

2

Administrative labyrinths

As the story of Cyril Chan has demonstrated, access to higher education for non-Europeans from the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG) was complicated and required navigation of a variety of intersecting and often contradictory policies. The policy and administrative situation by the late 1940s and into the 1950s was influenced by a number of factors, including postwar obligations, conservative government and a patronising and colonial approach fixed in the minds of politicians and bureaucrats. Even within the Australian bureaucracy, more power was held in Canberra than in the TPNG Administration in the territory. This situation was puzzling and frustrating for the bureaucrats involved, but was far more damaging and affecting for the students and potential students, as the stories at the beginning of Part One have illustrated.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Australia had pressing and present responsibilities within the Pacific. These arrangements began when British New Guinea (geographically, largely the south-eastern quarter of the island of New Guinea) became the Territory of Papua in 1906, administered by the newly formed Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth had convinced Britain to entrust the newly formed nation with colonial responsibilities, and as Patricia O'Brien has written: 'Australian politicians hoped for a new era of colonisation'.¹

1 Patricia O'Brien, 'Remaking Australia's Colonial Culture?: White Australia and Its Papuan Frontier 1901–1940', *Australian Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 98, doi.org/10.1080/10314610802663043.

With the outbreak of the First World War, German New Guinea was forcibly occupied by Australia (geographically the north-eastern half of the island and the large islands to the north of the mainland). Following the war, this became a League of Nations mandated territory under Australian rule (from 1921). In fact, O'Brien argues that,

Prime Minister Billy Hughes argued vociferously at the Paris Peace Conference that New Guinea should be annexed to Australia on the grounds of security and as compensation for the immense loss of blood and treasure in the war.²

In 1949 the administration of Papua and New Guinea was merged, after which they became the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG). Those who lived in TPNG, particularly those deemed non-European, were treated differently for purposes of citizenship, rights and, importantly in the context of this book, access to education.

The Australian TPNG became a key site of conflict during the Second World War. In this period, thousands of subjects of the territories supported – or were forced into supporting – the war effort, with many dying in the process.³ The environment and lives of those who lived in Papua and New Guinea were significantly impacted by the conflict, as the land was occupied by Japanese forces, and Australian forces saw the islands and their inhabitants as providing a buffer, preventing an advance of Japanese forces to Australia. These physical and psychological sacrifices were made in support and defence of Australia, often without consent. Nevertheless, Scott MacWilliam, who argues 'victories made possible reconstitution of the ties',⁴ pointed to a stronger bond between Australia and Papua and New Guinea after the Second World War than had existed previously, when there had been a more hands-off approach to governing and supporting the territories. Brian Jinks has argued that before the Second World War, 'Australian governments believed that their main colonial

2 O'Brien, 'Remaking Australia's Colonial Culture?', 107.

3 Kokoda Initiative, *Voices from the War: Papua New Guinean Stories of the Kokoda Campaign, World War Two* (Canberra: Government of Papua New Guinea and Government of Australia, 2015).

4 Scott MacWilliam, 'Papua New Guinea in the 1940s: Empire and Legend', in *Australia and the End of Empires: The Impact of Decolonisation in Australia's Near North*, ed. David Lowe, 25–42 (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1996), 26.

charges ... should be self-supporting'.⁵ This benign neglect of the prewar period was replaced after the war with a more active approach to governing and 'development'.⁶

The manner in which Australia administered the territories on the island of New Guinea changed after the Second World War. This responsibility was formalised by the Papua – New Guinea Provisional Act of 1945, which led to the two territories being administered by one civil administration.⁷ Outside the internal legislative and logistical machinations within the parliament and bureaucracy of Australia, the manner of administration was also affected by broader United Nations activities. Obligations under the UN Trusteeship System included a requirement for the trustee territory to be moved towards self-government or independence, and involved reporting to the United Nations on a regular basis.⁸ Tracy Banivanua-Mar argues that Australia worked towards convenient, self-serving, outcomes as the trustee and – along with the United Kingdom, USA and New Zealand – worked to manage the process and agenda in the United Nations, which led to 'the imposition of independent national statehood, bound by administratively expedient colonial borders wedding the procedure of decolonisation to colonialism itself'.⁹

Managing this situation in Papua and New Guinea from 1949 was the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck. Hasluck plays an influential role in Australia's colonial administration of the territories, spending 12 years as Minister for Territories before assuming the role of Minister for External Affairs. This followed a distinguished career in the Department of External Affairs before he entered parliament. Hasluck assumed the territories of Papua and New Guinea would 'ultimately attain self-government, either through independence or through some constitutional association

5 Brian Jinks, 'Australia's Post-War Policy for New Guinea and Papua', *The Journal of Pacific History* 17, no. 2 (1982): 86, doi.org/10.1080/00223348208572438.

6 Nicholas Ferns argues that this is in part a result of a broader shift in attitudes within the international community, with Australian policymakers being influenced by changes in thinking around aid and development. Nicholas Ferns, 'Beyond Colombo: Australian Colonial and Foreign Policy in the Age of International Development, 1945–1975', PhD thesis, Monash University, 2017.

7 Lyndon Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea: Australian Government Policy 1945–1975', *History of Education Review* 34, no. 2 (2005): 3, doi.org/10.1108/08198691200500009.

8 Stuart Robert Doran, ed., *Australia and Papua New Guinea, 1966–1969*, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2006).

9 Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 218.

with the Commonwealth, such as statehood'.¹⁰ However, Hasluck and his colleagues in government were more concerned by the broader implications of the Cold War, and saw the decolonisation agenda in the Pacific as being outside that prism. Given Hasluck assumed that TPNG's moment of self-determination was many decades in the future, he sought its gradual development. In a speech to parliament in 1960 he noted that 'political advances could follow only after social and economic improvements'.¹¹

Cyril Chan's experience, navigating the labyrinthine administrative processes as he did to access education in Australia, was not isolated. While TPNG was, in fact, a territory of Australia, its (albeit limited) geographic distance from the mainland engendered an isolation from policymaking when it came to scholarship eligibility. In the case of the Australian International Awards Scheme (formerly known as the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme), bureaucratic changes and announcements made their way to Port Moresby via a number of routes.

The Australian Administration in TPNG discovered the existence of the Australian International Scholarship Scheme largely via circulars and letters sent by the Department of External Affairs (DEA). In February 1958 a letter sent by DEA to the Department of the Territories noted that the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme had been 'absorbed' into the Australian International Scholarship Scheme which would provide up to six awards to 'persons from outside the Colombo Plan area'.¹² The letter noted that Fiji was being offered one award in the current financial year. A few months later, in April, the South Pacific Commission sent a circular to commissioners and territorial administrations about the Australian International Scholarship Scheme, noting that the scholarships would be awarded to 'students from countries in which Australia has a special interest'.¹³ A note from Geoffrey Roscoe in the Department of Education in Port Moresby noted that he had never heard of the scholarship scheme, but he thought it might be of

10 Megaritty, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 5.

11 Paul Hasluck, *Australian Policy in Papua and New Guinea: Statement in the House of Representatives* (Canberra: Government Printer, 1960), 7–11. Hasluck was to agree to a faster move to self-government in the year after this statement, recognising that he could not fight the accelerating push for decolonisation around the world.

12 'Scholarship for Fiji | 4th February', Box 340, File 6-2, Australian International Scholarship Scheme 1958, PNG National Archives.

13 'Australian International Scholarship Scheme | Savingram from the South Pacific Commission | 16th April', Box 340, File 6-2, Australian International Scholarship Scheme 1958, PNG National Archives.

interest to students from Papua and New Guinea.¹⁴ Donald Cleland, the administrator at the time, decided to seek more information from the Department of Territories, asking the secretary for ‘further particulars’ as the ‘scheme may be of interest to students from this Territory’.¹⁵ This request was passed on to DEA, which clarified that students of the TPNG were not eligible for the scheme because it was designed for students from outside Australia and its territories.¹⁶

This exchange of letters and memoranda across the Pacific to clarify that the TPNG was, in fact, a part of Australia and thus ineligible for an ‘international’ scholarship scheme is instructive. The distance in thinking and the lack of communication between DEA and the Department of Territories is striking. Perhaps it also indicates the isolation from Canberra, and official decision-making, felt by the administration in TPNG – they were receiving information about Australian programs (for which they were ineligible) from the South Pacific Commission, rather than from their own colleagues in Canberra.¹⁷

It was clear that the educational needs in TPNG were significant, and Australia was obligated under the conditions of its trustee status to support TPNG on a path to self-government. In the interwar period, the two administrations responsible for these territories, according to Lyndon Megarrity, ‘left educational matters largely to the Christian missions’.¹⁸ This was, as a rule, restricted to the primary school level, what is now known as basic education. Megarrity argues that in addition to outsourcing educational matters, the administrators did not put sufficient funding towards education, and the reality that ‘95 per cent of Papua New Guineans remained illiterate by the end of World War II’ supports this argument.¹⁹

14 ‘Australian International Scholarship Scheme | Letter from GT Roscoe to the Assistant Administrator | 22nd May’, Box 340, File 6-2, Australian International Scholarship Scheme 1958, 1958, PNG National Archives.

15 ‘SPC – Australian International Scholarship Scheme | Letter to DOT from DM Cleland | 28th May’, Box 340, File 6-2, Australian International Scholarship Scheme 1958, 1958, PNG National Archives.

16 ‘Letter from Cr Lambert to Cleland Re SPC Australian International Scholarship Scheme | 29 July’, Box 340, File 6-2, Australian International Scholarship Scheme 1958, 1958, PNG National Archives.

17 As the exchanges note, however, the DEA had clearly informed the administration regarding the change of name of the scholarship to the Australian International Scholarship Scheme, and its purpose, in circulars sent earlier in 1958.

18 Megarrity, ‘Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea’, 2.

19 Megarrity, ‘Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea’, 2.

As discussed earlier, the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, played a formative role in policy decisions regarding education in TPNG. Hasluck wished to avoid the development of an elite of highly educated Papua New Guineans and was more concerned with developing the education system from the ground (or primary school) up. Hasluck was concerned that 'an Indigenous educated elite would gain too much influence and power in an era when the standard of education of most Papua New Guineans was profoundly limited'.²⁰ Nevertheless, from 1954, scholarships were provided to a small group of indigenous and mixed-race young people for study at secondary school on the mainland of Australia.²¹ This created a two-tier system, where some students were given the opportunity to study in Australia and others were unable to access adequate secondary schooling. With lack of political will in Australia, a minister who believed that slow progress was sufficient, and very little funding, the prospects for the growth of an education system in Papua and New Guinea were dim. Despite his misgivings, three key objectives for the scholarship scheme had been outlined by the minister in 1956 – a superior education, better fluency in the English language and a sympathy with and understanding of the efforts being made by Australia and Australian objectives in the territory.²² The *Pacific Islands Monthly* reported on the arrival of '19 Native Scholars' from TPNG in Australia in February 1954 – noting that the scheme had been criticised because 'these young natives should be training in their own Territories and not subjected to the innumerable social influences which must affect their training in Australia'.²³ The same article highlighted criticism of Australia's education programs in Papua and New Guinea; 'sporadic, piecemeal attempts at native education may be excellent in themselves, but they only emphasise the Territory's lack of an overall plan of native education'.²⁴

The number of students coming to mainland Australia for secondary schooling was not large, with only small numbers each year qualifying for a scholarship under the territory's scheme. Only 16 students qualified in 1954,²⁵ but owing to what the territory's Senior Guidance Officer called 'the extension and progressive improvement and consolidation of the school organisation in the Territory', 92 students passed the qualification exam

20 Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 1.

21 Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 6.

22 'TPNG Native Secondary Scholarship Scheme, Memorandum, 12 June 1957', A452, 1961/2382, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

23 '19 Native Scholars Arrive in Australia', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, 1 February 1954, 18.

24 '19 Native Scholars Arrive in Australia', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, 1 February 1954, 18.

25 Although 19 students were listed as travelling to Australia in reporting in the *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

in 1958.²⁶ Reviews of the scholarships program over the late 1950s led to changes and improvements, but as the provision of secondary education within TPNG increased, questions were asked of the logic behind the scheme. As the standard of schools in the territory improved, the first objective outlined at the beginning of the scheme, a superior education, was less easily achieved. However, territory administrators were concerned that the mixing of non-native and native students would cause problems – an issue highlighted in the 1954 article by the *Pacific Islands Monthly* and in the experiences of the students sent home from Charters Towers, as discussed earlier.

Despite these reservations about ‘racial’ mixing, among the students who travelled to Australia from Papua and New Guinea to undertake university study were some who were not of ‘European’ descent. These students accessed a program called Commonwealth Scholarships, the scheme that Cyril Chan was ultimately able to access. This scheme, designed to increase the number of Australian students attending university, was established by the Menzies Government in 1951. Each state was allocated a quota of scholarships that were awarded on the basis of academic merit, with fees paid for all awardees, and a means test deciding the payment of a living allowance.²⁷ In 1952 the Universities Commission decided there was no justification to provide a special quota of scholarships for the TPNG, despite the fact that these students could be considered eligible for the scholarship as subjects of Australia’s colonial administration. Instead, it was the ‘policy of the Commission to afford children of residents of New Guinea the opportunity of competing for Commonwealth scholarships in the state in which they complete the examination qualifying for matriculation’.²⁸ Thus, the scholarships formed an opportunity for students from TPNG to study in Australia, provided they could in the first instance come to Australia for their secondary schooling. If a student was not able to access the TPNG secondary school scholarships, this added financial burden proved an additional hurdle to access. In addition, the stipend provided via the Commonwealth Scholarship was designed as a supplement – with stipend amounts reducing according to the income of an awardee’s parents. In 1957 this was equivalent to approximately A£240 per year. This was in

26 JA Lee, ‘Review of the Native Secondary Scholarship Scheme, 14 March 1958’, A452, 1961/2382, 1958, NAA.

27 Dale Daniels, ‘Student Income Support: A Chronology’ (Research Paper Series, 2017–18, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2017).

28 ‘Acting PM Fadden to Minister Hasluck Letter, 1952’, A452, 1958/743, NAA.

stark contrast to the A£561 per year provided for Colombo Plan students.²⁹ Thus, even with a scholarship, the opportunity for tertiary education in Australia was out of reach for most 'native' students from the territories.

All of this evidence, along with the stories of Cyril Chan and the young men sent to Charters Towers, serves to reinforce several aspects of Australian colonial administration in TPNG. The isolation of policymaking from on-the-ground implementation created myriad problems for those seeking access to higher education opportunities. Hasluck pursued his slow approach to development because of his own beliefs and agenda and could only be forced to change tack when it became clear that TPNG and the broader global community would not tolerate it any longer. The situation in TPNG, with hundreds of different language groupings and no national identity, was difficult for white Australians to comprehend. Trying to implement education policies across the varied and often difficult-to-traverse terrain (both literally and metaphorically) was complex. It was clear that neither the Department of Territories nor the TPNG Administration was able to do so competently, ensuring what was described by an Australian academic who taught in TPNG as a 'trickle of scholarships' was available for students over the 1950s.³⁰

Australia's obligations in the territories it administered created confusion and misunderstanding. The Department of Territories was unaware of the entitlements of the citizens under its administration, who often sought access to 'International' scholarships despite their status as part of Australia. The award of scholarships, and the control of mobility that they represented, demonstrates the layers of policies and bureaucracy that were created and enforced by Australia as the trust power. Students from TPNG could only access Commonwealth scholarships for university education on mainland Australia if they had completed their matriculation in one of the states (rather than territories). This highlighted the tiered nature of Australian citizenship, with full benefits only available to a limited few and benefits closely linked to race. It also highlighted Australia's slow approach to developing the education system in Papua and New Guinea – with a functioning secondary system not yet in place by the end of the 1950s. The assumptions in this approach to development would continue to have impacts for decades after.

29 JA Lee, 'Mr JA Lee – Tour of Duty in Australia – April 25th – June 13th', A452, 1961/2382, 1957, NAA.

30 Ian Maddocks with Seumas Spark, "'Taim Bilong Uni": Ken Inglis at the University of Papua New Guinea', *History Australia* 14, no. 5 (2017): 547, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2017.1389233.

This text is taken from *Mandates and Missteps: Australian Government Scholarships to the Pacific – 1948 to 2018*, by Anna Kent, published 2024 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/MM.2024.02