

Chapter 13

The Continuing Connection

John Guise held every high office except the one he most wanted. Speaker in the Second House, he was Somare's deputy in the third. For the rites of independence, he was Governor-General. In that capacity, he declared:

Papua New Guinea is now independent.

We have at this point in time broken with our colonial past and we now stand as an independent nation in our own right.

On the distinguished visitors' platform, Gough Whitlam thought the same of Australia since 'Australia was never truly free until Papua New Guinea became free'.¹ At this euphoric moment, when Australians celebrated the end of their own colonial narrative, they saw Papua New Guinea in cheerful terms. Its strategic significance was no longer acute: it was democratic, stable and well governed; and Panguna would make it economically self-sufficient. The country still relied on Australia and Australians for many services and for aid, but, despite Morrison's disapproval, funds came with no conditions. Australia was punctilious in respecting the country's sovereignty.

Compare this view with a recent statement by strategic analyst Hugh White. He welcomes Australia's 'more hands-on approach', but he wants more involvement:

[T]o have a real chance of helping to pull Papua New Guinea out of its long, sad slide towards state failure, [Australians] are going to need to do a lot more, and to do it very differently ...

We need to take a comprehensive approach that helps PNG address service delivery, central administration, economic development, constitutional issues, political processes and national identity.²

In the minds of some influential Australians, Papua New Guinea has become a political tragedy, an economic disaster and a strategic nightmare.

Two sets of pressures have transformed relations. One centres on aid. When much of the Third World became independent, the former colonies were assumed to be self-suffi-

cient, or they would soon become so. Aid would not be needed for long, so it was delivered ad hoc. In time, delivery became more professional. The creation of AusAID's predecessor, ADAA (Chapter 9), like other Whitlam Government initiatives, was catching up with the practice of other developed countries. Even so, Morrison was not unusual when he imagined untied aid to Papua New Guinea as unfortunate and temporary.³

By the 1990s, however, aid had become normal globally. The World Bank took the lead. Its charter prohibits intervention in domestic politics, so the Bank focused on macro-economic issues; but its analysts noticed failures in programs designed to rescue countries from crises.⁴ Appalled by repressive regimes, corruption and abuses of human rights, the Bank concluded that these were not merely human tragedies, but barriers to economic growth. Accordingly, they began to promote 'good governance' (democratic government, competent administration and market-friendly economics) in countries seeking their financial support.⁵

Individual donors followed suit, focusing on democracy, equity and participation — as well as economics. All began to impose conditions for their aid, and especially for their rescue packages. As bankruptcy stalked Cook Islands, for example, donors came to the rescue on condition that half the public service was retrenched and the other half took salary cuts. During Skate's difficult reign in Papua New Guinea, donors withheld funds pending the adoption of reforms (see below). As Macdonald points out, it is hard to say if donors' insistence on good governance is neo-colonial or benign. Either way, their effect is 'to make "them" appear to be more like "us"'.⁶

So it is hardly strange that there are limits to Papua New Guinea's options as a recipient of aid. What does make it unusual is the dominance of a single donor. Even without aid, Australia would loom large. In 1999, Standish reckoned that Australians had invested \$A2.6 billion, and bilateral trade amounted to \$A2.2 billion per annum.⁷ To take a more concrete example, *ex-kiaps* are seen as the best intermediaries between outsiders and villagers, and resource companies employ them for liaison work with the people whose land they traverse — or excavate.⁸

But aid has become the central strand of this multidimensional relationship. Administered mainly by AusAID, it is a declining fraction of Australia's budget but a permanent feature of Papua New Guinea's. It exceeded \$A300 million per annum through the 1990s while project aid displaced budgetary support. Garnaut, who lobbied for untied aid in the first place, insists that it was appropriate in the 1970s and perhaps later. He reckons that the defeat of the beefed-up Leadership Code in 1978 triggered the policy shift: untied aid was indefensible when news leaked out about the business interests of politicians. Project aid promised accountability. Whether or not it achieves this, project aid has undermined local control and damaged the morale of officers managing programs and services.⁹

The quality of public administration probably declined during the 1980s, but this was neither swift nor calamitous. For several years the new institutions of government functioned largely as intended. As one of the virtuous Gang of Four, upholding the integrity of government, Morauta conceded that efficiency and integrity might not last, but (at worst) they would inspire a later generation. And Cabinet rejoiced in low inflation,

a healthy balance of payments, hard currency and the resource rent tax. Management deteriorated abruptly from 1989 with the closure of Panguna and civil war.¹⁰ The mine provided one-third of foreign exchange earnings and one-fifth of government revenue. To survive this calamity, currency was devalued, 2,000 public servants were sacked and spending was slashed.

External help was needed but Australia was restrained. Aid was increased by a mere \$20 million over two years. Australia's Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans, flew into Port Moresby: 'Before waiting to hear what Prime Minister Namaliu was doing [a lot] he remarked that PNG would have to tighten its belt.'¹¹ Papua New Guinea's leaders accepted that Australian aid should dwindle. (They could have pointed out that it had fallen from 0.3 per cent of Australian GNP in 1976 to 0.1 per cent in the 1990s.) In practice, Evans's curt advice recalled an ambush by the same government in 1985, when aid was cut abruptly for the next five years — and Hayden's sleight of hand in 1975.¹²

As the drumbeat of denunciations grew to a roar (Chapter 12), aid became conditional. By the end of the 1990s, instead of sending a cheque to Waigani, AusAID was funding 73 projects directly. Although each was no doubt well-conceived, collectively they marginalised Papua New Guinea's faltering institutions. AusAID treated local public servants as a lost cause and allowed them to be partly eclipsed by Australian consultants and by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).¹³

Australia is not the only possible benefactor. The World Bank has provided funds, for example, in a Structural Adjustment Program in 1996. However, Australia and the World Bank collaborated to suspend funds during the Skate era, pending specific reforms.¹⁴ A particular complication was Dr Pirouz Hamidian-Rad (Chapter 12). The Bank declined to negotiate as long as he was a negotiator. Prime Minister Skate then tried to borrow commercially. Alas, European banks would not lend a cent: the country must rely on the World Bank and Australia. In spite of differences of emphasis, these two usually work together. When Morauta replaced Skate, for instance, Australia offered to relieve the liquidity crisis and asked the World Bank and the IMF to revive the Structural Adjustment Program.¹⁵ The European Community, Japan, China and Taiwan might eventually become major donors, but so far they have not matched Australian support.

More broadly, Australia's aid 'increased in size, spread and significance just as the PNG state's capacities have declined'. As an Australian High Commissioner conceded, aid by itself is pointless: if an economy is poorly managed, 'in the long run no amount of aid will make much of a difference'.¹⁶ That comment explains Australia's new enthusiasm for strengthening the agencies of government (and of civil society, which usually means the churches and politicians temporarily out of office). AusAID's priorities include 'promoting effective and equitable legal systems and strengthening the rule of law', and 'strengthening civil representation and participation to enable better scrutiny of policies and practices'. Another term for this approach is intervention.

Because of the dependence of one government on the other, relations between them would never be easy:

Whatever Australia did, Papua New Guinean leaders would think Australians were patronising or interfering or neglectful or dominating. Australians would think PNG leaders were managing poorly, doing too little for development and enriching themselves at the expense of the population as a whole.¹⁷

One Australian body did find time to look broadly at this relationship. In 2002, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee initiated an inquiry.¹⁸ This bipartisan committee researched and debated for eighteen months before reporting. They endorsed existing aid programs, but also proposed a ‘Pacific economic and political community’. The community could establish a common currency, labour market and budgetary and fiscal standards. Other proposals encourage closer cooperation and integrated services. Labour mobility would allow short-term workers to enter Australia. The twinning of Australian local councils and island communities, the exchange of public servants and an expanded volunteer program would complement official relationships, taking the emphasis away from the aid nexus.

On the most sensitive issue of the day, the senators reported that most of the submissions they had received ‘recommended an end to the Government’s policy of processing asylum seekers offshore — the “Pacific Strategy”’. That was a reference to Australia’s agreement with Nauru and Papua New Guinea whereby asylum-seekers would not land in Australia (where they would gain legal rights) but would be interned in island camps while their requests for refugee status were processed. (Melbourne writer Jim Davidson claimed that the Government treated island nations ‘as if they were simply client states: non-whites can be safely kept off-shore in ... our very own Bantustans’.¹⁹) This policy, observed the senators, fed the perception that ‘Australia’s domestic political considerations are more important than broader regional issues’, so they wanted to end it.

An Eminent Persons Group tried to carry these ideas forward. When they toured the islands, however, island leaders feared that their sovereignty would be swallowed by a body that Australia would dominate. The only proposal to create a forum crashed on the reefs of sovereignty. The benefits of closer association were undeniable: but the loss of independence was intolerable.²⁰

Meanwhile, the second set of pressures emerged. The terrorist assaults on New York and Washington, the massacre of holiday-makers in Bali and Australia’s anxiety about terrorism gave prominence to a cadre of security specialists. Suddenly the world seemed more perilous, and Prime Minister John Howard incautiously (but revealingly) let a journalist describe him as America’s deputy sheriff. The ‘war on terror’ threw sinister light on the (unrelated) collapse of the Solomon Islands Government in 2000 and helped to justify the intervention of an Australian-led force, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) to restore law and order. Unlike previous peace-monitoring, such as the Australian-led Peace Monitors in Bougainville, RAMSI has a mandate to disarm criminals and to strengthen the institutions of government. RAMSI deploys accountants and administrators alongside police and soldiers.

The ominous term ‘arc of instability’ was pressed into service to describe all Melanesia from Irian Jaya to Fiji. The phrase has a revealing history. It was coined in

Australia as a term to encompass civil strife in Indonesia, but it is no longer acceptable to refer so dismissively to that archipelago. Melanesians have inherited the term, even though most of their problems concern their stable (not to say stagnant) policies and performance rather than their frequent and peaceful changes of government.

However murky its origins, 'the arc of instability' is a lens through which some Australians now see Papua New Guinea as a security risk. A year of negotiations led to a bilateral Enhanced Cooperation Package to address these suddenly urgent problems. Seventy Australian public servants were posted to Waigani departments, and 200 police joined the RPNGC. These are not advisers but front-line officers. Australia was already funding retraining and retrenchment in the Defence Force, shrinking it from 3,300 to 2,000. Under the ECP umbrella, two Australian lieutenant-colonels will now 'work with the PNGDF'. Two more officers will follow.²¹

Allan Patience argues that these moves merely revive the security interest that he insists has always shaped Australia's relations with Papua New Guinea:

the recent arousal of Australian interest in governance in PNG is directly related to the events of September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism. And that interest ... is part of Australia's preoccupation with its own security.²²

That perception is shared by James Laki, soldier and commentator, who reads Australian policies as 'driven by comments and observations by the Centre for Independent Studies and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute' and encouraged by the success of RAMSI, which some see as a dress rehearsal. He observes that Australia ignored the Solomon Islands crisis (they rebuffed Prime Minister Bart Ulufa'alu's plea for Australians to disarm the country's corrupt and partisan force) and the bizarre coup by George Speight in Fiji. After September 11, Australians were much more willing to intervene.

And what, he asks, is the role of Papua New Guinean politicians and public servants in the context of the ECP? Politicians will not control Australian officials.

Does this mean Australia would be in control, just like the colonial days? Is it the public service, or some parts of it, that require capacity 'enhancement'? Some opinions from Australia suggest there is no 'legitimacy' to rule by the PNG Government ... If it is the political system that requires enhancement, then it would be interfering with the internal affairs of a sovereign country.²³

These questions are much too complex to address here. Suffice to say that the equality of sovereign states that seemed axiomatic in 1975 has been abandoned. We seem closer to the paternalistic 1960s than to the optimistic 1970s: Australians enter Papua New Guinea quite freely while Papua New Guineans come to Australia mainly as students; the budget relies on Canberra's subventions; ministers display erratic interest in their portfolios and imperfect control of their departments; and Australians hold key posts in the economy, the bureaucracy and the uniformed forces.

It is now possible to address the criticism that Australians could and should have done very much better. Right-wingers pioneered this argument, but they have no lien on it. In his inaugural lecture at UPNG,²⁴ Allan Patience denounced

the ham-fisted decolonization that Australia forced on PNG ... [and] The undue haste and unjustifiable comprehensiveness of Australia's withdrawal in 1976 — leaving PNG without the levels of infrastructure, capacity, and capacity-building necessary for a smooth transition to independence ...

The grim fact is ... there never was a real, functioning 'state' capable of taking over in PNG once Australia withdrew ...

And it's not just the hasty, Whitlamesque decolonization strategies that need a ... critique, but the whole miserable, lacklustre, complacent, lazy, ineffectual colonial period ... the insensitive paternalism of the Hasluck years, the sheer ignorance of the Barnes years, and the Whitlam-like hastiness of the Peacock years.

Nobody blames Papua New Guineans for accepting independence. On the contrary, they are portrayed as victims of a confidence trick by all-knowing, all-powerful Australians (especially Whitlam). These critiques rest on questionable assumptions: that the Pax Australiana extended across the whole territory, and that it was not unravelling. In that view, Australia could have stayed indefinitely and made ponderous preparations. It is also assumed that continuing Australian rule would have resolved, rather than exacerbated, problems of governance.

These assumptions are flawed. 'Tribal fighting' was reviving in the districts with the least exposure to Australian rule; those with the most economic development were the most truculent. Papua New Guineans made a better fist of dealing with resource companies than had the Australians, and brought peace to Rabaul and Bougainville, where Australian policy had fomented violence. Somare's coalition resulted from free and fair elections, and they wanted independence. After that election, independence was not Australia's call.

Although the general argument is wildly implausible, several specific suggestions deserve consideration. The most compelling is that Australia *should have localised the public service much earlier*. The necessary steps to have made that possible include removing the intransigent managers of the Public Service Commission and waiving the inflexible rules of the Commonwealth Public Service. The Administrative College and the university would have been created sooner; and ASOPA would have been overhauled to train Papua New Guineans in large numbers. These steps were affordable and achievable — but they were also unimaginable in Australia in the 1950s. Hasluck's purpose was to preserve social difference, even as he integrated the Administration into Australian systems of governance. That strategy was inimical to rapid localisation and the formulation of territorial standards.

Three territorial circumstances would have posed serious problems. A localised public service would have been dominated by cadets from coastal Papua and the New

Guinea islands, where primary education was most advanced. Educated people from the interior would have been as scarce as hen's teeth, and the public service could not have carried out its secondary but vital role of nation-building. The *kiap* system — the branch of government that touched most people — rested partly on the mystique of white skin. Coastal policemen and evangelists did wield authority outside their own communities, but they enjoyed only a reflection of the white men's authority. Finally, the scenario of swift localisation requires an exponential increase in the breadth of the school system, and much earlier secondary schooling. However, teachers were scarce in Australia at the time and the Director of Education, Bill Groves, could not recruit enough even for the schools that did operate.

It is also argued that *the legislature should have been localised much sooner*. But Papua New Guineans formed a majority of the House of Assembly from day one. It was not a stacked parliament that prevented self-determination. Devolution was impeded by the timidity of indigenous politicians, their inexperience in the face of esoteric rites in law-making and public administration, and the Territory's extreme financial dependence. These hurdles might have been vaulted by resolute actors, but to what effect? Until 1972, only a handful of leaders had the education, the experience — and the self-confidence — to challenge Australian advisors. The localisation of politics, like localisation in the public service, presupposes very different circumstances than actually prevailed.

Australian traditions inhibited participation either in law-making or in public administration. Despite interventions by David Hay and Tony Voutas, little deviation was allowed from Canberra precedents. Increasingly, Territory public service practices were brought into line with Australian rules. This uniformity could have allowed the fruitful transfer and exchange of public servants, but that was neither intended nor achieved. Conversely, the creation of an indigenous public service with its own salary structure was resisted fiercely (and understandably) by local public servants. Many Australian practices seem ludicrous in the local context (the Commonwealth and the Territory public services both worked from 7.45am to 4.06pm, five days a week) until we recall that the Territory public service was an Australian body, answerable through Australian public servants to an Australian minister. Its senior officers were all Australians until at least 1972. In government offices — though not in the House — adaptation could only have created confusion.

Should there have been *more time* between self-government and full independence? In very rare agreement, the CPC and Tom Critchley would both have preferred at least one more year. Against that view, Papua New Guinea did enjoy a much longer transitional period than was normal in Asia and Africa. One reason for Australia's insistence on speed was Morrison's expectation that he would have to apply pressure to make devolution work at all. That was a fair assessment of the inertia of the Ministerial Members, but Somare's coalition was very different. We cannot assess Morrison's, and Whitlam's, further argument that delay would have encouraged opposition and secession. Whitlam remains intransigent, although his tone is now defensive:

I hear it asserted that my government was in error in pushing PNG into independence too soon ... I simply assert that, had we delayed PNG independence, even for another year, we would have put the country in the gravest danger of breaking up.²⁵

Right or wrong, it was a considered and coherent position and one that Somare accepted.

What consequences might have followed from an extra year of self-government? Perhaps localisation of the public service would have been more measured. The House might have digested and accepted a few more of the CPC's proposals. It is (just) conceivable that the governments would have reached a more equitable agreement on aid and we might even hope that the roles of the Defence Force and the police would have been better conceived. But Papua New Guinea's leaders, lacking our perfect hindsight, might not have wanted or achieved these outcomes. They might even have made other mistakes.

Australia's insistence on *Papua New Guinea's unity* is worth reflection. In the 1970s, national unity was frail in the archipelago of ethnic and language communities. That is why the CPC was so passionately wedded to nation-building, and this concern is evident in Somare's anxiety about the national broadcaster. Was Australia's insistence on unity justified? It arose, after all, from Australia's own pursuit of regional stability and security, not from an assessment of local circumstances. Quite apart from the continuing distress of some Papuans and their determination to prove Papua's separate status, national unity has cost nine destructive years of civil war in Bougainville.

There is even a Pacific precedent (in the separation of the Gilbert and Ellice Group into Kiribati and Tuvalu) for splitting a colony. But most of Papua New Guinea's leaders have always insisted on unity, while 'Papua' and 'Bougainville' were (and are) no more coherent than Papua New Guinea. Ethnic coherence would have unravelled the Territory into a host of communities (like Narokobi's scenario, Chapter 8). This anarchic vision was abhorrent to Australians, and very few Papua New Guineans were willing to carry their parochial loyalties to the extent of ethnic autonomy. In any event, the question is moot. The UN saw Katanga's attempt to secede from Congo as evidence of a mining company's manipulation of political forces, and Biafra's populist attempt to leave Nigeria failed to win external support. After these events, UN endorsement of a fragmented Papua New Guinea was inconceivable.

It is hard to imagine plausible alternatives to the way that Australians did decolonise, but four sets of technical decisions are worth considering. A recurrent complaint of Papua New Guineans is the inadequacy of their material legacy: there were no railways, few all-weather roads and only obsolete ports (except in Bougainville). There were too few schools and clinics. Could the Territory have gained *better infrastructure*, more schools and colleges, a reliable transport system and better trained police if Hasluck had won bigger budgets? His shopping list (Chapter 2) hardly encourages that theory. Among other things he wanted to:

- double school enrolments;
- enrol 10,000 secondary scholars, 2,000 technical students and 2,000 teacher trainees;
- build or rebuild hospitals;

- provide more antenatal care;
- survey 40-50,000 people each year for tuberculosis;
- extend government influence to the whole population;
- extend Local Government Council coverage;
- increase the production of cocoa, coffee, rubber, logs and timber;
- create 7,500 land blocks; and
- double the mileage of roads.

This was an expansion of existing programs, with the same emphasis on general education and health. This was not the infrastructure that Critchley had in mind, or that Papua New Guinea's leaders now yearn for. That idealised public works program implies a different perspective than that which animated real policy-makers.

Another set of technical decisions led to a poorly designed *Defence Force and a constabulary* unsuited to modern policing. The inadequacies of the Defence Force stem from the Australian Army's autonomy and their failure to think through their strategic perceptions. Foreign policy analysts were keen to disengage from the Territory precisely when the army was determined to be embedded.²⁶ The defects of the police, on the other hand, do seem attributable to Australian political processes, the hasty departure of officers and the neglect of training.

Many decisions concerning *financial aid* could also have been handled more creatively. It was timely that Australia created a professional aid-management body, but several political decisions were calamitous. Hayden's deduction of golden handshake funds from the independence settlement was the most savage, but later decisions (Chapters 9 and 12) were equally high-handed and hard to accommodate.

With hindsight, we might imagine other benevolent scenarios — but that would be utopian. The young Papua New Guinean politicians and their officials had almost no experience in government. Australian public servants were not much older, and, in any case, the decolonisation project had no direct precedents. The achievement is even more remarkable when we recall the political context. The Whitlam Government was under siege and often in disarray while Papua New Guinea's novices were under fire from radicals in the CPC as well as conservatives in the United Party. In such a new, complex and emotional enterprise, of course there were mistakes and miscalculations; but there were fewer than we would expect in a project of this scale and complexity. The fact is that Papua New Guinea's governance was widely admired for more than a decade. Errors were made, but no plausible alternative would have produced much better outcomes, and they could have been much worse. The transfer of powers from Canberra to Waigani was an outstanding bureaucratic feat at both ends.

That brings us at last to the larger question: was an independent Papua New Guinea an appropriate goal? Separate destinies are implied in Alfred Deakin's view (Introduction) that 'A "White Australia" may exist ... but a "Black New Guinea" the territory ... must always remain'. If these neighbours were categorically incompatible, they must

ultimately go their separate ways. That idea still underpins Australia's sense of itself. While most of the world gropes for regional associations, we represent ourselves as an isolate. When we think of ourselves as victims of distance (and Geoffrey Blainey's *Tyranny of Distance* is still a bestseller),²⁷ we ignore the links that bind our island neighbours to us – and us to them.

Until Federation, the idea of Australasia expressed the shared interests of colonists and colonial governors, relying on the Royal Navy for security, London for capital, Westminster for legitimacy and Christianity for salvation. For the makers of the Constitution, however, 'a continent for a nation' seemed to be the largest possible federation.²⁸ Papua and New Guinea did become Australian Territories, but not part of White Australia. While New Zealanders encouraged social assimilation in their dependencies, Australians insisted on social discrimination. Their decolonisations embodied the same contrast. Cook Islanders and New Zealanders invented free association and extended the matrix to Niue and Tokelau.²⁹ The effect, as well as the purpose, of New Zealand's decolonising was integration. Australia did propose something similar — but only for Nauru, whose 9,000 people would have settled in Australia.³⁰ When Guise asked about closer relations, the Government moved to cut Papua New Guinea loose (Chapter 4). New Zealand welcomed Islander immigrants: Australia made Papua New Guinea independent to avoid that outcome.

In the aftermath of the colonial era, an elastic region embraces the whole 'arc of instability': Australia is its core and its blind spot. Tens of thousands of Polynesians have moved to New Zealand,³¹ but the longer road runs from Polynesia to Australia, via New Zealand. Thursday Island is another staging post: Torres Strait Islanders move south while Papua New Guineans cross from Daru for supplies and services, or to resettle.³²

Within this lively region, most of its aid flows from Australia, and some from New Zealand. Several currencies are linked to the Australian dollar. Most of the social and natural science research on the islands is conducted in Australia or New Zealand. Peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-observing depend on Australian logistics, and New Zealand's Pacific Policy relies on Australia's regional hegemony. Australians and New Zealanders cooperate in regional crises, most obviously when Bougainville peace talks were staged by New Zealand and endorsed by Australia.³³

The system of separate, sovereign states obscures the social, economic and cultural networks, and obstructs the flow of capital, labour, technology and ideas. At the very least, the region needs a political forum such as the Australian senators proposed. The Pacific Forum meets rarely and casually, and the agenda of the Pacific Commission is technical, so neither can perform this role. In any event, their membership is too broad to focus on the issues of most importance to Papua New Guineans. Some meetings do occur between Australian and Papua New Guinean ministers, but conversations occur more often — and more unequally — between Australian bureaucratic patrons and Papua New Guinean clients. Especially as more Australians move into sensitive positions, Australia's relations with Papua New Guinea need an arena in which political issues can be raised, explored, argued — and resolved. We need to share technical services (in education, security, research, currency, agronomy, disease control, geology

and meteorology for a start) and we need a political forum to oversee them. Decolonisation is not the end of a story but a new chapter.

Meanwhile, can we delineate this unique post-colonial relationship? Let us begin with a surprising continuity. In 2005, Australians acknowledged a labour shortage and one politician proposed that Papua New Guineans be admitted as seasonal workers. He made no headway at home, but the *Post-Courier*³⁴ summed up many Papua New Guineans' sense of grievance:

Our bureaucrats and politicians have been talking to their Australian counterparts, pushing the concept of letting approved workers from PNG go to Australia for short-term working contracts.

... New South Wales parliamentarian and Kokoda Track champion Charlie Lynn reckons our people can do the jobs the Australians want filled ... We are Australia's nearest neighbours. They administered us for many years and pushed us into independence in a way that many would call 'rushed', perhaps premature. Mr Lynn knows well the sacrifices [of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels]...

In essence, we deserve better treatment when a chance comes along, such as the current labour crisis in Australia ... we do have many thousands of moderately educated young people who could solve Australia's worries with fruitpicking and other seasonal industries.

Australia, give our young people a chance. Lest We Forget.

Beneath the overblown rhetoric is the uncomfortable fact that Australians still enjoy easy access to Papua New Guinea, but the converse is not true: unlike (for example) Swiss or Canadians, Papua New Guineans cannot obtain working visas, though they can enter for schooling. Entry is not much easier than it was for Miss Tessie Lavau in the 1950s.

For 100 years, Australians have portrayed Papua New Guinea as Australia's dark Other. We suppose that we enjoy good governance, prosperity and social order where they endure mismanagement, poverty and chaos. From the other side of Torres Strait, Australia is also seen as the Other, often with admiration tinged with envy, and sometimes with resentment. Decades of de facto colonial rule have left such an emotive heritage that we cannot treat Papua New Guinea as if it were no more important than, say, Pakistan or Palau. The two countries rather resemble a divorced couple who find that their ties are too complex, too many and too sensitive to ignore. In brief, they need a neutral forum in which to meet, review the past and argue about the future, including the size and shape of the alimony.

The language of colonialism and independence is so limiting that policy-makers of the 1970s could see only two options: to be colonised or to be free. The reality has always been more nuanced: Papua New Guinea was substantially free in 1974 — perhaps more autonomous than under the ECP. That either/or choice resembles the

language of the Family Court, in which a couple is either married or divorced. Australian rule over the Territory was not a marriage made in heaven, and it could never be consummated by full integration. Yet these countries are so close in so many ways that the divorce cannot easily be made absolute. Neither side was attracted to New Zealand's open marriage — 'free association' — with Polynesia. By default, independence was the only item on the agenda, but one political act could not undo ancient geography or modern history.

Some analysts condemn the colonial era while others denounce the manner and speed of decolonisation. Those views perhaps miss a more crucial point. Decolonisation is by no means complete and independence is a work in progress. What seemed like a divorce in 1975 is a trial separation, in which the two governments can negotiate a new way of living next to each other. As they grope towards a new relationship, it is more useful to understand the past than to moralise about it. If we do not understand the recent past, we are very likely to repeat it.

Footnotes

1. 'Freedom for Australia too', *The Australian*, September 16, 1975.
2. Hugh White, 'The deep mess of PNG demands long-term action', *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 15, 2004.
3. Barrie Macdonald, 'Decolonisation and "Good" Governance: Precedents and Continuities', in D. Denoon (ed.), *Emerging from Empire? Decolonisation in the Pacific*, Division of Pacific and Asian History, Canberra, 1997.
4. Peter Larmour (ed.), *Governance and Good Government: Policy and Implementation in the South Pacific*, Canberra: NCDS, 1995; World Bank, *Governance: The World Bank's Experience*, Washington, 1993; Barrie Macdonald, '"Good" Governance and Pacific Islands States', in Peter Larmour (ed.), *Governance in the Pacific Islands*, Canberra: NCDS, 1997.
5. World Bank, *Governance and Development*, Washington, 1992, p. 58.
6. Macdonald, 'Decolonisation and "Good" Governance'.
7. Bill Standish, *PNG 1999: Crisis of Governance*, Research Paper 4, 1999-2000, for the Australian Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group.
8. Eg., Glenn Banks, 'Mountain of desire: mining company and indigenous community at the Porgera Gold Mine, Papua New Guinea', PhD thesis, ANU, 1997; and Fitzpatrick, *Bamahuta*.
9. Interview with Ross Garnaut.
10. Ibid.
11. Stewart Firth, 'Papua New Guinea: Why we must offer ex-colony more than words and money', *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 27, 1997.
12. Ibid.; and interview with Ross Garnaut.
13. AusAID, *Papua New Guinea Program Profiles, 1999-2000*
14. AusAID, *International Development Issues*, 52, 1998.
15. Standish, *PNG 1999*.
16. David Irvine in an ANU seminar, cited by Standish.
17. Firth, 'Papua New Guinea: Why we must offer ex-colony more than words and money'
18. An inquiry into Australia's relations with Papua New Guinea and the islands of the south-west Pacific', for the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group, August 12, 2003.

19. Jim Davidson, 'Land of the Long Black Cloud', *Australian Book Review*, March 2002.
20. See my 'Pacific Solutions', in *Times Literary Supplement* (5280), pp. 12-13 (June 11, 2004)
21. Sean Dorney, ABC, December 16, 2004.
22. Allan Patience, 'What is Australia really up to?', *Post-Courier*, July 5, 2004.
23. James Laki, 'A critical appraisal of the ECP', *Post-Courier*, October 13, 2004. Lt.-Col. Laki is a Senior Research Fellow at the National Research Institute
24. Allan Patience, 'Failed and Vulnerable States: Towards a Political Science of South Pacific Regionalism', Inaugural Lecture, April 30, 2004.
25. Whitlam in *Hindsight*.
26. Bruce Hunt, 'Papua New Guinea in Australia's Strategic Thinking', PhD thesis, University of New England, 2004.
27. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: how distance shaped Australia's history*, Melbourne, 1968.
28. I develop this argument in *Historical Studies*, 'Re-Membering Australasia: A Repressed Memory'.
29. Karen Nero, 'The End of Insularity', in Denoon, *Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*.
30. Nancy Viviani, *Nauru: Phosphate and Political Progress*, Canberra, ANU, 1970; Nancy Pollock, 'Nauru: Decolonised, Recolonising, but never a Colony', in Denoon, *Emerging from Empire?*
31. Nero, 'The End of Insularity'.
32. *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 12, 2002.
33. Monica Wehner and Donald Denoon (ed.), *Without a Gun*, Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2002.
34. *Post-Courier*, March 9, 2005. Editorial, 'Australia, give our workers a fair go'.