

4. W. E. H. Stanner: Wasted war years

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William Edward Hanley Stanner (1905–81) came to anthropology as a mature-age student having first worked as a bank clerk and journalist. He was twenty-three when he attended his first anthropology lectures at the University of Sydney, given by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Camilla Wedgwood and Raymond Firth. On completion of his degree—in both economics and anthropology—he was sent to Daly River, NT, where he conducted research for his MA, awarded in May 1934. Returning to Daly River in 1934–35, he spent a brief period at the newly founded Catholic mission at Port Keats (now Wadeye), which became his primary field site until he ceased fieldwork in 1959. For the second half of 1935, he tutored at the University of Sydney (as part of his research fellowship obligations). In between completing his degree and leaving for London, he worked also in the NSW Premier's office advising on economic matters and writing speeches.¹ In 1937 and 1938 he attended the London School of Economics (LSE), at his own expense.² Raymond Firth assisted him by employing him as his amanuensis for *Human Types*, a general volume on anthropology.³ Stanner acknowledged this was 'of great assistance to his own [work and]...closely allied with the thesis I am preparing...it has been a great stimulus to me and also a discipline for some of the methods I have been applying to my own work.'⁴ He was awarded his doctorate, 'Economic Change in North Australian Tribes', in 1938.⁵ As there were no positions for anthropologists in Australian universities, he remained in Britain, finding work with the Oxford Social Studies Research Committee, which saw him in Kenya when war was declared.

Stanner's 'scrupulousness about the quality of his published work' resulted in no published book on the results of his field research in East Africa or Australia.⁶ His major publication was a survey of British, New Zealand and Australian colonies in the South-West Pacific, *The South Seas in Transition* (1953). He was

1 Stanner to Firth, 6 July 1936, Archive of Sir Raymond Firth, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics and Political Science [hereinafter FIRTH], 8/2/3. It was in Bertram Steven's office that Stanner met W. C. Wentworth, who helped found the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in 1964, and was the first Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Holt Government.

2 Elkin to Firth, 12 February 1937, Firth to Elkin, 19 March 1937 and Stanner to Elkin, 12 January 1937, all in Elkin Papers [hereinafter EP], University of Sydney Archives, 160/4/1/78; Stanner to Firth, 11 June 1937, FIRTH7/7/31.

3 Raymond Firth, *Human Types: An introduction to social anthropology* (London, 1938).

4 Stanner to Firth, 11 June 1937, FIRTH7/7/31.

5 University of London. Stanner asked Firth if he could change the title of his doctorate to 'A Study of Social and Economic Change in North Australian Tribes'. Firth refused. Stanner to Firth, 11 June 1937, FIRTH7/7/31.

6 Firth to Registrar (ANU), 26 February 1964, FIRTH8/1/121. In Stanner's papers there are several unfinished manuscripts.

a man of essays—a genre of engaged argument, short, polished and aiming at insights about the present. The same could be said of his scholarly work. In fact, his most important writings—those on which his reputation largely stands—were produced between 1956 and 1968, commencing with his essay ‘The Dreaming’ (1956) and culminating in 1968 with his five-part Boyer Lectures, *After the Dreaming*.⁷ In 1979 an eclectic collection of some 19 essays written over his lifetime was published as *White Man Got No Dreaming*. He was a master of crafted essays and his standards of perfection disabled him to complete the writing of books.⁸ He restricted access to his MA thesis, for example, because he was concerned that it was incomplete and that it could be misused and misunderstood. Perhaps he was anxious about how his work would be received by his colleagues and others, fearful they might find weaknesses. Perhaps we gain a sense of Stanner from a comment in his wartime security file when he was described as a man of ‘cultured and restrained manner’, and his point of view ‘is never startling rather non-committal if anything’.⁹ Raymond Firth, on the other hand, saw a man who was both ‘critical and negative’, a man who was emotionally and intellectually ‘outside’, which is revealed most in Stanner’s correspondence with Firth and A. P. Elkin.¹⁰ Combined with what I see as a fear of failure—a certain dubiety—was a sense of his own importance and entitlement. It led him to state his objective, particularly his wish to have a chair, but when offered one he found reasons for not accepting it, usually stating he was not ready. That is, he was not content with junior or middle positions nor was he prepared to take on leadership positions, perhaps even fearful of failure.¹¹ Sometimes he put his failure to obtain a post down to obstacles put in the way by others, which is seen, for example, in his relations with members of the wartime Army’s Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA). During the war, he made

7 For further discussion, see Tim Rowse, ‘After the Dreaming: The Boyer lecturer as social critic’, in Melinda Hinkson and Jeremy Beckett (eds), *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia* (Canberra, 2008), pp. 233–50; Ann Curthoys, ‘WEH Stanner and the Historians’, in Hinkson and Beckett, *An Appreciation of Difference*, pp. 233–50. For another largely uncritical assessment of Stanner, see Jeremy Beckett and Melinda Hinkson, ‘“Going more than half way to meet them”: On the life and legacy of WEH Stanner’, in Hinkson and Beckett, *An Appreciation of Difference*, pp. 1–23.

8 In Stanner’s papers there are several unfinished manuscripts, all started in the 1930s or later. As will be seen in this chapter, he confidently informed his sponsors, especially Elkin and Firth, of their completion, near publication or their near completion. Melinda Hinkson offers another explanation, arguing that Stanner had two abiding ambitions: to contribute to public life, which was ‘cut across by a deep intellectual interest in the questions of social process’. She goes on to say that while these two ambitions are not incompatible, it was an ‘increasing burden of public responsibility in his later life that kept Stanner from writing the books he imagined he might complete’. Hinkson, ‘Thinking with Stanner in the Present’, *Humanities Research*, 16:2 (2010), p. 92.

9 Report, 8 April 1942, National Archives of Australia, Canberra [hereinafter NAA], C123, item 12630.

10 See Melinda Hinkson, ‘Stanner and Makerere: On the “insuperable” challenges of practical anthropology in post-war East Africa’, in Hinkson and Beckett, *An Appreciation of Difference*, p. 51; also David Mills, ‘How Not to be a “Government House Pet”: Audrey Richards and the East African Institute for Social Research’, in Mwenda Ntarangwi, David Mills and Mustafa Babiker (eds), *African Anthropologies: History, critique and practice* (London, 2006), pp. 85–6, who offers another viewpoint on Makerere to that of Hinkson.

11 Stanner to Firth, 5 August 1949, FIRTH7/7/31.

powerful enemies and friends and would probably be surprised by the negative assessments of many of his colleagues from that time. He no doubt would be surprised too by various comments and assessments made by Raymond Firth whom he considered a friend and supporter, and, sometimes confidant. For example, in his referee's report for the Sydney University Chair, in 1955, Firth was almost wholly positive. But by 1957, in his report to The Australian National University (ANU), he appears to have lost patience with Stanner's dithering and his lack of direction, which is highlighted by a comparison of Firth's referee's reports. In 1955, Firth knowingly misrepresented Stanner's East African experience as being successful, but in 1957 he stated quite the opposite and was far more reserved and critical in his overall assessment.¹²

Stanner returned to Australia in October 1939 and spent the first few months writing up his East African research. He undertook lecture tours for the University of Sydney Extension Board and prepared scripts on 'political and military matters'—that is, propaganda for broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation: ABC) as part of his duties with the Department of Information.¹³ In these, he encouraged Australians to recognise their triumphal past and the heroic men and women who settled the country as models for the coming days of war.¹⁴ He was adviser to Percy Spender, Minister for the Army in the third Menzies Ministry, who, after a change of government, remained a member of the War Cabinet until February 1944.¹⁵ Stanner even contemplated becoming a politician himself, standing for the United Australia Party (UAP) in the federal election of 1940.¹⁶

At the end of June 1942, Stanner was appointed to the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale (CNM), chaired by Alfred Austin Conlon, who prepared an interim report on the problem of civilian morale for submission to the Prime Minister, John Curtin.¹⁷ Stanner's appointment came after he had provided a critique of the draft report on the committee.¹⁸ Stanner had a 'gift for simplicity in describing problems of a complex nature', which appealed to Conlon.¹⁹

12 Firth to University of Sydney Registrar, 6 July 1955, University of Sydney Archives G3/190; Firth to ANU Registrar, 25 July 1957, FIRTH8/1/3.

13 Diane E. Barwick, Jeremy Beckett and Marie Reay, 'W. E. H. Stanner: An Australian anthropologist', in Diane E. Barwick, Jeremy Beckett and Marie Reay (eds), *Metaphors of Interpretation: Essays in honour of W. E. H. Stanner* (Canberra, 1985), p. 13.

14 See, for example, 'War Morale: A challenge to Australian youth', ABC Broadcast, 1942. Stanner Collection, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [hereinafter SC], MS 3752, item 69. For Stanner's broadcast scripts, see also NAA, SP109/3, 318/48.

15 David Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's war effort, 1939–1945* (Sydney, 1996), pp. 209–13.

16 Report, 8 April 1942, NAA, C123, item 12630.

17 Conlon to Curtin, 4 April 1942, NAA, A1608/1, AK 29/1/2.

18 'Criticism by Major W. E. Stanner of the draft Interim Report of Committee on National Morale to the Prime Minister', n.d. [probably April 1942], SC, MS 3752, item 68.

19 John Pomeroy, 'Morale on the Homefront in Australia During the Second World War', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1995, p. 200.

Conlon, a medical student, was availing himself of the opportunities opened by the exigencies of war; he headed the university's Manpower Section, before heading the CNM. The committee, however, turned out to be more a tool for political networking than an effective organisation to raise national morale. Conlon's strengths were his charisma and vision for the nation; he created groups to deal with specific ideas and issues with the intent of formulating new policies. Stanner's strengths were analysing and critiquing such ideas and policy. Their talents, while on the surface appearing complementary, were not.²⁰

In early 1942, the problem of guarding northern Australia against a possible Japanese invasion was raised at a joint meeting of the Australian Navy, Army and Air Force, the US Army and the Flying Doctor Service, which recommended that an observer unit (similar to that of the coast watchers in New Guinea) be formed to communicate all information from observer stations and in particular aircraft sightings and naval and military movements.²¹ At the request of Major-General Edmund Herring, Stanner made an appreciation of the requirements for an observer unit in northern Australia. He recommended a highly mobile unit, 'horsed rather than wheeled', capable of operating on their own initiative. An East Africa district officer and ex-army officer Lieutenant Colonel Henderson, who had described the South African Boer commando action to Stanner, inspired the idea for such a unit.²² On 11 May 1942, the establishment of the North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU) was officially announced and Stanner was made Commanding Officer, with his headquarters at Katherine, NT.²³ In this position, he remained until October 1943 when he was transferred to the Directorate of Research (from April 1945, it was the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs or DORCA), located at Land Headquarters, Victoria Barracks 'L' Block, Melbourne. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and made Assistant Director of Research (Territories Administration). J. R. Kerr was the other Assistant Director, which dated from the time it was a research section under Stantke. Stanner recalled some time later it was an unsought appointment: 'I was posted (against my will and protest) to the Research Directorate at LHQ.'²⁴

20 Brian Jinks, 'Alfred Conlon, the Directorate of Research and New Guinea', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 12 (1983), pp. 21–33; H. C. Coombs, *Trial Balance: Issues of my working life* (Melbourne, 1983), p. 197; also Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People* (Canberra, 1970), p. 399; Pomeroy, 'Morale on the Homefront in Australia During the Second World War'.

21 Report: Joint Services and US Army meeting on the organization of observer and intelligence services, North Australia, 7 March 1942, NAA, MP 729/6, 29/401/618.

22 Richard Walker and Helen Walker, *Curtin's Cowboys: Australia's secret bush commandos* (Sydney, 1986), pp. 6–7.

23 Apart from his 'interest in soldiering', Stanner's only 'military experience was serving in a Militia Signals unit during the early 1930s'. See Geoffrey Gray, "'The army requires anthropologists': Australian anthropologists at war, 1939–1946", *Australian Historical Studies*, 37:127 (2006), pp. 156–80; also Walker and Walker, *Curtin's Cowboys*, pp. 178–82.

24 Quoted in Walker and Walker, *Curtin's Cowboys*, p. 179.

The idea of a research section was first put to the Adjutant-General of Land Headquarters, Major-General Victor P. H. Stantke, by Conlon, who argued that such a section would assist in the development of a strategy that could be implemented in the event of an invasion and occupation of Australia by the Japanese. Stantke had 'put in' the Army Education Service to 'keep the morale of troops up', while the research section focused on civilian morale.²⁵ In early February 1943, Stantke was replaced with Major-General C. E. M. Lloyd, who saw no value in such a research section and threatened it with closure. Conlon managed to have the section transferred, in February, to the Directorate of Military Intelligence and, by October, had convinced Thomas Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of Australian armed forces, to bring the section under his command and rename it the Directorate of Research. John Kerr, then a close friend of and deputy to Conlon, stated that Blamey needed a group of people who could advise him on what were 'non-military problems, not merely internally, but in relation to Whitehall, the British Army, and also...colonial problems in New Guinea and Borneo and relations with the Americans in Japan and so on'.²⁶ The directorate developed policies for the colonies in the South-West Pacific from Melanesia to Borneo as well as plans to train colonial officials in a specialist school, a national university, and a universities commission.²⁷ Conlon proposed that the directorate should become the policy arm of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU) so that by the time a civilian administration took over it would be 'in a state of development far ahead of any that had been contemplated previously'.²⁸

Richard Hall observed that war provided the opportunity for intellectual talent to play a role in running the country.²⁹ The new generation—confident that past mistakes would be avoided, sure of their ability to influence the course of events, if not during the war, then certainly in the postwar period—saw themselves as liberal, reform-minded progressives, with a nationalist agenda and a bias for state intervention. They were representative of the new academic and professional elite that emerged during the war and which was to play an influential part in public life during the decades following the war.³⁰ It was as part of this intellectual and social milieu that members of the directorate

25 Stantke, in John Thompson (ed.), *Five to Remember* (Melbourne, 1964), p. 101.

26 Kerr, in *ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

27 L. P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (London, 1948), p. 18; Brian Jinks, 'Policy, Planning and Administration in Papua New Guinea 1942–52, with special reference to the role of Colonel J. K. Murray,' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1976; Jinks, 'Alfred Conlon, the Directorate of Research and New Guinea', pp. 21–33; S. G. Foster and Margaret M. Varghese, *The Making of The Australian National University 1946–1950* (Sydney, 1996), pp. 3, 12–13, 20, 22, 26; Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley* (St Lucia, Qld, 1999), pp. 47–73.

28 John Kerr, *Matters for Judgment: An autobiography* (Melbourne, 1978), pp. 101–5. See also Alan Powell, *The Third Force: ANGAU'S New Guinea war, 1942–46* (Melbourne, 2003), especially pp. 92–139.

29 Richard Hall, *The Real John Kerr* (Sydney, 1978), pp. 43–5, 53.

30 Pomeroy, 'Morale on the Homefront in Australia During the Second World War', p. 231; see also Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian foreign affairs 1941–1947* (Melbourne, 1980).

found themselves. Stanner did not see himself as part of this new progressive professional elite of which Conlon was a fierce promoter. Peter Ryan, a member of the directorate, recalls that when Stanner left the directorate, he had written a note by hand that was ‘a document of private hatred, loathing and contempt, expressed with such articulate venom’. Conlon commented, ‘a little sadly: “Poor old Bill. We never really did get him round to our way of thinking, did we?”’³¹

Conlon believed that Stanner’s experience in East Africa and knowledge of British colonial policy and practice, as well as his critical and analytical skills, would be useful in formulating postwar colonial policy for Papua and New Guinea in particular, although Stanner had little experience with Papua New Guinea or the South-West Pacific generally. Initially, Stanner was given the task of providing an overview of colonial issues involving the United States and Britain in terms of obligations and commitments, economic capacity, manpower requirements, and policy imperatives and such like. Conlon in a sense misjudged Stanner’s lack of practical experience and misread him, judging him to be sympathetic to the enterprise that Conlon was overseeing. Stanner was clear sighted and perceptive in setting out the situation found in British colonies and the failures of colonial governance, and his experience in East Africa only heightened his understanding of these problems—racial, economic and political tensions, the calls for independence—but he was not constructive in the sense of formulating and assisting in implementing policy. Stanner’s strength was his ability to identify problems. Stanner was on the side of reforming colonial government rather than arguing for the abolition of colonial rule (decolonisation) and encouraging self-government and eventual independence for colonised states in the Pacific region especially.³² In fact, he thought independence movements ‘might never concern New Guinea and Papua’; nevertheless, he was cognisant that international pressure and attention, plus the changes brought about by war, would result in changed conditions post war.³³ The effect of this pressure and how it would impact on the obligations of small colonial powers such as Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific was hard to predict other than a recognition that there would be change of some sort.

With Kerr and J. D. Patience, his directorate colleagues, Stanner attended the Field Officers’ Conference, held in Port Moresby in February 1944.³⁴ The conference ranged over various administrative and policy matters, such as health, agricultural production, land tenure and ‘native’ labour and welfare,

31 Peter Ryan, *Brief Lives* (Sydney, 2004), p. 45.

32 See David Mills, ‘Anthropology at the End of Empire: The rise and fall of the Colonial Social Sciences Research Council, 1944–1962’, in Benoit De L’estoile, Federico Neiburg and Lygia Sigaud (eds), *Empires, Nations, and Natives: Anthropology and state-making* (Durham, NC, 2005), pp. 136–9.

33 ANGAU, Conference of Officers of Headquarters and Officers of Districts Staff, Port Moresby, 7–12 February 1944, NAA, MP 742/1, 65/1/435, vol. 3.

34 *Ibid.*, vols 1–3.

as well as discussion on the development and organisation of ANGAU. It was stressed by Major-General Basil Morris, General Officer Commanding ANGAU, that it was a military unit and as such it was not possible to commit to a future civil administration but it was able to lay the foundations for a 'sound progressive policy of betterment'. Lieutenant Colonel Stanner, who was the senior directorate officer, presented a paper: 'Broad Aspects of Colonial Administration.' Majors Kerr and Patience were observers. Stanner concluded that the conference had produced much evidence of 'conflicting opinion as to the objectives which Colonial policy should seek to attain, and the methods which should be adopted to ensure the attainment of these objectives'. Stanner's presentation illustrated, the chair of the meeting noted, 'how many of our [ANGAU] problems were intimately related to the national and international sphere' as well as putting all these matters into perspective.

There were aspects of ANGAU about which Stanner was critical but this did not extend to the treatment of New Guinean labour; on the basis of little research, he declared that service mostly as labourers and carriers with ANGAU has 'definitely improved the native'. Control had

been firm, but just; his physique has improved from the excellent housing and rations he receives; he has learnt the value of discipline and his added responsibilities; he has a far more extensive appreciation of health and hygiene matters; he has been taught how to produce more and better food within his own village.³⁵

In making such a judgment, Stanner in fact 'endorsed the army's policy of placing war needs ahead of native interests'.³⁶ When the Australian administration returned after the war, Stanner was confident that there would be an 'efficient and contented labour [force], and if such proves the case, most of the credit should go to the personnel [patrol officers] of ANGAU because of his efforts on behalf of the native during the war period'.³⁷

Native Labour Officers (often from the prewar civil administration) were responsible for recruiting labour; they handled labour right down to the front line. H. I. Hogbin, who had undertaken research on labour in New Guinea, disagreed with Stanner. He was critical of practices he saw as endemic, particularly the systematic brutality of ANGAU labour overseers.³⁸ He suggested ANGAU was

³⁵ Ibid., vol. 3.

³⁶ Powell, *The Third Force*, p. 196.

³⁷ W. E. H. Stanner, 'ANGAU', November 1944, Australian War Memorial [hereinafter AWM], 54/80/2/1.

³⁸ H. Ian Hogbin, *Report of an investigation of native labour in New Guinea, carried out on instructions from the Director of Research by Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hogbin during the period March to June 1944*; Hogbin, *The natives of the Salamaua Coast*, A preliminary report by Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hogbin forwarded to Brigadier Cleland, ANGAU HQ, for perusal and despatch to the Director of Research, LHQ, 7 October 1944 (copies in possession of author).

‘losing standing in the people’s eyes by itself engaging in any form of recruiting’. Stanner questioned the objectivity of Hogbin’s report.³⁹ Hogbin was supported by James McAuley, also a member of the directorate, who commented to the anthropologist Camilla Wedgwood that ‘the longer the smell of Angau clings to the POs [patrol officers], the less use they will be in their proper administrative functions’.⁴⁰ At the Native Labour Conference, held in Sydney on 1 December 1944, which examined ways of changing the various laws governing indenture, Hogbin represented the directorate.⁴¹ Stanner was in London. A result of the conference was a decision by the Minister for Territories, E. J. Ward, to phase out indentured labour. Stanner, however, maintained his view that ‘working under indenture was agreeable to the natives and had become of some positive social and economic importance to them. An increasing volume of labour offered itself without direct compulsion.’ In fact, he was confident that prewar labour legislation ‘would more than stand comparison with labour laws in any other country’.⁴² Criticism had been levelled at these laws by the League of Nations Mandates Commission, headed by Lord Hailey. The Australian social scientist C. D. Rowley showed that statistical and other data ‘drives home the point of [the] unpopularity of working for the Europeans’.⁴³

Soon after the Field Officers’ Conference in Port Moresby, Stanner and Kerr left to advise Blamey and the Australian Prime Minister at the Imperial Prime Ministers’ Conference in London. Kerr, the story goes, was sent to keep watch over Stanner, who was not trusted to represent the views of the directorate fairly or to promote Australian interests as understood by Conlon and the others.⁴⁴ Kerr and Stanner attended meetings on Borneo and Hong Kong, which formed the basis of planning for the installation of military, and eventually civilian, government in those locations. Stanner prepared a number of papers on British colonial policy and its application to Australian territories and those parts of the region deemed as Australian interests at the time.⁴⁵ Kerr returned to Australia but Stanner remained in London at the request of Conlon who by now was unsure how best to counter the critical and troublesome Stanner.

Increasingly, Stanner was unhappy over the influence the directorate was exercising and the possibility of their ideas becoming government policy.⁴⁶ He

39 Powell, *The Third Force*, pp. 196, 198.

40 McAuley to Camilla Wedgwood, 10 September 1946, Wedgwood Papers, National Library of Australia [hereinafter NLA], MS 483, box 1.

41 Conference on Native Labour, 1 December 1944, NAA, MP 742/1, 274/1/246.

42 Stanner, *The South Seas in Transition*, p. 81; cf. Powell, *The Third Force*, pp. 196, 200–2, 223–8.

43 C. D. Rowley, *The New Guinea Villager* (Melbourne, 1965), p. 106.

44 Various, NAA, MP729/8, 49/439/73.

45 See various, NAA, A 518, R 815/1/1.

46 Elkin was not in agreement with Stanner; rather he looked upon the ‘announced intentions’ of Ward as ‘indeed promising. I hope there is no retraction.’ Elkin to Hogbin, 27 September 1945, Hogbin Papers, University of Sydney Archives.

was concerned that 'Conlon and Co will not long be content to limit themselves to Papua New Guinea'. It was 'not easy to see how or when', but he expected 'some wider penetrations... There are wider fields to buy into' such as Indonesia, the Solomons and other South-West Pacific territories.⁴⁷ He dismissed the directorate's plans as illustrating 'the increasing erectility of the Directorate's libido... likely to afford equal assistance to the bounding megalomaniacs or melancholias between which we now alternate'.⁴⁸ He condemned

the amount of outright nepotism, and the extra-ordinary coincidence that each burst of what purports to be zeal for liberalism and native rights always ends up the same way—higher salaries, expense accounts, positions of power, wider influence for one or other [of the group]—all these [things] sickened me.

It even extended to London to include Audrey Richards and Lucy Mair, whom he described as part of a small, 'self-interested coterie' at the LSE with 'whose views I have disagreed'.⁴⁹

In mid-August 1945, when Japan announced its unconditional surrender, Australian forces were in general control of northern Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo—all the former territories collectively referred to as British Borneo in the prewar period.⁵⁰ The British had sent a civil affairs unit to Australia, led by Brigadier C. F. C. Macaskie, former Chief Justice and Deputy Governor of Borneo. This was unacceptable to Conlon and DORCA, who wanted an Australian-controlled civil administration in British Borneo. J. R. Black, a prewar patrol officer⁵¹ and member of ANGAU as well as being attached to the directorate, was ordered to raise a detachment: the British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit (BBCAU). Stanner was attached to BBCAU as Senior Civil Affairs Officer. He had been 'lifted off the plane from America' where he had been enrolled in a three-month course at the School of Civil Affairs, Virginia, and 'hustled straight to Borneo'.⁵² Kerr had been sent back to London, liaising with, and plotting against, the British over the occupation of the returned British territories.⁵³ Stanner described his Borneo appointment: it 'amounts to a militarized Provisional Commissionership, with a pretty fair staff of District Officers and ADOs, plus all the former civilian employers in the usual string of colonial technical departments. As it grows it will approach the Administratorship'.⁵⁴

47 Stanner to Firth, 23 September 1944, FIRTH7/7/31.

48 Quoted in Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, p. 45.

49 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

50 Joan Beaumont, *Australia's War 1939–1945* (Sydney, 1996), pp. 45–7.

51 For an example of Black and Taylor on patrol, see Bill Gammage, *Sky Travellers: Journeys in New Guinea, 1938–1939* (Melbourne, 1998).

52 Stanner to Firth, 10 September 1945, FIRTH7/7/31.

53 Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, p. 68.

54 Stanner to Firth, 10 September 1945, FIRTH7/7/31.

Stanner had disagreements with the British occupying forces, which only compounded the difficulties between DORCA officials and the British. Conlon and Kerr were unable to maintain Australian control and the British took over military administration in January 1946.⁵⁵ Stanner returned to Australia and was demobbed in the same month.

While in London, Stanner had compiled a series of reports on British colonial policy.⁵⁶ It was a further opportunity to lay out his disagreement with Conlon and his colleagues at the directorate. He reiterated his unease over ‘the network of power the “boys”...have built up [which] is so strong’, but their ‘theory is showy [and] confused...using phrases which have long since been shown in Africa, their homeland, to have lost meaning’.⁵⁷ Stanner’s support for a reformed prewar British colonial system in Africa and its applicability for a postwar Papua New Guinea was unacceptable to his directorate colleagues, especially to Hogbin and Wedgwood.⁵⁸ Despite the beginnings of a debate in Britain over the future of the British colonies and arguments about decolonisation, self-government and independence, Stanner remained wedded to the colonial mission: ‘I believe that our [British, which included Australian] efforts in any field will be of little value unless we recapture conviction on our own colonial mission.’⁵⁹ Stanner was of a view that the basic problem was to ‘achieve balanced and progressive social economies’.⁶⁰ As in many matters, here he advocated a cautious approach, stressing the need to first establish the forms before formulating and implementing policy.⁶¹ He identified difficulties in achieving a balanced and progressive approach, such as the constitutional arrangements between Papua (an Australian territory) and New Guinea (a League of Nations Trust Territory); political and economic relations between the colonies and the metropolitan power; the development of resources; and a major impediment being the skills and abilities of Papuans and New Guineans. He could not decide which was the most important issue: nutrition, education, technical training, or political development. He did not neglect the strategic importance of Papua and New Guinea and the Pacific in general; it was, he reminded his readers, in Australia’s security interests to ensure that Papua New Guinea was viable.⁶²

55 R. W. Reece, Alf Conlon, the fall of Singapore and British Borneo, Unpublished paper (1993) (copy in possession of author). See also Memo, Hood to Sinclair, 24 May 1945, NAA, A2671, 57/1945.

56 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, LSE, FIRTH7/7/31; Stanner, British Planning in the Pacific, Section I, pp. 3–4; Colonial Policy, Section III; Memo, Pacific Territories Research Council, 6 July 1945, NAA, A 518, R 815/1/1.

57 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

58 H. Ian Hogbin and Camilla Wedgwood, *Development and Welfare in the Western Pacific* (Sydney, 1943), pp. 1–31.

59 For a sustained critique of postwar colonial planning in East Africa, see W. E. H. Stanner, ‘Observations on Colonial Planning’, *International Affairs*, 25:3 (1949), pp. 318–28.

60 W. E. H. Stanner, ‘New Guinea Under War Conditions’, *International Affairs*, 20:4 (1944), p. 493.

61 Stanner to Firth, 2 June 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

62 Stanner, ‘New Guinea Under War Conditions’, pp. 489–94.

After the war, he continued to voice his opposition to the policies being implemented under the administration of J. K. Murray, the Administrator of a recently amalgamated Papua and New Guinea and ex-Principal of the School of Civil Affairs. In mid-1946, Stanner was asked by the American Institute of Pacific Relations to 'undertake a survey of post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction in the south-west Pacific'.⁶³ It was a further opportunity to not only distance himself from DORCA (and the Labor Government, especially H. V. Evatt, Minister for External Affairs, and E. J. Ward, Minister for Territories) and their views but also to point to their shortcomings and how these had impacted on policy in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the South-West Pacific. He did not expect to return to Australia. In a presentation of his research findings to Chatham House in mid-November 1947, Stanner explained his criticism:

If the New Guinea scene is looked at closely it is difficult to resist the impression that what may well have begun as genuine idealism has now begun to degenerate into futile, piecemeal welfarism which is paying little regard to the limitations of the primitive culture of the natives on the one hand, and on the other of the controlling factors of Australian politics and economics. I do not think the local administration is to be held altogether responsible. A number of factors have made their contribution. The military authorities withdrew before the civil authorities were ready. The devastation and social disturbance...were of great magnitude. A large proportion of the trained staffs were lost in the war...The planning situation was badly mishandled...[T]he Minister [Ward] was given and acted upon some very bad advice. A number of administrative blunders were made. A large proportion of officials have been out of sympathy with the new policy. The present administration is deeply divided. Shortages of staff and material have been a heavy handicap. The natives have been unhelpful and restive. But the underlying mentality of the planners [Conlon, Kerr and Hogbin] has been, or seems to have been if we judge by the outcome, at fault.⁶⁴

So, while there was almost 'nothing good to be said of the...policy...the intentions [of the officials] are of the best'.⁶⁵ His opposition had not lessened with time.

Stanner's hostility to Conlon, whom he described as his 'bete noir',⁶⁶ and others in the directorate such as Hogbin and Kerr was unrestrained and unrelenting.

63 Stanner, *The South Seas in Transition*, p. v.

64 The post war situation in the South-West Pacific, Address given at Chatham House, London, 12 November 1947, SC, MS 3572, item 91.

65 Stanner to Firth, 23 May 1947, FIRTH7/7/31.

66 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31. He added, with obvious pleasure, that Conlon 'is in obscurity again and has resumed his medical course'. See also Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley*, p. 49.

It was mutual dislike and distrust. He referred to them as ‘the triumvirate’ and accused them of being behind his failure to obtain a suitable appointment in Australia. There was no love lost between them, and Stanner never let an opportunity go without criticising the actions and decisions of ‘the boys’, as Conlon, Kerr and Hogbin described themselves. Stanner commented to Elkin at the end of 1944 that he did not regret his decision to break with ‘that group’,⁶⁷ although he remained with the directorate until he was demobbed in January 1946.

In early 1946, Lucy Mair, a British scholar who was the recognised expert on colonial administration, had been brought out by Conlon (no doubt on the recommendation of Hogbin) to assist in the development of colonial policy and to lecture at the School of Civil Affairs. When reviewing Mair’s *Australia in New Guinea* (1948), Stanner was seemingly gracious: ‘with the exception of Stephen Read’s [sic] *The Making of Modern New Guinea*, [there has been no] systematic examination of the colonial problems of colonial administration in the area [Papua and New Guinea]...This book remedies the deficiency...with one exception.’ The ‘one exception’ was Mair’s ‘appraisal of the new policy’, which in Stanner’s opinion was ‘in several important aspects defective...There is not merely a loss of objectivity but a flight from it, which mar an otherwise excellent book’. Stanner believed the ‘whole experiment conducted in Papua-New Guinea from 1945 to 1948 [the Labor Government was voted out of office in 1949] will be a source of interest and a subject of debate for many years’.⁶⁸ On that he was correct!

While ‘Conlon and Co.’, to use Stanner’s expression, largely ignored Stanner’s critique of colonial governance, his report on the Colonial Social Sciences Research Council (CSSRC) was of particular interest to Conlon, who attempted to develop an Australian equivalent: the Australian Pacific Territories Research Committee (APTRC). This had the potential, Conlon believed, to provide a process through which progressive policy for Papua and New Guinea and the other Melanesian colonies could be debated and formulated. It also had the potential to influence the type of research undertaken in these areas. Concomitant with the APTRC was the establishment, in December 1944, of a School of Civil Affairs—later the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA); it was envisaged as taking over from the University of Sydney all the training of field officials and overseeing research in the colonies.⁶⁹

The school and the Pacific Territories Research Committee were, in Stanner’s view, a danger to the long-term viability of Elkin’s department:

67 Stanner to Elkin, 22 September 1944, EP, 197/4/2/573.

68 Stanner, ‘Review of *Australia in New Guinea*, by L. P. Mair’, *International Affairs*, 25:3 (1949), p. 394.

69 Elkin ‘disapproved strongly’ of Conlon. Conlon, in turn, ‘loathed everything Elkin stood for’. Tigger Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A life of A. P. Elkin* (Sydney, 1985), pp. 151–2, 155.

You see the position that is shaping; it will be an extraordinary array of personalities with their mingled gifts and weaknesses. If Conlon can mould them into an effective team, they may do good work, but the more I ponder on the long term position of your department, the more I wonder at the final outcome. The position of the Federal grant [the subsidy provided by the Commonwealth to the University of Sydney for the Chair of Anthropology] rather worries me, too.⁷⁰

In early 1946, when it appeared the school was to be wound up, Stanner conceded that 'on the whole it seems to have done good work'.⁷¹ By 1948 he was convinced his earlier prognostication on the establishment of the ASOPA (the successor to the School of Civil Affairs) and the Pacific Territories Research Committee had come to pass and threatened not only the training of colonial officials and the teaching of anthropology at the University of Sydney but also Elkin's control over anthropological research. But worse was in store, he told Elkin:

[T]he next focus of power to fall under the spell of this little gang will be the South Seas Commission. The next will be your chair, when you go; and when they have that, *all* the research into anthropology, sociology and colonial administration in the S. W. P. will be in the same hands—cocksure, ambitious, politically-minded, and quite unscrupulous.⁷²

He blamed Hogbin most of all; in Stanner's opinion, it was he who undermined the integrity of anthropology. What Stanner objected to was the 'indirect effect of ambitious, untrained outsiders [the staff of the ASOPA] being allowed to build up vast showy research projects which will ultimately weaken the University departments, merely to please transient political interests'. He accused Hogbin of

pursuing consciously a policy which he knew could only weaken the Sydney department, which has a long and honourable tradition. And to please whom? A group of power-hungry thrusters on the one hand, and a political party on the other. This is bad stuff, Elkin. Short-sighted, unscholarly, and in my opinion politically venal.⁷³

But he was not necessarily enamoured with the situation at Sydney under Elkin. He was critical of both the journal *Oceania* (under the editorship of Elkin) and the department. Both *Oceania* and the department reflected, in his opinion, a

70 Stanner to Elkin, 22 September 1944, EP, 197/4/2/573. See also Stanner to Firth, 23 September 1944, FIRTH7/7/31.

71 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

72 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

73 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573. He made similar observations to Firth. Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

lack of interest in theory and the ‘thin sociological studies of the Middletown type’ pursued by the department. He told Firth that ‘since you and Radcliffe Brown left I can’t find one theoretical gleam’.⁷⁴

The war opened up space for new ideas and new groupings, often bypassing or replacing older institutions, some of which lasted, some of which did not survive the war and the immediate postwar years. Stanner, living through these times, more and more positioned himself on the side of continuity, tradition and stability—what might be seen as his inherent conservatism. He also had to confront his future post war. There were possibilities, such as staying on in London to act as a ‘counsellor on colonial and allied matters’ on Stanley Melbourne Bruce’s staff; Bruce, from Stanner’s correspondence, appeared to be negotiating a position with an agency of the United Nations Organisation. This did not eventuate; Bruce retired from public life in 1945. Stanner was optimistic and reasonably sure he would find a position as an anthropologist or economist, either in the academy or in colonial administration either in Australia or in Britain, or a research project in East Africa or Malaya. He even raised the possibility of a colonial governorship. In his view, it was a question of hitting the ‘right note’ as he realised he had ‘an extraordinary range of experiences to capitalize’ on.⁷⁵

Before war’s end, he told Elkin that he did not

quite see the lines clearly shaping yet. A Chair is the best solution from every point of view and I will make that a firm ambition from now on. I always knew that I would reach a point of having a lot to say and teach and being ready to do so if the circumstances would do their stuff. I hope...that some opportunity will arise, if not in Australia then abroad.⁷⁶

Two years later, the situation had hardly altered and he now doubted whether the academy was a possibility:

I was always prepared to scratch along till I was about 40 but it would be ruinous to go on doing it until I am 50! Slowly but surely my hope of perpetual and careless youth fades, at which I get more and more annoyed. So I have ruled out any more academic research at the fellowship level and what I want now is a reasonably well-paid, if possible a well-paid appointment, academic or departmental. There are too many well-

74 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31. At the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies conference in May 1961, Mervyn Meggitt voiced similar misgivings about the state of theory in Australia. M. J. Meggitt, ‘Social Organization: Morphology and typology’, in H. Sheils (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (Melbourne, 1963), p. 216.

75 Stanner to Firth, 23 September 1944, FIRTH7/7/31.

76 Stanner to Elkin, 22 September 1944, EP, 197/4/2/573.

experienced people a bit older than I am in line for the academic posts, so I think they're excluded. I am thinking now rather along the lines of a Colonial Office advisorship or even an administrative job.⁷⁷

Stanner was supportive of regional commissions as he anticipated regional bodies, such as the Caribbean Regional Commission, would bode well for the future of colonial rule; thus 'when...the [South Seas] Commission [is established it] should bring the machinery of administration to the Pacific right up into the vanguard of progressive colonial policy'.⁷⁸ Stanner was an adviser to the Department of External Affairs on the setting up of the South Seas Regional Commission. John Kerr was the organising secretary for the first South Seas Conference and some of the staff of the ASOPA wrote background papers for the conference held between 28 January and 6 February 1947. An outcome of the Canberra Agreement signed between Australia and New Zealand in 1944, the South Pacific Commission (SPC) was established on 6 February 1946.⁷⁹ Its purpose was to promote economic and social development of the indigenous peoples in the Pacific Island territories under the control of the administering powers.⁸⁰

Although supportive of such bodies in principle, Stanner was critical of the way the South Pacific Commission had been established and worried about its future:

What sickens me is the amount of jockeying going on behind the scenes. As far as I can see there are going to be some terrific struggles departmentally and between various interested personages...It will be several years...before it can free itself from such influences and get down to work.

In addition, there would be staffing difficulties, which he believed would be its main problem 'for years to come'. His 'formal advice had been to go slowly, not to promise much, and make the first target the organization of a first-class technical staff on the lines of the Caribbean Commission'. He did not 'think it is possible to spend a great deal of money in sensible ways for some time to come. But the usual crowd of idea-merchants are coming in guaranteeing that they can do everything overnight.'⁸¹

Nevertheless, he hoped to be offered 'a very good job' with the commission but this was not to be despite having the support of Sir Frederic Eggleston.⁸²

77 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

78 The South Seas Commission, ABC Broadcast, 8 May 1946, SC, MS 3752, item 83.

79 'South Pacific Commission', *International Organization*, 1:2 (1947), pp. 368–70.

80 Agreement Establishing the South Pacific Commission, 6 February 1947, NAA, A1838, 346/4/3.

81 Stanner to Firth, 2 June 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

82 Stanner to Firth, 2 June 1946, Stanner to Firth, 5 November 1946, also Stanner to Firth, 12 May 1947, all in FIRTH. He had also had his name put forward for a senior diplomatic position in Russia; he was opposed,

It was a complicated matter and the hand of his enemies continued to deny him any opportunities in Australia, including a position on the commission.⁸³ His fears about the continued influence of 'the boys' might have been realised had Kerr accepted the position of Secretary-General when it was offered to him on a permanent basis at the first formal meeting of the commission held at the ASOPA in May 1948.⁸⁴ Stanner commented to Firth on realising that he would be overlooked by Evatt for any role in the SPC: 'I am striking bad trouble once again with Evatt, who seems to have been advised against me or just doesn't like the look of my face or something.'⁸⁵ Stanner's past, and his negativity towards others, was coming back to haunt him. 'Around each corner', he told Ian Clunies Ross, were those who did 'not like the cut of my jib'.⁸⁶ Stanner had a rather inflated view of himself, even a sense of entitlement; added to this was a touch of personal pique. Kerr described Stanner as having 'an ego of terrific size which gets mixed up with the objective problem'.⁸⁷ Hogbin thought Stanner's lack of success with Evatt and the others explained why 'his prejudices have run away with him', especially in *The South Seas in Transition*. Hogbin had read the PNG section of the manuscript, which he had severely criticised, as Stanner's facts 'are sadly at fault'.⁸⁸

Once it became clear that Kerr had rejected the position of General Secretary, Conlon asked Eddie Ward to nominate him for the position, as it would, Kerr wrote, 'open the way for him to do the sort of things he had done in the war time years'; with reservations, both Kerr and Evatt supported Conlon's nomination. Certainly, there was concern by the British delegation that Conlon would capture the key position of Secretary-General. They had not forgotten Conlon's role in trying to secure Borneo for Australia. It was not until the next meeting, in Suva, that W. D. Forsyth, a career diplomat from External Affairs, was appointed Secretary-General.⁸⁹ This was the end of Kerr's involvement. He returned to the Bar. Conlon, after a brief and disastrous principalship of the ASOPA, also ceased to exercise any influence on returning to university and completing his medical degree, which was awarded in 1951.

however, by those in the Department of External Affairs (as well as by Evatt) whom he considered 'not very good, and I could buy and sell most of them for general experience and competence'. Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

83 Stanner to Firth, 2 June 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

84 Kerr, *Matters for Judgment*, pp. 108–9; see also SC, MS 3752, item 63.

85 Stanner to Firth, 2 June 1946, FIRTH7/7/31; Hogbin to Linden A. Mander, 12 May 1948, University of Washington Libraries (Seattle), Mander Papers, Accession No. 730-7-55, box 5, folder 5-12.

86 Stanner to Ian Clunies Ross, 30 September 1948, NAA, A10651, ICR 23/28. Stanner blamed 'the boys' for the late publication of *The South Seas in Transition* (completed in 1947 and published in 1953). The publication of Mair's *Australia in New Guinea* (1948) and Hogbin's *Transformation Scene* (1951) was further evidence.

87 Kerr to Conlon, 19 June 1945, University of Tasmania Archives, Keith Isles Papers (unsorted).

88 Hogbin to Mander, 12 May 1948, University of Washington Libraries (Seattle), Mander Papers, Accession No. 730-7-55, box 5, folder 5-12.

89 Susan Woodburn, *Where Our Hearts Still Lie: A life of Harry and Honor Maude in the Pacific Islands* (Adelaide, 2003), p. 218.

While disappointed that he had missed a job with the commission, Stanner had been offered and accepted the position of Director of the Institute for Social Research at Makerere College in Uganda to undertake research in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Uganda and Kenya. He confidently informed Firth that the survey of the South-West Pacific had provided him with an opportunity to 'read and think hard' about wider, fundamental issues, and 'the sequence of problems one encounters in moving from New Guinea on the West to the Cooks [Cook Islands] on the East involves just about everything the British colonies have to face up to anywhere'. He was 'sure I shall be able to work much more quickly and surely in Africa as a result'.⁹⁰ An initial task was to develop a comprehensive research plan in consultation with the three East African governments of Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. As director, Stanner was allowed 'the utmost possible latitude in the planning of research', but it was stipulated by the CSSRC that 'the central interests of...the Institute should lie in the social, economic, political and linguistic problems which now confront the inhabitants of the three territories'.⁹¹

Stanner's report questioned the 'wisdom of establishing an Institute' and made much of the financial, logistical and political complexities; in all he felt it 'would be a matter of years before either the Institute or Makerere could confer noticeable benefits upon one another'. More damning was Stanner's assessment that he could not see 'the value from an administrative viewpoint of much anthropological material'. In his opinion, the 'yearning for anthropological services in East Africa is as great as the desire in England to send them'. This was not what the CSSRC wanted to hear. Stanner's resignation took effect after he had completed 'the two field tasks which he came out to do'.⁹² Audrey Richards, who had initially been convinced by Firth of the suitability of Stanner, was not going to abandon the project and the establishment of the institute. She took over the directorship and placed the institute on a sound footing.⁹³

Resigning only contributed to an already difficult situation regarding Stanner's future. Returning to Australia was not an easy option although the political situation was changing and the power of 'the boys' was somewhat diminished. Elkin was a possibility. While it appeared that Elkin would offer him wholehearted support, this was not the case. Elkin was wary of Stanner's ability to complete the task at hand. (Elkin had, before the war, attempted to find positions for Stanner, such as putting his name forward for the new position of Director of the NT Native Affairs Branch, which was given to E. W. P. Chinnery.)

90 Stanner to Firth, 23 May 1947, FIRTH7/7/31.

91 Mills, 'How Not to be a "Government House Pet"', pp. 85–6. For a history of the CSSRC, see Mills, 'Anthropology at the End of Empire', pp. 135–66; Stanner to Firth, 5 November 1946, Stanner to Firth, 23 May 1947, both in FIRTH7/7/31.

92 Stanner to Canham, 11 December 1948, and Stanner to Firth, 27 June 1948, both in FIRTH7/7/31.

93 Mills, 'How Not to be a "Government House Pet"', pp. 85–6.

Towards the end of the war, Elkin held out the possibility of a readership should the funds become available. One other factor that militated against Stanner was Elkin's full embrace of his young students Ronald and Catherine Berndt.⁹⁴

Elkin had found a new student who was more to his liking, Ronald Murray Berndt, who with Catherine, his wife, formed the ideal anthropological partnership. Ronald and Catherine were full of energy, enthusiasm and, like Elkin, stuck solidly at a task until it was completed; moreover, they were prolific, publishing paper after paper, book after book. Elkin had also lost some of his enthusiasm for Stanner due in part because Stanner had not fulfilled the expectations of Elkin, who wanted tangible results from the research undertaken between 1932 and 1935. Stanner, aware of this, assured Elkin:

I have a great deal almost ready for publication, given a little more work upon it...I will make a supreme effort in 1949 to publish my study on aboriginal economics (now 10 yrs old but fairly good), and to bring my Kamba study of government, economics, law and tribal history...up to date...With luck, I might therefore have three books out or in the press by the end of next year. I will also send you that long report on the Warramunga and other tribes for publication in *Oceania* if you think it is still acceptable.⁹⁵

He had made similar undertakings four years earlier; he was confident then that Faber 'will accept my book on Kenya. It's with them now for reading, with a strong recommendation from Oxford. [Lord] Hailey has seen it and seems to think well of it. I am hoping Mannheim will also publish my PhD thesis.'⁹⁶

In his pitch to Elkin, Stanner pointed to his wish to be back in Australia, 'where my roots and home and heart are. But to do what? Every avenue seems closed for reasons which you know as well as I.'⁹⁷ He lamented that there was 'nothing for me in the Aust. universities until they found more chairs, or some one does'. And there was nothing in Canberra, 'so long as Evatt and Ward are there. I found my disagreements with them [and their entourages] insuperable.'⁹⁸ It had not been easy, he told Elkin; it had 'been a terrific struggle since 1936 to keep going, earning a living before being free to write and publish; even so...I always planned to make my run a bit later than most, but the war and other things have made me later than even I wanted to be'.⁹⁹ He retained his ambition for a chair in anthropology, particularly the Sydney University Chair. But after the

94 Geoffrey Gray, "'You are...my anthropological children": A. P. Elkin, Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, 1940–1956', *Aboriginal History*, 29:1 (2005), pp. 77–106.

95 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

96 Stanner to Elkin, 22 September 1944, EP, 197/4/2/573.

97 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

98 Stanner to Clunies Ross, 30 September 1948, NAA, A10651, ICR 23/28.

99 Stanner to Elkin, 25 October 1948, EP, 197/4/2/573.

war he seems to have lost belief in this ambition, seeing himself as not ready for elevation—further illustrated by the range of positions he applied for, many of which he was ill suited for. Ian Hogbin informed Linden A. Mander, Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington (Seattle), that Stanner had applied for the job of Administrator of Papua New Guinea and was ‘turned down in favour of Colonel [J. K.] Murray’.¹⁰⁰ He applied unsuccessfully for a position with the International Wool Secretariat as Australian representative in London. He missed out on a position as Reader in Colonial Administration at Oxford University, which he was confident of winning. He applied for a readership at Manchester only to lose out to Max Gluckman.¹⁰¹ Possibly unknown to Stanner, he was considered as a suitable replacement for Reo Fortune should he reject the offer of Government Anthropologist in Burma.¹⁰² This did not eventuate. Stanner was back to a situation where he was working to keep himself alive with little opportunity to write, once more faced with further interruption to his career and possibly more wasted years.¹⁰³

When the Auckland University College advertised its Chair of Anthropology, Stanner applied.¹⁰⁴ It was a late application and somewhat half-hearted. The London selection committee commented on his apparent lack of interest, but nevertheless this was ignored or overlooked by the Council of Auckland University College, which offered him the Chair. He was also offered, at the same time, the Readership in Comparative Institutions in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the newly established Australian National University. He declined the Auckland Chair. It was a peculiar decision in light of Stanner’s often-stated ambition to obtain a chair. ‘My aim’, he told Firth,

is a Chair in Anthropology as soon as practicable, if possible in a few years. Whatever I now do must be directed to that end...It is either that or get out of the subject altogether...The six years lost in the war nearly crippled me as it is. I do not know anyone else, who had no job to go back to, who lost as much time.¹⁰⁵

Notwithstanding his self-pity, his dubiety came to the fore once again. By way of explanation, he told Firth, who had been on the London selection panel along with E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Darryl Forde, that he was ‘not mad keen on a Chair for the sake of having one...when one comes I want there to be no doubt

100 Hogbin to Mander, 12 May 1948, Mander Papers, University of Washington Libraries (Seattle), Accession No. 730-7-55, box 5, folder 5-12.

101 David Mills, *Difficult Folk? A political history of social anthropology* (New York, 2008), pp. 99–101.

102 J. Hutton to Stallman, 28 May 1946, RAI (Applied Anthropology, 1928–1949), A/43, 15/81.

103 Stanner to Firth, 23 May 1947, FIRTH7/7/31.

104 Firth to Stanner, 7 December 1948, FIRTH7/7/31; Geoffrey Gray and Doug Munro, *Establishing anthropology and Maori language (studies)*, Auckland University College: the appointment of Ralph Piddington, 1949, Unpublished manuscript.

105 Stanner to Firth, 18 May 1949, FIRTH7/6/15.

about my fitness for it'. He did not think he would be ready 'for a couple of years at least'. Had it been Sydney, which he most coveted, it would be the same. He realised it was a decision of

some importance...I either have to take this chance in New Zealand or prepare myself to win out [on] an independent chair at some later stage... it means if I persist in the idea of a chair, going to Canberra presumably for four or five years, which puts me in the late 40's—a bit late for a first chair. And I cannot count on this chance coming again.¹⁰⁶

Firth was disappointed that Stanner had turned down the Auckland Chair; it was an opportunity for Stanner to establish his academic credentials, which, on his own admission, were so lacking.

In the years that followed, Stanner's academic reputation steadily declined; he did not take the opportunity, in those early years at ANU, to complete the several manuscripts for publication that had been promised over the years. When Elkin retired in 1955, Stanner applied for the Sydney Chair, expecting support from Elkin.¹⁰⁷ It was not forthcoming. Elkin's assessment of Stanner was anything but supportive and he supported Ronald Berndt. Ignoring this, however, the selection committee ranked Stanner with J. A. Barnes, the eventual appointee. He failed primarily on the grounds that the committee considered he had been out of anthropology doing other work and his anthropology work was not recent. As one member of the committee commented: 'Stanner's past rose up and defeated him.'¹⁰⁸ He believed himself to be in line for the ANU Chair after Nadel's unexpected death in early 1956 but he was overlooked.¹⁰⁹ When Elkin's successor, J. A. Barnes, resigned from the Sydney Chair in 1958 to take up the ANU Chair, Stanner again applied to Sydney—again unsuccessfully. Stanner was eliminated in the first round; W. R. Geddes was appointed ahead of K. E. Read and Bill Epstein. Stanner accused Barnes of 'influencing the electors against him'.¹¹⁰ It illustrates a tendency in Stanner to blame the circumstances or others for his failures. He had, however, made a late application. When applications were called for, Stanner was away at Port Keats (Wadeye) on a field trip and he hastily put forward his 1955 application, which included two dead referees: Radcliffe-Brown and S. F. Nadel.

The problem remains: why, when he was so close in 1955 for election to the Sydney Chair, was he rebuffed by the ANU in 1957 and again by Sydney in 1958? The explanation lies with Raymond Firth's judgment of his suitability for

106 Stanner to Firth, 5 August 1949, FIRTH7/7/31.

107 Gray, *A Cautious Silence*, p. 223.

108 Notes taken at meeting of selection panel, 9 September 1955, University of Sydney Archives, G3/190.

109 See Geoffrey Gray and Doug Munro, 'Your own position is not being overlooked': the politics of choosing a successor to S. F. Nadel, 1957, Unpublished manuscript.

110 J. A. Barnes, *Humping My Drum: A memoir* (Self-published: <www.lulu.com>, 2007), pp. 273, 277–8.

the ANU Chair in 1957. Firth noted Stanner's strengths, especially his training in economics and his interest in politics, his 'intelligence and insight and admired his grasp of broad subjects'. Notwithstanding, the concerns Firth expressed in 1949 and in 1955 remained:

[I]n a way Stanner's achievement has tended to fall short of expectation and very far short of his own ideal. In some ways he has been his own worst academic enemy. Essentially he has seemed unwilling to face responsibility. His refusal of the Directorship of the East African Institute of Social Research was symptomatic of his tendency to dwell upon the difficulties inherent in the situation rather than the possibilities of what can be made out of it. His desire for a really worth-while achievement sometimes makes him over-elaborate his argument.¹¹¹

Once at the ANU, Stanner reduced his academic and political interest in both East Africa and Papua New Guinea, and turned his attention to Aboriginal Australia, particularly Port Keats (Wadeye). This is not to say that he did not in those early years at ANU retain some interest in East Africa and to a lesser degree Papua New Guinea, as he completed *The South Seas in Transition* and continued to struggle with his Kamba book. He continued to write the occasional paper on both areas. In recognition of his knowledge, the Menzies Government had him appointed as Second Australian Commissioner of the South Pacific Commission in 1953—a position he retained until 1956. (J. R. Halligan, previously Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, was Senior Commissioner.) In the same year, Stanner and Nadel reported on the ASOPA to Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories. Hasluck wanted ASOPA relocated to the Canberra University College. Stanner, who completed the final report, made a series of recommendations regarding the length and scope of courses provided by ASOPA, but his ideas were opposed by the then Principal, C. D. Rowley. In the end, despite pressure from Hasluck, ASOPA remained at Mosman and the courses were retained.¹¹²

In the early 1960s Stanner was largely responsible, together with his old friend from Bertram Steven's office William C. Wentworth, MHR, for establishing the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. In 1964 he was awarded the second Chair in Anthropology at the ANU, which, due to his previous experience in 1957 and his firm conviction that he had too many enemies, he believed was not for him.¹¹³ Elkin, somewhat hypocritically congratulating Stanner on his appointment, wrote: 'you have had an unnecessarily long wait—a delay not unconnected with the machinations, which have had no relation with

111 Firth to ANU Registrar, 25 July 1957, FIRTH8/1/3.

112 Nadel to Lambert, 27 May 1953, NAA, A518, A114/1/1, part 3; Minutes, ASOPA Council on Tuesday 2 March 1954; Discussion and Recommendations by Subcommittee of the School Council at Port Moresby, 19–26 March 1954, NAA, A518, A114/1/1, part 3.

113 Firth to Stanner, 11 February 1964, Stanner to Firth, 17 February 1964, both in FIRTH8/1/121.

anthropology as an academic discipline.’¹¹⁴ After the change in the Australian Constitution in 1967 that enabled the Commonwealth to develop programs for Aborigines, Stanner was appointed to the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, which was headed by H. C. Coombs.¹¹⁵ Their task was to make recommendations regarding Aboriginal policy and its implementation. Stanner resigned from the council in 1976 on the grounds of ill health.

Stanner was a man of many talents and abilities. Although he saw the war years as wasted, he nevertheless gained much from those years. He commented to Firth that ‘[i]t’s extraordinary how productive my wasted years (1940–46) have been in one sense’. And while he had not been able to read much while serving, his ‘ideas and theoretical interest sharpened considerably of their own volition almost’.¹¹⁶ The war years brought a number of these to the fore. It enabled him to demonstrate his administrative skills, especially the establishment of the NAOU and his work for DORCA. He was detached, possessed of a gift for simplicity in describing problems of a complex nature, and he could in his analysis be both ‘critical and negative’. These abilities did not always work to his advantage and, coupled with his uncertainty about a professional direction—economist, colonial administrator or anthropologist—saw him seeking a career across disparate fields and regions. It was only at the ANU, where he was sure of a permanent position, that he was able to consolidate, refocus and, to some degree, relax. He died in 1981.

The anthropologist and historian Diane Barwick, who, over more than 20 years, developed a close professional association with Stanner, remarked on his death: ‘in his later years he had disproved the Colonel Blimp image he once had and achieved very great stature for his contribution to the reform of Aussie policy and perhaps to a reform of the public image of Aborigines.’¹¹⁷

114 Elkin to Stanner, 10 June 1964, cited in Hinkson and Beckett (eds), *An Appreciation of Difference*, p. 22.

115 For a discussion of the work of the council, see Tim Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs’ legacy in Indigenous affairs* (Melbourne, 2000).

116 Stanner to Firth, 6 April 1946, FIRTH7/7/31.

117 Diane Barwick to Harvey and Audrey [unknown], 5 January 1982, Barwick Papers (unsorted), State Library of Victoria. An indication of her relationship with Stanner is possibly explained by her comment: ‘I felt as if I had lost two fathers in a year.’ Her father died the same year as Stanner. Derek Freeman, with a hint of sarcasm, referred to Stanner as ‘the Brigadier of Anthropology’. Interview with Freeman, 13 February 1993.