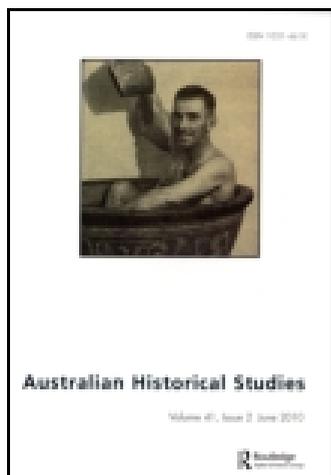


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Remaking Australia's Colonial Culture?: White Australia and its Papuan Frontier 1901–1940*

PATRICIA O'BRIEN

This article explores imperial Australia and its Papuan colony from 1901 to World War II. Through exploring shifts in imperial doctrine it examines the polemics that Australian governments and colonial officials faced in governing the colony of Papua from 1906 to 1940, and shows how and why Australian colonial practice in Papua altered. This article also explains how understandings of race, the philosophy of 'protection' and British imperial theories and practices influenced Australian imperialism in Papua following the nineteenth-century colonisation of Australia, and in the twentieth-century contexts of the Northern Territory from 1911 and New Guinea from 1914.

It is clear from the first Commonwealth Parliamentary debates in 1901 about how Australia would govern British New Guinea, the colony that would be known as Papua from 1906, Australian politicians hoped for a new era of colonisation. Some reflected on the treatment of 'our own natives' as 'one of the blackest pages of our history' that had set Australia's indigenes on the path to 'dying out fast', while others expressed relief that, unlike South Africa and New Zealand, 'we have never had a native war'.¹

In 1901, colonial violence was still a feature of Australia's northern frontiers. Nevertheless, parliamentarians took comfort in the belief that the continent was now quiet, if the violence of the past century was acknowledged at all. In relation to Papua they hoped for a new mode of colonial relations, fostering a matured Australian national image that would be in step with international standards of English-speaking imperial powers like the United States in her new Pacific possessions, along with that of mother Britain in the Federated Malay States.² The Labor politician Hugh Mahon stated: 'it is in the interests of Australia to show the world that we are prepared to deal gently, equitably and even generously' with the Pacific's indigenous peoples.³

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¹ Charles MacDonald (ALP Kennedy) 3 November 1904 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter *CPD*], 6513; Alfred Deakin quoted in Hank Nelson, 'Changing the Label', in *Papua New Guinea: A Century of Colonial Impact 1884-1984*, ed. Sione Latekefu (Boroko: National Research Institute, 1989), 22. Thomas Skene (FT Grampians) 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7418.

² Brian Jinks, Peter Biskup and Hank Nelson eds, *Readings in New Guinea History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), 90.

³ Hugh Mahon (ALP Coolgardie) 1 August 1903, *CPD*, 3008.

To most parliamentarians, New Guinea belonged to Australia 'as Tasmania does'.⁴ Yet there were numerous misgivings about the Commonwealth assuming responsibility for Papua due to concerns about expense, how to ensure that Papuans did not gain access to White Australia, and what political rights would be extended to Papuans and whites living in the territory of Papua. However, the compelling dictates of Australia's Monroe Doctrine—to keep this territory and others adjacent to the mainland out of the grasp of competing powers—overrode other apprehensions.⁵ Despite the dominating sentiment that this territory was 'rightfully' Australian, parliamentarians established new frameworks for colonial relations to ensure that past mistakes were not repeated. Labor's Charles McDonald cautioned that injudicious land policies in New Guinea could result in extremely costly battles similar to those in New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1860s. The British government spent over fifteen million pounds to quell 'various insurrections amongst the Maori to say nothing of valuable lives lost', McDonald reminded parliament, a cost that Australia should not replicate.⁶ The overall tone of parliamentary debate between 1901 and 1906, when Papua was transferred to the Commonwealth, was that Australian colonial power should benefit the natives; the aspiration was encapsulated by the pledge of George Reid, Australia's third Prime Minister, that Australia would be 'friend and protector' to Papuans.⁷

Sentiments towards Papuans expressed by Commonwealth parliamentarians departed radically from their attitudes and legislation regarding Australian Aborigines. The constitution excluded Aborigines from the population statistics and their right to vote was denied in the Franchise Act of 1902, relegating their status within the new nation to one of exclusion and leaving responsibility to the states. In contrast, parliamentarians worried over their Papuan subjects' land and political rights under Australian control.⁸ Similar concerns for Aborigines of the Northern Territory—due to transfer from South Australia to federal control in 1911—were largely absent.⁹ Still, Alfred Deakin saw this new Federal power over the Northern Territory as securing for Aboriginal people 'better treatment which every civilized people must feel is part of the "white man's burden" cast upon

⁴ William McMillan (FT Wentworth) 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7397.

⁵ John Watson (ALP Bland) and Thomas Brown (ALP Canabolas) 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7423, 7427. 'Australia's Monroe Doctrine' has also been described as the 'Deakin Doctrine' first articulated in the 1880s. Frank Crowley ed., *A Documentary History of Australia. Volume 3* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1980), 130–32, 146, 166. Donald Craigie Gordon, *The Australian Frontier in New Guinea 1870-1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

⁶ Charles McDonald, 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7461. The Solomon Islands was another source of discussion along these lines.

⁷ Nelson, 'Changing the Label', 21.

⁸ Senator Miles Staniforth Smith (FT Western Australia), 20 November 1901, *CPD*, 7477–8; Senator William Higgs (ALP Queensland), 20 November 1901, *CPD*, 7487; Senator Dobson, 20 November 1901, *CPD*, 7489; Thomas Skene, 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7417; Edmund Barton (PROT Hunter), 23 July 1903, *CPD*, 2520.

⁹ Alan Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 122–43; Peter Read 'Northern Territory' in *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, ed. Ann McGrath (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 269–305.

us'.¹⁰ Deakin saw no contradiction that while Aboriginal people were dispossessed, Papuans '[should] not be unjustly deprived of their lands or excluded from lands which properly belong to them'.¹¹ This article examines how attitudes and policies towards these two groups of indigenes—one in a colony and the other in a settler society—differed so greatly at the same historic moment.

One key reason why there were such differences is that changes within European imperial nations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had an impact on the drafting of Papuan colonial policy. The dynamic of 'new imperialism' has been described by Fredrick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler as an attempt by European 'civilised states' to develop a new era of 'imperialist morality' that supposedly replaced the old, brutal system. Though Cooper and Stoler emphasise that this change in imperial philosophy did little to change empire 'on the ground', European imperialists 'reassured' themselves that their 'new' imperialism was based upon 'reasoned efforts to build structures capable of reproducing' the assumed successes of European societies: stable government, orderly commerce and wage labour, a complex structuring of group boundaries, racial categories, and the regulation of sexual and social interactions.¹²

The historiography of this article is based upon a substantial body of work on Papua and New Guinea as pre-war colonies of Australia as well as on a literature examining adaptations in imperial styles and policy from the late nineteenth century across the globe.¹³ Works by Hank Nelson, Roger Thompson, and Andrew Lattas that have considered how Australian national identity and interests fuelled the creation of colonial policy in Papua and New Guinea have had the most direct relevance to this study.¹⁴ This article explores the interactions between Australia

¹⁰ See discussion about the Northern Territory in *CPD* on 5 July 1901, 2149–57; 19 November 1901, 7439; 20 November 1901, 7474; 10 September 1902, 15898–911. Alfred Deakin (PROT Ballarat) 10 September 1902, *CPD*, 15907.

¹¹ Deakin, 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7411–12.

¹² Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 31.

¹³ Francis West, *Hubert Murray: The Australian Pro-Consul* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1969); L.P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1970); Hank Nelson, 'Hubert Murray: Private Letters and Public Reputation', *Historical Studies* 14, no. 56 (April 1971): 612–21; Edward Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975); J.D. Legge, 'The Murray period: Papua 1906–40' in *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, ed. Wayne Hudson (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1974); Ian Campbell, 'Anthropology and the professionalisation of colonial administration in Papua and New Guinea', *Journal of Pacific History* 33, no. 1 (1998); Amirah Inglis, *Not a White Woman Safe: Sexual Anxiety and Politics in Port Moresby* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974); Chilla Bulbeck, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994); Richard Eves, 'Colonialism and Corporeality: Methodist Missions and the Refashioning of Bodies in the Pacific', *History and Anthropology* 10, no. 1 (1996): 85–138; Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation and Colonial Governance* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Hank Nelson, 'Changing the Label'; Hank Nelson, *Taim Bilong Masta: The Australian Involvement with Papua New Guinea* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1982); Roger Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980); Roger Thompson, 'Making a Mandate: Formation of Australian's New Guinea Policies 1919–1925', *Journal of Pacific History* 25, no. 1

and Papua by placing that colonial entity within the context of imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century and within the longer history of British imperial thought and practice.¹⁵ Developments in imperial doctrine were critical to the polemics that Australian governments and colonial officials faced in governing the colony of Papua from 1906 to 1940, and Australian colonial practice in Papua shifted within the larger British imperial context. Drawing connections between Aboriginal policies and the governance of the Northern Territory and New Guinea (from 1914), I shall suggest how understandings of race influenced imperial practices.

Hubert Murray served as the territory's Lieutenant-Governor between 1908 and 1940.¹⁶ Murray's long administration highlights a number of the tensions and shifts in Australian colonial attitudes during this period. He polarised his contemporaries and divided historical opinion over whether he was the bastion of paternalistic colonialism or the humanitarian bulwark against the worst excesses of old-style Australian frontier practices.¹⁷ Murray wrote a great deal about colonialism and its functions, distilling many different colonial methods during his tenure as Lieutenant-Governor.¹⁸ In public and private writings he mused about Australia's standing amongst the imperial nations, its white national identity, and its enterprises in Papua, New Guinea, and northern Australia. Although parliamentary discussions stressed the need for restraint in governing Papua for the joint benefit of the natives and Australia's national image, there was also considerable pressure to maintain older frontier relations. Murray, despite his many flaws, believed along with numerous early parliamentarians that imperialism and native welfare were complementary.

Debates about how to govern Papua and, from 1914, New Guinea, reflected fierce disputes about colonisation that can be traced back to the earliest years of the New South Wales colony. When the first governor, Arthur Phillip, licensed a punitive raid against local Aborigines who were menacing the fledgling settlement

(1990); Roger Thompson, *Australia and the Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1998); Andrew Lattas, 'Humanitarianism and Australian nationalism in Colonial Papua', *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 2, (1996): 141–65.

¹⁵ Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*; Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Nicholas Dirks, *Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2006); Patricia Hayes, 'Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus: The Making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa 1915–46', in *Cultures of Empire: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Catherine Hall (New York: Routledge, 2000); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Murray had acted in this position from 1906.

¹⁷ Roger Thompson, 'Hubert Murray and the Historians', *Pacific Studies* 10, no. 1 (November 1986): 79–96.

¹⁸ John Hubert Plunkett Murray published several books and academic papers, and wrote annually in the *Papuan Annual Report* (PAR). In addition to his published work there is also an extensive unpublished literature by Murray in the Hubert Murray Papers, Mitchell Library, and the Murray Family Papers at the Australian National Library. His major published works are *Papua or British New Guinea* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912); *Papua of To-day* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1925); *Review of the Australian Administration in Papua from 1907 to 1920* (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1920); *Anthropology and the Government of Subject Races* (Port Moresby: Government Printer, 1921).

in December 1790, he unleashed a force that would overshadow white and Aboriginal frontier relations into the twentieth century. This tension centred on whether settler behaviour towards indigenes should be dominated by restrained, peaceful, and lawful conduct or by violence explicitly or implicitly condoned by colonial authorities. Friction over this issue reached its height in the 1820s and 1830s in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales during the intense frontier conflicts that accompanied mass pastoral expansion. Proponents of both sides of the debate—typically missionaries and their followers on one side and pastoralists and their sympathisers on the other—wielded significant influence. Pastoralists enjoyed political influence owing to their economic primacy, while missionaries had connections with the Evangelicals in the British parliament and the Colonial Office who, having achieved the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1832, turned their attention to the plight of indigenes under British rule.

The greatest clash between these two factions occurred in 1838 during the Myall Creek Massacre trials that resulted in the execution of seven convicts. Rather than quell frontier violence, the trials intensified antipathy towards Aborigines and escalated frontier tensions.¹⁹ As the political power of British Evangelicals waned from the 1840s, so too did the influence of their antipodean counterparts, bringing the demise of the protectorates, aimed at moderating pastoralist behaviour towards Aborigines, in Port Philip (by 1849), South Australia (by 1857), and Western Australia (by 1857), which had aimed to moderate pastoralist behaviour towards Aborigines. Protection, however, was changing its meaning, and was becoming a method of controlling the Aboriginal population.²⁰ With a crippling drought in the 1840s and gold rushes from 1851, missionary colonialism had limited impact on curbing violence in Queensland, the northern territory of South Australia, and Western Australia; indeed the violence continued into the 1930s. Violence was embedded in an Australian frontier culture shaped by competition over women and resources—land, stock, water—and by cycles of retaliation.²¹

¹⁹ 1838 was also the year that the Australian Aborigines Protection Society was launched along with counterparts throughout the British Empire. Whilst maintaining an active moral profile it had limited power to implement its agenda from the 1840s.

²⁰ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788–2001* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 54.

²¹ Of the extensive primary and secondary literature on violence on Australian frontiers, see Lyndall Ryan, *Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1996); Roger Millis, *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day Massacre of 1838* (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1992); *The Push From the Bush: A Bulletin of Social History* (Special Myall Creek Issue, 20 (April 1985)); Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998); Patty O'Brien, 'The Gaze of the Ghosts: Images of Aboriginal Women in New South Wales and Port Phillip 1800–1850' in *Maps, Dreams, History*, ed. Jan Kociumbas (Sydney: Braxus Publishing, 1998), 382–400; *Historical Records of Victoria. Volume 2B* (Melbourne: Government Printing Office, 1983), 523–695; Gordon Reid, *A Nest of Hornets* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982); A. Dirk Moses ed., *Genocide and Settler Society* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Peter and Jay Read, eds., *Long Time, Olden Time: Aboriginal Accounts of Northern Territory History* (Alice Springs: Institute for Aboriginal Development, 1991), part one; Neville Green, *The Forrest River Massacres [1926]* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Press, 1995); John Cribbin, *The Killing Times: The Coniston Massacre 1928* (Sydney: Fontana, 1984); Tony Roberts, *Frontier Justice: A History of the Gulf Country to 1900* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2005); Peter Read, 'Murder, Revenge and Reconciliation on the North Eastern Frontier', *History Australia* 4 (1) 2007 (DOI:10.2104/ha070009): 9.1–9.15

The next phase of protection for Aborigines was the passing of protective legislation in each colony, first in Victoria in 1869 and finally in 1911 in the federally administered Northern Territory. Under this legislative regime, administered by a Protection Board and Chief Protector of Aborigines, 'protectors' had 'the authority to determine Aborigines' place of residence, oversee their labour contracts, control their property and assume custody of their children'.²² A reserve system was introduced, physically separating whites from Aborigines. Historians are divided over the impact of this system of protection, noting regional and temporal differences in the impact of these policies.²³ Aboriginal histories about being subject to protection legislation offer less ambiguous assessments of the oppressiveness of these acts that were not abandoned in full until well after World War II.²⁴ When we compare protection for Aborigines and Papuans, the difference in theory and practice was striking.

The territory of Papua that the Commonwealth inherited in 1906 was a lacklustre colony, losing money and unattractive to investors.²⁵ Prime Minister Barton reckoned that there was an imbalance of 500 whites to about 350,000 Papuans.²⁶ As little in the way of infrastructure existed, the whites clustered around coastal and river areas, engaging in small-scale trade, missions, copra plantations, and—particularly—mining. The 1887 Imperial Conference agreed that the administration of British New Guinea be entrusted to Queensland, but funded by New South Wales and Victoria.²⁷ William MacGregor, the first governor of British New Guinea, described the motive for the imperial presence in Papua in mercenary terms—'for our own ends'—and advised that this 'should never be forgotten in dealing with the natives'.²⁸ Despite Commonwealth hopes at the turn of the twentieth century that Australia had overcome its brutal frontier past, violence practices were still commonplace in Papua under British rule, as they were in Northern Australia for a further thirty years.²⁹

Parliamentarians like Hugh Mahon were aware of the situation that existed in Papua under Queensland's administration. In 1901 the governor of British New Guinea, Sir George Le Hunte, instructed Captain Armit to avoid the euphemisms 'dispersed' and 'hurt', in place of 'killed', when reporting on the bloody clashes on the Yodda River with government forces that had led to 54

²² Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 12.

²³ Bain Attwood 'Aboriginal Protection', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, eds. Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t127.e12>>, accessed 5 June 2008.

²⁴ See, for instance, *Lousy Little Sixpence* directed by Gerald Bostock and Alec Morgan, Ronin Films, 1982.

²⁵ Beatrice Grimshaw, *The New New Guinea* (London: Harper and Row, 1910), 85–66; Donald Denoon, 'Capitalism in Papua New Guinea: Development or Underdevelopment', *Journal of Pacific History* 20, nos. 3–4 (July–Oct 1985): 119–34.

²⁶ Barton, 12 November 1901, *CPD*, 7081.

²⁷ Initially the three governments contributed £15,000 per year, which was subsequently increased to £22,000. Barton, 7 August 1901, *CPD*, 3495.

²⁸ William MacGregor, quoted in Murray, *Review of the Australian Administration*, x.

²⁹ Nelson, 'Changing the Label', 21–22.

deaths.³⁰ Le Hunte, however, had also participated in punitive raids on Gaoribari Island in retaliation for the murder of two missionaries. Diane Langmore has described it as a 'disciplined, orderly expedition' in which thirty-four islanders were killed, their ceremonial houses burned and war canoes smashed.³¹ Though the action was deemed restrained and 'inevitable', since 'the natives brought it upon themselves', Le Hunte's conduct was called into question.³² In a later conciliatory expedition to Gaoribari, Le Hunte claimed that only ten people had been killed the previous year.³³

Le Hunte's Australian-born successor, Christopher Robinson, attracted far greater opprobrium at Gaoribari Island in 1903. Robinson embodied the ruthless violence of the Australian frontier, allegedly encouraging 'his police to shoot indiscriminately', even at Papuans swimming away. The Royal Commission that followed found 'large numbers of people'—over a hundred—had been killed.³⁴ Press reports led to a stern rebuke from federal politicians who wanted to remove him from office. Robinson, however, committed suicide.³⁵

The Australian government attempted to orchestrate changes in the entrenched colonial culture by appointing a Briton, Francis Barton, as governor; however, he was unable to balance his belief in a new era in Australian imperialism and colonial interests.³⁶ The future Prime Minister Billy Hughes noted another problem during Queensland's administration: 'year by year . . . the lands of the territory have been steadily sold', exposing Papua to 'ungodly marauders' who exploited their resources. Hughes argued the Commonwealth should:

prevent every alienation of land and should secure such healthy social, moral and industrial conditions in the island as will insure to every man in it—that is to say, every native in it—that he shall at least not have a worse time under the dominion of the British Empire than he has hitherto had.³⁷

Hughes' personal views on Papua and New Guinea became critically important after World War I when he became Prime Minister.

Passed in 1905, *The Papua Bill* included numerous safeguards against the repetition of past events. One of the key differences between Australia's relations with Aborigines and with Papuans was the divergent meanings that 'protection' had in the two colonial contexts. Protection of Aboriginal Australians in the early twentieth century meant attending to a 'dying race' for Australian governments whereas for Papuans it meant preservation. From

³⁰ Hugh Mahon, 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7421–423. It is not clear from Mahon's report to Parliament which year these incidents on the Yodda River took place. Mahon states they were contained in Le Hunte's 1900 report and they possibly took place in February and March of 1899.

³¹ Diane Langmore, 'Le Hunte, Sir George Ruthven (1852–1925)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 10 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1986), 66–67.

³² Jinks et al., *Readings in New Guinea History*, 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71–80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁵ Langmore, 66–67.

³⁶ Thompson, *Australia and the Pacific Islands*, 5–6.

³⁷ William Morris Hughes (ALP West Sydney) 19 November 1901, *CPD*, 7446–447.

this premise all details of colonial policy was structured. British law would supposedly operate to protect life and property of both Europeans and Papuans. All manner of relations between coloniser and colonised were regulated. Native title was recognised in the *Land Ordinance* of 1907 and land could be sold only as leasehold. These land sales were moderated through government officers, thereby preventing the widespread dispossession of Papuans.³⁸ Temperance advocates ensured that alcohol, gambling, and opium were proscribed for natives.³⁹ Governing Papua would be a more orderly affair, displaying Australian civilisation and its rejection of cruel frontier colonialism. Since the Commonwealth government did not expand funding beyond £20,000 per annum, protection was entwined with economic growth and preservation of a labour supply; it was thus intrinsic to the success of the colony and not only a humanitarian measure.

Contemporary arguments that labouring in the tropics was work only 'coloured' men could perform had a deep impact upon Papua. Historically, European imperialists had seen the tropics as the 'white man's grave'. Although such ideas were challenged,⁴⁰ eugenic and medical 'evidence' underlay popular representations of white man's inevitable slide into a state of drunkenness and degeneracy precipitated by a life of idleness, boredom and too intimate contact with natives.

Racial ideas shaped medical research well into the 1930s, 'confirming' the dangers of physiological changes in whites labouring in tropical heat.⁴¹ Debates about the effect of climate on temperament were both racialised and gendered. The suggestion that Papuan women should be used as contracted labourers was unsuccessfully mooted in 1908 and again in 1921, as was child labour.⁴² Women were indentured 'under certain conditions for domestic service', according to Hubert Murray who wrote in 1923 that 'in this we agree with other British possessions in the Pacific though we differ from the Mandated Territory' of New Guinea where the indenture of women was not as restricted.⁴³

From 1905 the Immigration Restriction Act—which was partly intended to protect white labour on Queensland's sugar plantations from indentured Pacific islanders—was extended to Papua, in order to restrict Asian labour. The

³⁸ Murray, *Review of the Australian Administration*, 3.

³⁹ The ban on intoxicants was at the centre of parliamentary discussions in November 1904.

⁴⁰ Grimshaw, 1; Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) and *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ Alison Bashford, 'Is White Australia Possible?: Race, Colonialism and Tropical Medicine', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 2 (March 2000): 248–271; Richard Eves, 'Going Troppo: Images of White Savagery, Degeneration and Race in the Turn-of-the-Century Colonial Fictions of the Pacific', *History and Anthropology* 11, nos. 2–3 (1999): 351–85; H. Priestly, 'Physiological Observations in the Tropical Parts of Australia', *Proceedings of the Pan-Pacific Science Congress* 2 (1923), 1486–492.

⁴² National Archives of Australia (NAA) A518/1 item S840/1/5; Murray, *Review of the Australian Administration*, 12–13; Murray, *Papua of To-day*, 127–28.

⁴³ Murray, *Papua of To-Day*, 5.

Australian parliament decided that there was to be no 'intermediate' between 'white' and 'brown', Hubert Murray observed.⁴⁴ The problem remained, however, of how to obtain labourers, develop infrastructure, and attract investment while preserving the benevolent spirit of the Native Labour Ordinance (1907). A memo written on behalf of capitalists to the Department of External Affairs in 1912, stated that 'Port Moresby pleads for coloured labour and asks why a dog-in-the-manger policy should be pursued . . . [as] the Papuan will not work and the government will not allow others to be brought in who will work'.⁴⁵ Labour policy remained intact due to fears about Asian influence upon social order and the security of Australia.

Roger Thompson has argued that in these early years before World War I there was 'considerable pressure from Australia [on Murray] . . . to pay more attention to protection of Papuans than he did at first . . . but such a policy was not against his inclinations'.⁴⁶ As a judge who remained active in this role throughout his tenure, Murray took the view that justice should be meted out to individuals, as opposed to groups.⁴⁷ The use of collective punishment was a hallmark of frontier colonialism that Murray opposed in policy and practice, instead using the court system to settle matters that set Papua apart from frontiers in Northern Australia at the time. The application of justice in Murray's Papua was also directed at whites in ways that had previously been beyond the purview of government and soundly within an earlier realm of white man's imperial privilege. In 1909 and 1910, one of his resident magistrates, Owen Turner, along with a subordinate, Mr Tooth, were investigated for misconduct. Turner and Tooth found themselves foul of Lord Crewe's edict of January 1909 that rendered concubinage with native women a dismissible offence within the British colonial service. Both were accused by Sergeant Gaiberi, a Papuan under Turner's command, of having 'connections' with native women and using the police and village constables to obtain women for them. Turner wrote to Murray, once these charges came to light, stating that they were 'malicious and entirely false'. He took particular exception to one of the charges that he had 'connection' with one native woman twice. He replied indignantly that 'a white man' would never commit such a barbarous act.⁴⁸ In the hearings into this matter, twenty Papuans gave evidence against Turner. In closely corroborated accounts, these Papuans portrayed a system whereby young women were regularly procured for these officials. The Papuan men who were coerced into bringing women, and the women themselves, stated in evidence that they concurred because of fear of the government, fears of imprisonment of

⁴⁴ Murray, *Review of Australian Administration in Papua*, 17.

⁴⁵ Memo on Native Labour, Department of External Affairs NAA A1/15 1912/10121. The memo accounted for Papuan reluctance to work as being 'the native is too well off to work' and they do not want to leave their wives behind.

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Australia and the Pacific Islands*, 15–16.

⁴⁷ Murray's experience during the Boer War also solidified his position against collective punishments. C.D. Rowley, *The Australians in German New Guinea 1914–1921* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1958), 192; West, *Hubert Murray*, 2–9.

⁴⁸ NAA G82/4 role 1. December 5, 1909.

themselves or their parents, and fear of the burning of houses and crops. The evidence of the young women revealed that they were often not willing. Betalia stated that 'he had connection with me. I cried out to him to let me go.' Toombara said, 'I do not want any more white men, white men been having me all the time'.⁴⁹ The young women reported that Turner would give them sticks of tobacco as compensation.

Murray and his fellow councillors found Turner guilty as charged. Not only had Turner 'lowered himself in the eyes of the natives', but his conduct was of national importance for Australia. The Minister for External Affairs, Atlee Hunt, wrote that he had 'no doubt' that Murray was 'as anxious as he ... that the Papuan service shall be one of which Australia shall have no reason to be ashamed, should comparisons on moral lines ... be instituted between it and the public services of other tropical possessions of the Empire'.⁵⁰

The Turner case demonstrated how justice operated in Murray's Papua, but also graphically displayed colonial perceptions and treatment of native women at a time when the British colonial service was attempting to eradicate violent behaviour and sought to implement a racialised sexual morality amongst its officers. Though intimate contact between white men and Papuan women was not approved of, it was not legislated against, as it was in 1911 in the Northern Territory, until 1951 when the Native Women's Protection Ordinance that aimed to stem the perceived problem of miscegenation was passed.⁵¹ The extent of cross-cultural sexual relations created the need for provisions that attempted to render white fathers responsible for abandoned offspring; hence the Native (Half-Caste) Ordinance of 1922 stated that European fathers would be compelled to maintain their illegitimate native children, so long as paternity could be proved. This ordinance was careful to ensure that women were not paid such monies directly as the administration did not want them to perceive it as a 'reward'.⁵² According to the 1921 census, there were an estimated 158 children affected at the time the ordinance was passed. Amirah Inglis has argued that their actual numbers were probably far higher.⁵³

Murray rarely commented upon sexual relations between white men and Papuan women, though he discussed Papuan sexuality intellectually, within anthropological debates about native population decline. Privately, he attempted to end rumours that he engaged in illicit relations with Papuan women.⁵⁴ Murray's opponents had cabled the King in 1920 stating that he was 'a menace to the British Empire'.⁵⁵ Murray reported that this attack stemmed from his assertion that white labour was less efficient in the tropics. His opponents

⁴⁹ NAA G82/box 1, evidence taken in December 1909 and January 1910.

⁵⁰ Minister for External Affairs to Murray, 14 December 1910, NAA G82, box 1.

⁵¹ Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 84–85; Wolfers, *Race Relations*, 127–28.

⁵² *Native (Half-caste Children) Ordinance*, NAA A1/15 1923/4739 (1922).

⁵³ Inglis, 19–20.

⁵⁴ Murray to Mr Bainbridge NAA G82 role 2 (20 November 1920).

⁵⁵ J.H.P Murray (hereafter Hubert) to George Gilbert Murray (hereafter Gilbert), 14 December 1920, NLA ms 565/397.

'construed' such statements 'as an expression of contempt for the white race in general', even though Murray was voicing an influential stream of scientific thinking of the time.⁵⁶

Australia's imperial policies in Papua, fashioned upon modern British imperial ideals, began to fray from 1914 when the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) occupied German New Guinea. Murray watched as the old frontier colonialism was reasserted. Governing between 1914 and 1921, the ANMEF adopted German colonial methods, described by Captain Jens Lyng as: 'pay them badly; tax them heavily; [and] treat them severely.'⁵⁷ In the early 1920s, Murray became acutely aware of the increasing gulf between the style of colonialism in Papua and in New Guinea. For instance, while Murray was advocating a form of native political self-representation, the 'capitalistic party in Australia' was advocating the exploitation of Papua 'as Germans would exploit it'. According to Murray, these factions within Australia believed that Germany was 'the only nation that knew how to deal with natives'.⁵⁸ Opponents of Murray agitated for a number of modifications at this time, not least of which was the importation of South-East Asian or Indian labour into Papua as the lack of 'good boss boys and intermediaries between the white and the raw black' was curtailing development.⁵⁹ Murray answered critics of his liberalism by citing British imperial standards as the basis for Australian colonialism, where the use of women and child labourers or violence was out of step with modern imperial standards.⁶⁰

In 1919, Murray hoped that the two territories would be combined under his leadership. Yet the vocal opposition against him at the time prevented this.⁶¹ Murray was so disaffected with Australian colonial culture in New Guinea that he thought the United States' rule would be preferable, as it 'seem[ed] to be doing wonderful work in the Philippines'.⁶²

Murray argued that profit rather than 'native uplift' was the driving force in 1914. This goal shaped colonial policy in numerous, invidious ways. The ANMEF adopted the German model of tropical administration: forced and unpaid indenture of women, children, and men for work on roads and government plantations, wages for labourer set at half that of Papua, and 'disciplinary punishments' that could be administered by an employer upon a worker and without trial.⁶³ Such punishments included 'solitary confinement with or without chains and with or without light' for a maximum of three days. This disgusted Murray: it would surely 'drive a native mad'.⁶⁴ The former

⁵⁶ Murray, *Papua of To-Day*, 217.

⁵⁷ Jens Lyng, *Our New Possession (Late German New Guinea)* (Melbourne: Melbourne Publishing Company, 1919), 235. Rowley, *The Australians in German New Guinea*.

⁵⁸ Hubert to Gilbert, 21 September 21 1921, NLA ms 565/401.

⁵⁹ *Second Annual Report of the Planters' Association of Papua 1921* cited in Jinks et al., *Readings*, 146.

⁶⁰ Murray, *Review of Australian Administration*, 12–13.

⁶¹ Wolfers, *Race Relations*, 89.

⁶² Hubert to Gilbert, 31 October 1918, NLA, ms 565/388.

⁶³ *Report on the Territory of New Guinea September 1914 to 30th June 1921* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1921), 11.

⁶⁴ Hubert to Gilbert, 30 August 1916, NLA ms 565/381.

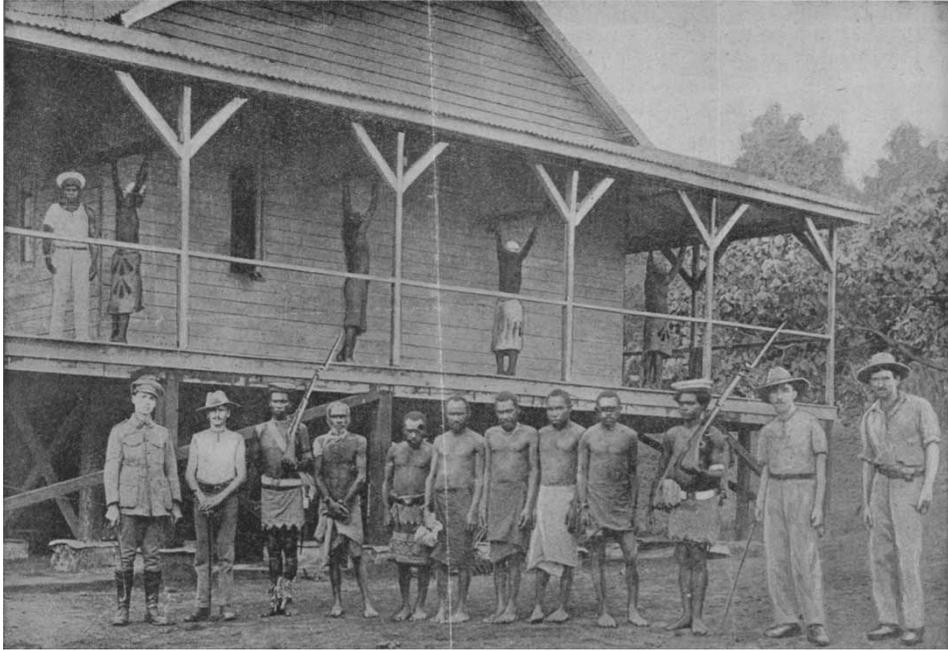


Figure 1. Ill Treatment of the Natives in New Guinea

German New Guinea, though more profitable, was in Murray's perception presided over by a group of degenerate, drunken gamblers who perpetrated barbaric cruelties over their native charges. As with the German administration that preceded it, the use of collective punishment was pursued and resulted in a tense and bloody frontier, as the historian Charles Rowley has described.⁶⁵ The re-emergence of such levels of brutality appalled Murray. In correspondence, dated 1921, he uncharacteristically enclosed a photograph reproduced in the *Leader* that depicted the treatment of prisoners in order to emphasise his point about systemic cruelty in the ANMEF- administered New Guinea (Figure 1).⁶⁶

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. 'The interests of the natives of the islands would be best conserved by

⁶⁵ Rowley, 191–205.

⁶⁶ 'Ill Treatment of Natives in New Guinea', *The Leader*, 3 December 1921 p. 28 enclosed in Hubert to Gilbert, 29 January, 1922, NLA ms 565/402 and 402a. The problems of the ANMEF military administration were partially acknowledged at its end, being excused in government reports due to the instability and inexperience from leadership down to the lower orders of personnel. See *Report on the Territory of New Guinea: 14*; *The Official Handbook of the Territory of New Guinea* (Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1943), 67; Rowley, 296–334; Wolfers, 74–87.

direct annexation', he claimed.⁶⁷ However, New Guinea's status became that of a 'class C' mandate, which required a system of reporting to ensure the colonial regime upheld the 'sacred trust' towards native subjects, albeit 'on very permissive terms'.⁶⁸ International oversight of Australia's governance did little to hinder Australia's administration. Despite a raft of legislation that created a more British framework of native policy in the Mandated Territory, the standards of native policy never rose to the level of Murray's Papua. Native policy was not 'made a political issue until after the second world war',⁶⁹ and the Mandated Territory remained more violent, though more economically successful owing mainly, according to Murray, to the use of forced labour.⁷⁰

Though Murray argued for the amalgamation of Papua and New Guinea in 1919, he opposed moves by Commonwealth governments in the 1920s and 1930s to bring the two entities together. Francis West—the biographer of the Murray—argued that Murray's position changed because he feared amalgamation would rid of him of the power to shape his benevolent style of native administration, which he regarded as reflecting the 'sacred trust' emphasised in the League of Nations Mandates.⁷¹ Despite challenges, Murray's policies remained largely intact during his tenure although, as Hank Nelson argues, his protection policies became more regimented and paternalistic.⁷² As the white population increased, a system of racial division was implemented to protect whites and their property from those 'town' Papuans who had lost their cultural and village links. As with the Pacific islanders in Australia, town Papuans were 'blackened' and rendered more threatening to the growing ranks of colonials.

In turn, colonials were further whitened by the greater presence of white women, who made the colonial group more vulnerable and heightened racial anxiety. The most explicit manifestation of this racial anxiety was the White Women's Protection Ordinance of 1926 that allowed for severe punishments for sexually threatening behaviour towards white women by Papuan men, even though the incidence of such acts was minuscule.⁷³ The other irredeemable flaw

⁶⁷ W.M. Hughes quoted in 1919 documents from the Paris Peace Conference in Wayne Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris: The Birth of Australian Diplomacy* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia Limited, 1978), 92–96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 28; Murray, *Review of the Australian Administration*, 9. The phrase 'sacred trust' was in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Susan Pederson, 'Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations' in *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies*, eds Caroline Elkins and Susan Pederson (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁶⁹ Rowley, 311.

⁷⁰ West, *Hubert Murray*, 237–45; Hank Nelson, 'The Swinging Index: Capital Punishment and British and Australian administrations in Papua and New Guinea 1888–1945', *Journal of Pacific History* volume 13 part 3 (1978): 130–52. Nelson points out that in the last twenty years of Murray's administration two people were sentenced to death compared to sixty-five during the same period in the Mandated Territory. Hubert to Gilbert, 17 November, 1923, NLA ms 565/413.

⁷¹ West, *Hubert Murray*, 237–39; Hubert to Mary Murray, 16 May 1939 in West, *Selected Letters*, 228–29.

⁷² Nelson, *Taim Bilong Masta*, 20.

⁷³ Inglis, *Not a White Woman Safe*, and 'Rereading the White Women's Protection Ordinance' in *European Impact and Pacific Influence*, ed. Herman Hiery and John MacKenzie (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), 324–37; Bulbeck, 190–215.

in Murray's administration was his attitude to native education. Murray explicitly did not want to create 'a Papuan intelligentsia', but preferred a 'diffusion of elementary education', which is something that can be viewed as a typical component of colonial oppression.⁷⁴ Murray has been criticised for these policies, yet they were accompanied by forms of self-government, such as the village councillor system that was in place by 1928.

There is, however, a connection between the changes in colonial policy and shifts in attitudes from Australia's political centre during the 1920s. Murray thought Prime Minister S.M. Bruce (1923–29) indifferent to Papua and its native policy.⁷⁵ Bruce's successor Scullin (1929–32), though more philosophically aligned with Murray, irritated him through his seeming lack of trust in Murray's judgment.⁷⁶ The lowest point for Murray was when Charles Marr, Minister for Territories in the Lyons Government (1932–39), proposed changes to native policies. Murray was incredulous that on the agenda of the 1934 Colonial Administrators conference was 'the whipping of natives—can you imagine it in Australia at this time?'.⁷⁷ Murray scolded the delegation that this was 'a disgrace to Australia', and succeeded in having the item removed from the paper, 'though the Minister remained in favour'.⁷⁸ The publicised violence of the prospecting expeditions led by Michael Leahy from 1931–34, in which twenty-eight killings were admitted, attested to the different frontier that existed in the Mandated Territory as well as the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations oversight that prompted further dismay from Murray in the 1930s.⁷⁹

The other pressure that gives Murray's policy shifts after 1920 a clearer context is the rise of Japan and the fear of Pacific races dying out. Murray argued that his policy of enforcing native protections was the bulwark against Papuans dying out, unlike their counterparts in neighbouring colonial jurisdictions whose populations were declining. The motivation was primarily humanitarian until Japan appeared as a threat to Australia after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), and its subsequent expansion in Micronesia. From this point on, the preservation of Papuans was recast as imperative to the survival of white Australia. In 1925, Murray argued that if the Papuans died out the islands would be filled with the 'industrial races of Asia' that displayed incomparably more 'fitness to survive', but that they would prove a 'menace to the Commonwealth'.⁸⁰ The urgent question of the dying 'brown' Pacific preoccupied government, administrators, doctors, and anthropologists at the time. Dr J.H. Cumpston, Director-General of the Commonwealth Department of Health, asserted that the native races of 'the Pacific are disappearing' and the

⁷⁴ Murray, *PAR* 1937/8 cited in Jinks, 135.

⁷⁵ West, *Hubert Murray*, 238.

⁷⁶ Hubert to Gilbert, 1 May 1931 in West, *Selected Letters*, 131.

⁷⁷ Hubert to Gilbert, 18 February 1934, NLA ms 565/460.

⁷⁸ Hubert to Gilbert, 5 May 1934, NLA ms 565/461.

⁷⁹ Michael Leahy, 'The Central Highlands of New Guinea', *Geographical Journal*, vol. 87, no. 3 (March 1936): 229–60; Hubert to Gilbert, 19 May 1935, NLA ms 565/466.

⁸⁰ Murray, *Papua of To-Day*, ix.

'repopulation now proceeding must result in international strife'. So, he continued, the 'conservation of the native races is the wisest course, if possible, and should be undertaken without any delay'.⁸¹ The survival of Melanesians was inextricably linked with the survival of white Australians. Murray's policies were pragmatic policies for Australia's interests.

Despite aligning Papuan survival with the national interest in White Australia, Murray refused to accept that depopulation was occurring in his territory. There were exceptions, such as in areas where he suggested the people were deserving of disappearance owing to their 'unnatural offences and other filthy customs'.⁸² Murray's refusal to acknowledge depopulation infuriated a number of his anthropological critics, who argued that his policies, particularly his encouragement of missionary activity—were accelerating this calamity.⁸³ Despite his argument that depopulation was not occurring at an alarming level, Murray set about altering policies that might stem the demise of Papuans.

Judicious land and labour laws were no longer adequate for the purpose of preserving Papuans' wellbeing; so in the 1920s Murray adopted other regulations that were endorsed by W.J. Durrad, a missionary from the Melanesian mission, and seconded by W.H.R. Rivers and other experts in the collection *Depopulation in Melanesia*, published in 1922.⁸⁴ As these experts deemed clothing, often wet and not sufficiently laundered, to be the cause of skin diseases among Melanesians, the wearing of clothes was proscribed for most Papuans, though minimal covering of the body for the sake of decency was encouraged. Murray instituted a baby bonus that amounted to a payment of five shillings per annum to a woman with four children, with an extra shilling for each additional child. Men with four living children were exempted from the hefty native tax imposed in 1918 and that was designed to compel men to enter the plantation labour market. The monies generated by this tax were fed back into native education health, as well as the Department of Anthropology, formed in 1923 as another plank in the Papuan administration campaign to prevent depopulation in Papua.

Since the 1893 *Report of the Commission on Fijian Depopulation*, colonial administrations believed that a key reason why populations of Islanders were declining was that their lives were no longer as exciting and so their 'zest for life' had to be reinvigorated.⁸⁵ One tactic to reinvigorate natives was devised by Murray and his Government Anthropologist, F.E. Williams, in the form of the

⁸¹ J.H.L. Cumpston, 'The Depopulation of the Pacific', *Proceedings of the Pan Pacific Science Congress*, 1923, vol. 2, 1393.

⁸² Murray quoted in Pitt-Rivers, 'The Effect on Native Races of contact with European Civilisation', *Man*, Vol. 27 (January 1927), 6.

⁸³ Hubert to Patrick Murray in West, *Selected Letters*, 128; George Pitt-Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races* (London: Routledge, 1927), 12–13.

⁸⁴ Donald Denoon et al., *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76–77; W.H.R. Rivers ed. *Essays on Depopulation in Melanesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

⁸⁵ Stephen Roberts, *Population Problems of the Pacific* (New York, AMS Press: 1969), 68–70.

monthly newspaper, the *Papuan Villager*, first published in February 1929.⁸⁶ The paper, touted as a paper for the 'brown man', was instrumental in delineating Australian whiteness, Papuan brownness, and their relationship in the colonial order. In an article titled 'Working for the White Man', published in April 1930, these intents were spelt out:

The white man all came in the first place from Europe on the other side of the world ... and it nearly always happened that where they settled they became masters ... In this way too they have come to Papua and ... are now the real masters in Papua ... I suppose it is because they are harder working and stronger and because they know a lot that the grandfathers of Papua never found out ... white men seem to be bosses wherever they go.⁸⁷

Anthropologists considered the racial malaise of Papuans most acute given the prohibition of traditional male activities that were considered anathema to British values, most notably headhunting.⁸⁸ The solution was the substitution of traditional competition with sporting competition in cricket. The editorial advocated: 'if you are wild with another man you need not hit him over the head with a club you can simply hit him over the fence for a sixer.'⁸⁹ Papuan readers were also introduced to Australian Aborigines. Readers were told that 'there are still many of these people left in Australia though not so many as formerly (for some reason they have been getting fewer and fewer. We think that will never happen in Papua)'.⁹⁰ The transfer of beneficial white culture to Papuans was a key dimension of the plan to stem depopulation in Papua when the risk for white Australia was at its most acute in the interwar years.

These examples of blunt colonial ideology, though grounded in contemporary social science, were solidly within Murray's desire to extend the advantageous aspects of white Australia to his colonial charges. For Murray, Australia's national interests were best served by a benevolent form of colonial rule that sought to prevent depopulation from occurring at levels witnessed elsewhere in the Pacific.

In 1939, Hubert Murray wrote that 'I am afraid that a rude awakening awaits our natives if amalgamation becomes an accomplished fact'.⁹¹ His prediction was realised following his death in 1940 and the outbreak of the Pacific War the following year, when the two territories were amalgamated. Harsh policies that featured conscription, forced labour, and a rise in corporal and capital punishments were justified by the emergency conditions.⁹² Yet these

⁸⁶ Michael W. Young and Julia Clark, *An Anthropologist in Papua: The Photography of F.E. Williams 1922–39* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

⁸⁷ *Papuan Villager*, April 1930.

⁸⁸ Denoon, *A History of Australia*, 113–116.

⁸⁹ *Papuan Villager*, September 1932.

⁹⁰ *Papuan Villager*, September 1929, 3.

⁹¹ Hubert to Gilbert, 25 July 1939, NLA ms 565/489.

⁹² See Hank Nelson, 'From Kanaka to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel' in *Who are our Enemies?: Racism and the Working Class in Australia*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1978).

developments show how greatly the spirit of Federation-era politicians, embedded in a global push for improved imperial standards, had been abandoned by the Australian government that no longer viewed the treatment of colonised peoples as a measure of national stature.