

3.

Help us to convince governments of our value

In the first years of its existence anthropology was faced with two problems: a shortage of funds and a lack of trained anthropologists. To maintain funding the Professor of Anthropology had to show government that anthropology was useful in the administration of its Indigenous populations, particularly in colonies such as New Guinea. If convinced, the commonwealth and the state governments would continue to subsidise the chair. Rockefeller Foundation funds, which subsidised the chair and supported anthropological research, were limited in their duration and were expected to end in the mid-1930s. Without this support the future of anthropology in the Sydney department was threatened.

Marking territory: mapping the discipline

As a result of budgetary decisions made by the states and the commonwealth, this reached a crisis point for the continuation of the department in the early 1930s. The other problem, faced by Radcliffe-Brown in particular, was the lack of suitably trained researchers. He had to find suitably qualified anthropologists from Britain and America and send out his students as soon as they had completed their degree. This he did, and the range and scope of anthropological research in the first five years of the department's life was considerable. However, combined with Rockefeller funding, a broad agenda and a requirement to pursue anthropological research in the Territory of New Guinea (and the shortage of suitably trained researchers) left Radcliffe-Brown in a quandary with regard to research sites outside of mainland Australia. He interpreted the anthropological project, as envisaged at the Pan Pacific Science Congress of 1923, as the Bernice P Bishop Museum in Honolulu taking responsibility for research in Polynesia, Japan for Micronesia, and Australia

3. Help us to convince governments

for Australia, including New Guinea and Melanesia and the Polynesian outliers. This needed clarification.

Radcliffe-Brown wanted to divide any research 'as well as we can between Australia itself and New Guinea and Melanesia' and anticipated that by the early 1930s a survey of northern Australia would be completed. The Melanesian work was 'very urgent, as in most parts the natives are either dying out or losing their culture with great rapidity'. He hoped to develop 'a definite plan for work [there] in about a year's time'; until that time he concentrated on the 'outlying islands of Melanesia that show Polynesian affinities'.¹ The director of the Bernice Bishop P Museum, HE Gregory, concentrated on the 'Polynesian race' in the east Pacific, through Melanesia, Indonesia, and on into south-east Asia. He expected, in co-operation with New Zealand institutions, that a 'detailed reconnaissance' of Polynesia would be completed by the end of 1930. After that the task 'was to segregate the Polynesian cultural elements within geographic Melanesia and on through Indonesia to Asia'.² He hoped Sydney would take responsibility for the 'Polynesian strays [outliers] in the Loyalty and New Hebrides islands' as well as Fiji.³ Despite these grand plans Gregory, like Radcliffe-Brown, was hindered by a shortage of trained researchers.

Ideally, Radcliffe-Brown would have preferred to devote his 'energies to carrying out a systematic study' of Australia and 'would be quite pleased' to confine 'ourselves to this area, at any rate for a period of five years'. However, he explained to Gregory, he was somewhat constrained as the department was established 'specially in connection with the two territories of New Guinea [and] shall therefore [need] to devote a good deal of attention to New Guinea and those Melanesian islands that come under the Mandate to Australia'. It was essential, mainly due to the training of colonial officials, to conduct 'intensive functional and biological studies of native cultures in New Guinea'. But this was not confined solely to New Guinea. It was Radcliffe-Brown's view 'that to understand the Oceanic cultures they must all be studied together'. Consequently he had marked out research work in New Caledonia, New Hebrides and Solomon Islands, which was complementary to that already undertaken by the Bishop Museum. Despite Australia and New Guinea giving him more work than he could cope with, he was reluctant to leave the Pacific: 'we shall probably always be greatly interested in Polynesia. I have myself lived and worked there, and Firth, who is to be my assistant, and I hope my successor when I leave made the Maori the subject of his early studies. There are certain problems relating to Samoa, Tonga and Fiji that I am very interested in, and I would like to have a chance

to return there and carry out further investigations'.⁴ By the end of the 1920s Oceania had been divided and mapped: Sydney would focus on Papua, New Guinea and Australia, Japan on Micronesia and the Bishop Museum on Polynesia. Melanesia was open to research by either the Bishop Museum or Sydney, depending on the availability of funds and researchers.

In his first report to the ANRC, Radcliffe-Brown stressed that 'in view of the rapid passing away of the aboriginal peoples in Australia and the Mandated Territories, it is of pressing importance that, for the present, the work of the Committee on Anthropological Research should be devoted especially to the organization of research connected with the cultures of these peoples'.⁵ Of course, he pointed out the importance of research in New Guinea, but he paid 'special attention to research in Australia so as to complete if possible, our knowledge of the aborigines before it is too late'.⁶

Before it's too late

The 'significance of research on Aboriginal cultures and societies has continually been fuelled either by the belief that Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction by the operation of natural laws or by the belief that access to the authentic pre-colonial practices was about to disappear' (Peterson, 1990, p. 4). Depopulation was a problem in the external territories but was not of the same order as on mainland Australia where many of the remaining Aboriginal people, in the guise of protecting and preserving them, had been removed to mission stations and government reserves, thereby massively disrupting their lives. It was expected by most scientific authorities that Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction (See McGregor, 1998).

In Aboriginal Australia there were few places uninfluenced or unaffected by the European invasion, occupation and settlement. Paradoxically, seen from the standpoint of today, one of the underpinnings of the new discipline of social anthropology was the fiction of an authentic Aboriginality comparatively uninfluenced or affected by white settlement. (The twin problems of a people doomed to extinction and living a pre-colonial life were elided.) Radcliffe-Brown considered many parts of northern Australia as suitable sites for intensive anthropological research, particularly the area between the Kimberley in north-western Western Australia, Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and Cape York in North Queensland. I discuss the research work undertaken in these areas in the following chapters.

3. Help us to convince governments

The Kimberley, for example, was opened to sheep and cattle in the 1880s. It was a particularly brutal and violent period: hundreds of Aboriginal men, women and children were shot. In 1926, the year before the anthropologist AP Elkin first did fieldwork in parts of the Kimberley, a massacre occurred at Onmaleneri, near Forrest River Mission, which was recalled by some of Phyllis Kaberry's informants in 1934 as well by Elkin's in 1927. In an attempt to control the violence against Aboriginal people many were forcibly removed from their country and resettled on mission settlements or government reserves. This was also a way of controlling the movement of Aboriginal people. Several government reserves such as Moola Bulla Native Settlement and Violet Valley Feeding Depot were created in response to pastoralists' concerns about the killing of cattle on their stations by Aboriginal people. Moola Bulla, for instance, had a twofold aim: its primary purpose was to act as a buffer between the 'semi-nomadic aborigines' and the marginal pastoral regions; its subsidiary purpose was to 'civilise' the local Aboriginal people. The Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, AO Neville, argued that stations such as Moola Bulla enabled the gradual transition towards civilisation.

Radcliffe-Brown wasted no time implementing his research program. Besides the small projects that focused primarily on physical anthropology, anatomy and physiology which have been discussed in the previous chapter, he promoted social anthropological projects involving lengthy periods of fieldwork. He suggested twelve months in the field as minimum stay and two years if the people were largely untouched by contact with civilisation. This was a radical shift in the way anthropological research had previously been undertaken. (Stocking, 1995, pp. 221–28) What Radcliffe-Brown asked of his researchers was 'the sociological investigation of primitive peoples — systematic investigation directed by sociological theory'.⁷ Most of the early workers were inexperienced and untrained in fieldwork, which Radcliffe-Brown set about to alleviate. Ursula McConnel, for example, received 'special training'; and while he judged Elkin, the first ANRC-sponsored field worker, to have 'a good systematic training' in anthropology and ethnology, he nonetheless thought Elkin needed to spend 'about three months' in Sydney in order to make a thorough study of Australia Aboriginal ethnography and get additional training in methods of field investigations.⁸ Elkin ignored his advice and went straight into the field. McConnel was more diffident and attended the department for training. Radcliffe-Brown followed up with an extensive correspondence with his field workers, directing them to investigate specific problems and provide him with

answers. In this way he directed the field work method, questions and results although his influence over the final production of knowledge is harder to determine.

To capture the spirit of primitive life rather than the lived lives of colonised peoples, researchers were encouraged to find men (rather than women) aged in their mid-fifties. Men of this age were, it was believed, most likely to be fully initiated (and more likely the last to be so) and hence know the various rituals and ceremonies, perhaps even performing them for the benefit of the anthropologist, as occurred with Elkin when he was at Mt Margaret in late 1930. The Adelaide linguist TGH Strehlow 'believed that the year 1875 represented "a convenient", if arbitrary, birthday division line for determining completely trained Aranda ceremonial informants' (Kimber et al, 2004, pp. 77, 79). Clearly Radcliffe-Brown and Strehlow recognised how dramatic the moment and aftermath of the encounter was, yet they seemingly ignored it as having any effect worth reporting other than that of leading to depopulation and a loss of culture. But this was usually expressed in terms of indigenous peoples inability to cope with civilisation culturally and socially. The memories of these Aboriginal men of fifty-five or older of the events during the early years of white invasion were consequently not considered to be of any importance; the history of the colonial encounter and its effects was largely ignored by anthropologists or described as a sociological event: 'culture clash' or the even more benign and misleading 'culture contact'. In fact, from reading field notes and correspondence, it seems that anthropologists were told about the impact of settlement but decided to ignore such information as being unhistorical and not pertinent to their scientific endeavours. Indigenous people were consequently presented therefore as being out of place and out of time: out of history.

The initial thrust of the research programme outlined by Radcliffe-Brown set the agenda for subsequent years and it was implemented by his successors Firth and Elkin. Given the smallness of the department and the paucity of trained anthropologists and linguists, it was impressive in its comprehensiveness and outlined ideas for future research and academic positions at the University of Sydney, if sufficient funds were available. It was not until the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies was created in 1964 that a research programme of such magnitude was again undertaken. The emphasis was on recruiting Australian-born researchers, initially those trained overseas and supplemented by those trained by Radcliffe-Brown.

3. Help us to convince governments

Radcliffe-Brown encouraged a 'systematic scientific study of the mythology of any Australian tribe' as 'some information on this subject is urgently needed for the proper understanding of Australian culture'. McConnel was funded to investigate 'the customs and beliefs of Australian aborigines and more particularly their mythology'. However, this was the exception. Elkin conducted an 'investigation of the anthropology and ethnology of the aborigines of North-West Australia'. Donald Thomson, a zoologist from the University of Melbourne, after completing a Diploma in Anthropology under Radcliffe-Brown, went to Cape York Peninsula. CWM Hart, a student of Radcliffe-Brown's, was sent to investigate 'the life of the native people of Melville and Bathurst Islands [more commonly known as Tiwi] along the lines generally followed in social anthropology'. Radcliffe-Brown's own research was to accumulate and file genealogical information about the 'surviving Aborigines and mixed bloods' of New South Wales for the purpose 'of permitting studies of heredity...to be carried out systematically'. He did not expect 'immediate results of scientific value...but the information collected and filed will be of very great importance in all future studies of the physical anthropology and physiology...and will make it possible to carry on for the next fifty years, a continuous study of the effects of racial miscegenation'.⁹

Among those anthropologists recruited from overseas, the American Hortense Powdermaker, one of the first graduates of the LSE trained by Malinowski, planned to undertake 'a general study of the sociology of the [Aboriginal] people [on Groote Eylandt] with emphasis on their kinship system and their religious and political organisation'. Interestingly for the time she wanted to obtain 'information from the women and thus get the native women's point of view on' religious and social organisation as well as on sexual problems. The 'whole study', she told the ANRC, 'will be done from the functional point of view'. Powdermaker, however, did not work in Australia rather she was sent to Lesu, New Ireland in the Territory of New Guinea. W Lloyd Warner, a graduate of the University of Chicago, was sent to Arnhem Land. Reo Fortune, a New Zealander who had done post-graduate work in psychology at Cambridge University, applied to investigate 'the social organisation, religion, mythology, magic, technology, etc of an Oceanic people combined with investigations into their psychology, special attention being paid to the study of the psychology of the native children'. He worked on Tewara Island in the D'Entrecasteaux group in the Australian territory of Papua from November 1927 to May 1928. Raymond Firth,

another New Zealander, who had trained under Bronislaw Malinowski and CG Seligman at the London School of Economics, applied to undertake an 'anthropological study of a Pacific island community... Contributions to social and economic anthropology and to the study of the inter-relation between the Melanesian and Polynesian races; data bearing on the problem of culture contact between native peoples and the European'. He subsequently worked in Tikopia. Herbert Ian Hogbin, a student at the University of Sydney, applied to do a 'complete ethnographical survey of the natives of Rennell Island, to be followed probably by further surveys in Sikiana and other islands amongst or in the neighbourhood of the Solomon Islands', which he did.

Gerhardt Laves, a student of Edward Sapir (who is considered by most present-day linguists as the most influential linguist of his generation), conducted a linguistic survey of Australian languages. Radcliffe-Brown hoped he would redress the lack of systematic research into Australian languages. He commented that various field workers had made some studies among the people with whom they worked, but none of them had Laves' thorough training. Radcliffe-Brown believed that linguistics was important enough to suggest the appointment of a lecturer in the University of Sydney, although it was not until 1944, when Arthur Capell was employed, that such an appointment was made.

Studies in psychology were considered particularly difficult as 'the native psychology is determined on the one hand by the culture, and on the other hand may be determined by the morphological and functional differences of the nervous system and other organs which distinguish the race from others'. Any investigations on this subject required an adequate knowledge of the 'native culture and should work towards the ultimate co-relation of psychological characters with inherited biological characters'. Thus research in 'native psychology must be carried out in the closest possible co-operation with the survey of the sociology and religion, linguistics and human biology'. The Australian Stanley D Porteus, at the University of Hawai'i, was brought out by Radcliffe-Brown in 1928 to conduct research in north-west Western Australia and Central South Australia. Ralph Piddington followed up on this work in 1931.

Although he emphasised the sociological aspects of anthropological investigation, Radcliffe-Brown considered the Australian Aborigine as 'a highly specialised variety of our own species [which afforded] an opportunity for very important investigations in the field of Human Biology, but the opportunity must be seized very soon, since...in a few years [the race] will be gone'. He was not overly confident in the work done

3. Help us to convince governments

by the University of Adelaide Board for Anthropological Research and was doubtful whether the 'accumulation of further data of this kind will be of much value until some progress has been made in dealing with the problem of the significance of the variations such measurements reveal'. What was needed Radcliffe-Brown concluded was a systematically planned series of investigations to be carried out over a number of years by several researchers. Until there was a chair in Human Biology in an Australian university it was unlikely that the subject would receive the treatment that it deserved.

The research field in New Guinea and Melanesia was, he declared, an 'immense one, the systematic investigation of which cannot yet be undertaken by the Council with its present resources'. There did not seem much prospect of the ANRC being able to conduct a systematic study similar to that being carried out in Australia. Nevertheless, Radcliffe-Brown recommended that in view of the importance to Australia of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, and the need for purposes of administration of a thorough sociological and linguistic survey of that region, 'it would seem that the [ANRC] would be well advised to urge upon the Federal Government the need for providing a Bureau of Ethnology for the investigations of the natives of the Mandated Territory, and of Papua, with which bureau the Council would be able to co-operate while continuing to carry out the investigations amongst the Australian aborigines'. He proposed that particular attention be paid to land tenure, economics, native foods (diet), depopulation and the influence of European contact, all matters of interest to colonial administrators. He warned that 'the special work [training colonial officials] for which the Department of Anthropology was established...cannot be carried out as it should be until a great deal more research has been done in New Guinea and Melanesia'. Nonetheless he adjudged that during his tenure much had been accomplished in the training of cadets and officers of the Territories of New Guinea and Papua in social anthropology, although the aim remained to make 'possible a scientific administration by the application of anthropological knowledge to native problems. But at present our knowledge of the languages and cultures of these areas, is woefully inadequate, not only for purposes of the administration but also for the proper training of cadets'.¹⁰

He needed to find an outlet to publish the results of all the research he had instigated. British and American Anthropological journals were of limited value and were not so focused on Australian-based research. While not explicitly stated, publishing the results of research was a useful way of informing the Rockefeller Foundation, the commonwealth and

the states of the way their funds were being used; it provided a public record of the work done and demonstrated the success of the ethnographic enterprise. It was decided that some of the Rockefeller grant would be used to fund a journal and in 1930 the first issue of *Oceania* was published (Elkin, 1970). It is still being published.

Crisis

When Radcliffe-Brown left Sydney for the University of Chicago not to return to Australia, Elkin bitterly described him as a starter and a stirrer, rarely staying in one place for long. Elkin declaimed that

a new department is founded: [Radcliffe-Brown] seeks and obtains appointment, and sets its activities on sound lines. About five years later another a new one is established; he seeks, obtains, and sets going; but about five years later moves on again, and if not to start up a department. At least to stir one up, as in the case of Chicago and, a little later, Oxford...Radcliffe-Brown excelled in this role, a very valuable and important one...The 'five year' type of office holder, the missionary type. (Elkin, 1956b, p. 239)

Radcliffe-Brown planned to leave for Europe in early 1929, hoping to get Raymond Firth as a lecturer in the department as soon as he returned from fieldwork in Tikopia, and expecting Firth succeed him at Sydney. Radcliffe-Brown expressed great confidence in Firth's abilities and saw him as 'the only qualified man with the necessary special knowledge to plan research in the regions with which Sydney is concerned and to train students for the work in that region'.¹¹ Firth, in the words of Camilla Wedgwood, combined a 'capacity for organising and administration as well as first-rate anthropology, and such people are about as rare as icicles in mid-summer'.¹²

The department was in increasing financial crisis at the time of Radcliffe-Brown's departure as the commonwealth and particularly the states had indicated they were no longer prepared to fund the department to the extent they had and were reconsidering their positions. (The amounts for each state were: Tasmania, £56; New South Wales, £577; Victoria, £425; Western Australia, £93; Queensland, £212; South Australia, £137.) Without this funding the Rockefeller subsidy for the Chair would cease. There was concern also that Radcliffe-Brown's departure might lead to the department 'go[ing] to pieces as it had done in Cape Town'.¹³

3. Help us to convince governments

Before his departure Radcliffe-Brown, aware of the dangers for the continuance of the Chair, proposed a series of reforms that would strengthen the independence of the chair. He recommended that the federal government increase its grant to £2500; the States be urged to continue 'their present contributions' until the federal government takes full responsibility; an 'institute for social and administrative anthropology' replace the Sydney department; the 'duties of this institute shall be to provide training in anthropology and colonial administration for cadets and officers of New Guinea and Papua, and to carry out and direct researches amongst the Australian aborigines and amongst the natives of New Guinea'. He envisaged that the institute could be attached to the University of Sydney in much the same way as the schools of Public Health and Tropical of Medicine; it would provide teaching for undergraduates and administrative officers, administer the Rockefeller Foundation funds, conduct research and be responsible for *Oceania*.¹⁴ The ANRC did not warm to these arguments as it was unwilling to lose control of Rockefeller Foundation funding; nor was Radcliffe-Brown supported by the University of Sydney Senate.

Aware that the department would require continued government support Radcliffe-Brown obtained support from Lord Lugard, a member of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission. Lugard is given credit for devising a new way of governing colonial subjects, what he called 'indirect rule', that is ruling them according to their own customs rather than imposing alien ones. He also asserted in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922) that colonies should be run for the benefit of their subjects and the empire as a whole. He was a significant and respected figure in colonial governance. Radcliffe-Brown informed the Australian government that Lugard (and presumably the League of Nations) would 'regard it as a very serious loss if the training of officers in Anthropology for New Guinea were abandoned', adding that the training of cadets in anthropology was one of the helpful features of the present administrative system.¹⁵ Support from Lugard was a 'strong argument' for the Australian government to do all it could, in 'spite of financial difficulties, to maintain the existence of the Department'.¹⁶ The states withdrew financial support, only New South Wales continued and its grant was greatly reduced. At the end of 1931 the Rockefeller Foundation renewed its grant to the ANRC as well continuing its subsidy of the chair for a further five years dated from 1930.

At the end of 1931, when Raymond Firth was made acting professor, the financial future of the chair continued to be unclear

and the University was reluctant to commit itself beyond the end of 1933. The commonwealth, still considering the value of a chair of anthropology, sought detailed information on the anthropology department and its training courses as part of its evaluation of anthropology's usefulness in colonial administration. Firth replied in a memorandum entitled 'On the Study of Anthropology in Australia and the Western Pacific', which in effect provided the first overview of the department since its foundation.¹⁷ Between 1926 and 1931 267 students had passed through the department in Anthropology I and of these eighty-one continued in Anthropology II. (Anthropology I was a second year subject). Anthropology I and II included teaching the 'principles of social structure with special relation to kinship grouping, law and Government, economic organisation and moral and religious institutions; general ethnography; cultures of Oceania, especially Australia, and Melanesia'. Two students had completed the MA, with two sitting the examination in 1932, and a further three to sit in 1933. Two Diplomas in Anthropology were awarded, 'one for a thesis by an officer from Papua who attended the short course', Leo Austen. Fourteen Cadets from the Mandated Territory had received training, while twelve other officers and six missionary students had attended the short course. Members of the Government Service in Papua and the Mandated Territory, officials from the Northern Territory of Australia and the British Solomons Islands Protectorate had 'taken advantage of the facilities available, while an officer from the New Hebrides Government applied for enrolment. The interest shown by the cadets and other officers in these courses had] been most satisfactory, and they claim to have derived considerable benefit therefrom in relation to their problems of administration'. A 'special short course' of one term was provided for Magistrates and other officers of Papua and New Guinea, and missionaries. In addition to the 'ordinary instruction', lectures and discussions in the application of anthropological methods to colonial administration were held.

Firth confirmed the 'programme of systematic investigation', instigated by Radcliffe-Brown, was 'being pursued' and summarised the 'present position of field research' in Australia as providing additional 'intensive studies of hitherto little-known tribes' combined with 'more general surveys of tribes over wider areas for comparative purposes'. He stated, for example, that Stanner's research in the Daly and Lower Victoria Rivers was helping close the 'gap in our anthropological knowledge of the groups between the Kimberley district and North Arnhem Land... though much will remain yet to be done in this area'. He was hopeful that 'soon it should be possible to set out a plan of systematic research'

3. Help us to convince governments

in Melanesia. The work on the 'Polynesian islands on the fringe of the Melanesian area will be taken up and completed'. These were ambitious plans given the limited number of researchers available and curtailment of research funds.

Firth emphasised that 'a closer study than heretofore might be of some practical assistance to Governments in their efforts at stemming the decline of the aboriginal population, or at all events at ameliorating their present condition'. He continued:

Intensively and extensively the study of Australian aboriginal culture has thus benefited greatly, and much of the knowledge... gained is capable of being turned to practical advantage, should it be desired, in the interests of the administration of the natives. This is well exemplified by the publications of Dr Elkin, as in his booklet *Understanding the Australian Aborigines*.

Until this expression of 'hope' there had been no expression from the Committee on Anthropology other than the certainty of extinction of Aboriginal people and the need, therefore, to record all that could before this inevitable event.

Firth was sufficiently confident about the future of the department to ask for twelve months leave to attend the London School of Economics. The problem of finding a temporary replacement who would not be difficult to dislodge was discussed by Firth and Malinowski. Any appointment had to know that it was on 'the definite understanding that he would not remain any longer' than a year.¹⁸ This would leave the position open for Firth. There was no opportunity for Camilla Wedgwood, lecturer in anthropology, because there was a very strong anti-woman element in the Senate which was further compounded by her correct belief that a woman would not be acceptable to the men of the ANRC.

Despite Malinowski's support for Hogbin, Firth considered him unsuitable to 'handle the ANRC side of things'. Firth recommended Elkin who he judged was 'equipped from the start' despite the complex situation and was, moreover, 'the best solution' in the long term. The deepening financial crisis with regard to the department's future made it essential to have someone with Elkin's administrative abilities.¹⁹ The situation deteriorated and the Senate presented Firth with an ultimatum: resign or stay. Twelve months' leave was no longer an option. The department was instructed not to enrol any new students. On hearing of Firth's imminent departure Radcliffe-Brown told Elkin that he was 'distressed that Firth is leaving...and that the fate of the department is so doubtful'.

He asked Elkin whether there was any chance that he would take over and assured him of his support.²⁰

Firth's faith in Elkin was rewarded almost immediately. Soon after he was appointed lecturer-in-charge, in 1933, Elkin enlisted the support of the British-based Australian anatomist Grafton Elliot Smith to help save the department. He was an eminent Australian scientist, well known to the Australian government as well as to the Rockefeller Foundation. Elkin reiterated Radcliffe-Brown's argument and emphasised Australia's commitment to the League of Nations and the territory of New Guinea. Under the Mandate system Australia was expected to train field officials 'for their work amongst the primitive peoples concerned'. There was no doubt, he told Smith, 'that the year's work... does make the officers more efficient and understanding in their work'. Despite their field experience 'they really know very little about the natives or the problems'.²¹ The continuance of the chair was critical if these obligations were to be met.

An assured future?

There is little doubt that Elliot Smith's connections did help but Elkin, in his later accounts, overstated Elliot Smith's personal role as well his own, thus implicitly diminishing the role of Firth and Radcliffe-Brown and ignoring that of Malinowski. During the crisis Malinowski was also in New York, based in Rockefeller headquarters, and he maintained contact with Masson. Mulvaney believes that Malinowski 'seemed assured that, if the Australian government did not renew' its funding the Rockefeller Foundation 'would have compromised. In order to maintain its Australian programme, it would have authorized the use of research funds to provide teaching on a temporary basis' (Mulvaney, 1988, p. 212). Elkin offered a more simplistic view; he was of the opinion that success lay with Elliot Smith and himself and the acceptance by the commonwealth government of the argument of 'the value of anthropology for the administration of Papua and New Guinea' (Elkin, 1970, p. 264). Firth told me that he considered Elkin exaggerated his role in saving the department: 'The Sydney department was indeed in sore financial straits, but not irredeemable, as Elkin showed. He certainly did a great deal for its survival, though he was not its sole saviour'.²²

In late 1933, the University Senate was assured by the commonwealth that it would provide a sum of £1250 per year for the next four years. With the New South Wales government's grant and the pound-for-pound subsidy from the Rockefeller Foundation, it was probable that the chair would continue in the foreseeable future. There was

3. Help us to convince governments

however no guarantee that the state government would continue to provide an annual subsidy once the Foundation subsidy ceased in 1935. In its submission to the commonwealth the ANRC indicated that £1250 per annum was insufficient; at least £2500, would 'place the department on a satisfactory footing'. The commonwealth increased its subsidy to £1750. The ANRC endeavoured to obtain the support of the Foundation through Malinowski and Masson, his father-in-law, who told the ANRC that Malinowski 'expects to persuade the Rockefeller Foundation to make good whatever may be lacking of the £2500 endowment of the Chair'.²³

The future of the department was further endorsed at the end of 1933 when the University advertised for the position, initially for five years, of professor of anthropology. There were several scenarios raised, including the possibility of Radcliffe-Brown returning to Sydney or Firth being induced to return. The selection committee, which consisted of the deputy chancellor (Sir Mungo MacCallum), the vice-chancellor (Robert Wallace), Judge Alfred Backhouse, Frank Leverrier, Professors TGB Osborn and HA Todd and Mr AJ Gibson representing the ANRC met on 19 December and reported to the senate on 21 December. The University was clear about how it wished to proceed. MacCallum was keen for an Australian to be appointed. There were nine applicants, including Elkin and one late application from the Australian CWM Hart. Hocart, Hogbin, Fortune and AA Marret, were likely candidates (Wise, 1985, p. 110); from other sources it is known that FE Williams, government anthropologist in Papua, was an applicant.²⁴ Elkin (whose referees were Elliot Smith, WJ Perry and Radcliffe-Brown) was informed on 22 December that he had the position for five years from 1 January 1934.

The executive of the ANRC clearly liked the appointment and offered their congratulations:

It seems peculiarly appropriate that you, who were the first applicant for a grant for anthropological research, and were our first fellow, should now become professor of Anthropology. Your wide practical experience of anthropological work in Australia and your connection with the Department...since its early days, will no doubt help you in the problems which arise in connection with the work of the Department, which is so closely bound up with the work of this Council. [You can be assured] of the co-operation and whole-hearted support of the Council in all matters concerning anthropology, and [be] certain that relations between the Council and yourself will be

A Cautious Silence

in future, as they have been in the past, of the happiest and most helpful nature.²⁵

The financial crisis had ended. An unexpected event threatened the whole research enterprise, however. On 25 May 1934 Henry Chapman, the ANRC's honorary treasurer, committed suicide. It was discovered that he had misappropriated between £13,700 and £15,400 from the ANRC, including the Rockefeller Foundation funds. This left the Council in much the same financial position as it was at its inception, fifteen years earlier. It was realised that without Rockefeller support the Council would 'experience very considerable difficulties in carrying on the present anthropological activities' especially in connection with payments to researchers in the field.²⁶ Fortunately, the Foundation reimbursed the ANRC and anthropological research continued:

The Rockefeller Foundation...made a further appropriation in February 1935, on a tapering basis, as follows — 1935–36, \$US15,000; 1936–37, \$US10,000; 1937–38, \$US5,000. The Foundation officials intimated that this would be regarded as a final grant...made in such a way as to enable the Council to carry over unexpended balances from one year to another...so that it would not be required to return any sum remaining at the end of the period of the grant, namely June 30 1938.²⁷

So while the chair may have been saved the newly appointed professor continued to commute between Morpeth and Sydney, spending three days per week in Sydney. In 1935 he decided that he could forego his clerical responsibilities and devote his energies full-time to the chair. In 1936 Hogbin was appointed to a permanent position, a result of extra funding from both the Commonwealth and the New South Wales government. There were, however, no Australian philanthropists to pick up from Rockefeller, as had been hoped, and the department continued to rely on government funds and internal university funding. The reduced amount enabled work to be completed and a few projects, supported primarily by Elkin, to start. Largely in response to the withdrawal of Rockefeller funding, Elkin wrote to the Minister of the Interior that he hoped that 'some day the Federal Government will be able to make some grants to the Australian National Research Council in order that it might continue the research work...hitherto...financed by the Rockefeller Foundation'²⁸. The commonwealth showed little interest in supporting research through the ANRC although it continued to subsidise the chair, as Elkin pointed out, for reasons associated with the training of colonial field officers for work in New Guinea.