

Similarly, all of the micro-finance businesses set up by refugees in Nauru were done so for Australian dreams, which I was told could prove that they had catered to Australian clientele. Nauru is essentially an Australian company town outpost with a remarkably similar administrative structure to its much larger neighbour. Such mirroring aspects as the Australian currency, Queensland education system, and Australian firms in operation made it relatively easy for refugees to use Nauru as a transitory hub for working towards Australian futures. It was on this basis that English language classes took off in popularity, indeed oversubscribed, with many Connect workers employed to teach English to Nauru's refugees, complete with Australian twang. Those who were not well versed in English became very proficient, taking English language tests, evening classes on the side of business employment, all in the hopes of Australian moves. Courses at Nauru's University of the South Pacific branch were also extremely popular. Many of Nauru's new refugees attended USP open days while Connect staff bustled in and out collecting course descriptions and flyers to distribute around their district makeups. I was often asked about the courses on offer at USP and whether enrolling on one might have currency in Australia; which made me shiver at another of my company town convergences. I maintained a firm distance, recommending the advice of others more proficient. However, as with the Kiribati instance, referenced in my opening vignette, I knew that in a company town setting a fly-on-the-wall existence is something of an impossibility. As a result of Connect's developmental drives, several of the refugees did enrol on subsidised degrees and vocational training programmes, taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the Australian government to shape themselves as market subjects for Australia. The Nauruan language classes on the other hand had no takers. Connect even later had trouble finding a Nauruan keen to teach the local language to refugees.

At the same time, as the popularity of the hard working refugee trope made clear, power imbalances resulted in some offshore refugees disciplining themselves in ways conducive to the commodity regime: always turning up on time, always proactively engaged. But even here, people reproduced themselves as labouring

subjects favourable to the regime, what Ong (2000) terms “flexible” neoliberal subjects. Instead, they took advantage of extractive opportunities in order to execute their trading dreams. In a context where one-to-one case workers assessed what you were doing, where refugee selection teams might one day fly in and whisk you elsewhere, and where forging a close Australian worker relationship could be a tactical onward move, several refugees I spoke with also judged that the choreographic presentation of “being seen as a hard worker” would make themselves favourable to the Australian economic market. For them, not working and engaging in labour strikes, reflected poorly on future endeavours. Thus, while the connectivity work of multiculturalists sought to sow the refugee into Nauru, employment was only ever used for pursuing onward Australian dreams or for sustaining the Australian company town district, all of finite temporality. Several offshore workers I spoke with acknowledged this to be the case. Some secretly hoped that the language courses and other forms of employment would be useful for the refugees in the chance that the Australian government caved and veered the supply chain from Nauru to Australia.

On the other hand, while some refugees chose to make themselves into Australian market subjects, others took more explicit advantage of the mainland end offshore activists, choreographing themselves as suffering refugee subjects for the mainland moral economy, neither of which defied commodification.

Freedom or Death

““Disciplining” can take contradictory forms,” write Nevins and Peluso (2008: 22). “At particular times and places, docility and following orders are deemed appropriate; at others, “wild” workers are valued and cultivated.” While the refugees turned workers produced themselves as the empowered dutiful refugee to fill the Australian market niche, the offshore activist refugees produced themselves as suffering refugees to whet the Australian moral appetite. Both played with “the fiction’s constructions” (ibid 24) that could make them into Australian market subjects. From the start, many labour activists refused to work, attending few of Connect’s schemes. Others publically gave up their jobs in protest at the Australian government’s maritime embargo and the Nauruan government’s complicity. They chose to concentrate their efforts on more explicit forms of publicity, working with mainland public relations teams in the end offshore activist movement. While contracted multiculturalists

worked to downplay refugee differentiation using diversity paradigms, in their work, offshore refugees reinforced the commodity trope of the suffering refugee to propel their onward moves. Instead, Nauru's offshore refugee activists refetishised themselves through an oppositional frame, projecting their profit motives on a global scale. They tended to Facebook pages that marketed the veracity of the suffering offshore refugee, such as Offshore Processing Centre Voice, Nauru's Refugees' News, and Free the Children Nauru.



Figure 5.13: Refugee Labour Strikes

In February and March 2015 in the high profile refugee protests that brought about the birth of the CLOs described in the previous chapter, the shutters on next to all refugee businesses were soon closed. Many refugees went on labour strike, boycotting Nauru's schools, English classes, jobs, and all of Connect's diversity offerings. Even though the Nauruan government announced that all refugees who continued to protest would lose their jobs, the majority cared little for these threats in the knowledge that firing a refugee could be easily construed as evidence of the government's cruelty. In the first 2015 protest, protesters stormed the Connect job agency, after taking to the streets, chanting, "We want freedom!" "We're refugees not criminals!" "Freedom or death!" They issued statements to ABC News, one person said: "We are refugees, we are not slaves. The way that we're living here and the way the Nauru government is behaving with us is just like slaves" (Fox and Bolitho 2015).

Many in the mainland end offshore movement encouraged the labour protests exterritorially. They were certain that the protests, the photos of children holding crosses, the refugee suffering claims, would galvanise a global movement in sway of exporting the offshore refugee to the mainland. In the aftermath of the riots, Nauru's lone Persian restaurant shut its doors. The landowners were no longer willing to rent land to the proprietors involved in the protests. Even if they had not explicitly made derogatory Nauru statements to the Australian media, they were associated with a

wider group who figured the country as one made up of refugee beaters and cannibals, putting forward accusations like:

They attack the refugees. You are walking in the street, they say “Fuck you, go back to your camp.” They throw rocks. They spit at you. This is normal (Mathiesen 2014).

The Nauruan government constantly released public statements that sought to address these accusations, so readily taken up across the global media stage amid waves of offshore refugee belief. President Waqa (2016b) spoke on Australian media, announcing, to largely deaf ears, “The refugees are not in detention but enjoy the same freedoms enjoyed by Nauruans, although refugees have better facilities than locals. They have access to good quality education, health services and social support networks.” He later wrote opinion pieces in *The Daily Telegraph* (2015) and *The Australian* (2016) in the wake of ever-rolling end offshore savagery accusations:

We have hosted the offshore processing centre for Australia, and we have done so with compassion, understanding and professionalism. As a Christian nation, we treat every person — refugee or asylum-seeker — with dignity, even when that respect is not returned. We have worked hard to ensure asylum claims are processed fairly and with integrity.

Despite what you might read, refugees are safe in our country. Many choose to interact with locals and many do not, but that is their choice which we respect. They have housing, food, education, health facilities, leisure activities — all provided at no charge.

But some refugees — coached by activists in Australia — cause trouble, refuse to send their children to school and encourage others to do likewise, as they mistakenly believe social unrest will help them get to Australia, their ultimate agenda.

This includes fabricating stories of abuse ...

Media organisations such as *The Guardian Australia* and the ABC seem surprised when we don’t allow them access to our country. After their dishonest campaign against us, they expect us to open our arms and allow them to visit and create more trouble within our borders! ...

While we understand the importance of transparency we have a responsibility not to cause unrest, incite violence and create potentially dangerous situations. Nauruans will continue to be good hosts to our refugee and asylum-seeker

guests. Our motto is “God’s will first” and I believe God’s will is to show love and care to all, irrespective of those who may try and tarnish our name or belittle our nation (Waq 2016a).

Minister Adeang invited in Channel Nine’s *A Current Affair* to shoot a report on Nauru’s processing set-up, then later Sky News. However, mainland media channels like the ABC and the Guardian responded by lambasting reports that deviated from the offshore suffering line as “biased,” “insensitive,” and “tabloid right-wing drivel.”

Part of the problem was the media selectivity and AU\$8000 journalist visa fees that the government enforced after the waves of anti-Nauru tirades. As Chapter 3 detailed, Nauruans’ paternal pride in their factory operations has not produced the desired effect among some media and international superplayers invested in promoting offshore suffering frames. Australia’s media operates at polar ends of the spectrum. The majority of liberal papers were invested in fuelling the cause, some with former NGO refugee industry volunteers in their ranks. Many media outlets like the BBC in their *Newsnight* report (2012) and the later documentary *Chasing Asylum* (2016) relied on pre-production consultancy with refugee lawyers, other industry players, and mainland campaigners. At times, they set out with an end offshore agenda, having been emotively affected by dominant Nauru presentations. Whistleblowers legally implicated themselves by breaking contractual clauses to publically deride the operations whereas everyday offshore workers had no interest in publically discussing their involvement. Commented one Australian worker: “I prefer not to tell people where I work. I either get high moral critiques about what I’m doing or I get, “Why are you helping them?! They should rot out there.”” As a result, angles were skewed through the lens of refugee venture capita and the campaign for mainland importation. The journalists who did not figure the operations in refugee suffering terms soon found themselves hounded by Australia’s refugee activist players and splashed across rival media outlets as insensitive to vulnerable victims.

The Spanner in the Works

Coursing through my fieldwork was the operational crux of deterrence that unfortunately for the Nauruan government only ever worked to their disadvantage. As the music consumer relations project made clear, the Australian government did not want to show that the company town was too nice, which would negate the entire

rationale behind its existence. Emphasising the vast expenditures on flat screen TVs, Macbook Pros, air-conditioning, and Madonna aerobics class overheads would only anger their right-wing electorate. Part of the offshore supply chain's currency was the spectacle of suffering, even if the reality was quite different. The deterrence spectacle ironically coincided with the curation of offshore pathos, resulting in a world where the veracity of the suffering offshore refugee was sacrosanct. Unfortunately for the end offshore campaigners, in an attempt to convert mainland audiences through offshore pity, they were also part of the cultural production that fueled the offshore. Famous campaigns like that of the "Nauru Leaks" reinforced the commodity paradigm of the suffering offshore refugee, running up against the Australian right-wing electorate's compassion fatigue that drove offshore processing deeper into the Pacific. The marketing tactics also fueled mainland anxieties about the violence of self-promoting commodities, both in Australia and in Nauru, leading to more industrial blowouts that were given widespread mainland media coverage. Instead, offshore suffering representations only gave added clout to the refugee manufacturing system, with its powerful industry supermajors, from which rose the refugee company town world of Nauru.

Nor did the end offshore marketing campaigns bring about the desired offshore-Australian market importation, which was their principle concern. The mainland product advertising merely riled the Australian government, who otherwise might have imported the accredited offshore refugees under the radar as in the early trading years. Now, the government remained set on victory in the offshore refugee standoff. In 2016, across the course of many protests, Immigration Minister Dutton continued the deadlock stance, announcing, "My message to those who protest is that it will not change the government's commitment to the processing and resettlement arrangements in place on Nauru" (Republic of Nauru 2016b). President Waqa echoed, "My message to refugees here on Nauru is to accept they are here and to understand that the Government of Nauru is doing its best to look after them and keep them safe. Advocates must begin telling refugees and asylum seekers the truth about their situation and what their future holds, and stop goading them into quitting their jobs. There is always hope, but there's a time when you must be realistic and accept the circumstances. Only then can you get on with your life" (ibid). Because the Australian government was determined to continue with outlasting the refugees, and the Nauruan government financially reliant, the flare-ups that marked this industry sector only ever

led to more projects that sought to warm the populace and its discontented commodity to the grand project of offshore extraction.

Although the cultural imaginary was of a refugee country where refugee and non-refugee lived in harmony, it was the latter politics that reared its head as the pivotal flaw in industry design. As Mitchell (2002) shows us, projects encounter practical difficulties when fundamental failures are presented as minor complications in the implementation of plans. Nauru only ever operated as a twilight universe of refugee industrialisation, based on an idealised version of a refugee protecting state. But it was hollow and artificial, reliant on Australia to send people for processing, and filled with, when I arrived, 506 freshly refugee imprinted people who never imagined nor wanted to construct lives in Nauru. The imagineering projects ignored the aspirations of Nauru's "awkward subjects" (Li 2008) to be in Australia and not the imagined refugee community, intrinsic to a state-building and community cohesion exercise. Rather, these consumer relations events went to the other extreme, actively celebrating and encouraging refugee and non-refugee inclusion as part of a utopian corporate imaginary. As a result, the power, capital, and labour that went into the state-building effort was largely ineffective, superficial at best. Indeed, connectivity efforts often led to more frictions and fear as labour strikes added to the protests that shook the industrial frontier, moving from the factories across the township.

It is to the resource curse that the final chapter turns, questioning the future for the once phosphate now refugee company town.

Chapter Six:

Bitter Money

Venezuela had lost control over itself; intoxicated by oil as waste it had become transformed into waste. . . . The identification of both the nation and individuals with excrement became an ever more common short hand expression for everyday problems . . . “somos una mierda,” “es que este es un pais de mierda” (“we are pieces of shit,” “it’s that this country is made of shit”) – Fernando Coronil (1997: 233)

‘Every one, the Kiribati, the Tuvaluans and so and so are laughing at us. The whole world are laughing because we do not have any more money.’ Victims of ‘cheap humor’, the ‘natives who sold their souls’ – In Times of Phosphate (Republic of Nauru 1994: 86).

They talk about the glory days. But these, these are the bullshit days. I go to Australia and people laugh when I say I’m from Nauru. Bird shit island, now this – Personal Interview, Republic of Nauru, July 2015.

This book has sought to argue that the refugee processing and resettlement operations in Nauru looked much like the practices in Australia. However, as a consequence of the evangelism afforded the offshore refugee, the country has seen some of the highest operational blowout rates in the world. Self-immolation, lip stitching, and pharmaceutical overdosing are endemic to the business, heightened by the demands of refugee presentation. A discontented commodity set on the Australian mobility futures trade galvanised by end offshore activists has resulted in extreme social devastations at the expense of those within the processing cycle and for Nauruans. Despite the potential for eventual rewards, the work of offshore activists in leveraging for mobility futures has resulted in commensurately higher risks for executors on the trading floor. In Nauru, civil unrest given vocal promotion by mainland end offshore campaigners has also fomented a police state apparatus that works alongside the risk adversarial practices designed to stopper the public relations attempts of offshore refugees.

At the same time, refugees have “unleashed” an unprecedented boom that has converted Nauru into “a mono-economy” – what Watts (1994) refers to as the “shock of modernity”: in 2016, refugee-related revenues were the dominant stream to the Nauruan government. Sparkling refugee resettlement blocks, monthly refugee land payments, and multicultural cuisine are all testament to the permeation of the refugee through Nauru’s economy and polity. Air Nauru once again soars overhead with a fleet of five aircrafts, filled with offshore industry workers experienced in processing and resettlement, and locals on shopping sprees to Brisbane and Majuro. As part of the refugee euphoria, in 2017, services extended to Kwajalein and Guam, with plans for a return to Norfolk Island. The Nauruan government continued to “gift the nation” (Coronil 1997) and its charismatic leaders with “magical power” as “agents of modernity” after the decades of phosphate bankruptcy. Headlines in the local news ran with unprecedented displays of the country’s miraculous progress:

“Nauru bank a big hit!”: The agency’s automatic teller machine (ATM) has been installed and comes online soon while the bank has also taken over the ownership of another similar ATM on the island at the Capelle and Partner store.

Another exciting product available to customers shortly will be a MasterCard debit card which can be used overseas, including Australia (Republic of Nauru 2016c).

They promoted a grandiose world in which the Nauruan and refugee worked side by side to shape the refugee utopia dream. “We coexist on our beautiful island with a diversity of nationalities and cultures. We have embraced those who have travelled afar or from within the region to be part of our existence. We have opened our hearts and our homes to those who have found themselves on our island. We are truly and island of many nations,” spoke Madam Louisa Waqa for her International Women’s Day Address in March 2015, as refugee protests broke out throughout the township.

“It should be known that most refugees living on Nauru are peaceful and law-abiding ... many refugees and their children ... simply want to enjoy a peaceful life on Nauru,” said Minister Adeang (2016) to assuage the populace’s concerns, whenever blowouts went unbridled on a steady rolling cycle. “We have taken bold steps to reform our systems of government and strengthen our democracy despite the lies spread by some foreign media like the ABC, who refuse to recognise the advances we are making and continue their dishonest political campaign of attempting

to influence Nauru's domestic politics,” said President Waqa (2016a). Near proud leaders in UNHCR’s global top players, Nauru ranked third for the highest percentage of refugees in relation to state population in 2015 (UNHCR 2015). This bore stark parallels to Nauru’s first phosphate heyday when PO_4 saw the country boast the world’s second highest GDP per capita after oil rich Saudi Arabia (over AU\$50,000 per person per year). But a ravaged pot-marked landscape, cadmium infused groundwater supplies, phosphogypsum inhalations, and a reliance on import labour and goods, all around a finite resource, have been some of the many by-products of the phosphate boom. And as with phosphate wealth, refugee wealth, “the magical elan vital of economic and social transformation, has proven to be a very mixed blessing” (Watts 2004: 206).

For Parker Shipton (1989), the Luo concept of “bitter money” best encapsulates the misfortune inherent in new ways of obtaining money linked to forms of economic advancement (selling lineage land for profit, dealing in tobacco or gold). In their discussions of the refugee boom, many locals were torn by the economic benefits that the refugee brought, but also the conflicts engendered by the high-risk operations. Ultimately, the realities of the refugee business were assumed by and felt to Nauru’s disadvantage, not to mention self-professing refugees expressing the veracity of the commodity form. As with other offshored and high-risk industries, no amount of risk adversarial projects could detract from the familiar operational hazards of processing and managing humans, now orientalist in form. Like the oil producing communities Watts (2001) describes, torn apart by internal or inter-community conflicts, corruption, and the onset of civil violence, Nauru again became tied into the repeating destructions of a resource cursed state.

Part One: An Ungovernable Space



Figure 6.1: Ship to Port

I sit on a rusted bench beside the tennis courts laid out by the British Phosphate Commission. In my sights is the ivory-pillared mansion of the Commissioner’s clubhouse. Once, I’m told, filled with pool tables, antipodean banter, and the seat of the ultimate Sunday roast. The refugee processing centre now has that title.

Excitable screams. It’s break time. The shipment

is finally on the way out after months of trading standstill.

I heard a rumour a few days before. An Aiwo resident, fed up with the phosphate dust, had torched one of the cantilevers. Several years prior, Aiwo dust protestors had also burned down the main police station. I put this to my companion, Chris. An old time phosphate worker, I knew he'd be well versed in phosphate politics. He nods, "People often run up to kiln area and get them to stop the kilns and machines. Sometimes they'll stop cooking the phosphate and wait for the winds to change. But sometimes they don't. People have set the conveyers alight before. That's what happened with the old cantilever."

We become engaged in an avid conversation about phosphate dust. How to contain it. Some of the repercussions. Chris, like several phosphate workers I speak with, is incredibly environmentally concerned – not unlike many human-minded in the refugee industry. He went into the phosphate business with the goal of addressing the pollutant byproducts: all starkly visible to him growing up in Nauru. He describes some of the projects to me:

People have come up with so many suggestions about the dust. Someone said, "Let's put sprinklers in the chimney," but that still dried it. Before that there was another one. We'd build the chimney up, aim it even higher, and blow the dust as far as we could so it wouldn't fall until it reached the sea. But it didn't work. The winds changed. We didn't always know when that would happen. Sometimes if we had big winds, the dust would blow back down in our faces. We just couldn't build the chimney high enough. BPC had the electrostatic dust precipitator installed when they were running the show.

He draws out the process for me. "The dust went up the tube. See like this. And when it got stuck and thick then here," another line, "the dust moistured down and drained out as fumes."

"Did it work?" I ask, becoming more inquisitive.

"Well things can never be perfect when you're in the mining industry, dust is always part of it, but it was diluted." He then shakes his head, sighing as he thinks back about the NPC takeover, "Things fell way behind. There weren't the regulators, compliance, penalties, we didn't know so much about it. None of the environmental concern or demand like now. Now it's Zero Dust."

I'd heard all about Zero Dust the day before. A tour around the phosphate plant, and I'm quickly hurried over to new equipment fresh in from Brisbane, laid out for preparation on the factory floor.

My tour guide points to a long metallic cylinder, tracing an invisible line along its side. "The dust goes to a chamber here. Then it's filtered, over here, before going to the chimney." He gestures up at the ceiling. The furnace is on halt for the moment. "See right now we get dust coming out the chimney but if this works then it'll only be smoke."

Back down by the playground, Chris confesses more scepticism about Zero Dust. "When they don't do the mining, that's when we'll get Zero Dust. But if we stop that, we stop the money. No minister, no landowner wants that. They'll never solve the dust."

5 July, 2015. Yaren District, Republic of Nauru.

Shortly after the Omid and Hadon self-immolations in April 2016, against a backdrop of deepening civil unrest and refugee processing disruptions, Minister Adeang announced that Nauru was looking to expand the geographies of refugee processing into new regions beyond the Pacific. With a discontented public, a volatile resource, and end offshore campaigners constantly making the refugee blowouts incrementally higher, Nauru was forced to reorient themselves towards new overseas circuits and take on an export-oriented approach. Adeang made a statement to the country's resources broadcast on Nauru Television, Radio Nauru, and published in a special edition of the Nauru Bulletin, available in multilingual translations, in which he recognised the desires of offshore refugees not to be in Nauru, even though for them it was home. Nauru and Australia were in negotiations with new trading partners to export the refugees to onward lands. He emphasised the micro credit loans, the employment services, the many educational programmes, and the new air conditioning units installed throughout the processing and resettlement districts, asking that the refugees take advantage of the many schemes, using their time on Nauru "constructively and peacefully," respecting "our home, our beloved nation, our Pleasant Island [as] our welcome guests" (Adeang 2016). In the meantime, the Australian and Nauruan governments were at a loss with what to do next, conscious that the country needed to extricate itself from the damaging enterprise or face more resource fuelled uprisings.

Then, the end offshore campaigners launched their biggest blockbuster attack ever, blowing all other marketing campaigns out of the water. In August 2016, the Nauru Leaks campaign made global waves, published across newsreels from Hollywood and Acapulco to Capetown, Rome, and beyond. Working with the Guardian Australian, the team of familiar refugee activist faces brought together a catalogue of over 2000 filed incident reports from the first days when refugee processing began. Stories of refugee rape, beatings, self-harm, and child sexual assaults were fired at the Australian and Nauruan governments, collated on the Guardian's Nauru Leaks online interactive database together with graphic imagery, campaign footage, and the words of offshore refugees and former workers turned end offshore campaigners. Nauru's offshore refugee operations were characterised as an exceptionality, "a dark, wretched Truman Show without the cameras," a "gulag archipelago," rife with "horrible mistreatment," "squalor," "trauma and self-harm" (Farrell, Evershed, and Davidson 2016). Nauru was catapulted onto the global media stage. BBC, CNN, AlJazeera, Le Monde, and the New York Times all featured reportage on the incidents and respondent global refugee movement. Most local newspapers followed suit.

The latest publicity drive unleashed an unprecedented season of end offshore refugee power. A small Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch team flew to Nauru on a furtive three-day "refugee mission" collating the predictable stories of machete chasing, refugee beatings, rape, and squalor. Giving interviews worldwide, on ABC, NPR, and in the Guardian, their subsequent report *Islands of Despair* (2016) was circulated by all the industry players as factual evidence of offshore refugee torture, soon cited in a host of Nauru export-oriented publications. "Regular - we're not talking several incidents. Regular, systematic attacks from local population. People are hacked with machetes," said Amnesty's Anna Neistat in interview on NPR (2016). "Every single woman I spoke to told me that they cannot go out because now they're absolutely at the mercy of the locals."

During the summer months, extraordinary levels of action took place, which caused the value of the commodity to skyrocket. Refugee activists abseiled from the Australian Parliament, dyeing the fountain in front of Parliament House red, with a banner reading "Close the bloody camps now #justiceforrefugees." Others interrupted Prime Minister's Question Time, gluing their hands to furniture, shouting, "Justice for Refugees!" Churches hung banners up across Australia in support as high profile

rallies took to the streets. Refugee networks of activists, NGOs, and academics circulated import-oriented publicity through industry listservs and media networks. They organised author readings of *Offshore: Behind Manus and Nauru* (2016), “the true story of Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and refugees,” high profile screenings worldwide of the new Oscar-winning filmmaker documentary *Chasing Asylum: The Film the Australian Government Doesn’t Want You To See* (2016). The ABC released a Four Corners program, *The Forgotten Children* (2016), with claims of Nauruan refugee child sexual assault, and a local culture of rape and cannibalistic violence.¹ Snap actions were held outside Australian embassies and consulates from London to Washington D.C. Segments aired worldwide, all as evidence of the savagery of Nauruans: refugee molesters to the extreme. Media outlets and spokespeople around the world took up this narrative, stressing the brutal conditions for Nauru’s refugees through tropes of suffering, persecution, and vulnerability.



Figure 6.2: Nauru Leaks

Sourced from AlJazeera Report. August 10, 2016. <https://youtu.be/9bLRHd9W3Dk>.

At the time I was living in Berkeley, and never post-fieldwork, my immersion in this end offshore imaginary brought the fetishistic power of the refugee into stark visibility, whereby a moral storyline was used to orient the refugee towards Australia’s mainland consumers. But a politics of fear and animosity also converged with the end offshore suffering narrative. It was the anti-refugee refrain that refugee lobbyists battled against, which sustained Nauru’s offshore operations. Global scares, Freidberg (2013) shows, freight commodities with meanings in various ways, which

¹ The ABC was later heavily criticised for using old photographs of facilities no longer in use, and footage of men hitting each other with steel poles taken from a YouTube video, “Who Let The Dogs Out,” posted by a user known as “NoRulz.” See the Nauruan government’s less publicised response (Loop 2016). Earlier that year, the ABC had also been forced to apologise for alleging that a five-year-old had been raped in Nauru on a 7.30 programme.

simultaneously results in stricter and more complex production and trade standards, and practices of “civilising” supply chain sites. In Australia, the discourse of fear and compassion fatigue that shipped the prospecting refugee to Nauru is fixated on the human refugee form. As much as the pro refugee campaigners made evangelical waves with their latest end offshore push, conflicting yet converging narratives predictably emerged of “we don’t want our country “flooded” with “Islamic refugees”” (Heffernan 2017). “You’re free to go home anytime you like, Australia is NOT your home and NEVER WILL BE :)” read one response to the post “We are here and still suffering” on the Nauru refugee-maintained Twitter page, Such a Human #Nauru (2016).

In Australia, this was the time of the Islamophobic rise. From the 2015 Sydney shooting to a later 2017 Melbourne car rampage, the Muslim terror angle had become daily tabloid fare. The ultra right-winger Pauline Hanson had steadily resurged in vocal prominence as the leader of the One Nation Party. Her plans for a total refugee import embargo, a ban on all Muslims entering Australia, were given widespread right-wing promotion connected to Islamic terrorism. “We’ve seen that these refugees we’ve brought in are actually terrorists themselves, so let’s take a hard stance on this. We don’t know who these people are,” riled Hanson to nationalist support (Carney 2016). Although the end offshore campaigners had an appetite for refugee consumption, many in the polarised Australian public were not so receptive. Along with the commodity scares of refugee Isis insurgents, the discourse of queue jumpers also took precedence from many Australian consumers, including many certified refugees who had been through the mainland processing system. They were set on disallowing the importation of this particular load of maritime prospectors who went outside the fairytale camp narrative of refugee to consumer. Others supported the government discourse of “protecting lives at sea,” believing that Nauru was an important node in the deterrence cycle that dissuaded the unregulated maritime arrivals. Ending offshore operations would open the flood gates to a surge of deep water arrivals, which lead to extraordinary numbers of drownings: the photos of which were made popular by corporate giants like UNHCR.

Nonetheless the end offshore campaigners could only achieve victory if they “re-enchant” (Hodgson and Bruhn 1992) the Australian consumer and sold the offshore refugee. The refugee tropes around which refugee corporate power had found extraordinary moral economic capital enabled unprecedented global exposure. At the

same time, the many industry professionals that lent such factualised backing could only survive if they sold the commodification of the refugee. For the many offshore refugees that lent bodily veracity to the campaign, promoting themselves as refugees was how they acquired moral worth for mainland campaigners, even as others were not keen to market themselves in this way. In this sense the end offshore mission faced a fundamental contradiction, and one that led to the establishment of Nauru as a refugee company town in the first place. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, the advertising campaigns failed to sufficiently convince the Australian populace that the refugee was important to their moral appetite, to be brought, now processed, into their consumptive spheres. At the end of the unprecedented season of high level volatility, the offshore supply chain held strong.

The Devil's Excrement

But by this time, the Nauruan government and its public were well and truly fed up with their offshore resource. Minister Adeang had been accused of killing his wife on ABC Lateline, the entire country of refugee child rape, and President Waqa the totalitarian state's evil dictator. They were famous as refugee molesters the world over. End offshore extractors leapt onto anyone who did business with the small country, tarnishing them by association, even the government's Brisbane-based public relations team who had been employed at the Australian Immigration Department's advice in the peak resource war season of 2015.² Many of the offshore contractors were threatening contract termination: the activist campaigns were too much to take, and the commodity risks had become too great. Wilsons Security, Transfield (by then BroadSpectrum), and Connect all announced high profile offshore resignations across 2016. Not only were the willing industry contractors dwindling in number but other firms operating in Nauru outside the explicit industry operations, such as Bendigo Bank were targeted as part of an unethical supply chain.³

² Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2015, the Nauruan government, fed up with the pro refugee/Nauru cannibal frame, contracted a Brisbane public relations team, Mercer PR, to handle their company town brand. Although Mercer PR was contracted with minimising Nauru's adverse publicity, Mercer became the subject of end offshore targets. Their workplace practices in Brisbane were constantly tooth combed by end offshore campaigners. They were lambasted for any out-of-line practice, with their other clients publically named and lobbied to divest.

³ See for example Managing Director Mike Hirst's (2016) interview on ABC Radio, and the company's released statement about the ethics of their presence in Nauru. In April 2016, Westpac Bank cut all mainland ties with the Nauruan government.

“They call our country a hellhole and accuse our government — which was recently democratically re-elected with an increased majority — of all sorts of things that are untrue,” wrote President Waqa (2016a) in the wake of the Nauru Leaks global blockbuster drive. One among many saddening posts on the local “fact checking” Facebook group “Refugees on Naoero - Nauru” (2016) read:

☹ feeling defeated.

All I actually hear is bad things about Nauruan people; so much its hard for me to explain where I am from because every second person ends up bashing my country and just assuming that it's "a nothing country" (everyday when I worked at a supermarket I would get comments like this).

But the President’s mainland articles, the Facebook posts, the increased media invitations, including an entire Sky News crew, and protestations that “the processing centre for asylum seekers is world class and far exceeds the standard of many refugee camps across the world” (Waqa 2015a) never cracked through the might of the refugee suffering campaign. As detailed in the previous chapter, locals were subject to a torrent of public relations events: perhaps some of the most refugee-sensitised publics I had seen, with refugee awareness raising and multicultural festivities on a regular basis. But similar Islamophobic fears also raged among many in the Nauruan public, all heightened by their very real backyard explosions, and a local diet of Australian and international tabloid media that connected the refugee, the terrorist, and the Islamic state threat. Some people had conspiracy theories tied into terrorist imaginaries about what it was that made the Australian government so unwilling to absorb their Nauru certified refugees.

The Australian government also wanted to rid themselves of mining extraction in their backyard, and market their black gold onto newer faraway consumption lands. The offshore load of self-immolating now certified refugees, refusing to take the Cambodian futures contract (the Phnom Penh apartment, business set-up, private healthcare, all expenses paid) did not have a sustainable development future. Bill Shorten, leader of the Labour Opposition, was in his schadenfreudic element, calling for a Senate Inquiry and saying that Australia could not “turn a blind eye to what's happening.” “I'd ask Mr Dutton, how many abuses will there have to be before he thinks he should act?” Shorten publically announced to the press (Anderson 2016). The abseiling protestors and refugee torture allegations were going wild with more publicity stunts on an ever-rolling basis, keeping offshore workers on edge. In the

same period, the National Audit Office released a scathing report about the spiralling offshore expenditures: their second in the span of only two years. The report concluded that between September 2012 and April 2016, AU\$1.1 billion was approved by Australian Immigration Department officers who “did not have the required authorisation” and there was “no departmental record of who authorised the payments” of another AU\$1.1 billion spent on sustaining the magnificence of Nauru’s refugee company town (Australian National Audit Office 2016). Senate Estimates were constantly on the offensive, organising more public hearings around the spiralling refugee torture allegations.⁴ Globally, politicians were also beginning to raise eyebrows. Some, like the British government, had already sent their Acting High Commissioners for Nauru on company town tours from Honiara headquarters to give the operations the under-the-radar ok. But even though the accusations of the end offshore campaign did little for the Australian Liberal government’s moral reputational standing, they also faced an impasse. They could not now absorb the offshore refugees, even if many I spoke with secretly wished this was the case. If they took this option, the Labour party would have a field day, mirroring the Liberal Party’s move on the Gillard Labour closure in 2012. The only solution was to extend the geographies of distribution into new consumption spheres.

But for the Nauruan and Australian extraction partners, looking to promote the offshore refugee to onward markets, the “natural bounty” of the offshore refugee “had, in the magical and mysterious process of being transformed into money, become a putrid and toxic waste” (Watts 2004: 205). Not only had they failed to market the refugee and the Nauruan to each other, but now, like the end offshore campaigners, they had trouble whetting the appetite of other countries to consume, many of who were also enveloped in commodity scares or refugee glut booms. Few countries wanted to join Australia and Nauru’s refugee export industry circuit. Wherever offshore distribution extended, the end offshore campaigners only targeted state involvement with the same anti-civilisational publicity tactics thrown at Nauru. This had already been the case when Cambodia joined the supply chain network, before that, the Gillard plan of Malaysia instead of Nauru as a processing hub. In predictable form, words like human rights abusers, dictators, wife-beaters, refugee

⁴ See the latest Australia Senate Inquiry, “Serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre.” Hearings were held across Australia from November 2016 to March 2017.

bashers, all emerged with tabloid sensationalist flare. Nauru's offshore refugee exportation had to take place with popular white market importers in highbrow refugee resettlement states that had longstanding industry procedures already in place. New Zealand had previously offered their assistance but was too close for Australian comfort for the spectacle of offshore deterrence to work.⁵ The Australian government still had a hard-lined stance to promote amongst their anti-maritime import public. The United Kingdom had just emerged into the Brexit age, enveloped in similar xenophobic fears as those rippling across Australia. Their general public had little taste for the transoceanic trade in refugee lives or in the notion of the immigrant at large. Canada had imported a few certified offshore refugees under the radar but was in the middle of their own refugee import glut in an unprecedented season of Syrian consumptive demand. There, public interest was also beginning to dwindle as flows of self-importers were beginning to bubble up from Canada's southern borders.

Then, the Australian government cracked a new and greater trade deal that would send the offshore refugees off their back door and into new white market lands. At the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016, they agreed with the United States government, at the time one of the globe's leading refugee importers, to a produce trade. In exchange for some of their unwanted trade goods, certified in Costa Rica, the US would join the distribution cycle on a limited one-time deal, and take Australia's Pacific import grades. Like Australia, the US funds extensive network of regional processing plants, including one in Costa Rica, for unregulated Central Americans arrivals hoping to access American mobility futures. Like Australia, the US has also acquired political currency around the promotion of a hard-line approach to the "undocumented" southern border arrival. Similar regional frontiering projects have looked to deter and screen out the unwanted from wanted arrival, but have also led to surplus deposits of certified goods in trading limbo. With the assistance of UNHCR RSD teams, Australian Immigration Department teams would fly to Costa Rica and select Central American varietals for Australian consumption. The US government negotiated that the most "complex" and "difficult"

⁵ In 2016 for example the New Zealand government offered to take 150 certified offshore refugees per year from Nauru and Manus as part of their annual 750 refugee import quota. This offer was declined at the time. The offer was then renewed and declined by the Turnbull Coalition government in the 2016 summer trading season.

cases were only fair for this trade deal.⁶ Simultaneously, US Immigration Customs and Enforcement teams would follow suit, flying to Nauru and Manus Island to conduct their own enhanced screening procedures of the offshore bulkloads. Any interested offshore refugee could put their name down for this segment of the transcontinental trade, women, children and families coming first. Those who declined the deal would receive a 20-year Nauru visa or home country relocation. The lifetime Australian import embargo would stay in place for all certified offshore refugees with a shelf life date after 13 July 2013, solidified by amendments to the Migration Act. At the same time, the Australian government announced dramatic increases in maritime border enforcement over the upcoming years, to turn-back and decrease the numbers of deepwater futures arrivals.

But commodity scares still threw up obstacles for the supply chain to work. The United States Congress caught wind of the trade deal, made under the Obama Democrat administration. Republican congressmen sprang into action. Iowa Senator Charles Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Virginia Senator Bob Goodlatte of the House Judiciary Committee sent a letter to Secretary John Kerry and Department of Homeland Security head Jeh Johnson, demanding answers about the shipment of the high risk and low-grade discards from the Antipodes, writing:

...the individuals who will be resettled are coming from countries of national security concern. In fact, two of the countries are officially designated by the State Department to be State Sponsors of Terrorism ... it begs the question why Australia and other countries refuse to admit these individuals (Grassley 2016).

When the news hit, right wing US outlets like the Conservative Daily Post were up in arms about the Obama trade deal “to grant asylum to 1,800 “high threat” Muslims denied by Australia”:

Though the so-called migrants were deemed too dangerous to be allowed admittance to Australia, due to their connections with state sponsors of terrorism, Obama and Kerry have quietly agreed to grant them *permanent residency*, and distribute them throughout American cities and towns, without consulting local governments (Jeffries 2016).

⁶ The US and Australian governments have made refugee trade deals in the past in relation to swapping refugees in Nauru and Guantanamo towards the end of Nauru’s first industry heyday in 2007. See Dastyari (2008).

The United States is the *crème de la crème* of white market refugee absorption that the Australian government thought surely few of Australia's end offshore activists would shirk their nose at. Under the weight of refugee industrial power, similar refugee resettlement work also extends across American lands. Powerful industry conglomerates of refugee ecclesiastical, NGO, INGO, academic, bureaucrat, refugee, non-refugee, incensed citizenry, and corporate players also work to warm consumers to refugee absorption and sow the refugee into their lands against prevailing refugee fear mongering scares.

But dramas continued to unfold across the transoceanic trading floor. Earlier that month, after the deal had been struck, the shock age of Trump broke onto the horizon. As promised, upon his ascension he went rampant. Wild racist, Islamophobic policies went into overdrive machination. Refugee import clampdowns, southern wall building, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Libya all blacklisted in any entry capacity. Refugee import quotas halved to 50,000 for 2017 from 117,000 in 2016, all refugee resettlement programmes suspended for 120 days, to the loud cries of refugee industry professionals and consumers worldwide. The Australian government panicked not only about their offshore refugee trade deal, but also about their transcontinental trading future in any capacity. As one of his first acts after taking office Trump signed an executive order to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement covering twelve countries including Australia, signed in February 2016 after seven long years of negotiations. Meanwhile, the Australian press and Labour Opposition were having a field day, breaking out the Trump puns with predictable flair, with Prime Minister Turnbull "roasted" on the Nine Network's 60 Minutes by political editor, Laurie Oakes:

Donald trumps Australia's interests (Speers 2017)

Laurie Oakes: Malcolm Turnbull doesn't realise he's been Trumped (Oakes 2017)

However, Australia is a close ally of the United States, what Erik Paul (2006) refers to as the "51st state," and the second largest military contributor in Syria and Iraq. Begrudgingly, Trump agreed to uphold the deal, "the worst deal ever," complaining that he was "going to get killed" politically, accusing Turnbull of seeking to export the "next Boston bombers" (Miller and Rucker 2017).



Figure 6.3: Donald J. Trump Twitter Page

Sourced from Twitter Post. 1 February, 2017, 7:55pm.

https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/827002559122567168?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

The US refugee import embargo has a clause within it that still honours prior trading deals including this refugee-refugee exchange, but only for 1250 “extremely vetted” and selected certified refugees from Nauru and Manus in total, which flows over in double that number.

For the offshore refugees, there was transcontinental turmoil about their market exchange, but many were also enwrapped in the same commodity scares that saw them ping pong back and forth in trading standstill. Although 900 of the certified refugees signed up for screening for onward moves, many watched the xenophobia unfolding across America in sheer petrification, questioning their onward destinations. I received an email from Sean, certified as a refugee as of almost 2 years. He was excited about future moves but also scared about redistribution into unknown worlds of hatred and fear. He questioned his reception as an Iranian and as a refugee, asking what it was like in Ground Zero, where I was in Berkeley at the time. Several of Nauru’s refugees also remained set on the Australian mobility futures trade. After tireless years of end offshore campaigning, they did not want to relent and take anything less than their ideal. Some offshore activists played a large part in encouraging offshore speculators to hedge their bets against the onward market movements. Transfixed by the hallucinogenic appeal of the offshore refugees, they instigated the prolongation of the end offshore campaign, encouraging offshore refugees not to relent. Not only did many of the mainland activists suspect – and some secretly hope – that the transoceanic trade deal might fail but many also believed that the offshore suffering promotional tactics – now made visible on a global scale – might still yet batter the Australian government into submission. Unfortunately this

only led to the nightmarish cycle of more human harms, which reinforce mainland consumer disinterest, while simultaneously stirring Nauru's social geographies.⁷

A Renewable Resource Cycle

Two fundamental predicaments arise from this narrative of Nauru. The first is the lasting problem of the refugee complex that makes possible the forms of capitalist wealth to commodify people as refugees. As Albert Ellis (1946: 277) once wrote, in what could surely characterise the ubiquity of the refugee industry, "You can't get away from the old B.P.C. ... The Commission's personnel both past and present are now so numerous and widespread, with such a faculty of coming to the fore when special phosphate matters ... have to be dealt with." Building on global production scholarship, I have argued that it is important to get behind the commodity fetish and challenge essentialising notions in more critical and perhaps revolutionary directions. But as each chapter has detailed, the particular physiology of the refugee as a self-promoting commodity proves difficult to dis-assemble. The refugee is not only a driver of industrial capitalism but facilitates global commodity chains, mass media platforms, and norms of consumer culture that are intrinsic to the moral and political economic currency earned from the commodity form. Yet even if people want to be made into refugees, what of the enduring effects of refugee idolatry on a grounded and renewable scale? As this book has sought to make clear, high-risk practices of production operate starkly to the detriment of those enveloped in the human-refugee operations. Fantasy images of offshore refugee suffering and anti-civilisational depictions of Nauruans, what Paige West (2012) refers to in the Papua New Guinean coffee trade as "an imagined primitive," solidify the consumer fetish under an oppositional frame.

As Mitchell (2011) points out, profitable resource projects are not only sources of revenue and conflict for the countries directly involved in their production, but impinge on and shape the body politic in places that have a great demand in utilising that resource. As much as refugee industry subjects human life to growing calculability, bureaucratisation, and regulation, refugee life is firmly entangled in the edifice of capitalism as a calculative practice of democratic rule. It was because of the resource spectacle of the 1,355 offshore refugees, used to satiate an inflamed public,

⁷ See "Teen refugee attempts suicide on Nauru after Trump executive order" (Keep 2017).

that the Australian government publicly raised their mainland refugee industry quotas in the 2015 Budget. Onshore refugee industry funding expanded from refugee resettlement and language training through to money for UNHCR's regional expansion. In addition to these budget increases, the government publicly increased their operations in Iraq and Syria, sending warplanes to join the US-led coalition in fighting, what Tony Abbott had termed the "death cult" and "Islamic State terrorist threat" in Iraq and Syria (Peatling and Hutchens 2015). In tandem with more reservoir-drilling and resource-driving bonanzas – Australia is the second largest military contributor in Syria and Iraq – sending and encouraging a few people on the move through the industry mantra, 12,000 bespoke refugee lives were extracted from nearby reserves in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. With UNHCR and IOM workforce personnel, the government led a "refugee mission" to the Middle East to identify and process worthy human lives fleeing the terrorism of Syria and Iraq (women, children, and the families of vulnerable minorities). AU\$957.9 million was put into border enforcement to target future mobilities traders on land, by air, and sea. Boat pushbacks, extending into Indonesian waters, regional border enforcement funding, anti-smuggling and self-importing marketing campaigns, and fisherman payoffs looked to prevent the leachability of the crude refugee outside of the regulatory means of production (Missbach 2015; Missbach and McNevin 2014).

And of course, the second question is what of Nauru? The country 21km² now remade as a refugee company town so that it sparkles like Oman. Nauru's refugees have already reached peak production rates, and will run out by the end of the year. What then of Nauru whose offshore refugees are going to fertilise new offshore lands? The incredible buildings and infrastructure that have become modern Nauru: the hospital, luxury cars, the glass doors of Bendigo Bank, the new ATM credit card machines, the Air Nauru routings on the horizon. What of the company town infrastructure? The trained refugee determination teams? The Refugee Day Celebrations? The Beach House? The Rohingya takeaways? "Imperial ruins" (Stoler 2008) already blanket the atoll. The rusted phosphate turrets, the BPC train tracks, the Japanese bomber remains, added to by turbulent refugee pasts: the burned out husk of the RPC 3, the boarded up Persian restaurant, a mouldy DIAC - IOM sign, still tacked onto the former processing centres from the first industry heyday. These infrastructural forms all gave a sense of foreboding but were also ever-present reminders of declines into poverty that animated new extractive creations.

Part Two: A Finite Resource?

With the aging of the industry, abandoned oil camps and decaying oil towns scattered throughout the states of Zulia, Portuguesa, and Anzoátegui have added a ghostly aura to oil's former presence in Venezuela (Coronil 1997: 108)



Figure 6.4:
Imperial Debris

In *In The Time of Oil* (2010), Mandana Limbert follows the temporal uncertainties brought about by the oil boom in the Arabian Gulf, in which the inevitability of decline produces a constant anxiety about a coming future without oil, and a return to poverty. In Nauru's offshore refugee world, the present was not only haunted by the future, but also redoubled by memories of the past. Nauru has seen constant escalation of the lifespan of both the phosphate and refugee industries, but the preoccupation with how long either will last was palpable. In the 1920s there was no sense of urgency, most people felt that the phosphate would last for "perhaps 300 years." By 1939 a life of 60 to 70 years was first mentioned with Nauru's peak phosphate extraction rate in 1973. In 1980, the Nauru Phosphate Corporation then expected that the anticipated life of the phosphate industry would only be 14 years (The Nauru Post 1980). These predictions have been stretched out on an ever-rolling cycle as secondary phosphate mining has rampaged into once verdant now ravaged lands; limestone by-products are shipped to the Marshallese, prolonging yet also expediting the inevitable precipitous decline. "Like the refugees, first they told us five years for the phosphate, then they told us ten, then fifteen," Elaine, a local refugee

landowning tycoon said, comparing how refugee processing moved to integration under five, then ten, then twenty year visas.

In my many conversations with locals in Nauru, depleting phosphate and refugee supplies were spoken of in tandem. Everyone knew that, and many willed that, the end of refugees be on the horizon. For the government, this meant obtaining maximum revenue from a dwindling operation, ““future proofing” Nauru against economic shock,” through a boom and bust mentality. The refugee visa and taxation schemes, high land rental leases, and local import duties were part of the push for generating maximum revenue in an era of future uncertainties. The new hospital, new primary school, new higher education centre, and public sector training programmes that rose with refugee wealth were all devised to prepare the country for the non-refugee days that loomed ahead. Many of my conversations with government bureaucrats revolved around future proofing, the awareness that the renewed economic prosperity was finite. Several said that the current “good times” were “just like the phosphate days,” but this time round they needed to invest. “I always make sure that there’s something in it for us,” one Ministerial Secretary remarked. “Like when it’s education and they’re sending in the Australian teachers then Nauruans need to profit also. Teachers in every classroom, not just for the refugee children. With the hospital, it’s not just a hospital for refugees but one that will benefit Nauruans for when they’re not here.”

However, so many of the proofing schemes were faced with greedy obstinacy and a resource cursed mendicancy, much to the exasperation of expatriate personnel. A Fijian nurse raged to me on one occasion:

We came to work this morning and a party was starting up next door. People don’t come to work, they get a friend to sign them in on the time sheets and they still get dollars if they don’t turn up to work. They live likes it’s the phosphate years. The government just spoils this country rotten. In my country you have to sign in and you work, and man is it tough. The caterers didn’t turn up to work last week so we ended up serving food to the patients.

“This is just how we do it here, we’re proud in Nauru. We were the first Pacific island that obtained independence, and did we want to show it,” chuckled one MP to me, characterising the dominant attitude. “Other people came in and did everything for us. We didn’t have to lift a finger. It’s hard to get over that even though we need to.” On the local wireless I often heard the Cantilever Boys refrain spin:

Naoero, we do the local style. Naoero, we like the Nauruan style ... We sit around on a mat, staring the driveway ... drinking ice coffee and drinking home brew beer, that's the Nauruan style."

Nauru was a party country, again riding on the boom.

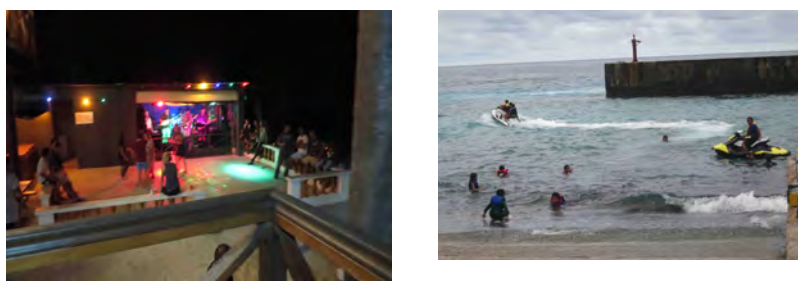
Even when voicing future uncertainties, and the need to set the county on an even keel, the new gold rush undermined the success of long-term planning endeavours. Nauru entered into an almost a predictable cycle of boom town repercussions, mirroring the Gillette Syndrome spiral that El Dean Kohrs (1974) describes in Wyoming mining boom towns. The Nauruan education department did not maintain drop-out statistics since their last census in 2011 (40% left school at 17, 1% of students attended tertiary education), but it was clear from my many discussions with locals, and institutional observations, that drop-out rates remained high, exasperated by the boon of easy RPC employment. Many high school students found quick or ad hoc employment at the RPCs, dropping out at sixteen. The ease of refugee employment (several times the salary of government departments) gave high school students little incentive to stay in school. "The problem is that you can get so much more money working for one of the refugee companies. Teachers, doctors, they've all gone there. My brother earns three times more than me in security," one government bureaucrat said. "We've lost so many of the locals up to the top," another commented. "It's the dollars and interest. I remember coming to work one day and wondering, "Where's everyone gone!? Oh ok, they've all gone up there.'"

Also clear was the side effect of the resurged party scene, such as the new bars and popular bingo halls that had sprung up. These new forms of consumptive excess either tempted older students from school or lured parents from ensuring their children went to school or at times were even properly fed. Instead, I often observed children left to their own devices as their parents ticked bingo boxes, parked up at the again heaving hall. Thanks to Nauru's resurgency, each week AU\$3000 bonus ball prizes, jet skis, and motorbikes were in the offering – the embattled governance over which the CLOs took on new company town roles. In response to the lowland temptations, and the "Topside brain drain," as one local called it, the Nauruan Education department then created the Nauru Education Assistance Trust Scheme in 2016. They offered AU\$5 a day financial incentives for all students who attended school from pre-school to grade 12, kept in the country's new Bendigo Bank savings accounts. This method was also one born in the phosphate town years. The BPC paid

a subsidy to the island's church schools on the basis of attendance and academic progress (Viviani 1970: 53). At the time the scheme was heralded as a great success, inaugurating an educational system far greater than any other Pacific island, where compulsory attendance was achieved, before the spending spree abandon in the phosphate heydays.



Figure 6.5: Boom Town Highs



The Australian government's DFAT office in Nauru has also mirrored some of the BPC's developmental trends. Twenty-two percent of their official AU\$25.2 million aid budget for Nauru in 2015-16 was put into the education system (Australian aid accounts for 20% of Nauru's overall budget) (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2016). In order to help build Nauru's educational capacity, they have funded Nauruan teacher training schemes with New South Wales' University of New England both in Nauru and in Australia. They have increased the number of Australia Award scholarships for Nauruan students to study in fields such as health, education, environmental management, and public policy with the view to long-term development. In addition to the fly-in-fly-out teaching teams brought in for refugee education, they have also funded the building of a new Learning Village, which brings together Nauru's higher education institutions onto one campus.

Like in the phosphate town years, the Australian government attempted to project the rosy tinted vision of developmental progress in DFAT reports. "The working of the ... deposits is in no way prejudicial to the interests of the natives, who, on the contrary, have never been so well off as they are under the present

Administration,” announced the Australian government in a ministerial statement in 1922, in what could almost be a description of the refugee industry in the 2000s (cited in Viviani 1970: 49). Economic impact assessment teams were called in to show the CSR glow of the Australian government’s company town doing: the resurged economy, the jobs – told to censor the brain-drain failures. But in reality, in almost a classic example of boom and bust failure, well-meaning but beleaguered development teams always wage battle against the refugee business.



Figure 6.6: New Learning Village Higher Education Complex

I spoke with several trainee teachers who dropped out of the courses because it was too much work, some juggling small families. They could obtain easy employment at the RPCs if times got tight. Industry recruiters argued that working with Australian refugee firms provided transferable literacy and writing skills that could be used for other sectors in the future, which is why several certified refugees had taken jobs back in the industry. However, what seemed to be more the case was that many locals used industry employment to obtain quick cash or, like the Fijian nurse remarked, have friends “clock in” and not even show up to work. The many security guards I spent time with just slouched and played games on their new iPhones, eating the fresh cuisine flown in for company town labour. Few pursued transferable qualifications; most were interested in the higher salaries than other local industry sectors.⁸

The implications of easy refugee employment were already manifold in 2015. Many development aid budgets went unspent because no trained staff were there to ensure the money was spent effectively. The Education Department for example had an AU\$31,000 budget for administration supplies in 2015 and only spent AU\$1,000,

⁸ The Nauruan government increased public sector salaries in 2015 in order to compete with the refugee industry firms. At the same time, they also lobbied Australian refugee firms to increase local RPC wages, which were far lower than that of expatriates.

which resulted in government cuts for the following year. A great deal of the Australian aid budget also went unspent (officially, AU\$25.2 million in 2015), rolling into the following year, without government employees to effectively decide how the finances should be spent. This was similarly the case with the RPC revenues at large, which totalled AU\$115 million in 2015 (RON Budget 2015-16). The country remained reliant on expatriate labour and expertise, with next to all institutions staffed by foreign advisors in managerial positions.

But the Nauruan government also continued to project the outward display of wealth that had become so commonplace since the phosphate era, which ultimately led to the country's first ruin. In the phosphate heyday, government demands were for full twenty-one gun salutes abroad. Legendary stories tell of past presidents demanding red carpet treatment when they indulged in shopping sprees in Melbourne. Not too unlike those years, in the refugee heydays that I observed, government cavalcades zipped around the small country for commemorative and high profile events. On countless occasions, I witnessed gluts of pomp and ceremony as refugee wealth once again abetted spectacular excess. At government events, the President rolled up in a blacked out chauffeur driven car, flanked by brass-buttoned police. A Nauruan flag proudly waved from the bonnet. Incredibly pompous formalities went into the displays of Nauruan grandeur. Lavish spreads always accompanied government events, heaving with imported delicacies that I rarely encountered or could afford in the shops: entire pig belly roasts, mussels, crabs, salmon, now multiculturally diversified with Rohingya and Iranian cuisine on the side. The government spared little expense even in the voiced anticipation of a dwindling future. Part of the tension was exhibiting the outward appearance of wealth to a hyperconsumptive public while preparing against another imminent demise. While government MPs stressed the need to invest, they also tried to replicate the past boomtown years, caught in something of a resource spiral of attempting to "dazzle and divert" locals away from the resource curse of the refugee boom.

The phosphate heydays had been marked by windfall payments, and flown-off shopping sprees to Dubai. There were no taxes, import duties, or other tariffs. "We've been spoilt, so spoilt," one local remarked to me. A major obstacle for the Nauruan government, still woefully mistrusted because of phosphate bankruptcy, is the constitutional ease of votes of no confidence that makes public discontent always a threat. At the request of the Nauruan government, DFAT brought over industry

advisors under the Pacific Technical Assistance Mechanism scheme in fields such as health, customs, taxation, and finance to assist in building Nauru's long-term revenue generating capacity.⁹ At their recommendation, the Nauruan government trepidatiously initiated several new regulations including taxation and customs import duties, but feared the public reprisal. Worried at the response of a spoiled public, and to secure their own local business interests, the Law and Justice Department made business taxation schemes excludable to all but foreign industry firms. Public taxation did not enter into the equation. "Maybe one day," commented a fearful Nauruan government official.

Similarly, visa fees were only charged for expat workers and refugees, both in process or once certified. The Australian government footed the bill for the latter, which was the principle state revenue stream in 2016 (AU\$31,200,000 that year alone) (Republic of Nauru Budget 2015-16). In a small town context, where kinship and local political ties complicate the landscape, it remains difficult for customs officers to enforce regulations. Government MPs wave their credentials; locals use the "we're family line," incensed at having to pay duties on the goods brought back from Brisbane shopping sprees. One of the main supermarkets, Egigu, remains government owned, with profits made for officials from taxation and duty exemptions. So too, the bingo halls, the cocktail bars, where small town family ties run deep. And in Nauru, everything rests on tenuous boom-bust foundations, portending an ominous demise.

"Ladies and gentlemen," spoke President Waqa (2015b). "Today we live in a time of great harvest, but challenges and scarcity always revisit us time and again. I ask each and every one of you to set aside a portion of your income for the rainy day and invest as much as you can." But despite Baron Waqa's words, the government also continued to propel the Nauruan dream, fawning their public used to hyperconsumption. Like the phosphate boomtown years, government MPs flew planeloads of locals off on spending sprees to Majuro across 2015, celebrating the new destination for Air Nauru's expanding fleet in dreamtime style. I spoke with one local flush from their government-funded trip still wearing a pair of sunglasses that had MAJURO emblazoned on the side. They regaled me with the cash they received

⁹ Nauru's trade imports peaked at AU\$157,812 in 2013 from AU\$21,435 in 2006 with construction activities associated with the RPCs. Imports of cigarettes and alcohol also peaked in 2014 from a lull without the refugee business. In both instance the government missed out on the potential revenue generator, later amended through Australian and international assistance. Information obtained from Nauru Bureau of Statistics.

for shopping mall and nightclub excursions, which reminded me starkly of the stories I had heard from the 1970s phosphate boom years. “Nightclubs every evening, high class hotel, look at the new trainers I was able to pick up. Hard to get here.”

Refugee wealth made it difficult to transition to the frugality that many voiced as necessary for securing their economy on a stable plateau. Instead some locals I spoke with made furtive plans on the side, having lived through past demises before. “I’ve told my children they all have to go to high school in Fiji. I don’t care what it takes,” one of my local informants told me as he juggled jobs in refugee security to prepare for a time without refugees. Others maintained properties in Australia or Fiji, bank accounts abroad or shoe-boxed cash under their beds in case the country again had another catastrophic fold. Some also ignored the eventualities in Pollyanna belief that things always worked out in Nauru. Eliciting toxic waste industries or the fall-back option of development aid cash payments is easily obtainable, the spiralling reliance that the economist Helen Hughes (2004) once warned the government against. As a percentage of their GDP, aid receipts are higher in Nauru than any other Pacific Island Country (ADB 2014).

A major difficulty in Nauru is the availability of land for government development projects; exasperated by the ease of refugee and phosphate lease earnings. Like the employment salaries, the government can little compete with the higher land leases earned from refugee and worker housing and the RPCs (AU\$8.50sq/m versus over AU\$12.50sq/m for the latter). As a result, ideas for local development schemes have met with little success. Attempts to encourage the planting of fruit trees and vegetable beds across the district locales, sometimes even obtaining land for new school projects, playgrounds, and the hospital expansion are long-winded and delayed or never even take off the ground. Local landowners can easily obtain quick revenue from refugee industry firms, holding out for refugee land leasing as more certified refugees moved across the country. Development teams in Suva offices rolled their eyes when I said my research focused on Nauru: a context where development projects are doomed to failure not because they failed to integrate the knowledge of local participants (Scott 1998) but because the local knowledge of participants involved the acquisition of phosphate then refugee wealth without apparent effort. Unfortunately, the projects that the country has found windfall success with have been filled with immense repercussions, and are ultimately

temporal in nature, as with the government's latest entrepreneurial endeavour to diversify their extractive product lines.

Offshore to Offshore Extractions

Expectations of the end of refugee wealth turned Nauruan government eyes to their own offshore, bioprospecting mineral extraction of the seabed floor. Like the refugee trade in its early days, seabed mining has taken off worldwide as a new economic growth sector, leading to a so-called "Wild West" mineral stampede (Sakashita 2015). Seafloor polymetallic nodules are rich in gold, copper, nickel and cobalt, and found in sizeable deposits in volcanic hotspots in the Pacific Ocean. Worldwide, undersea minerals are in high demand for the making of cell phones, computers, home appliances, and construction materials. Japan, Great Britain, Russia, South Korea, China, France, and Germany, amongst many others, have secured licenses to mine the global ocean's abyssal plains. Since the early 2000s, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, now as of 2011 with EU support, has marketed seabed mineral extraction as a development strategy for Pacific states – much like UNHCR's RCF scheme – organising high profile conferences that endorse the new and emerging trade (ISA 2011).

In the knowledge that the refugee industry was temporary, the Nauruan government set up the Nauru Ocean Resource Inc. as an incorporated subsidiary of the Canadian-based firm Nautilus, later taken over by Vancouver-based major DeepGreen Resources, to scout out mining prospects in their economic zone. But like Nauru's agricultural and refugee prospects, the country's particular geographical position has resulted in a surrounding seabed barren of high-value minerals for global trade. The largest of the world's deep water mineral deposits in terms of nodule abundance and metal concentration have been found in the Clarion Clipperton zone, an area that spans 6 million square kilometres, lying between Hawaii and Mexico. In 2011, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) gave the Nauruan government 25,000 square km. of the ISA Reserved Area, specially earmarked for developing countries.¹⁰ As the refugee industry began to taper, the Nauruan government put together plans to outsource the mining, commencing when refugee wealth subsided.

¹⁰ The International Seabed Authority is an organisation formed by the United Nations in 1982 to divide deep-water mineral resource zones in international waters. They enhance and enforce environmental extraction regulations through bodies like the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

As with other extractive industries, there are of course immense industrial byproducts that come with the sea-bed mining trade. The volcanic hotspots where nodules are found are home to an abundance of ecological communities. Crabs and mussels, luminous octopods, deep-sea fish and prawns, and brittle stars are just some of the verdant life of the nodule fields (Tornero and Hanke 2016). The intrusion of the harvesting machines into the deep-sea ecosystem destroys the productive vent habitats, killing virtually all of the attached organisms on the chimneys. The mining also releases pollutant metal byproducts into the ocean water, which contaminates not only ecological life but is ingested by the seafood that surfaces into the global food chain. But like phosphate and refugees, this extractive operation has also gained operational clout the world over as it circulates through the geographies of global consumption. The industry is also one promoted as a development strategy by intergovernmental organisations between and for developing countries, like the association of phosphate and refugees with liberal state modernity.

In Nauru, the move to another high-risk industry was certainly accompanied by environmental concerns of stirring seabed waters. However, several government personnel stressed to me, “we need the money,” pointing to the many environmental safety procedures that they were applying to this maritime extraction zone.¹¹ This time at least, the turbulency that accompanied the transformations in company town rule sat far outside their backyard. But like with Nauru’s other industry projects, the seabed mining operations are again outsourced to foreign firms, and starkly temporal in nature, lasting until the inevitable peak manufacturing rate is reached. Rather, it is another way for Nauru to earn via an armchair revenue generational scheme. In 2015, the Nauru Justice Department set up the Seabed Ministerial Fund with the SPC-EU Deep Sea Mineral team in anticipation of the new royalty windfalls on the horizon. Nautilus estimated exporting 6 million to 7 million tonnes per annum from the seabed floor. The Nauruan government would recoup taxes and royalties until drilling depletion (Hayden 2012).

¹¹ In 2015, the Nauru Justice Department with the SPC-EU DSM team put together attempts to indemnify the country against liabilities, setting up the Seabed Ministerial Fund in anticipation of the new offshore revenue that might yet extricate them from the cycle of dependency.

Refugee Resurgencies?

Seeing that millions of pounds of the tax-payers' money have been paid out for these two islands, the inevitable question arises as to how long will the deposits last. It is, of course, almost impossible to gauge accurately the depth and extent of the phosphate deposits, but ... even if the annual output from the two islands reaches the high figure of half a million tons, Australian, New Zealand and United Kingdom farmers have nothing to worry about as regards future supplies of fertiliser for the next two hundred years at least! (Collinson 1926: 241)

But, like the ever-rolling phosphate mining, assuaging Malthusian food scares, Nauru may still have a refugee company town role to play. Nauru's international trade owes a great deal to the resultant commodity scares that are enveloped in the refugee episteme. Politicians and the press have made much of the ways in which the asylum seeker and refugee are figures of fear or welfare-scroungers that explain their countries' engrained inequalities. At the same time, strengthening borders and military campaigns has become the operative stance, refueling the resource cycle. In Nauru, the company town planners developed the infrastructure to sustain and prolong refugee processing, altering the "time-honored "here today, gone tomorrow" pattern of oil field production" that Hinton (2004: 374) describes. When announcing the US trade deal, Turnbull reiterated that Australia would continue to toughen borders and enhance their Middle Eastern military presence, moving to a controlled production output that would extend Nauru's company town life on a more permanent basis. Nauru, Turnbull (2016) announced, would take on a permanent place as a remote processing outpost in the regional deterrence frontier. At the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in New York in September 2016, shortly before the American trade deal was publically unveiled, Minister Adeang said that Nauru had the infrastructure and systems in place for the processing phase, but elicited other countries to join the supply chain on a more permanent basis:

Nauru invites other countries to assist in finding durable resettlement solutions for our refugees. This is the critical missing component. Remote processing is one part of what needs to be a comprehensive migration strategy (Round 2016).

Later, Adeang put forward a supply chain segue that would move Manus Island's prospective refugees to Nauru's quality assured landscape, famed privately among

industry executives for its safety measures. In May 2017, with the imminent closure of the Manus RPCs following the PNG Supreme Court ruling, Adeang said that there was extra capacity at Nauru's processing sites, extending the invitation to PNG's refugees. As with secondary mining, this would enable Nauru to expand their market share, assuming that their primary reserves were exhausted by the end of the year.

With the political potency of refugee scares, the refugee supply chain set-up may prove an attractive assemblage for governments beyond the Asia Pacific. Not only can employees move from camp to camp within a professional network, but also the industrial schema modulates to other manufacturing regions. European governments have looked to the Australian system of production and circulation. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel, under fire for an "open-door refugee policy," and losing votes to the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany party, has been called on to extrapolate an Australian-style system to the Mediterranean (Shalal 2016). The UK government for example spent AU\$10 million in 2016 funding processing centres and boat pushbacks in Libya to stem the flow of self-importers from North Africa to Europe (Independent Commission for Aid Impact 2016). The Refugee Nation plans of Silicon Valley businessman Jason Buzi is one of the more recent submissions that add to the architectural blueprints of refugee company towns in creation.¹²

Ironically, Nauruans might also find themselves inserted within the commodity cycle on a more permanent basis. In the wake of new manmade disasters and ever diminishing funding reserves, refugee majors are now arguing for the expansion of the Geneva Convention to encompass new forms of human life, in particular "the climate change refugee." Encroaching globally warmed seas have seen Nauru's neighbours pondering future tacks. With Nauru's high level atoll, the country has up to now been little affected. But who knows what the future holds as Nauru continues to export its upper plateau for quick phosphate cash to the nearby Marshallese: building up their low-lying lands in anticipation. This is not to make recommendations about what the Nauruan government should do. Their current industry is obviously immensely destructive, and perhaps on the way out. This remains to be seen, particularly with the global abundance of evermore-raw materials, and the consumptive lobby addicted to increasing supply and demand. Rather, it is to stress that the government's refugee industrial operations, like offshore mineral and

¹² See Refugee Nation 2017. www.refugeenation.org.

phosphate mining, has found popularity the world over, obfuscated behind the power of the commodity form. The refugee remains constructed as a fetishised object, incrementally so through the exceptionalist angle targeted at Nauru, a country that remains the subject of immense racist accusations.

Discourses of racial and cultural superiority continue to haunt Nauru. These colonial (mis)representations obscure Nauru's centrality in new global commodity economies. From feeding into and from global food systems through phosphate to new cosmopolitan knowledge economies through refugees, but under portrayals of "guano" then "gulag" island, Nauruans shoulder the humiliation of resource curse exceptionalism and handmaiden depictions with remarkable jocularity. Yet, as I have sought to detail, Nauru shares *virtually* the same blueprints, builders, and conflicts as Melbourne and elsewhere, constructed to the experimental peak of refugee industrial design. Local frictions were interwoven with the mainland and offshore fetishism of the market and the commodity. The image of the offshore suffering refugee allows people to further disregard the structural causes and inequality that makes more people refugees. If, as Tsing (2005) argues, it is the frictions generated by contingent universals that enable us to see commodity fetishism in action, then it is in the oppositional disruptions that sustain fictional representations in new "global transmission narratives" (Starosielski 2015: 69) where we also witness the solidification of universals in circulation. By tracing commodities and cultural narratives through amplified and extended ecological systems, we can see the forms of rationalism and effects of universals behind interconnected processes that look to obscure similar commodity practices and facilitate contingent industry realities.

Coda: PO₄₃ meets RSD

I sit with Sylvain, a former phosphate worker. He's taken to making jewelry and sculptures from phosphate discards, largely for refugee industry personnel. Sylvain's house is almost always filled with laughter and noise, and I regularly make sure to stop by on my cycle route home. Trudy, his wife, is bubbly and always up for a natter about the latest Nau-rumours and company town goings on. They share a coconut with me, freshly picked, as we look through some of Sylvain's newest creations. The walls of their house gleam with curved statuettes, necklaces engraved with names like "Kazzy," others in the shape of hearts and diamantes, several in the shape of Nauru. A

whiteboard is filled with orders marked by dates of fly-in-fly-out needs of completion. Sylvain and Trudy are friends with several of Nauru's new refugee residents, living in nearby resettlement housing. Some will occasionally pop by to learn the art of phosphate whittling: several for hopeful future business ventures, keen to contribute in creative ways to the Australian economy, others to pass the time of day around their Nauru prolongation.

To one side sits a phosphate paperweight carved with the logo Wilson's, the subcontracted Australian firm for RPC security: a visible amalgamation of two extractive sectors in one. I assume another souvenir for a fly-in-fly-out worker returning to Australia; maybe to give to their line supervisor back in Melbourne. "No," Sylain tells me. "That one actually never sold." I turn the embossed stone over. A logo I've never seen is carved on the backside, hidden from view on the shelf. A Nauruan employee, I'm told, from one of Wilson's local subcontractors, designed it for his Australian security partner, before losing their contract in favour of another company town player. Now it sits, obscured, backside turned, industry contract annulled. Before I leave, Trudy ties a pendant around my neck in the shape of Nauru engraved Julia. She says to me like so many others, "we probably won't see you again, you guys always leave once you've done your work and mostly never come back." I think how stark these words are in portending Nauru's future time without refugees. What will be the long-term harms left in the boom and bust wake? Nauru is a country that has, willingly and unwillingly, been subject to the toxic remainders of commercial processes.



Figure 6.7: PO₄₃ meets RSD

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Appendix 1: Australian Migration Excision Zone

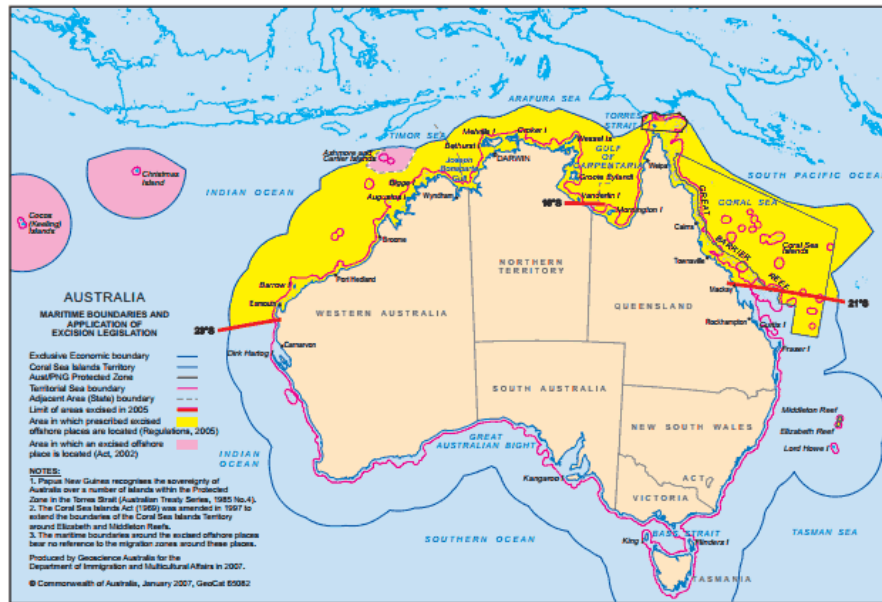


Figure 1

Sourced from Forced Migration Current Awareness
<https://fm-cab.blogspot.co.uk/>