

# The Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia in Historical Perspective

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia (VGS), a student-run initiative of the 1950s that sent idealistic and young Australian university graduates – including doctors, teachers, engineers, and scientific researchers – to work for the Indonesian Republic. Although less than fifty volunteers ended up serving in Indonesia through the Scheme, its cultural impact was profound: many ex-volunteers became leaders in their professions thanks in part to their experiences in Indonesia, the pool of experts who founded the academic discipline of Southeast Asian Studies in Australian universities were drawn heavily from the alumni of the VGS, and cultural organisations such as the Australian-Indonesian Association of Victoria were founded and run for decades by individuals who went through the VGS. The VGS also served as a precursor and model to other voluntary aid programs, such as the United States Peace Corps and British Voluntary Service Overseas, and is the ancestor of Australian Volunteers International. More than this, through examining the VGS and placing it in its historical context, new perspectives can be added to the historiographies of Australian-Indonesian relations, the Cold War, and post-war conceptions of Australian identity.

The thesis divides into four substantive chapters. 'Background to the Formation of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme' traces the developments within Australian society that made something akin to the VGS feasible and, to the individuals who founded it, desirable. 'The Volunteer Graduate Scheme and Australian-Indonesian Relations' provides a short history of the VGS as it operated, and shows how the VGS represents a less-familiar perspective in the history of Australian-Indonesian relations than is normally presented, in which 'world minded' Australians rather than diplomats or experts spearhead interactions with Indonesian society. 'The Cold War and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme' examines the ways in which the Cold War – and anti-communism – influenced the development of the VGS and, by extension, the ways that Australians engaged with Indonesia and understood Indonesian society and their own actions. This chapter shows that although the Cold War is fundamental to understanding the events of this period, the driving force of actions were often more complicated than a simplistic communist / anti-communist dichotomy. 'Identity, White Australia, and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme' provides two new perspectives on the formation of Australian national identity in its relationship with Asia in the Menzies era. The first section of this chapter looks at the impact of mass migration of non-English speaking European countries, and the ways in which the changes occurring within Australian society influenced the understanding Australians had of their own identity and place in the world. The second section looks at the roles that gender played in the VGS. Gender served as a complicating factor to the Scheme's pursuit of intercultural friendship, with mixed-race intimate relationships a source of anxiety and pride, at different points. This section also shows how female volunteers themselves used gender and their experiences in Indonesia to offer a critique of the position of women in Australian society.



## **HDR Thesis Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Fletcher O'Leary

/ / 2017



## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

In the time that I have spent researching and working on this thesis, a period which included nearly a year's worth of extended leave, I have received very generous help, encouragement, and guidance from many people. My principal supervisor, A/Prof. G. R. Knight, offered me significant support, material and immaterial, and took great pains to read and critique my successive drafts despite not being physically present in the country for a large part of the writing up stage. Dr. Pritchard, who was co-supervisor for this project, was able to guide me at crucial stages and provide options and perspectives on how to frame this research, for which I am eternally grateful. I am also grateful that he hounded me on my use of split infinitives proposition-ending sentences (although I maintain a genial scepticism towards his hard-line approach to grammar).

I would like to thank Laurie Wesley, who generously provided a copy of his self-published history of the New Zealand Volunteer Graduate Scheme that was unavailable in Australia, and Ailsa Zainudd'in, who permitted me access to oral history recordings and transcriptions held by the National Library of Australia before the end of a 10 year embargo due to expire in late 2016.

Final thanks go to Nicholas, who proofread the final draft (despite confessing that he thought the subject matter was 'a bit esoteric'). And, of course, thanks to L, for pretty much everything.

## **List of abbreviations**

ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASCM	Australian Student Christian Movement
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organization
NUAUS	National Union of Australian University Students
VGS	The Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia

## Introduction

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A conference, dedicated to surveying the previous fifty years of ‘Indonesia-Australian interactions’, was held at Flinders University in South Australia in 1995. Professor Herbert ‘Herb’ Feith, for decades a recognised authority on post-revolutionary Indonesian politics, focused his address to the conference on his recently deceased mentor and friend, Molly Bondan. Brilliant and passionate, she had served as President Sukarno’s chief English-language speechwriter and translator. Bondan had also served as a guide to the young Feith in his first forays into Indonesian politics. Even though their differences became quickly apparent – starting with their divergent views on Sukarno’s version of Indonesian nationalism – her impact on Feith was profound.

But Feith’s address was more than a retelling of Molly Bondan’s unique impact on his life’s work. It was also an exploration of his own earlier idealism as seen from the distance of decades. Feith had served as documentarian, analyst, and participant-observer as Indonesia moved from the democratic kaleidoscope of its National Revolution through to the authoritarianism of Sukarno’s Guided Democracy and Suharto’s New Order military regime. He had dedicated his life to furthering cross-cultural understanding, working with the world’s leading research centre on Southeast Asia at Cornell University before helping to establish the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Monash University, and later the magazine *Inside Indonesia*.

Feith stressed that he and Molly Bondan shared similar backgrounds, in so far as they were both members of a ‘Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness and political renewal’ that had sprung up in Australia after World War Two.<sup>1</sup> This was especially true of Feith who, as a student, had helped to establish

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Feith, “Molly Bondan: Pioneer, Mentor and Role Model,” in *Half a Century of Indonesian-Australian Interaction*, ed. Anton Lucas, Flinders University Asian Studies Monograph 6 (Adelaide:

an ALP Club at the University of Melbourne in opposition to the anti-Chifley, pro-communist Labour Club already in existence. It was less true, though, of Bondan, who had significant difficulties with the Labor administration due to her marriage to the Indonesian nationalist, Mohammed Bondan, at a time when White Australia was still an orthodoxy harshly enforced.<sup>2</sup> Feith also put forward the idea that he, Bondan, and their contemporaries were part of a 'continuing story': the 'Australian-Indonesian honeymoon' of the late 1940s.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, 'honeymoon' turns out to be a problematic description, but it does serve to bring into focus a new phase in Australia's relationship with its 'nearest northern neighbour'.

The relationship between Australia and Indonesia has been one that has flown in the face of any belief in geographic essentialism: the idea that due to their physical proximity, Australia and Indonesia *must* have complex, meaningful, and lasting interactions. The historical record presents a different picture entirely. Prior to World War Two, if the Dutch East Indies occupied the minds of Australia's inhabitants at all, it was as a place for occasional elite tourism and, in common with the other European colonies in Southeast Asia, as an apparently impregnable imperial bastion that stood between Australia and the dangers to the north. This illusion was dramatically shattered by the events of the World War Two and its aftermath. Within a few short years, the Netherlands Indies was first taken over by the Japanese and subsequently submerged by the forces of Indonesian nationalism, culminating in the international recognition of Indonesian independence at the end of 1949.

Feith was therefore correct when he identified the 1940s as the time that Australian-Indonesian relations began in any meaningful sense. The war had brought thousands of Indonesians to Australia, many of whom responded enthusiastically to the

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Flinders Press and the Department of Asian Studies and Languages at the Flinders University of South Australia, 1996), 8–15.

<sup>2</sup> Renate Howe, *A Century of Influence: The Australian Student Christian Movement, 1896-1996* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009); Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner, *In Love with a Nation: Molly Bondan and Indonesia* (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Feith, "Molly Bondan," 12.

Indonesian declaration of independence. Australian society was faced with industrial war on the waterfront, where militant trade unions used their considerable influence to declare Dutch shipping 'black' in support of Indonesian nationalists.<sup>4</sup> Union actions to support the new Indonesian republic continued right up to the transfer of sovereignty, while Australia also saw its first 'student riot' at a rally to condemn Dutch aggression.<sup>5</sup> These actions, however did not lead to sustained engagement with the Indonesian cause. It was a false dawn rather than a honeymoon.

Feith himself would play a lead role in promoting engagement with Indonesia. He did this by helping to establish a non-governmental scheme, which sent Australian graduates to Indonesia to fill professional roles left vacant by the departing Dutch.<sup>6</sup> Members of what became known as the Volunteer Graduate Scheme (VGS), these men and women pledged to live and work on absolutely equal terms as the Indonesian locals, and put 'a stitch or two' in the fabric of the new nation.<sup>7</sup> Established under the auspices of the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) at the beginning of the 1950s, the VGS was never as large – or as successful – as originally envisioned. It was later absorbed into the broader Overseas Service Bureau, which continues as Australian Volunteers International to this day.<sup>8</sup> Along the way, it served as an inspiration for the much better known United States Peace Corps and British Voluntary Service Overseas, which took the new model of embedded technical assistance pioneered by the VGS and grafted it on to governmental policy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1942-49* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Alan Barcan, *Radical Students: The Old Left at Sydney University* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 196–97.

<sup>6</sup> The VGS operated under several names including the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, Volunteer Graduates Abroad, the Volunteer Graduate Association for Indonesia, the Australian Scheme for Graduate Employment in Indonesia, and the Plan for the Employment of Graduates from Australia to Work as Indonesians or PEGAWAI. This dissertation refers to the Scheme uniformly as 'VGS' or 'the Scheme'.

<sup>7</sup> Betty Feith, "An Episode in Education for International Understanding. The Volunteer Graduate Scheme in Indonesia 1950 - 1963: 'Putting in a Stitch or Two'" (Master of Educational Studies, Monash University, 1984), 9.

<sup>8</sup> "The Australian Volunteer International: Our Story," *Australian Volunteers International*, accessed October 13, 2015, <http://www.australianvolunteers.com/about-us/who-we-are/our-story/>.

<sup>9</sup> Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880-1980*, Historical Studies in Education (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 176–79.

The impact that the VGS had on Australian understanding of Indonesian society was arguably unique. Indeed, only the Australian National University's Indonesia Project might be thought to have matched it. Established in the early 1960s, the Indonesia Project, with its (perceived) enthusiasm for supporting economic development to the detriment of human rights, fostered the so-called 'Jakarta Lobby' that advocated for better Australian relations with the New Order regime. Yet culturally, if not ideologically, the Project owed debts to the VGS, and even at its founding it was interacting with and absorbing the legacy of the earlier organisation. Colin Brown, of the Griffith Asia Institute, notes in his history of the Project that the economist Heinz Arndt consulted his 'Melbourne-based colleagues' about the Project in its proposal stage. During their discussions, his colleagues emphasised that 'cultural knowledge and understanding' underpins successful research. These Melbourne-based colleagues had all been involved in some way with the VGS: Herb Feith had been a volunteer, John Legge had been involved in the VGS since his time at the University of Western Australia, and Jamie Mackie was an active friend of the Scheme – though had not been a volunteer himself. Considering that Arndt never acquired more than conversational Indonesian, and recognised his own limited usefulness in Indonesian fieldwork, these words of advice no doubt ran counter to his own experiences in academia. This small interaction reveals something about the distinctive ethos that the VGS encouraged, at times in contrast to accepted wisdom. Despite these divergent philosophies, ex-volunteers and friends of the Scheme played an important role in the Indonesia Project from the beginning: Ken Thomas, who undertook two terms of service as a volunteer, became one of the first researchers attached to the Project.

These early interactions, and the legacies of earlier generations, have had a long-lasting impact on the way that knowledge has been structured and disseminated in the study of Indonesia in Australia. Robert Cribb, of the Australian National University, identified the tendency towards hegemonic ideas and 'circles of esteem' – scholars who respect each other, promote each other's works and defend each other.<sup>10</sup> The VGS was part of the foundational experiences for the first generation of

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Cribb, "Circles of Esteem, Standard Works, and Euphoric Couplets," *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (January 2005): 289–304, doi:10.1080/14672710500106408.

specialists who would occupy positions in the academic fields of Indonesian and Southeast Asian Studies in Australia. Whether it was the flypaper that first brought like-minded people together or the glue that maintained a sense of community, the intellectual and ideological offerings tied to the VGS became standard fare in the academic and cultural marketplace of ideas.

From the outside, the VGS might seem the perfect child of Feith's 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness'. Formed as the Cold War redefined world politics in a way different from that earlier envisaged by the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Organisation, it stuck true to the principles of ending unequal relationships between nations and people. To the Australian public, the Scheme made no apologies for its opposition to both the White Australia Policy and the racism that underpinned much of the global outlook of Australian society. Instead, the volunteers made explicit calls for "cranks" – the opponents of White Australia and racism marginalised by much of Australian society – to join them and make a difference.<sup>11</sup> The VGS married high idealism with practical action, making it a tantalising subject for the historian amidst the relatively barren social and political landscape of the Menzies era. Research into the VGS has the potential to impact on our understanding of the history of post-war Australian society, the ways in which white Australian society understood and integrated Indonesia into an expanding worldview, and the historical contingency of knowledge.

In an Australia that appeared to have comfortably retreated under Menzies into a conceit of its Anglo-centric past, VGS activists made a bridge into a newly independent Asia. They demonstrated that Australian women and men, part of a rising generation of university graduates with new understandings of identity and belonging, could discard the insularity of the 1950s and display genuine enthusiasm for decolonisation and Asian nationalism.

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<sup>11</sup> Ian Doig, "The Australian Scheme for Graduate Employment in Indonesia", 04.11.1954, "Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia" (1953-1958), 2, S.1433, University of Adelaide Archives.

It is not surprising that university students played this role. Thanks to the Colombo Plan, universities acted as bastions of cross-cultural interaction in the heart of Australian cities.<sup>12</sup> It was not unusual to see dozens or more students from Asia studying at any given Australian university.<sup>13</sup> Less well known is the other side to this story: the role that these universities played in exporting Australian nationals to Asia, acting as a field in which the existing rules of intercultural interaction did not apply. Both groups – Asian students in Australia, and Australian graduates in Asia – were designed to be transient, but in both instances deeper bonds were forged.

It was in this context that the VGS also seemed to signify a break with the Christian mission-based aid organisations that had been for many years the main form of interaction with the non-Western world, as well as one of the chief pillars of empire. The Victorian-era critic of empire, John Hobson, sardonically fused the moral, economic, and military interests behind imperialism in a seamless process: first the missionary, then the Consul, and last the invading army.<sup>14</sup> The race to ‘save the heathen’ was a very real factor in the imperialism of the British world-system, though the exact connection between empire and missionaries is a source of continued controversy. A 2005 additional volume of the *Oxford Handbook of the British Empire* is dedicated to examining the interaction between Empire and missions in depth, while more recently a global history of humanitarianism by Michael Barnett has provided a new understanding of how humanitarianism transitioned from the imperial to the post-colonial era.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> c.f. Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> The ‘Colombo Plan’ refers to the Colombo Plan for technical assistance for South and South-East Asia, initially an aid program for states in the Commonwealth of Nations that was expanded to include other newly independent developing states such as Indonesia. It was the flagship foreign technical assistance program that Australia contributed towards in the Menzies era. It sent foreign experts to developing nations to help with economic development, while many hundreds of foreign nationals were able to study in Australia through Colombo Plan-funded scholarships to attend Australian universities.

<sup>14</sup> John Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 204.

<sup>15</sup> See Norman Etherington, “Introduction,” in *Missions and Empire*, Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–19; Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

The VGS, with its professed internationalism and anti-racism, added new texture to this pattern. To be sure, the early volunteers were committed Christians. But they were not quite missionaries: in this time and place, these Christians rejected the sense of superiority of previous generations. Instead, their energy was funnelled into a secular organisation formed on a basis of cooperation, understanding, and equality with the non-Christians with whom they would work.

Another key element in the history of the Scheme is the interaction between an avowedly apolitical non-governmental organisation, and the broader context of the Cold War. How these young people justified their actions within the wider context of the battle against communism is a question that needs to be explored. As the diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Western nations including Australia deteriorated, participants in the Scheme had to navigate an increasingly complex situation which challenged their idealism.

This dissertation is structured around two areas of research. The first looks at the VGS and why it was organised at this particular time, in this particular form, and by these particular individuals. The VGS was not a spontaneous phenomenon, and this area of research identifies some of the themes and turning points which have had an impact on Australian-Indonesian relations. The second area of research takes the VGS as the point from which to look at two of the most significant factors in the development of politics and culture in Australia during the 1950s: the Cold War and White Australia. These two pillars of Australian foreign and cultural policy have been widely discussed, but the largely unexamined VGS is a near-perfect test subject with which existing historiographies can be affirmed, complicated, or challenged.

## **Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis has been structured thematically, with each substantive chapter dealing with a different aspect of the VGS. The first chapter covers the background to the creation of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, and contextualises its importance. Through this, it provides a historical overview of the relationship between Indonesia and Australia up to 1950, as well as that of the Student Christian Movement, the NUAUS, and the key actors in the formation of the VGS, such as Herb Feith.

The second chapter provides a history of the VGS from its inception up to the absorption of the Scheme into the Overseas Service Bureau, with a particular emphasis its impact on Australian-Indonesian relations. This history is told through individual stories and through the struggles of the organisation as a whole as it attempted to grow and sustain itself in the context of Indonesia's post-revolutionary landscape and the VGS' own shortcomings.

The third chapter examines the effect of the Cold War on the Scheme. It highlights how the Scheme was drawn in to Cold War debates, and how the Scheme operated in an atmosphere of suspicion and anti-communism. The VGS encompassed a range of Cold War experiences across two nation-states, including having two applicants blocked by the Australian Government for suspected communist sympathies. This chapter underlines the danger in presenting either communism or Western anti-communism as hegemonic and monolithic.

The fourth chapter looks at the impact of the White Australia Policy and 'identity' – taken broadly to mean national self-identification, race, and gender – on the Scheme. This final substantive chapter challenges the tendency in the existing historiography to treat post-war Australian society as passive and interest in Asia as being driven almost wholly by reaction to outside events such as decolonisation. Instead, this chapter shows the internal dynamism of Australian society pushed Australians to

engage with Asia. This chapter also examines the peculiar way in which gendered anxieties, especially around interracial marriages, were influenced by the White Australia Policy and how interracial marriages in turn became a source of conflict with the Australian Government and pride for the volunteers.

The research contained in this thesis is based largely on the collections held at the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA), complemented by material held in the archives of the University of Adelaide. The most significant of these, the records of the VGS at the NLA, contain minutes, advertisements, publications, and both personal and official correspondence. Importantly, this collection also contains numerous applications to participate in the VGS, allowing an assessment of the attraction that the Scheme held to a wider circle of individuals than the small core who actually participated in the project. Also at the NLA are the complete collection of the VGS' quarterly newsletter *Djemabatan* and the papers of Herb Feith, which contain copies of his regular letters to friends and family. These letters read almost as a diary of his adventures in Indonesia meant for those who knew him, mixed with Feith's views on social and political matters of the day. While these collections represent the bulk of the sources for this thesis, the archives of the Student Representative Council of the University of Adelaide and the newspaper digitisation project by Trove have also contributed to building up a fuller picture of the Scheme.

The decision was made early in the research process to prioritise the use of archival sources over the possible use of oral history sources. While many volunteers are still alive, with some still active in the successor projects to the VGS, the limitations of the Master of Philosophy degree (in tenure of candidature, structure, and word length) would have made it difficult to do justice to their histories. Further, what is of particular interest in this research is how the volunteers perceived the world at the time; less important is how they would reflect upon those views and experiences today. Luckily there has been renewed interest in the VGS in recent years, which will promote the preservation of oral histories in a way that this research has not done.

Throughout this dissertation, terms such as ‘white’, ‘White Australia’, ‘Indonesian’, ‘Australian’, and ‘Western’, and concepts such as ‘development’ are used – advisedly. It should be recognised that these were and are not descriptors for fixed categories or subjects, but rather have always been open to negotiation and contest based on historical context and contingency.

This dissertation stems from an interest in Herb Feith, whose remarkable life and passion for peace, justice, and intercultural understanding mark him out as a rarity in Australian history. Thanks to the time and circumstances in which he lived, Feith put his principles into action, with far-reaching impact. The VGS, though, is bigger than any one person. It came about in a specific time and place for a particular reason. Tracing the threads of the VGS reveal something deeper about the post-war history of Australian society and of Australian connections with Asia, both state-sanctioned and popular.

### **State of Studies: The Historiography of the VGS**

This dissertation focuses on the VGS, which, taken on its own, has already been the subject of historical inquiry as well as works written about by a number of participants and people directly associated with Feith himself. Their laudable enthusiasm, and the myth making (in a good sense) that it engendered, has nonetheless left significant gaps in the existing literature: how best to historicise their contributions is one of the key issues which this dissertation sets out to address. The present study aims to break new ground, as its treatment of the VGS is informed by – and is integrated within – three broader historiographical frameworks: the evolution of Australian-Indonesian relations, the impact of the Cold War on the post-war world – especially the role of aid and aid-givers to the emergent ‘Third World’, and the responses of Australia to decolonisation and the changing politics of race and gender.

There have been several attempts to analyse the VGS and its significance, dating back to the time when the Scheme itself was operating. As an organisation, the VGS attracted individuals with a belief in the history-making mission of the program, and it was these individuals who went on to create much of the organisation's historiography. The earliest monograph on the VGS is *Indonesia Face to Face* by Ivan Southall, a curiosity from 1964 written by a sympathetic outsider.<sup>16</sup> Southall was an established travel writer commissioned by the Overseas Service Bureau to write on the Scheme, and he travelled to Indonesia to interview participants and share their experiences.

This book, despite being thoroughly researched, was not intended to be an academically rigorous work. Rather, it was an opportunity to combine a travelogue with the story of the VGS. It served the purpose of opening Indonesia to casual readers, de-mystifying what was still a much-mythologised 'East' through interviews with serving and former Australian volunteers. Southall toured several places in Indonesia, quoting verbatim the Australians with whom he spoke and shedding light on the issues of intercultural relations. He aimed to present the lived experience of participants as they discussed race, marriage, money, and Indonesian society, while at the same time describing the blunt sensory otherness of the archipelago, inter alia the stench of the Jakarta canals and such tropes as 'colourful' traditional dances. As an author, he had the added advantage of being able to contextualise his experiences and interviews in Indonesia with access to the correspondence that Scheme participants sent back to Australia.

Aside from its non-academic nature, there are several elements of *Indonesia Face to Face* that make it deserving of the label 'curiosity'. It is a work most definitely of its time. Written from experiences that took place during the authoritarian Guided Democracy era, it is difficult to grasp from its account of the VGS much of the early enthusiasm and singular focus on participating in the nation-building process. By this time, Sukarno – at least in the minds of the Australian public – was tied to the ongoing

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<sup>16</sup> Ivan Southall, *Indonesia Face to Face* (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1964).

Malaysian confrontation that had soured Indonesia's international relations, and a despot and demagogue to boot.<sup>17</sup> Southall saw the VGS at a low ebb, as it was being subsumed into the Overseas Service Bureau and losing its focus on building the bridge between Indonesia and Australia. This period was a transition point, leaving Southall's experiences unlike those that would follow, but markedly different from the experiences of the participants of the preceding years.

After Southall's work, there is a gap in discussion of the Scheme until 1984, when Betty Feith, Herb Feith's spouse, submitted a Masters dissertation focused on the Scheme at Monash University.<sup>18</sup> This represents the first attempt to grapple with the VGS in an academically rigorous form. Entitled *An Episode in Education for International Understanding. The Volunteer Graduate Scheme in Indonesia 1950-1963*, it was written with the authority of the participant-observer. Betty Feith had been instrumental in establishing the Scheme, and had served as an English language instructor for the Indonesian Department for Education through the VGS.<sup>19</sup> Straddling the divide between historian and memoirist, she was able to access privately held papers and call upon the recollections of many of the people who went through the Scheme – attested to by 'Appendix A' of her work.<sup>20</sup> This appendix is a complete list of volunteers who served in Indonesia from 1951 which notes individuals with whom she had maintained contact up to the submission of the dissertation (over 60% of the total number). *An Episode* will be reproduced as part of a forthcoming release in the Herb Feith Translation Series by Monash University Publishing.<sup>21</sup>

While doing much to lay the groundwork for an understanding of the VGS, *An Episode* is not, nor does it claim to be, a complete history of the Scheme. Feith's main concern

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy Viviani, "Australian Attitudes and Policies Towards Indonesia, 1950 - 1965" (Ph.D Thesis, Australian National University, 1973), 257-69.

<sup>18</sup> Feith, "An Episode."

<sup>19</sup> Her experiences are summarised in Southall, *Indonesia Face to Face*, 175-76.

<sup>20</sup> Feith, "An Episode," 62-65.

<sup>21</sup> Ann McCarthy and Ailsa Zainu'ddin, eds., *Bridges of Friendship: Reflections on Indonesia's Early Independence and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme, 1920s-1960s* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, Forthcoming).

is the motivations of the participants – the ethos underpinning the VGS – and the issues that participants faced in matching principles with reality.<sup>22</sup> This is entirely expected for dissertation in the field of educational studies, but leads to the downplaying of any analysis of the Scheme and its relationship to the historical context in which it operated. The role of the Cold War, party politics, religion, race, and gender are all touched upon, but not all are analysed in depth. The deep connection that Betty Feith had with the Scheme also makes this a work that is reflective of the shortcomings of the Scheme but, perhaps, not critical enough. This leaves the dissertation, while academically rigorous, just as valuable as a primary source as it is as a secondary one.

The untimely death in 2001 of Herb Feith, in an accident at a rail-crossing in suburban Melbourne, renewed interest in the VGS as part of the memorialisation of the man and his work. *From Vienna to Yogyakarta* by Jemma Purdey, an Australian Research Council-funded biography of Herb Feith, was published in 2009 alongside papers for the Herb Feith Foundation and the Monash Asia Institute.<sup>23</sup> *From Vienna* dedicates significant space to the VGS, due to the formative impact that the Scheme had on Feith's life, and Purdey pays due care to the religious elements of Feith's motivations and life. However, the author did not set out to construct a history of the VGS, and by framing her analysis of the Scheme within the life story of one man, for whom the author clearly has great respect, Purdey does not critically engage with the questions outlined in this dissertation. Despite this, Purdey has produced the most comprehensive research on the VGS to date.

The VGS also appears in *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* by Agnieszka Sobocinska, though only in a superficial manner and as part of a wider narrative of

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<sup>22</sup> Feith, "An Episode," iii.

<sup>23</sup> Jemma Purdey, *From Vienna to Yogyakarta: The Life of Herb Feith* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011); Jemma Purdey, "Morally Engaged: Herb Feith and the Study of Indonesia" (17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, Melbourne, 2008), <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mai/files/2012/07/jemmapurdey.pdf>.

Australian experiences in Asia.<sup>24</sup> By placing the Scheme within the broader story of Australian aid and humanitarian interactions with Asia, Sobocinska, who is the deputy director of the Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University, demonstrates the Scheme's place as a pioneering non-governmental link between insular Australia and Asia. More recently, the VGS was the subject of a 2016 article by Sobocinska, entitled 'A New Kind of Mission: The Volunteer Graduate Scheme and the Cultural History of International Development'.<sup>25</sup> Sobocinska situates the VGS within the global history of humanitarianism, emphasising its importance to the development of the US Peace Corps and to the British Voluntary Service Overseas. This thesis approaches the VGS from a different angle, instead situating the VGS first and foremost within the specific context of Australian society of the post-war years. This has led to divergent analyses on some aspects of the Scheme. In particular, Sobocinska's argument about the minimal impact of the Cold War on the VGS is one that will be challenged in the discussion that follows.<sup>26</sup>

Although the historical literature relating directly to the VGS remains limited, the wider context in which the Scheme operated falls within a more substantial body of work, relating to Australian-Indonesian relations; the Cold War in Australia and Southeast Asia; and the politics of race, national identity, and gender in the post-war Australia. Elements of the relevant historiographies, and where the VGS may fit within these larger historiographical frameworks, will be discussed at the appropriate place in the chapters that follow. Before these concepts can be tested, this thesis first returns to the various historical threads that were woven together to create the Scheme: the tenuous relations between Australia and the Indonesian archipelago up to 1950; the development of the Student Christian Movement as an activist force in Australia's universities; and the handful of 'world minded' idealists who could envisage a new method of engagement with former colonies in post-war

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<sup>24</sup> Agnieszka Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours: Australians in Asia* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014), 105–10.

<sup>25</sup> Agnieszka Sobocinska, "A New Kind of Mission: The Volunteer Graduate Scheme and the Cultural History of International Development," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 62, no. 3 (2016): 369–87.

<sup>26</sup> Sobocinska, "A New Kind of Mission," 377.

Asia. As outlined in the chapter below, these are the pre-existing strands of Australian society which would come together to create something new.

## 1. The Formation of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme.

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The concept of a graduate employment scheme to assist the new Indonesian republic was endorsed by the national conference of NUAUS in early 1951. Its endorsement on paper was the culmination of lobbying and enthusiasm, but other factors were fundamental to ensuring that it succeeded in the context of post-war Australian society. Firstly, the birth of modern Indonesia during the course of the 1940s encouraged the search for deeper interactions such as those imagined by the VGS. Interactions shifted from being limited and peripheral to a new phase of relative intensity during World War Two, when substantial numbers of Indonesians came to reside in Australia. This led to the so-called 'honeymoon' period of the late 1940s, which saw elements of Australian society actively engage with Indonesian nationalism.

In the second place and contemporaneously, the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) provided a shared ideological background, national infrastructure, and network of influence to deliver a project of this size. Composed mostly of middle-class, liberally-minded Protestants imbued with teachings around social justice and serving the community, the ASCM had, for many years, incubated community projects in the same vein of 'practical action' as the VGS. The third and final element necessary for the success of the VGS was the specific cohort of Melbourne-based students that developed the concept of 'embedded technical assistance'. It was they, most notably Herb Feith, who were willing and able to flesh out this novel idea into a sustainable project. These three elements interacted with each other to create the conditions that made the VGS both theoretically conceivable and organisationally feasible by the beginning of 1951.

Due to the exceptional situation that the war had produced, Indonesia presented a significant challenge to Australian society's relative's insularity from Asia.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jan Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia* (North Melbourne, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008).

Following the war, Australia became a site of struggle for the Indonesian Revolution, and the events of this time have laid the foundation for an enduring and politically useful myth of Australian support for Indonesia, discussed below.<sup>28</sup> It is this period that has been referred to as the 'honeymoon' period in Australian-Indonesian relations.<sup>29</sup> This phrase, found in the works of Margaret George and Herb Feith himself, is used to describe an argument that there was an upsurge in popular sympathy for Indonesian nationalism and independence within Australia in the late 1940s, allied to support for the new international order represented by the United Nations. This is not an unchallenged view.

Nancy Viviani, the Foundation Director of the Centre for Asian-Australian relations at Griffith University, submitted a doctoral thesis in 1973, entitled "Australian Attitudes to Indonesia 1950-65", that provides plentiful information on public discussion about Indonesia during this period.<sup>30</sup> Viviani's central contention was that popular support in Australia for Indonesia, both during the independence struggle and after, was always lukewarm at best. Viviani used public opinion polls, newspapers articles, interviews with interest groups, and analysis of their published positions to reach the conclusion that support for Indonesia (or sympathy for the Indonesian position in international disputes) was neither deeply nor widely felt. Even so, it may be suggested that historically subsequent issues such as the dispute over competing claims for sovereignty of West New Guinea and the so-called *konfrontasi* coloured subsequent recollections of the less conflict-ridden period of Australian-Indonesian relations during the early years of independence.

To understand the formation of the VGS, and what contributed to the successful adoption of this concept for an aid project likewise requires a return to what the field of Australian-Indonesian relations looked like, prior to the disappointments and

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<sup>28</sup> The central focus of Lockwood, *Black Armada*.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret George, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution*. (Carlton: Melbourne University Press in association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1980), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Viviani, "Australian Attitudes."

conflicts of later years, and the changes in Australian conceptions of Indonesia and Indonesians in the lead up to 1950.

### **Australian-Indonesian interactions up to 1950**

Up to the outbreak of World War Two, the historical relations between the people inhabiting the Netherlands Indies and Australia were broadly characterised by disconnection, apathy, and marginality. Both the Dutch and the British remained firmly entrenched in their respective imperial networks. Within some strands of Australian colonial thought, the eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago, sometimes as far west as Lombok or Bali, represented the outermost boundary of the discrete continental unit of 'Australasia.' This was justified by the cartographic assertion of the 'Wallace Line', which gave this border a pseudo-scientific and seemingly natural basis.<sup>31</sup> While there were occasional calls from Australian colonists to assert white British control over all of Australasia and rule it as an 'empire of the southern seas', no concrete movements towards expansion or challenging Dutch imperial claims over the eastern islands ever arose from these visions.<sup>32</sup>

Concerns over security and national defence also played a role in Australian governmental attitude towards the Indies. The Dutch community, and its press in the Indies, were supportive of the Boer Republics during their war with the British Empire at the turn of the century, in contrast to the imperialist fervour of the Australian colonies.<sup>33</sup> The Australian Government considered the Dutch population of the Indies as a potential threat during World War One, due to the prevalence of sympathy for the German cause in officially neutral Netherlands.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Battersby, *To the Islands: White Australians and the Malay Archipelago since 1788*. (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007), 5–7.

<sup>32</sup> Battersby, *To the Islands*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Kees van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 10–11.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Overlack, "Australian Defence Awareness and German Naval Planning in the Pacific, 1900-1914," *War & Society* 10, no. 1 (May 1992): 37–38.

Despite the extent to which regular shipping services between Australia and the Indies from the late nineteenth century onward increased the *potential* for economic and social interaction, these interactions remained minimal and governed largely by the positions of the Indies and the Australian colonies in the world markets.<sup>35</sup> Two shipping lines ran regular services between Australia and the Indies, but Australian merchants and politicians showed only sporadic interest in developing deeper interactions.<sup>36</sup> In the decades after Federation, Australian business interests showed a limited understanding of, nor interest in, Indies society. A 'goodwill' tour of the Indies in the 1930s by the Manufacturers' Association of Australia ended in failure: not only did Australian industry face stiff competition from the products of other countries, the Australians were only interested in the comparatively small 'European' population of the Indies – the designation for a population of which a majority were mixed ethnicity. Australians were dismissive and patronising towards the majority and considered themselves racially distinct from most of their 'European' peers of the Indies.<sup>37</sup> During this same inter-war period, university-based intellectuals, taking the lead from overseas trends, established branches of the New York-centred Institute of Pacific Relations as well as an Australian affiliate to the British Institute for International Affairs. These groups encouraged research on regional issues, and while the implicit message of the output from the Sydney-based Institute for Pacific Relations before World War Two was that 'Australia could offer very little to the populations of Asia', the Melbourne branch of the Australian Institute for International Affairs entertained 'unprejudiced' analysis of Asian nationalism, its causes and prospects.<sup>38</sup>

While this disconnection and apathy towards the archipelago was prevalent in the populated temperate zones of the Australian continent, a different dynamic can be seen in the tropical north. Among coastal communities, pre-existing – albeit small-

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<sup>35</sup> Australia's trading relations before World War Two were defined by imperial preference and a "retreat into kinship" with other dominions of the British Empire. See Sandra Tweedie, *Trading Partners: Australia and Asia, 1790-1993* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1994), 56.

<sup>36</sup> Battersby, *To the Islands*, 51.

<sup>37</sup> George, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution*, 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, Nicholas. "Australian Intellectuals and the Image of Asia: 1920-1960." *Australian Cultural History*, no. 9 (1990): 81-84.

scale – trading networks between indigenous Australians and Southeast Asia continued after these regions were absorbed into the white colonial ‘frontier’. The tropical zones of Australia were also the geographic location in which industries such as pearling used indentured labour from the archipelago, while other industries experimented with imported ‘coolie’ labourer from Southeast Asia for intensive tropical work.

Indigenous connections with the Indonesian archipelago were well-established long before the arrival of Europeans in northern Australia. For generations, trading networks in the tropical north of the Australian continent centred on the export of trepang, a type of sea cucumber, to Southeast and East Asia. This brought with it intensive links between the people of Arnhem Land and the eastern islands of what is now Indonesia that brought about the exchange of goods, people, and ideas.<sup>39</sup> From 1860 onwards, pearling became a key industry in some coastal frontier towns such as Broome, and the success of this industry was reliant upon divers and luggers drawn mostly from West Timor. The indenture system survived Federation and the adoption of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, the centrepiece of the White Australia Policy, on the grounds that the work was considered so dangerous and undignified that it was unworthy of the white working class.<sup>40</sup> The pearling industry saw white Europeans cross borders for the recruitment of labourers, as well as lasting interactions between white, Asian, and indigenous communities in frontier towns.<sup>41</sup> While racial segregation in the community became a significant concern as the white population in the north increased in the 1920s, the enforcement of racial hierarchies was, at times, lax. Inter-ethnic sporting events in Darwin, for example, drew the ire of the Indies Government, which viewed them as subversive. Intimate relationships between indigenous Australians and indentured labourers were not uncommon, and led to the formation of racially and culturally mixed communities around Darwin, Broome and some islands of the Torres Strait.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*, 4–5.

<sup>40</sup> Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*, chap. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*, chap. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*, 110.

Elsewhere, attempts to introduce Southeast Asian labour failed in the face of race-based opposition. In Queensland there was an experimental introduction of Javanese labour to the cane fields, based on the racialist assumption that such people were naturally adapted to demanding tropical work.<sup>43</sup> Wealthy plantation owners put forward visions of establishing themselves as ‘white Rajahs’ of north Australia.<sup>44</sup> These projects failed in the face of a backlash against non-white labour, which was thought to undercut pay and conditions, and more general racial anxieties that flared into race riots targeting Javanese labourers.<sup>45</sup> These experiments became moot with the implementation of the White Australia Policy, which foreclosed the option of cheap imported labour.

The downward push of the Japanese armed forces in 1941-2, whose war against China had expanded into a war for dominance over Asia, proved the catalyst for ending the marginalisation of interactions between Australians and the people who now began to describe themselves and be described as Indonesians. This was to have a major impact on perspectives in Australian society about Australia’s ‘northern neighbours’ and on what was soon to be transformed by national revolution into Indonesia. The pace of Japanese advance in early 1942 was shocking to Western observers, Australians among them. Unable to withstand the offensive, Dutch colonial authorities evacuated to Australia and established a colonial government in exile. Indonesian civil servants, house servants, soldiers, sailors, and their families found themselves in Australia alongside Dutch officials and officers.<sup>46</sup> The colonial authorities also arranged for the transfer of political prisoners and their families from isolated prison camps in the Indies to Australia, afraid that they would collaborate with the Japanese. In all, it is estimated that between 5,000 and 10,000 Indonesians

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<sup>43</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 152; Battersby, *To the Islands*, 30–34.

<sup>44</sup> Battersby, *To the Islands*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Battersby, *To the Islands*, 32–33.

<sup>46</sup> Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 10.

found themselves in Australia, and unprecedented new cultural attachments and interactions grew from this wartime situation.<sup>47</sup>

At its most direct, the war shifted the limited interactions of Australians and Indonesians from the periphery to the centre of white Australian society, where racial hierarchies were not as clear or uniformly policed.<sup>48</sup> The war provided the space for casual encounters between Indonesians and white Australians without the need to negotiate colonial strictures, allowing bonds to form and racial equality (or at least tolerant and harmonious co-existence) to be legitimised, at least incipiently. On a larger scale, the Atlantic Charter, which proposed a new world order governed by principles of equality, national self-determination, and universal freedoms, became an important ideal as well as providing a new language which Australian activists deployed in their pursuit of a stronger bond with Indonesia.

Christian community groups in Australia played a key role in this. The Port Melbourne Methodist Church acted as patron of the men and women who arrived in Victoria: coordinating the billeting, healthcare and welfare of the newly arrived.<sup>49</sup> The *Roemah Indonesia* (“Indonesia House”) was established as a community centre for Indonesians at the Hotel Metropole in the working class, inner-city suburb of Fitzroy in Melbourne, and other *Roemah Indonesia* were subsequently established in Sydney and Brisbane. These venues played host to cultural events that were open to non-Indonesians, and represented the first time that steps towards intercultural understanding were attempted in any significant manner.<sup>50</sup>

The war years were also the first time that concern for Indonesian welfare was clearly demonstrable in the Australian community. While the bulk of this involved the provision of basic welfare, such as clothing and shelter by community groups, it also included political actions taken in response to Indonesian grievances. The political

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<sup>47</sup> Lockwood suggests 10,000 in Lockwood, *Black Armada*, 60; while official sources give a figure of 5,416 per Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 10.

<sup>48</sup> See Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*, chap. 6, for a discussion of segregation and racial politics in tropical Australia.

<sup>49</sup> Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 27–31.

<sup>50</sup> Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 34.

prisoners who had been transferred from the Dutch East Indies became a significant issue after the Civil Rights League protested their detention, and attention was drawn to them by the Communist Party's *Tribune*.<sup>51</sup> Australian trade unions also intervened in disputes between the Dutch and their colonial subjects over pay and conditions, recognising the need to support workers regardless of race.<sup>52</sup>

As the war in the Pacific entered its final years, attention turned to post-war reconstruction, the new world order that would be established with the defeat of the Axis powers, and the relationship that Australia would have with post-war Asia. In November 1944, the activist Molly Bondan (née Warner) organised a meeting between community groups to discuss the formation of an Australian-Indonesian Association, to continue the relationship that had developed between Indonesians and Australians due to the war. The association that came out of this meeting was broad-based, including the Council of Churches, the Civil Rights League, the University of Sydney and the NSW Trades and Labour Council.<sup>53</sup> Although this organisation was originally envisaged as an apolitical entity, it quickly came to adopt a political philosophy that was radical in nature. The association's statement of principles included a belief that 'to implement the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, including the principle of freedom of determination of their own future in a democratic way, is the surest guarantee of a progressive and prosperous Indonesia'.<sup>54</sup> This call to respect the principles of the Atlantic Charter was mirrored by student groups who were engaged politically on international affairs. On racial matters there was also a rapid and noticeable shift, with the aims of the association morphing from 'promoting an interest in Asia through culture and education' to 'meeting Indonesians on the same basis as it does all the people of the freedom-loving world, and on this foundation of equality ... cultivate friendly cultural, social, and trading relations'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 89–90.

<sup>52</sup> Although several skilled Indonesian workers joined the Metal Trades Union in Melbourne with the assistance of the Methodist minister Michael Freeman, the maritime unions which would have covered the largest number of "exiles" still enforced a colour bar. See Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 30; and for the rationale of the Seamens' Union, see Brian Fitzpatrick and Rowan Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia, 1872-1972: A History* (Sydney: Seamen's Union of Australia, 1981), 169–78.

<sup>53</sup> Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 111.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 114.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, 114.

The Indonesians temporarily residing in Australia were not immune from the rise in nationalist sentiment that erupted across Southeast Asia in the wake of the war. News of the 17 August 1945 Indonesian declaration of independence was broadcast by shortwave radio to Australia, and Indonesian desertions from the Dutch wartime establishment in Australia began within two days.<sup>56</sup> The Indonesian Seamen's Union, a radical nationalist trade union with many supporters in the Indonesian community in Australia, had been monitoring radio broadcasts from the Indies when the Republic was declared. The results were near instant. With the support of Australia's maritime unions, the Indonesian unionists had resolved to mutiny, and by early September 1945 several thousand Indonesian sailors were refusing to work the Dutch-controlled ships. On 23 September the unions representing Australian sailors and dockworkers joined in the conflict and declared all Dutch ships destined for the Indies 'black' – no union member would work them.<sup>57</sup> During this period, activists within the Australia-Indonesia Association acted in solidarity with the Republic, providing support and accommodation for mutineers and joining with Indonesians to incite docked crews to join the strike.<sup>58</sup> In the face of determined opposition from an alliance of their own workers, foreign trade unions, and nationalist supporters in Australia, the Dutch could not move their own forces and supplies to reassert power in the Indies for many vital months. In total, 31 Australian unions joined the strike, and the bans were retrospectively endorsed by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Eventually, a small union of coal lumpers (comprising around 30 members) was induced to break the ban in mid-1946, and Dutch ships limped out of Australian ports crewed by ex-internees and military personnel. It was 11 months after the declaration of independence that the last Dutch military ship left Australia.<sup>59</sup>

Without direct contact with Indonesians, who were rapidly deported by the Australian Government, engagement with the ongoing nationalist struggle in

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<sup>56</sup> Lockwood, Rupert, *Black Armada*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia*, 171.

<sup>58</sup> Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner, *In Love with a Nation* (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1995), chap. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Lockwood, Rupert, *Black Armada*, 218–20.

Indonesia subsided. Yet subsequent Australian responses to the so-called 'Police Actions' – attempts by the Dutch to enforce a military resolution to their fight against the Indonesian Republic without a formal declaration of war – demonstrated that there was still a sense of affinity in sections of the Australian community. Australia experienced its first 'student riot' during a rally in support of Indonesian independence in 1948, and retaliatory trade union bans were once again placed on Dutch shipping.<sup>60</sup> This student protest was a sign of a resurgent political life on campuses in Australia, with the ASCM playing a principal role.

### **The Australian Student Christian Movement: Ideology, Infrastructure and Networks**

The founders of the VGS could draw upon a rich history of student activism, turned outwards to global issues and which emphasised the role of individuals taking practical action. They were active in the ASCM, a non-denominational Christian organisation formed in the nineteenth century. The ASCM boasted global links and branches at every Australian university, as well as most other post-secondary education institutions such as teachers' training and agricultural colleges.

Activists interested in international affairs found in the ASCM a body that provided an ideological understanding of international relations, and in which individual action was celebrated as a key component of faith. The ASCM also provided an organisation in which a tradition of mission work dedicated to ending social and economic inequalities rather than proselytising could be drawn upon, even as traditional mission work was confronted with a new world order in which missionaries could no longer rely upon support from colonial and imperial regimes. On an administrative level, the ASCM was a ready-made national organisation, with branches in every state and experience in managing projects. This infrastructure meant that a program such as the VGS could move from idea to reality.

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<sup>60</sup> Barcan, *Radical Students*, 196–197. The 'Margaret Street riot' would pale in comparison to the student demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, but was a unique occurrence for its time.

More than this, former ASCM leaders were in positions of influence, and support from the ASCM could provide the VGS with credibility. Many of the ex-ASCM individuals who entered the service of the Curtin and Chifley administrations, such as the Solicitor-General Kenneth Bailey, were permanent public servants who retained authority after the 1949 election. This presented a formidable toolkit of ideology, infrastructure, and networks for the individuals who wished to build the VGS.

Founded in 1896 as the Christian Union, the ASCM drew direct inspiration from the American evangelical missionary tradition. One of its foundational principles was ‘to enlist students in the work of extending the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole world through training for home and foreign missions’.<sup>61</sup> An ancillary organisation, the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, promoted international mission work for graduates in the years up to World War One. According to the American founder of the Student Christian Movement, the mission work that Australians would undertake was ‘nothing less than the laying of secure foundations for what is destined to become a mighty Christian empire in the southern seas’.<sup>62</sup>

While the ASCM was headquartered in Sydney, the Student Volunteer Movement was located in Melbourne, and worked with existing missions to place volunteers with pre-existing denomination aid groups. Anglicans were offered positions mostly within the bounds of the British Empire in India, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. Congregationalists were directed to the Australian agents of the London Missionary Society to work in India, China, and the Pacific – also the regions in which the Baptist Foreign Mission Society operated. The Presbyterian Church had mission placements available in the New Hebrides, India, and Korea, while the Australian Methodist Mission Board operated in Fiji, Tonga, and New Guinea.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 85.

<sup>63</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 88–89; also see Christopher Waters, “Expanding the Australian Empire?: The Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, the Menzies Government and the New

The Student Volunteer Movement was dissolved in Australia in 1920, due to declining enthusiasm from graduates after World War One and an increased emphasis on building indigenous churches.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, this was not a sign that the ASCM was turning inwards. As early as 1923, the ASCM leadership was encouraging its branches to discuss controversial topics, including the White Australia Policy, the League of Nations, the place of Mandated Territories in the world, and the treatment of indigenous Australians.<sup>65</sup> The ASCM played an instrumental role in establishing politically-oriented clubs at Australian universities as well, occasionally in the face of opposition from university administrations. The first political clubs that they formed were 'Public Questions' societies at the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney, followed by Labour Clubs and League of Nations Unions.<sup>66</sup> These clubs were a vehicle through which these student activists could meet and discuss issues related to economic and political power, peace, and the international order.

The ASCM began to move out of the university during the Great Depression by promoting housing reform and direct action on social issues. Internally, it was also experiencing a greater polarisation in political discussions. The ASCM of the 1930s grappled with the effects of the Great Depression and an emerging radical social critique heavily influenced by Marxism as well as liberal Christianity. The ASCM chair in 1930 argued that 'to avoid revolution, the Christian Church must be progressive, no longer bolstering up the unrighteous society of the past'.<sup>67</sup> This belief in action and the positive role of state intervention to alleviate suffering was cemented in 1938 with the publication of *The Christian – the Light of the State*, in which the ASCM affirmed that 'as members of the State we can care for the sick and needy, educate the ignorant, and spread culture. We can abolish the robber instead of acting as Good Samaritan'.<sup>68</sup>

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Hebrides in the Late 1950s: Expanding the Australian Empire," *Journal of Religious History*, 2015, 1–3, doi:10.1111/1467-9809.12306.

<sup>64</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 157.

<sup>65</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 165.

<sup>66</sup> Barcan, *Radical Students*, 23.

<sup>67</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 201.

<sup>68</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 261.

With the advent of World War Two, the ASCM saw its ranks quickly depleted and its structures curtailed; the 1941 conference was the last time an interstate meeting could be held until after the war. While some members received conscientious objection status, many joined the war effort. Wartime restrictions might otherwise have represented a significant blow to the organisation, but instead the war presented new opportunities for those who shared a belief in state intervention for the public good. The rapid expansion of the Commonwealth bureaucracy saw a network of ASCM graduates placed in policy-making positions, especially in the Departments of the Attorney-General and External Affairs.<sup>69</sup>

As the war ended and the post-war world order was being formed, these former ASCM men – John Burton, Kenneth Bailey, William Macmahon Ball, and the Minister for External Affairs, H. V. Evatt – were all instrumental in developing Australia's response, emphasising a commitment to international arbitration, the United Nations, and an international accord to protect human rights. Macmahon Ball, a Professor of Politics at the University of Melbourne, served as goodwill ambassador to Indonesia and the Dutch East Indies during the first years of the war of independence, and advocated support for the new nationalist regimes in Asia.<sup>70</sup>

On campuses, the ASCM experienced a renaissance with the lifting of wartime restrictions and the flood of ex-servicemen into universities. The first national conference for the ASCM was held in 1946, at which the official study book envisioned the role of the church as embodying 'an ideal worldwide community beyond congregations, denominations and nations, grounded in God and man and overcoming social and economic inequality'.<sup>71</sup> The ASCM found its model of reformism challenged by a resurgent pro-communist left on campus, and ASCM activists became heavily involved in contests for control of student organisations in

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<sup>69</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 247.

<sup>70</sup> Macmahon Ball's role is discussed at length in Philip Dorling, ed., *Australia and Indonesia's Independence, Documents 1947*, vol. 1, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994), xiii.

<sup>71</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 256.

Melbourne and Sydney. At the University of Melbourne, which was a focal point for activism and conflict between communist and non-communist groups, ASCM members Herb Feith and Betty Evans were instrumental in forming an ALP Club in direct opposition to the pro-communist Labour Club.<sup>72</sup>

Internationally, churches were finding that older modes of mission work were under threat in a decolonising world. In India, missionary families were informed that their visas would not be renewed, while missionary work in mainland China was all but ended when the communists swept to victory.<sup>73</sup> As the post-war global order of decolonisation and insurgent nationalism increasingly disrupted established humanitarianism, new ideas for aid were articulated, which would match programs of action to the unfolding challenge of the 1950s.

### **Feith and the concept of 'embedded' technical assistance**

One such idea, that of 'embedded' technical assistance, found a receptive audience among ASCM activists at the University of Melbourne when it was articulated by returning delegates from an international conference. The first seeds were planted by delegates returning from the World University Service Assembly in Mumbai (Bombay). This Assembly had been marked by the debate on the future of 'student relief'. The issue at hand was what focus the organisation would have in the light of the scaling down of war-related relief efforts. The debate was between 'cold charity' – the supply of material goods for impoverished communities – and technical assistance. John Bayly, one of two Australian delegates and a student at the University of Melbourne, was approached by an Indonesian delegate, A.B. Loebis, who suggested a program of technical assistance that 'embedded' technical advisors in developing countries.<sup>74</sup> Loebis argued that the issue for international aid was not just one of

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<sup>72</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 269.

<sup>73</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 321.

<sup>74</sup> A.B. Loebis (Aboe Bakar Loebis b.1923) was a core member of Syahrir's nationalist circle during the Japanese Occupation. See John D. Legge, *Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia: A Study of the Following Recruited by Sutan Sjahrir in Occupation Jakarta*, Monograph Series 68 (Ithaca: Cornell

understanding problems, but of identifying with the communities that advisors were assisting. Upon his return to Melbourne, Bayly relayed these ideas to the student organisations that had sponsored his trip, and a committee was formed to explore the idea, with Herb Feith taking a leading position.<sup>75</sup>

Herb Feith brought to the project his own beliefs, shaped by personal experience. Born in Austria in 1930, Feith and his immediate family arrived in Australia in the late 1930s as refugees, the victims of persecution in Austria for their Jewish identity, and settled in Melbourne. Like much of the population of 'Red' Vienna, the Feiths were socialists and politically engaged.<sup>76</sup> Feith enrolled at the University of Melbourne in 1948, and became heavily involved in the Methodist church and the ASCM.<sup>77</sup> It was at the University of Melbourne that Feith studied the emerging Asian nationalist movements. This interest in Asia was nurtured by Macmahon Ball, who had travelled extensively in Asia as a representative for the Australian Government.<sup>78</sup>

Feith's intervention in propelling forward this idea of embedded development assistance was important for a combination of reasons. Born into a minority community in Austria and arriving in Australia as an outsider, Feith had come to identify strongly with Australian society and its professed egalitarianism. The idea of coming to understand and embrace a foreign culture was not idealistic for someone from Feith's background: it was lived experience. From the perspectives of a migrant with a non-British background, he could also see shortcomings. Feith's faith and politics also placed him in a rarefied position, as they developed in tandem. A socialist upbringing developed into activism in the Australian Labor Party, while his conversion to Methodism was tied to participation in the ASCM, an organisation whose emphasis on understanding current affairs and practical action to help the

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Modern Indonesia Project, 1988), especially p.53; and Aboe Bakar Loebis, "Tan Malaka's Arrest: An Eye-Witness Account," *Indonesia* 53 (April 1992): 71–78.

<sup>75</sup> The origins of the VGS are summarised in John Bayly, "Full Circle," *Djembatan*, September 1959, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 12–14.

<sup>77</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 61.

<sup>78</sup> For a full examination of Macmahon Ball's life in this time period, see Ai Kobayashi, *W. Macmahon Ball: Politics for the People* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013).

poor and dispossessed he admired. His education under the guidance of William Macmahon Ball provided a background in Asian, and especially Indonesian, politics and culture that was without peer in Australia at the time.

The idea of a graduate employment scheme to support the Indonesian republic was endorsed by the national conference of NUAUS in early 1951, after months of preparation and lobbying. With this formal endorsement, the Scheme came into existence. Many of the delegates registered interest in participating – although it would be several years before both the Indonesian and the Australian Government endorsed the Scheme as well. This chapter has laid out the background to the creation of the Scheme, and the particularly influential strands of thought, activism, and individual experience that saw the idea of a student-run, anti-racist aid organisation change from idealistic concept to realistic proposal. Perhaps the most visible element is the individuals who founded the Scheme, but they are situated within a broader community and history. Alongside these personal experiences and actions, the ASCM provided a national infrastructure, intellectual discourses, and networks of influential individuals that in turn shaped the structure and scope of the VGS. Underlying both these factors were the deeper strands of the interactions between Australian residents and the people of Indonesia. Drawing on the sense of unrealised potential in the relationships between the two societies, and thanks to the disruptions in interactions caused by World War Two, a perfect historical conjuncture arose in which the VGS could be established. It would not be a slave to these historical drivers. As the next chapter shows, the VGS quickly developed its own rhythms alongside the changing nature of Australian-Indonesian relations during the erratic years under President Sukarno.

## 2. The Volunteer Graduate Scheme and Australian-Indonesian Relations.

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When the VGS was approved by student activists in 1950, there were high hopes but few real-world models to which they could turn for inspiration. By 1962, the idea of embedded technical assistance was in good standing in Australia and internationally, but the Scheme which had demonstrated the potential of this model was nearing its end. This chapter focuses on three areas: the historical progression of the VGS from its rise to its end, understanding the composition of the Scheme, and weighing the idea of a 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness' pursuing Australian-Indonesian relations against the evidence drawn from the VGS. Underlying this focus is a reconsideration of the place that the VGS holds in the historiography of Australian-Indonesian relations.

To date, prominence has often been given to diplomatic aspects of the history of those relations, as exemplified by the approach adopted by Bob Catley and Vinsensio Dugis' *Australian-Indonesian Relations since 1945: the Garuda and the Kangaroo*.<sup>79</sup> Influenced by the policy of 'Asian Engagement' and the 'Asian Nation' politics of the early 1990s, works such as these focused on the handling of diplomatic crises that had arisen since Indonesian independence – with the implicit aim of supporting further engagement and understanding amongst Australians of their own place within Southeast Asia. The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with a similar goal, has commissioned several works on the relationship between Australia and Indonesia.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, whereas the focus in the established historiography rests largely with diplomatic crises and formal interactions between the Australian and Indonesian

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<sup>79</sup> Bob Catley and Vinsensio Dugis, *Australian Indonesian Relations Since 1945: The Garuda and the Kangaroo* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1998).

<sup>80</sup> George, *Australia and the Indonesian Revolution*; See David Goldsworthy, ed., *Facing North: A Century of Asian Engagement with Asia*, vol. 1 and 2 (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press in association with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001).

Governments, the story of the VGS provides a different and alternative perspective: the important role of ‘world minded’ non-experts in creating an informal and semi-formal mode of interacting with Indonesian society.

Alongside the formal aspects of Australian-Indonesian relations, these informal and semi-formal modes of interaction have gone on to be a key part of the myth-making of Australian society’s engagement with post-colonial Asia. As early as 1956, it was expected that the VGS would have an outsized impact: the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Tirtawinata, told the 1956 national conference convened by the VGS that ‘the smallest pebble thrown into a great sheet of water, causes ripples which eventually reach every shore. In the same way, the knowledge of this graduate scheme, the magnificent idealism behind it, is penetrating into the knowledge of people throughout the whole of Indonesia’.<sup>81</sup> This sentiment, or something similar to it, continues to affect the way in which the VGS is integrated into historical understandings of Australian-Indonesian relations.

There are three distinct phases in the Scheme’s history that will be considered in turn in this chapter: 1950-1953, 1953-1960, and 1960 onwards. During the first phase of the Scheme’s existence, the priority was making this type of aid program achievable – by making it both legible for the machinery of government and legitimate in the eyes of policy makers. The second period, in which legitimacy had been granted, involved the use of semi-formal and informal interactions to promote the project in the face of an unstable political situation in Indonesia and an increasingly sceptical Australian public. The final period saw a review of the Scheme’s ideals, and the amalgamating of the VGS into a similarly-organised aid organisation that had no specific focus on Australian-Indonesian relations. This chronology reveals some of the distinct elements of the approach that the VGS took towards Australian-Indonesian relations over the course of its operations.

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<sup>81</sup> Speech delivered by Dr. R.H. Tirtawinata, Ambassador for Indonesia, to the Volunteer Graduate Scheme Conference at the Melbourne University, 23.08.1956, “Records of Australian Scheme for Graduate Employment in Indonesia, 1950-1968” [Hereafter “The VGS Papers”], MS2601, NLA, item 21.

This chapter then turns its consideration to the composition of the Scheme. The VGS projected a sense of optimism and idealism, and this section is intended to outline some of the characteristics of the VGS as it was, rather than as it claimed to be. The division of the volunteer cohort by gender, qualifications, length of service, and where they were posted in Indonesia provides for a more complete picture of the experience of the VGS.

This background provides the background necessary to consider the idea put forward by Feith that he was part of a 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness and political renewal', and challenges whether this is an accurate representation of the character of the VGS. It shows that the VGS was not exclusively a project of the political left – nor did it draw its strength from the left. Instead, the VGS took in a diverse array of enthusiasts. This section shows that rather than being seen as an allied project, support for the VGS was noticeably absent from trade unions and civil society groups on the left.

## **The Chronology of the VGS**

### *1950 - 1953*

The period from 1950 – 1953 was marked by the need to legitimise the program, make it comprehensible to both governments, and secure a functioning structure for the Scheme under which it could operate. The Australian delegate to the World University Service conference in Bombay, John Bayly, returned to Melbourne in late 1950. By January 1951, a committee had been formed and a proposal put to the annual conference of NUAUS to sponsor a program for the employment of graduate students in Indonesia as embedded technical experts for the new republic. This proposal was approved, and a sub-committee formed under the auspices of NUAUS to further the project. Seven conference delegates also expressed interest in taking part in the program. A flurry of letters was sent to Australian and Indonesian government officials, Labor politicians, and old ASCM supporters like Professor Macmahon Ball, introducing the Scheme. The Department of External Affairs, according to the first

progress report from the Scheme's advocates, was 'enthusiastic, but non-committal so-far'.<sup>82</sup>

This opened the way for Herb Feith, who was due to depart for Jakarta in July 1951, to act as a test case for the Scheme. Feith had already found work in Indonesia with the help of Molly Bondan and her husband Mohammed Bondan, both of whom worked in the Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry. By November 1951, a second volunteer, Gwenda Rodda, had been approved by the Indonesian Ministry of Health and negotiations were underway for Ollie McMichael, a radio engineer, to take up a position at the Air Training School in Jakarta. These first volunteers were not recognised by the Australian Government, and negotiations with the Department of External Affairs revolved around a failure to comprehend the distinct purpose of the Scheme as a project for intercultural exchange.<sup>83</sup> As a consequence, the Australian Government initially declined to offer any support for the program, as it failed to see the distinction between it and the Colombo Plan that was then being established. A letter from Richard Casey, the Minister for External Affairs, to NUAUS, stated that 'in light of existing Australian commitments under the Colombo Plan and the United Nations Programme of Technical Assistance, I consider that we would not be justified in giving financial assistance to a separate [sic] scheme. Apart from the question of financial responsibility the operation of a scheme of the type proposed by Miss Evans is not free of practical difficulties'.<sup>84</sup>

Negotiations to secure government backing for the project proceeded through 1952, leading to an agreement in November which outlined the Australian Government's perspective on the Scheme. This was aided immensely by public advocacy for the VGS, which swayed members of the Australian Government to back the proposal: Menzies was said to be impressed by a presentation Don Anderson gave to an ASCM

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<sup>82</sup> Available as "APPENDIX B (i)" in Feith, "An Episode," 66.

<sup>83</sup> V. Wadsworth to R.G. Casey, 01.11.1951, "VGS Papers", item 55.

<sup>84</sup> R.G. Casey to NUAUS, 01.08.51, "VGS Papers", item 55.

conference which he attended.<sup>85</sup> The details of this agreement were set out in a letter from the Department to Don Anderson, the Chair of the NUAUS committee on graduate employment in Indonesia. In this letter, six points of agreement were established, the most significant of which mandated that the Australian Government bear some of the costs for the Scheme but also gave the government final say on which applicants were approved.<sup>86</sup>

A follow up meeting in Canberra between representatives of the Department of External Affairs and representatives of the Scheme fleshed out the Department's view further. They would not recognise NUAUS or its role in the project, on the basis that this would become a 'political' question of the government playing favourites with non-governmental organisations. The Department did, however, recognise that the Scheme would require significant interaction, both formally and informally, with the Indonesian Government. The Department stated that, while it could have no 'official knowledge' of direct contact between the Indonesian Government and the Scheme, it was happy to allow it continue. The procedure for application was then agreed in summary, including an interview with staff from the Department. Aside from scrutinising qualifications, it was decided that applicants would be assessed on 'temperament' and 'zeal'. According to the minutes of the meeting, it was felt that 'the main things are for candidates to have a realistic view of the situation to which they will be going, to be stable and balanced in outlook and yet at the same time to possess an enthusiasm and a missionary zeal'.<sup>87</sup>

The success of the negotiators in securing Departmental support for the Scheme spurred the development of more intensive operations. The previously *ad hoc* sub-committee formed in 1951 which managed the VGS was given permanency overseen by a committee of NUAUS. New officer roles were created to manage aspects of the

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<sup>85</sup> Ailsa and Din Zainu'ddin, "Cross-Cultural Marriages" in *Indonesian in Victoria from the 1950s*, Annual Indonesia Lecture Series 19 (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), 47. Ailsa Zainu'ddin was present at the conference where this occurred. Purdey gives a brief overview of the conference that convinced the Menzies Government to commit to the VGS in *From Vienna*, 118.

<sup>86</sup> L.J. Arnott to D. Anderson, 26.11.1952, "VGS Papers", item 9.

<sup>87</sup> Report on Visit to Canberra - March 1953, "VGS Papers", item 107.

Scheme, with Don Anderson appointed Chairman and Jim Webb appointed Secretary/Treasurer. Jim Webb would take responsibility for the Scheme through to its merger with the Overseas Service Bureau, and would also go on to be a key player in the formation of the Australian Council for International Development, an umbrella group for non-government international aid organisations.<sup>88</sup> Webb, a loyal ASCM member as a student and holder of multiple officer positions on campus and in the national student organisation NUAUS, served as Secretary/Treasurer of the Scheme on a voluntary basis while working for the University of Melbourne in tutoring and student welfare. The restructure gave pride of place to the Melbourne-based committee, with corresponding committees interstate feeding information and applications to their Victorian counterpart while a Jakarta-based committee of active volunteers would screen applicants and usher applicants through the Indonesian side of the process.<sup>89</sup>

By 1953 the Scheme was functional. It had received the support of the Indonesian and the Australian Governments, although L.J. Arnott from the Department of External Affairs admitted that he 'looked cross-eyed' when he was first informed of the idea.<sup>90</sup> The Australian Government financed and compartmentalised the Scheme under the Colombo Plan, which made it comprehensible to its policy-makers. Funding was available from the Australian Government for up to ten graduates to be sent to Indonesia every year. For the organisation of the Scheme itself, the committee in Melbourne established processes and managed applications in Australia, while Jakarta was home to three participants who relayed information and vetted candidates.

The first period was driven by the intent to open up Australian-Indonesian relations, and establish intercultural ties on the basis of personal friendship rather than formal diplomacy. The Australian Government, warily, gave its approval to an informal and

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Kilby, *NGOS and Political Change: A History of the Australian Council for International Development* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 32–34.

<sup>89</sup> L.J. Arnott to D. Anderson, 26.11.1952, "VGS Papers", item 9.

<sup>90</sup> Report on visit to Canberra - March 1953, "VGS Papers", item 107.

semi-formal mode of interaction in which the participants – unlike a diplomat or foreign expert – would be left to represent Australia without external supervision and with only limited support. As a mode of interaction this was unproven, but as the Scheme transitioned into a new period of confidence and recognition, it appeared to have a secure and bright future.

### *1953-1960*

1953 saw the beginning of the ‘golden age’ of the Scheme, in which the Volunteer Graduates Association was formed as a distinct entity to manage and promote the program. With its legitimacy established, the concept proven, and a new organisation, the years that followed were full of promise. During 1954/1955, the VGS sent twelve volunteers to Indonesia. While not close to meeting initial expectations, this was encouraging for the individuals who had organised the VGS with no precedents to guide them. Indeed, the following year, 1956, can be seen as the high point of the Scheme. Nine volunteers were in Indonesia on a range of projects, the only time that the number of participants came close to expectations. The Scheme received numerous requests for volunteers from different ministries in Indonesia, signalling to those who were running the Scheme that there was a place for this kind of program. 1956 also saw the first national conference dedicated to the Scheme where the Indonesian Ambassador, Dr Tirtawinata, gave an enthusiastic keynote address. Opening his speech with the observation that ‘nothing which has been done to help my country in the eleven years since we gained our independence has so appealed to the hearts and minds of my countrymen as the graduate employment scheme’, he observed that the VGS ‘is a demonstration of goodwill and understanding which has moved our hearts greatly and which we feel can do more than all the speeches of people in high positions to cement friendly relations between our two nations’.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Speech delivered by Ambassador for Indonesia, to the Volunteer Graduate Scheme Conference at the Melbourne University, 23.08.1956, “VGS Papers”, item 21.

This confidence in the Scheme manifested itself in the formation of the Volunteer Graduates Association, which replaced the NUAUS standing committee. This made the Scheme essentially self-managing and independent of NUAUS, although NUAUS was still represented on the managing committee of the new association and the Scheme continued to advertise itself as sponsored by NUAUS. This Association allowed returned volunteers to continue contributing to the program, as well as providing a way that friends of the Scheme, often family members of volunteers, could be recognised and have a say in its administration. A new constitution was adopted, and it was decided that a quarterly journal for the Scheme would be distributed to the association's members, student organisations, and individual subscribers. The journal *Djembatan* ('The Bridge') shared articles by volunteers and former volunteers on their experiences in Indonesia and the value of engaging with Indonesians on a person-to-person basis, and continued to act as a mouthpiece for the Scheme until its end. *Djembatan* spurred the expansion of the role of the VGS in Australian-Indonesian relations, to include advocating intercultural understanding within Australia. The VGS used its non-state, informal, and anecdotal understanding of Indonesian society – gained through informal and semi-formal interactions with Indonesians – to allay concerns about Indonesia and challenge ignorance. Quite effectively, returned volunteers became central players in discussions of the Indonesian state and progress in Australian-Indonesian relations: for example, an organisation as (presumably) isolated and parochial as the Horsham Methodist Guild in rural Victoria could host locally-born volunteer Gwenda Rodda to speak to them about Indonesia.<sup>92</sup>

Yet even during the period when the Scheme seemed to be meeting the expectations that had been placed on it, it was not isolated from the changing political situation in Indonesia. Rather, the Scheme interacted dynamically with the changing political scene as participants found themselves in the position of being both outside observers of the crisis in constitutional democracy in Indonesia and surrogates for Indonesian nationalism in Australia. The 1955 Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Bandung boosted Sukarno's prestige and made Indonesian nationalism a leading

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<sup>92</sup> "Spoke to Guild on Indonesia," *The Horsham Times*, October 13, 1954, 2.

voice for decolonisation and national liberation globally. Internally, however, fractures in the Indonesian body politic and society were beginning to create significant problems. Indonesia had not held elections post-independence, with seats distributed via negotiation between different parties, interest groups, and individuals. Preparations for the election of a representative parliament and constitutional assembly were significantly delayed, but were finally held in 1955 – with high hopes for a clear political direction for a country that was judged to have suffered since independence from a confusion of parties and a lack of consistent political initiatives.

As it turned out, the 1955 elections resulted in a parliament fairly equally divided between four mutually antagonistic major parties and a plethora of smaller parties and fronts, with virtually no chance for stable government.<sup>93</sup> It also saw the collapse of the pro-Western Socialist Party and a huge increase in the vote for the Communist Party, stoking concern in Australia that Indonesia would ‘go red’.<sup>94</sup> As the instability continued, military leaders asserted that they deserved a greater role in society, while Sukarno increasingly objected to the figurehead status afforded to the President and urged a return to revolutionary passion and the illiberal 1945 iteration of the Indonesian constitution.

The tone of articles in *Djembatan* reflected this political instability, but sought to allay concerns about the safety of Indonesia and the strength of Indonesian civil society. The first edition of *Djembatan* came out shortly after the outbreak of the *Permesta* rebellion in March 1957. A Central Intelligence Agency supported military uprising in the eastern islands of Indonesia against the central government, the rebellion was widely reported in the Australian press. The foreword to the first edition of *Djembatan* advised readers that:

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<sup>93</sup> Herb Feith completed his MA thesis on the 1955 elections, which was released as part of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project. See Herbert Feith, *The Indonesian Elections of 1955*, Interim Reports Series 6 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1957).

<sup>94</sup> Viviani, “Australian Attitudes,” 16.

You will probably find that our point of view is somewhat different from that expressed in the daily press and very different from those expressed by Europeans who lived in Indonesia ten years ago or earlier... Our point of view starts from the basic assumption that all men are equal, and that no one is more equal than anyone else. Apart from that basic assumption, you will find that we have many points of view – obtained by looking around us, not by looking down.<sup>95</sup>

In an article written for this same first edition on the Indonesian political scene and dated 20 June 1957, Herb Feith surveyed the way that politics had developed since the beginning of the *Permesta* rebellion. He wrote that, from a personal perspective, life continued as normal. He assured the parents of volunteers that there was no need for an Australian to worry about their safety. ‘If your letters from Indonesia are delayed’, Feith wrote, ‘don’t worry. It won’t be because anyone is afraid to write or because communications have been cut or anything like that. Almost certainly it will just be another case of administrative muck-ups’.<sup>96</sup>

Five more volunteers were sent over in 1958, a significant decline from the 1956 peak, but the Scheme continued to promote itself and stake a claim in the public consciousness on Australian campuses. The Scheme received a boost in its publicity in 1959 when UNESCO agreed to fund a special edition of *Djembatan*, which was distributed globally.<sup>97</sup> While the Scheme was being lauded internationally, however, there were signs that it had already reached its peak. Primarily, the VGS was failing in its core task of delivering volunteers to work in Indonesia – thanks to bureaucratic inertia on the Indonesian side (see below), increasing concern for volunteer safety, and economic volatility.

Yet by the end of the 1950s the Scheme had normalised the idea of embedded technical assistance, was well known in Australia and among influential groups abroad, and could rely upon a network of enthusiastic former and current volunteers

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<sup>95</sup> “Foreword,” *Djembatan*, July 1957, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Herb Feith, “The Indonesian Political Scene,” *Djembatan*, July 1957, 8.

<sup>97</sup> The front cover declares this edition of *Djembatan* to be the “Australian contribution to UNESCO-WUS seminar on the University’s role in the meeting of the Orient and Occident.” *Djembatan*, September 1959.

to support the project. Even by this stage, the small number of alumni were moving into prominence in cultural and academic fields: Ailsa Zainu'ddin was one of several volunteers who helped establish and subsequently guide the activities of the Australia Indonesia Association of Victoria, the most prolific of the Indonesia friendship associations in the 1950s and 1960s, while Herb Feith was offered a place with the Modern Indonesia Program at Cornell University in 1957.<sup>98</sup> Upon the completion of his thesis in 1959, Dr. Kenneth Vern Bailey was already a respected expert on tropical disease and famine thanks to his experiences in the Scheme. Dr. Bailey would subsequently take up work with the World Health Organisation. It also offered a new path for Australian-Indonesian relations, outside of the diplomatic sphere and geared towards public consumption and public comprehension.

### *1960 - 1963*

Despite these solid foundations, by 1960 the failure of the Scheme to live up to expectations – in volunteer numbers and impact – was being openly discussed. The changed political climate in Indonesia, where President Sukarno had assumed authoritarian power in 1959 through the implementation of his concept of ‘Guided Democracy’, was a deterrent to individuals wanting to work in Indonesia, but far from the only one. Low-level conflict with the newly created and pro-Western Malaysia, which counted Australia among its allies, and power struggles in a four-sided contest between Sukarno, parliamentary forces opposed to dictatorship, the Army, and the Communist Party created a sense of crisis in Indonesia which was relayed to Australia through an often-hostile press.<sup>99</sup> For the VGS, the more pressing issue was runaway inflation. The principle that Australians living and working in Indonesia should do so on a basis of complete equality with their local counterparts was difficult to sustain when Indonesian living standards were falling precipitously. This was keenly felt as inflation meant that the real wages of the majority of civil servants were no longer above poverty levels.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 195.

<sup>99</sup> The editorial lines pursued by Australian newspapers towards Indonesian affairs is detailed in Viviani, “Australian Attitudes,” 63–79.

<sup>100</sup> Feith, “An Episode,” 37.

Despite optimism that the Scheme would expand again and despite moves to increase publicity on campuses, the number of volunteers never returned to its 1956 peak. This was not from a lack of enthusiasm at the Australian end, where applications continued – albeit at a slower pace. The main problem was in Indonesia, where applications were not being acted upon, for both innocent and suspect reasons.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the dearth of volunteers on the ground in Jakarta to tackle bureaucratic inertia and the fading good will towards Australians meant that the VGS, despite its best efforts, was unable to place applicants.

An extended drought in volunteers of over a year was broken in May 1960, when economics graduate Lance Castles, who would co-write a book on Indonesian political thinking with Herb Feith in 1970, began his service. At the same time, some volunteers in health and medicine were arguing that the acute shortage of trained personnel in post-independence Indonesia was no longer apparent, and that the VGS may cause more harm than good by putting trained Indonesians out of work in some fields.

The National Committee decided to send a questionnaire out to all the volunteers, past and present, asking them their thoughts on the Scheme and whether it was still valuable. It also questioned whether the commitment to complete equality of wages was still viable or desirable. Only one respondent of 23 emphatically supported the introduction of an extra salary allowance for volunteers, all others either felt that it would be unnecessary or that it was against the principles of the organisation. One respondent dismissed the idea of ending equal pay, writing that ‘the whole Scheme would lose its point and uniqueness if this expression of our aim had to be dropped. Then we might as well direct enquirers to the foreign aid schemes and be done with

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<sup>101</sup> J. Gare to H. Feith, 23.05.1958, “VGS Papers”, item 35. This letter reveals some of the issues involved in handling the Indonesian bureaucracy - it was several months before the volunteers discovered that applications were being received, but filed away without action in one office. This was a recurring problem.

it'.<sup>102</sup> The majority of respondents also rejected the idea that the Scheme had made all the contributions that it could. Instead, the deterioration of relations between Indonesia and the West was seen as an important indicator of the continued value of the Scheme. Castles himself – at times the only volunteer left in Indonesia in the early 1960s – was emphatic that 'it's not yet time for us to think of withdrawing. There is no need to pull out now. If the V.G.S. could ever have achieved anything, it still can, and its need to do so is probably greater than ever'.<sup>103</sup>

It was not to be. The Scheme lost its distinctive administration in 1963, when Australian Government funding allowed Jim Webb, whose efforts had previously been divided between paid employment and volunteer work with the VGS, to work as the full-time director of the Overseas Service Bureau. This organisation had the same ethos of supporting embedded technical assistance, without the specific focus on helping Indonesia. The National Committee of the Volunteer Graduates Association accepted the offer for the Overseas Service Bureau to administer volunteering in Indonesia, which continued up to the twenty-first century through Australian Volunteering International.<sup>104</sup>

### **The Composition of the Scheme**

While the above history of the functioning of the Scheme provides valuable information on how the Scheme operated, it does not provide a complete understanding of the size and scope of the Scheme. Nor does it do justice to the ways in which the VGS represents a distinct mode of Australian-Indonesian relations. Due to the idealistic nature of the Scheme, much of the material that it produced presents a somewhat grandiose version of the program that may not reflect reality. This

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Feith, "An Episode," 26a; this debate was ongoing as late as the end of 1963. See Gwenda Rodda, "Equal Pay for Equal Work," *Djembatan*, October 1963, 3–4.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Feith, "An Episode," 27.

<sup>104</sup> See Peter Britton, "Australians Volunteer," *Inside Indonesia*, June 2002, <http://www.insideindonesia.org/australians-volunteer> for a 50-year retrospective on volunteering in Indonesia. Peter Britton was, at the time, the Chief Executive of Australian Volunteers International.

section will look at some of the finer details of the Scheme and provide some of the statistics that are known about the Scheme, to present a more rounded picture.

Betty Feith provides a list of 41 Australian volunteers as an appendix to *An Episode in Education*. This list appears to have been created from the honour roll of those who were considered 'official' volunteers under the Scheme found in issues of *Djembatan*, which began publication in 1957.<sup>105</sup> Apart from the names of volunteers active in Indonesia, this honour roll included their degrees, the jobs that they were undertaking while there, and the locations of their posts.<sup>106</sup> While 41 seems a low figure, which failed to come close to the expected number of volunteers, it represents the end result of a complex process of filtering which makes this number understandable – and suggests that numbers alone are not the key to understanding the significance of the VGS. The Melbourne-based committee for the Scheme, under its various guises (sub-committee, standing committee of NUAUS, National Committee of the Volunteer Graduates Association) managed all applications nationwide, with input from a Jakarta-based committee and, when the number and dispersal of volunteers made this impractical, through active volunteers on an *ad hoc* basis. The activists in the Scheme – ex-volunteers, Committee members, and other enthusiasts – drew up lists of potential recruits to approach about participating in the Scheme. Interstate committees of two or three students or faculty were tasked with identifying potential recruits on their own campuses. In 1956, Jim Webb submitted a report to the Executive of NUAUS in which he noted that for every 15 to 20 enquirers 'who pursue the matter in any detail', only one ever goes to Indonesia. Webb also noted that the VGS Committee was normally in contact with prospective volunteers for 12 to 18 months before their departure for Indonesia.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Feith, "An Episode," 62–65. This is close to complete, although Merle Bailey (née Day) is mistakenly double counted, as she served twice – once under her maiden name, and then after she had taken her husband's surname.

<sup>106</sup> The honour roll also included, later on, the names of participants in the Scheme from New Zealand, who began operating a parallel Scheme in the final years of the 1950s. This parallel scheme was smaller and more closely identified with the Student Christian Movement, and had a different culture and impact when compared to the Australian scheme. These individuals were not included in Betty Feith's list of volunteers. For further information on this adjunct of the Scheme, see Laurie Wesley, ed., *Celebrating the New Zealand University Students Association's Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia* (Auckland: Laurie Wesley, 2013).

<sup>107</sup> Report to NUAUS Executive Meeting, 26 - 27 May 1956, "VGS Papers", item 28.

Of those who successfully passed through this filtering process and became a volunteer, there are several distinguishing characteristics that reflect upon the Scheme as a whole. Firstly, the gender balance present in the VGS – 25 men were participants compared to 16 women – was both noteworthy and something that fits with the culture of the ASCM, an organisation which historically supported active female participation at all levels. This included both married and unmarried women, which was considered problematic and will be discussed further in Chapter four. Secondly, the background of the participants was heavily skewed towards Melbourne. Twenty-five of the volunteers held degrees from the University of Melbourne, while the next largest source of volunteers was the University of Sydney with a mere five. Armidale, the Universities of Adelaide, Queensland, and Tasmania all provided two volunteers, while the Universities of Western Australia and New South Wales produced one volunteer each. One volunteer, Adele Kerridge, held a sub-degree qualification (a Diploma in Occupational Therapy), but participated in the Scheme alongside her husband, an Agricultural Science graduate from the University of Queensland.

Thirdly, the volunteer experience of Indonesia was centred on Jakarta. Sixteen of the placements for volunteers were in Jakarta, while a further eleven were nearby in West Java. Sulawesi had four volunteers over the length of the Scheme whereas Aceh, Central Java, and East Java were home to three each. Two volunteers worked in Flores, and Sumatra and Kalimantan each had a volunteer. The kind of work that volunteers found themselves doing in Indonesia was diverse, but had a strong educational focus. The English Language Inspectorate of the Indonesian Ministry of Education seemed to be the most enthusiastic element of the Indonesian civil service about the Scheme. The Inspectorate employed the largest number of volunteers, despite the stated emphasis on technical and industrial aid: the Ministry of Education was described in the special edition of *Djembatan* as ‘our best “customer”’.<sup>108</sup> Jim Webb’s report to the NUAUS Executive Meeting held in May, 1956, reported with pride that a formal request for ‘at least’ twenty volunteers to teach English in the

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<sup>108</sup> “They Also Serve,” *Djembatan*, September 1959, 7.

Ministry of Education had been received.<sup>109</sup> Elsewhere, the number of teaching positions that volunteers could potentially fill in a single year was estimated at upwards of sixty. Sixteen volunteers served as lecturers or researchers, with a further ten teaching English. Five worked in government administration as economists or office workers. Despite the need for doctors and engineers being a priority for the Indonesian Government, only three doctors and three engineers participated in the Scheme, with the remaining volunteers finding work as a botanist, pharmacist, occupational therapist, and librarian.

In the agreement between the VGS administrators and the Department of External Affairs, it was envisaged that volunteers would be able to serve up to two terms in the Scheme, with each term being between two and three years.<sup>110</sup> Most volunteers served the expected two or three years. Beyond the average, seven served for three years or more, while eight served two years or less. One volunteer abandoned the Scheme after only a few months and returned to Australia. Contrary to expectations, only four volunteers officially undertook more than one term of service, although several did undertake other work in Indonesia outside the Scheme while one, who married an Indonesian, was denied Australian Government approval to undertake a second term as an official volunteer. One of the most significant impediments that the VGS encountered in recruiting graduates was the issue of teaching graduates being bonded to the state for a period of service after graduation. Several applications make it clear that otherwise qualified candidates could not undertake service in Indonesia due to outstanding commitments to state governments.<sup>111</sup>

The VGS never realised its promise: the Scheme was a modest enterprise, sending fewer than 50 volunteers to Indonesia over more than a decade. An aggregate experience emerges from these volunteers that fits very well with that of Herb Feith: a Melbourne-based applicant, education-focused, more likely than not to be male, and

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<sup>109</sup> Report for NUAUS Executive Meeting, 26.05.1956, "VGS Papers", item 28.

<sup>110</sup> Report on Visit to Canberra - March 1953, "VGS Papers", item 109.

<sup>111</sup> See "Judith Pocock", 07.09.1953; "Hedley Beare", 20.10.1953; "David Marchesi", 10.12.1961, "VGS Papers", item 8.

bound for Jakarta. This is not the sum total of the Scheme. As the next section will show, the experiences of Herb Feith, which have had such a significant influence on the way that the VGS has been remembered, are not universal.

### **A 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture' reconsidered**

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Herb Feith situated his life's story in an 'Australian-Indonesian honeymoon', driven by a 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness and political renewal'. This was an accurate description for Feith's own ethos and background, but the picture is far less clear if we analyse his fellow volunteers. Instead, the diverse backgrounds of the participants in the Scheme, the way that the Scheme interacted with civil society groups within Australia, and the way that the state viewed and understood the Scheme all point towards a much broader engagement with 'worldmindedness' and Australian-Indonesian relations.

From its infancy, the Scheme was not an exclusive project of the left. John Bayly, as the delegate from the World University Service conference who brought the idea of 'embedded technical assistance' to the students of Melbourne, is credited with originating the Scheme. But the second Australian delegate who took part in these early discussions, Alan Hunt, was at that time the President of the Melbourne University Liberals, and would go on to serve as Liberal Leader in the Victorian Legislative Council.<sup>112</sup> The early volunteers continue this pattern of political diversity. Of three volunteers in Indonesia at one time, Herb Feith was a member of the Australian Labor Party, as was Harry Whitfield, who referred to himself in his application as a 'convinced Socialist'.<sup>113</sup> In comparison the third volunteer, Gwenda Rodda, was active in the conservative Country Party, where she had served as the Secretary of a youth branch, in the lead up to the defeat of Chifley's Labor

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<sup>112</sup> Parliament of Victoria, "Alan John Hunt," *Re-Member (Former Members)*, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/re-member/details/1171-alan-john-hunt>.

<sup>113</sup> H.J. Whitfield to the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, n.d. [1953], "VGS Papers", item 26.

administration.<sup>114</sup> This is not unexpected for an organisation so deeply linked to the ASCM. While the ASCM had many Labor-supporting members, it was non-partisan and included members and supporters of parties of the centre and right.

The way that the Scheme interacted with civil society groups in Australia similarly challenges the idea that this was a small, left-wing intellectual group. The most enthusiastic groups which supported the Scheme during its negotiations with the Australian Government were church organisations, including the leadership of several protestant denominations.<sup>115</sup> These groups strongly favoured better relations between Australia and Indonesia, and were happy to use their considerable influence to bolster the Scheme when it was first being developed. However, the interest in the Scheme moved beyond the protestant Christian groups from which it arose: for example, the Catholic 'Food for Peace' group also supported the work that the Scheme was undertaking.<sup>116</sup> Outside the metropolitan areas, the Country Women's Association hosted volunteers to talk about their work in Indonesia and its importance to Australia.<sup>117</sup>

The position of financial supporters also reveals that this 'sub-culture' was far more widespread than appears at the outset. Sir Kenneth Bailey, the Solicitor-General, had both intellectual and familial ties to the Scheme through his son Vern Bailey, and actively sought out potential benefactors on behalf of the VGS.<sup>118</sup> Another supporter of the Scheme was the Australian High Commissioner in London, Sir Allen Brown, who donated twenty guineas sterling for the promotion of the Scheme.<sup>119</sup> These men were part of the Australian political establishment, and the fact that their names can

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<sup>114</sup> Rodda is listed as an organiser of the ominously (to modern, politically correct ears) themed 'Brightest Hawaii and Darkest Australia' themed ball. "Young Country Party Ball," *The Horsham Times*, November 26, 1948, 4.

<sup>115</sup> J. Garrett to R.G. Casey, 08.10.1951, "Recruitment of Experts - Indonesia - Volunteer Graduate Scheme", A1838/2032/5/4 PART 1, NAA.

<sup>116</sup> J. Mackenzie to J. Webb, 09.08.1958, "VGS Papers", item 3.

<sup>117</sup> G. Rodda to volunteers, 19.04.1955, "VGS Papers", item 65.

<sup>118</sup> K.V. Bailey to J. Webb, 11.10.1958, "VGS Papers", item 3.

<sup>119</sup> D. Anderson to A. Brown, 06.04.1959, "VGS Papers", item 1.

be tied to the VGS shows that the ideas behind the Scheme were attractive outside the political sub-group of Labor supporting students in higher education

One section of civil society that is absent in its support for or interaction with the Scheme is the trade union movement. While the Scheme did reach out to certain professional associations, this was on the basis of their status as professional groups for graduates, in keeping with the focus of the Scheme on individuals with particular qualifications.<sup>120</sup> In a similar vein, the correspondence that the Scheme entered into with the Australian Student Labour Federation appears to have been a courtesy extended to all major organised groups on campus – such as the ASCM and the Catholic Newman Society – rather than an indicator of partisan sympathies.<sup>121</sup> VGS volunteers were on hand to help the Labor-aligned Australian observers at the 1955 Bandung Conference (ex-ASCM member and foreign affairs expert John Burton and ANU Professor C.P. Fitzgerald), but there is no indication from the correspondence between the volunteers in Indonesia and the administrators in Melbourne that this was anything but assisting their employers in the Indonesian Government.<sup>122</sup> The only Labor Member of Parliament who seems to have taken any interest in the Scheme was Jim Cairns, who was also a founding member of the Australian-Indonesian Association of Victoria and a well-known supporter of anti-colonial nationalisms abroad.<sup>123</sup> Other Labor MPs were sceptical or outright dismissive of the endeavour. Leading Labor figure Kim Beazley Sr. dismissed the Scheme, finding it inconceivable that white Australians would be treated equally in Indonesia (let alone

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<sup>120</sup> “The Employment of Australian University Graduates in Indonesia”, n.d. [1951 or 1952], “VGS Papers”, item 55.

<sup>121</sup> For a list of who the originators of the Scheme saw as being potentially interested in their project, see the list of individuals and organisations that notice of the Scheme was sent to in “Australian Committee for Graduate Employment in Indonesia”, 18.05.1951, “Recruitment of Experts - Indonesia - Volunteer Graduate Scheme,” A1838/2032/5/4 PART 1, NAA, 296.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from H. Feith, 05.05.1955, “The Papers of Herb Feith [Hereafter “Feith Papers”]”, MS9926, National Library of Australia, Box 2.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, the contribution that Cairns made to a debate on Australia’s foreign policy in the House of Representatives, available in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (1956) retrieved from [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1956-0308/0084/hansard\\_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1956-0308/0084/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf).

want to go there), while Labor Leader Evatt withheld his support from the Scheme when he was approached.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

Judging from raw figures, the VGS appeared to be a failure. When it held its first national conference in 1956, the idealists who had worked so hard to establish the VGS could look forward to a bigger and brighter future for the Scheme. Instead, what was seen at the time as their project's first steps would later be recognised by these same individuals as its apex. The Scheme never lived up to expectations, not least because of the perceived 'instability' of the Indonesian Republic and the vagaries of Indonesian politics. The VGS put forward an innovative mode for international relations in which the personal, the semi-formal, and the informal could be used to bolster cross-cultural understanding. In doing so it explicitly diverged from high politics, formal diplomacy, and the type of foreign technical assistance that perpetuated expatriate communities and the division between locals and outsiders.

The significance of the Scheme was never intended to be measured solely by the number of volunteers that it sent to Indonesia, but by the impact that it was able to make on attitudes and culture. In this respect, the outcomes of the Scheme were mixed. Mutual distrust increased in both Indonesia and Australia, while the relations between Indonesia and Australia reached an all-time nadir during *konfrontasi*, just as the Scheme was being absorbed into the Overseas Service Bureau. However, in Australian society, former volunteers and activists played disproportionate roles in advocating for change in Australia's restrictive immigration policies and in teaching Australians about Asia, because they had a means of directly accessing international relations normally restricted to diplomats or foreign experts.

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<sup>124</sup> See telegram from H.V. Evatt to J. Webb, 19.05.1954, and letter from K. Beazley to J. Bayly, 22.12.1950, "VGS Papers", item 9.

As a model for embedded technical assistance, the United States Peace Corps and the British Voluntary Service Overseas both claimed descent from the VGS. The Scheme is very much a product of the political landscapes of Indonesia and Australia in the post-war years, and much can be learnt about these landscapes by looking in depth at aspects of the Scheme's operations. Like other aspects of Australian-Indonesian relations, it is impossible to deny the impact of the Cold War and racial attitudes on the Scheme. The impact was profound but also more nuanced than it appears on its surface, as the next chapters will show.

### 3. The Cold War and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme.

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The Cold War is central to understanding much of global history in the decades after the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945. For many who lived through this period, it served as a framework through which major political events were understood and contextualised. More than this, its effect was profound in determining what was acceptable and how individuals related to each other and to institutions. These influences were not always obvious, even to those who experienced them firsthand, nor were these influences always clearly expressed. As we shall see, the Cold War had particular resonances in Australia – resonances that were a good deal more profound and far-reaching than has sometimes been recognised.

With respect to the VGS specifically, it is possible to argue – as Agnieszka Sobocinska has recently done – that the Cold War had ‘surprisingly little impact’.<sup>125</sup> Such a position, however, is based on a narrow interpretation of what ‘impact’ means. A more robust approach is to assert the overall pervasiveness of the Cold War in the Australia and Indonesia of the 1950s and 1960s, and to recognise that those associated with the VGS could not escape it, even if they had wished. This broader view of the impact of the Cold War leads to a different conclusion: rather than having a limited impact, the Cold War is better understood as being woven into the very fabric of the Scheme through its effect on the people, the institutions, and the processes of the VGS – both in Australia and Indonesia.

In Australia, the VGS scrutinised individuals who expressed interest in the Scheme for political and moral rectitude, adopting standards that they felt were shared with the conservative Menzies administration. What they may not have known is that the stridently anti-communist Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, was personally involved in the vetting of every person seeking departmental approval under the Scheme, and that the Minister placed high importance on maintaining the Scheme’s reputation as a representative of ‘Australian values’.

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<sup>125</sup> Sobocinska, “A New Kind of Mission,” 377.

Two case studies from the selection process show the influence of the Cold War on the functioning of the Scheme in Australia. In the first, the experience of the applicant Kenneth Milne highlights the concern among those involved in the process that left-wing political leanings could cruel someone's chance to volunteer. In the second, two teachers, Allan and Wendy Scarfe, were rejected explicitly by the Minister on the grounds of their past connections to communism. Both cases demonstrate how the Scheme was shaped by the pressures towards Cold War conformity, rather than being immune to them.

Moreover, the impact of the Cold War on the VGS was not limited to Australia. Once in the country they had pledged to serve, the volunteers could not stand aloof from the ongoing debates around communism, anti-communism, and development that they encountered. Instead, volunteers had to navigate the Cold War by thought and deed, gravitating naturally towards the elements of Indonesia's political and social sphere that matched their own anti-communist and liberal-minded politics and taking a view towards development that was critically supportive of pro-Western reformers. In doing so, though, they were often fully aware of their own precarious position as outsiders in Indonesian society, and were circumspect proponents, if vocal at all, of their views. The larger question to be addressed here is whether the VGS should be considered to be part of an anti-communist, pro-Western apparatus active in Cold War Indonesia. In this respect, as will be argued, the case of Herb Feith himself is singularly revealing. But an aversion to communism and the radical left was not restricted to Feith alone. Rather, it was an institutional element of the VGS, which shaped the understanding of Indonesian society and politics that this generation gained through the Scheme. These perspectives subsequently shaped Australian academic and public discourses, in real but often unquantifiable ways.

For Australia's neighbours in Southeast Asia, of course, the 'Cold' War was anything but cold, with communist insurgencies throughout the region alongside multiple military interventions by Western powers. The Cold War had a Southeast Asian death toll in the many millions by the time of its putative conclusion with the fall of the

Berlin Wall in 1989. Recent research into the Cold War has concentrated on the role and function that the Cold War played on transnational history, influenced by the 'new' or 'post-revisionist' schools of Cold War history and the debates they have spurred.<sup>126</sup> This historiography, guided by the release of Soviet and American archives in the 1990s, has re-examined and brought to the fore the argument that the Cold War was centred in essence around the battle of ideas and beliefs.<sup>127</sup> Odd Arne Westad, from the London School of Economics, suggested in the 2000 Bernath Lecture that the most fruitful areas for further investigation in the study of Cold War history will be around the paradigms of 'ideology', 'technology', and 'the Third World'.<sup>128</sup> Westad subsequently published *The Global Cold War*, which focused on the impact of these factors on the Cold War as a global struggle between two power blocs.<sup>129</sup>

That the Cold War should have such deep implications, even in Australia, may seem counterintuitive. Communism was never more than a minor political movement in Australia. While it had enjoyed successes during World War Two, greatly expanding its membership and coming close to winning a majority at the 1945 congress of Australia's major trade union federation, these successes were halted and turned back in the latter half of the 1940s.<sup>130</sup> Although communists continued in leadership positions in many important trade unions, including those covering the mining and shipping industries, this never translated into significant political influence, signified best perhaps by the fact that the Menzies Government was only narrowly defeated in its attempt to ban the Communist Party of Australia via referendum in 1951.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, Australian political life in the 1950s was dominated by the perceived threat of communism, with the Petrov spy scandal fuelling claims of Soviet

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<sup>126</sup> Odd Arne Westad, "Introduction," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, Cold War History (Oxford: Frank Cass, 2000), 3–7.

<sup>127</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>128</sup> Odd Arne Westad, "Bernath Lecture: The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 551, doi:10.1111/0145-2096.00236. The Bernath Lecture is held by the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations.

<sup>129</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*.

<sup>130</sup> Jim Hagan, *The History of the A.C.T.U* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), 122.

<sup>131</sup> Frank Cain and Frank Farrell, "Menzies' War on the Communist Party, 1949-1951," in *Australia's First Cold War, Volume 1: Society, Communism and Culture* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 109–36.

infiltration of society. Known and suspected radicals were often under surveillance by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), which had been established specifically to fight the perceived internal threat posed by communist spies. Party members were banned from the civil service under Menzies, and many found difficulty in securing employment. Australia was firmly aligned with the United States in international affairs, and contributed soldiers to the Korean and Vietnam wars.<sup>132</sup>

In Indonesia, meanwhile, communism was woven into the nation-building myths of Sukarno. The interconnectedness of decolonisation and the Cold War was highly visible in Southeast Asia, and as Albert Lau of the National University of Singapore has argued, ‘the dissolution of colonial empires in Southeast Asia became inextricably connected to the political and ideological challenges involved in the pursuit of the global Cold War’.<sup>133</sup> For Sukarno and his acolytes, the future of Indonesia would be based on *nasakom*, an abbreviation of nationalism, religion, and communism. The Indonesian Communist Party was a mass-based party, the largest outside the China and the Soviet Union, with millions of supporters and allies in auxiliary groups such as the Peasants Front of Indonesia and the Indonesian Women’s Movement. Communists completely dominated the largest trade union federation, and as the 1950s continued were spreading their influence in the so-called *abangan* communities of Java.<sup>134</sup> This was of intense interest to the American Government: with a huge population, located on globally significant transport routes, and loaded with valuable resources, Indonesia was in many ways the most important domino in Southeast Asia.<sup>135</sup> Within Lau’s historiographical analysis, Indonesia is best understood as part of a ‘lower arc’ of Southeast Asia, where aid and influence

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<sup>132</sup> See David McKnight, *Australia’s Spies and Their Secrets*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), xiv–xvii.

<sup>133</sup> Albert Lau, *Southeast Asia and the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 3–4.

<sup>134</sup> Max Lane, *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia Before and After Suharto* (London: Verso Books, 2008), 28–41; “Abangan” is a term for the (so-called) nominal Javanese Muslims, as distinguished from the orthopractic “santri”. The “abangan” communities in the Sukarno years mostly supported nationalist or communist political movements, while “santri” favoured the Islamic political movements. See Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, C. 1930 to the Present* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012).

<sup>135</sup> H.W. Brands, “The Limits of Manipulation: How the United States Didn’t Topple Sukarno,” *Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (1989): 789.

peddling were the primary methods of waging the Cold War.<sup>136</sup> While the hand of the Central Intelligence Agency was embarrassingly revealed in rebellions against the central Indonesian Government in the late 1950s, the American Government's strategy revolved around the encouragement of anti-communist elements of the Indonesian armed forces. Though the conflict in Vietnam was increasingly prioritised as the 1960s progressed, Indonesia continued to be a key piece in American strategic thinking.<sup>137</sup>

Delving even further, the nature of aid and economic development programs during the Cold War has been a matter of significant debate. This debate is one of obvious relevance to the history of the role of Westerners (including the VGS) in aid projects in Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s, and to discussion of the volunteers as vectors for certain Western ideas and beliefs.<sup>138</sup> The Colombo Plan is the only *Australian* Cold War aid program that has received any significant analysis. Analysis of it by Daniel Oakman places the program of development support for Asian nations firmly within the context of the Cold War. Australia's contribution to the Colombo Plan was designed explicitly as an 'instrument of Australia's foreign policy fight against communism'.<sup>139</sup>

In the case of Indonesia as a recipient nation-state, the study of the role of aid during the Cold War has been relatively limited, despite acknowledgement of its importance.<sup>140</sup> While Soviet aid to Indonesia has recently received some attention, focus has remained fixed on the role of Western aid to Indonesia and the role that this aid played in consolidating the army-backed 'New Order' regime, headed by General Suharto. The New Order regime came to power in Indonesia in an 'incremental coup' between 1965 and 1967, a process which saw the replacement of Sukarno as head of

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<sup>136</sup> Lau, *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, 2.

<sup>137</sup> Frederick Bunnell, "American 'Low Posture' Policy toward Indonesia in the Months Leading up to the 1965 'Coup,'" *Indonesia* 50 (October 1990): 30-38.

<sup>138</sup> See Ragna Boden, "Cold War Economics: Soviet Aid to Indonesia," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 110-28.

<sup>139</sup> Daniel Oakman, *Facing Asia: A History of the Colombo Plan* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 2.

<sup>140</sup> Usha Mahajani, "Soviet and American Aid to Indonesia: 1948-68," in *Papers in International Studies*, Southeast Asia Series 14 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1970).

state and the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party, hitherto the army's main rivals for power. The narrative of aid as a tool of anti-communist intervention was first popularised by David Ransom's exposé of the part played by Ford Foundation specialists in securing a Western-oriented development plan for Suharto's Indonesia, originally in the press of the New Left.<sup>141</sup> More recently this has been greatly expanded by International Studies scholar Inderjeet Parmar, of the University of London, from an academically more rigorous perspective.<sup>142</sup>

The role of these 'economists with guns' in the authoritarian development strategies of Cold War Indonesia are an important historical subject, which fit into a broader narrative of American foreign interventions in support of capitalism.<sup>143</sup> However, the emphasis on securing American interests has not kept pace with new historiographies, encouraged by Westad, which look at the role of ideas and beliefs. Westad notes that there has been a wariness in ascribing ideological motivation to 'the West', and further analysis of the place of non-governmental aid and aid workers illuminates some of the under-researched elements of what was a complex ecology of interactions between Indonesia and the West.<sup>144</sup>

### **The Cold War and the VGS in an Australian context**

As an organisation that crossed borders, the VGS had to work within both theatres of the Cold War, which in turn shaped the Scheme throughout its existence. This process began, naturally enough, in the local Australian context from which the VGS arose. From its origins, the VGS was marked by the Cold War-inflected disputes among Australian university students of the post-war years. At the micro-level, many individuals involved in administering the Scheme participated in political activities as students. Some of the more forthrightly partisan activities included challenging

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<sup>141</sup> David Ransom, "Ford Country: Building an Elite for Indonesia" in *The Trojan Horse: A Radical Look at Foreign Aid*, rev. ed., (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975), 93–116.

<sup>142</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>143</sup> See Bradley Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S. - Indonesian Relations, 1960 - 1968* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>144</sup> Westad, "Bernath Lecture," 553–54.

communist stewardship of student representative councils and forming breakaway, pro-Labor ALP Clubs on campuses where established Labour Clubs were under the control of the Communist Party or their fellow-travellers.<sup>145</sup> A worldview hostile to communism and critical of Communist Party tactics was an unspoken element of the process of political maturation for these student activists of the late 1940s and early 1950s. This was not necessarily a reflexive or virulent anti-communism, but more often an engagement in the battle of ideas. This alone could be dangerous in an atmosphere of suspicion. Feith was the subject of report to the conspiracy-minded Victorian Special Branch for his 'pro-Communist' leanings, a claim that found its way into an ASIO file that was sporadically added to up to the late 1970s.<sup>146</sup> But in writing home to family and close friends, shared interest in politics was important enough for Herb Feith to conclude one of his letters by celebrating the No result in the 1951 referendum, despite his own hostility to communism.<sup>147</sup>

The political disputes of the Cold War were a normal, even casual, element of the shared lives of these student activists. Letters between the Scheme's organisers mixed official business with political gossip, such as the 'local ALP scandal' involving ALP Club members from Melbourne University, who were undermined by anti-communist Labor MPs while campaigning for a 'No' vote on the Communist Party Dissolution referendum.<sup>148</sup> Many of the activists who would shepherd the Scheme for years to come, such as Feith and Webb, maintained an interest in this campus partisanship. With this background, it is unsurprising that the influence of the Cold War threaded through one of the fundamental activities of the Scheme in Australia: the selection process for volunteers.

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<sup>145</sup> Howe, *Century of Influence*, 269–74.

<sup>146</sup> Australian Security Intelligence Organization, Central Office, "FEITH, Herbert Volume 1 F/26/79," A6119 / 3778, NAA.

<sup>147</sup> "Chainletter No. 10", 23.09.1951, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

<sup>148</sup> V. Wadsworth to H. Feith, 05.11.1951, "VGS Papers", item 55.

### *The selection process*

At face value, the Scheme encouraged the participation of all who shared common values around opposition to the White Australia Policy and a belief that the Australian people had a positive role to play in Asian affairs. In none of the literature was there any stated requirement to meet any loyalty tests or to hold a particular worldview. On the contrary, the Scheme made efforts to reach out to a variety of political, religious and social groups then active on campuses.<sup>149</sup> Despite this outreach to other organisations, it is clear from internal documents that there was a particular type of person who would be selected for the program: until the very end of the 1950s, all volunteers had also been ASCM members.<sup>150</sup>

The VGS National Committee was not the lone arbiter of the selection process. The Department of External Affairs made it clear that, if the Scheme was to have government support, the Department would have a continuing role in the selection of candidates. In these discussions, the responsibility of the Scheme to screen applicants against a test was established. This test focused on ill-defined characteristics such as temperament, maturity, and stability, but as Webb reported to the rest of the committee:

We must not think that E.A. approval is automatic. In general E.A. will accept Indonesian judgment on the technical qualifications and the utility of the candidate ... but make no mistake, the Department could and would reject someone they felt to be unsuitable.<sup>151</sup>

The report went on to state that rejections would be unlikely 'if we do our job properly'.

It is unclear from this report whether there was agreement between the VGS and the Department over whether a person with ties to communism, existing or former,

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<sup>149</sup> J. Webb to M. Schneider, 06.07.1955, "VGS Papers", item 23.

<sup>150</sup> Sobocinska, "A New Kind of Mission," 381.

<sup>151</sup> Report on Visit to Canberra - March 1953, "VGS Papers", item 107.

would pass this test. Alongside this lack of clarity, it was uncommon for politics to be explicitly raised by individuals in their application, which left the meaning of these specific requirements opaque. The silence around politics was not total, however, and in some instances the politically-charged atmosphere in which the Scheme functioned was exposed.

### *Case Study: Kenneth Milne*

In September 1955, the Scheme's chief administrator Jim Webb corresponded with representatives of the Scheme at the University of Western Australia, regarding the application of Kenneth Milne. A teacher in the process of completing a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Australia, Milne was an atypical applicant: originally from Scotland, Milne had attended university as a mature age entrant after several years as a merchant seaman.

Milne made it clear in his application that he was one of those 'White Australia cranks' to which the Scheme was advertised. Where Milne was asked to identify his hobbies, activities, and past associations with Asian affairs, he declared that in the merchant service 'I had charge of 24 Chinese firemen with whom I was on friendly and equal terms as far as the job permitted. The restrictions were not of my making'.<sup>152</sup> With four years of teaching experience, including to non-English speaking 'New Australians', and a commitment to anti-racism, Milne appeared to be a good candidate for the Scheme. However, the other documents from his application reveal politically-charged hesitation about his suitability to take part in the VGS.

The letter of recommendation that he received from the Guidance and Appointments Officer at the University was impersonal, unsure of what qualities were desired, and prevaricating in its assessment. The university official wrote that 'Milne is quiet and

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<sup>152</sup> Preliminary Questionnaire, K. M. Milne, n.d., "VGS Papers", item 81.

reserved, is said to be an idealist, and one who is very conscious of the inequality of opportunity amongst the various races in the world', before concluding:

He impresses me as being a mature individual and I know of no evidence of emotional instability. I do not know what his political views are, or whether you are concerned with them. All I can say is that to my knowledge he does not play any part in the political activities at this University.<sup>153</sup>

Ostensibly favourable, this report on Milne could be read ambiguously, and stopped well short of a whole-hearted endorsement.

Subsequently an interview was conducted with Milne by a WA-based representative of the VGS. He reported back that Milne:

appears to have no racial prejudices, is keen to learn Indonesian, speaks a little Dutch and is left-wing politically. He seemed a little worried lest the fact that he was for one year a member of the Labour Club should preclude him from selection. He assures me that he has had no political affiliations for 2 years. I am practically convinced (though I cannot be sure) that he is not the subversive, mischief-making type.<sup>154</sup>

After this reassurance, Milne was approved by the National Committee. Webb produced a report on Milne that quoted Boyce's letter and detailed all the correspondence that had occurred regarding his application, finishing with the encouragement that 'his papers should go to Embassy within a fortnight to 3 weeks, unless my account of the difficulties scares him off, which it shouldn't do!'<sup>155</sup>

Nonetheless, something evidently happened to cool Milne's enthusiasm. We do not know if this was political or personal. We do know, however, that Milne never followed through with his application. A letter – apparently unanswered – from Webb to Milne inquiring if he was still interested in the Scheme, dated 20 April 1956, is the last piece of correspondence on file. Even so, Milne's application, when contextualised

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<sup>153</sup> G. Scarlett to J. Webb, 21.09.1955, "VGS Papers", item 81.

<sup>154</sup> P. Boyce to J. Webb, 26.09.1955, "VGS Papers", item 81.

<sup>155</sup> Re K. Milne, n.d., "VGS Papers", item 81.

by other applications, reveals several important elements how the VGS navigated the political atmosphere of the 1950s in its selection process.

Firstly, the VGS approached the sensitive subject of political views and affiliations under the umbrella of 'motivation'. This catch-all could be used to assess both the actions and the thought processes of potential volunteers, while only obliquely connected to politics. It was clear to the WA representative of the Scheme what kind of information was being sought: as well as needing to reassure the Scheme's administrators that he did not hold racist views, Milne's political views would also be subjected to their assessment. For Milne's admittedly left-wing political views to be an acceptable motivation required them to be framed in a manner that emphasised his maturity and stability – something also done by other, successful, applicants. John Gare, who worked as an aeronautical engineer in Jakarta from 1957 to 1960, received a letter of recommendation from the Master of Wesley College at the University of Sydney. The letter stated, in part, that Gare 'is not aggressive in his ideas and, from a number of discussions in which he has taken part with other students in my presence, I would say he has a well-balanced, sane outlook on the world which confronts him'.<sup>156</sup>

Despite the circumspect approach of the Scheme, Milne as an applicant was aware that his politics would be subject to scrutiny. He chose to directly confront his problematic politics by distancing himself from his previous membership in the Labour Club and assuring the interviewer that he had not been politically active for several years. Other applicants made similar moves to reassure the administrators of the VGS that they were free from dubious political affiliations. Some are quite clear, such as the application of Neale Hunter, who wrote that he 'had little to do with the active side of student affairs, having been quite content to follow their progress and

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<sup>156</sup> Letter of recommendation from B.R. Wyllie, 16.08.1954, "VGS Papers", item 26.

observe the results'.<sup>157</sup> Others, like Ann McDonald, hedged their bets. McDonald wrote that as a student she was a member of both the Labour and the Liberal Clubs.<sup>158</sup>

A popular method applicants used to remove uncertainty about their political trustworthiness, which Milne did not, was to stress their reliability and good standing in the community – and by doing so, emphasising their respect for the values that Menzies asserted as central to middle-class citizenship and the Australian 'way of life'.<sup>159</sup> The letter of recommendation written on behalf of Ann McDonald, who served as a volunteer in the English Language Inspectorate in Jakarta, is an explicit example of this emphasis on standing. The letter of recommendation reads, in part, that 'She comes from a good Christian family which is highly respected in this City [Armidale]. Ann is a true reflection of a carefully studied upbringing and a happy home life'.<sup>160</sup> Political exclusion, though, was not a universal anxiety – if idealism was matched by activity. For example, Harold Whitfield, who would lecture at Gadjadara University from 1954-1957, wrote in his application letter to the Indonesian Government that he was a 'convinced Socialist'.<sup>161</sup> While this may have been alarming, and disqualifying in what was a pervasively anti-communist atmosphere, Whitfield was an individual who could rely on his personal connections. He was known to members of the committee through his activities in the ASCM and the ALP Club at Melbourne University, and could assure public servants that his socialism was of an acceptably moderate and technocratic, rather than radical, type.

While the internal dynamics of the VGS may have supported, however tentatively, a 'broad church', this was not true of the Department of External Affairs. In fact, the reputational risk of sending the 'wrong' representatives led the Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey, to claim that he personally vetted every appointment under the Scheme. In one case, the Minister stepped in and vetoed two applicants who had

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<sup>157</sup> Application of Neale Hunter, n.d., "VGS Papers", item 8.

<sup>158</sup> Application of Ann McDonald, n.d., "VGS Papers", item 26.

<sup>159</sup> John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), 22–24.

<sup>160</sup> Letter of recommendation from D.D.H. Fayle, 19.02.1954, "VGS Papers", item 26.

<sup>161</sup> H.J. Whitfield to the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, n.d. [1953], "VGS Papers", item 26.

been approved by both the VGS and the Indonesian Government. He defended this as the common-sense refusal to send self-confessed communist sympathisers, but he caused a minor controversy to erupt on Australian campuses around anti-communism and the nature of academic freedom, with the VGS at its centre.

### *Case Study: The Scarfes*

In many respects, husband and wife Allan and Wendy Scarfe were typical applicants to the VGS. The Scarfes possessed many of the characteristics of successful applicants: they lived and worked in Melbourne, where they had both studied at the University of Melbourne, held teaching qualifications, were from a Protestant background, and were in their mid-twenties. More than being typical, the Scarfes appeared to be *ideal* candidates for the Scheme. They were experienced teachers, yet were neither bonded to nor tenured in the school system. Furthermore, they were undertaking language instruction through the Indonesian Section of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, two of only ten in their class.<sup>162</sup> As perhaps an ultimate advantage, the Scarfes were on friendly personal terms with staff from the Indonesian consulate in Melbourne. In addition to all this, the Scarfes applied at a time of significant expansion for the Scheme, when those willing and able to teach were in high demand. The head of the English Language Inspectorate in Indonesia had only recently requested many more teachers, while the administrators of the VGS were in the process of promoting the Scheme in teaching publications.<sup>163</sup>

Allan Scarfe's application reveals that the Scarfes were interested in working in Java teaching English either at a teachers' college or secondary school.<sup>164</sup> Allan Scarfe also mentioned their acquaintance with Djismoen, Head of the Economic Section of the Indonesian diplomatic corps in Australia, and his assistant Salim, 'both of whom

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<sup>162</sup> Indonesian Class, n.d., "VGS Papers", item 5.

<sup>163</sup> Letter from an unidentified member of the Jakarta Committee to J. Webb and the Melbourne Committee, 23.11.1955, "VGS Papers", item 109; Handwritten notation to Minutes of the Jakarta Executive, 07.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 118.

<sup>164</sup> Both Allan and Wendy Scarfe would have applied separately, but only Allan's correspondence is contained in the VGS Papers.

indicated that we might mention their names, and if necessary they will vouch for our sincerity and our ability to make friendships with Indonesians'.<sup>165</sup> Scarfe finished his application letter with the explanation of his and his wife's motivation, writing:

We would like to get to know Indonesia and its people, and so play our small part in improving relationships between our countries, and in improving the understanding of the peoples of Australia and Indonesia have of each other. To us it seems that the future of the human race lies with Asia.<sup>166</sup>

His application was swiftly reviewed by the Melbourne Committee and by the Jakarta Committee of active volunteers.

The minutes of the meeting in Jakarta record that the committee members were enthusiastic about the application, writing 'We are very pleased about them, and will be on the mark to "guide" their applications as soon as they reach Djakarta'.<sup>167</sup> Following their approval of the Scarfes for participation in the Scheme, Jim Webb wrote to the Indonesian Embassy with a short letter of whole-hearted support, declaring that both were 'extremely interested in people and possess a large measure of idealism. At the same time they have carefully considered the problems associated with working in Indonesia as volunteers, and are aware of what this will involve'.<sup>168</sup>

With a warm letter of support from Webb and two Embassy staff willing to vouch personally for them, the Scarfes seemed justifiably confident that they would be quickly approved by the Indonesian Government, as indeed they were. However, their plan to work in Indonesia came to a shuddering halt when the Department of External Affairs rejected their application, with no explanation given, in a letter dated 6 April 1956.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Application Letter of Allan Scarfe, 08.11.1955, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>166</sup> Application Letter of Allan Scarfe, 08.11.1955, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>167</sup> Minutes of Fourth General Meeting VGS in Indonesia, 19.11.1955, "VGS Papers", item 109.

<sup>168</sup> J. Webb to B.A. Ubani, 09.12.55, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>169</sup> L.J. Arnott to A.J. Scarfe, 06.04.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

While no reason was given by the Department for the rejection of the Scarfes, the couple immediately suspected that it was due to Wendy Scarfe's previous association with the Communist Party. They were close, but the reason cited in ministerial correspondence was more mundane: '[Allan] Scarfe was once a member of the 'Labour Club' at Melbourne Univ. – which is a Com. [communist] show'.<sup>170</sup>

Jim Webb wrote a letter to the Department asking that a meeting be arranged in Canberra for Mr. and Mrs. Scarfe to plead their case. Conscious of the political background to the rejection, Webb restated that the Scheme vouched for the sincerity of the couple and attempted to resolve the issue with officers from the Department. After unofficial meetings in Melbourne with the Scarfes and departmental officers, he implored the Department to trust the committee. 'These applicants', Webb wrote:

are well known to this Committee and we are fully acquainted with the details of their past activities. From our intimate knowledge of these two graduates we are convinced that their desire to work in Indonesia is based on genuine humanitarian and non-political considerations.<sup>171</sup>

The Department refused to discuss the matter, reminding Webb that 'it is a matter of principle that we deal direct with individuals concerned in correspondence regarding applications for appointments'.<sup>172</sup> The Scarfes had already written to the Department requesting either a review or the reason why their applications were refused, to which the departmental officer responsible replied obliquely that they were 'unable to give that [the Indonesian] Government an unqualified recommendation for your employment in their administration'.<sup>173</sup>

In all subsequent communications on the matter, Webb reaffirmed the right of the Australian Government to refuse applicants. Allan Scarfe advised the Indonesian Embassy of the situation in a letter, writing that:

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<sup>170</sup> Department of External Affairs, "Scarfe, Mr and Mrs A," 1956, A10302, 1956/1026, NAA, 5.

<sup>171</sup> J. Webb to the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, 02.05.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>172</sup> D. Dexter to J. Webb, 10.04.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>173</sup> L.J. Arnott to A.J. Scarfe, 03.05.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

My wife and I feel extremely indignant that our characters and reputations should be condemned in this off-hand way, without our even being told the charges against us, so that we might defend our professional ability or our personal integrity.<sup>174</sup>

Allan Scarfe offered to work for the Indonesian Government outside the Scheme. Shortly afterwards, Ubani from the Indonesian Embassy advised Webb that not only would it be difficult for the Indonesian Government to offer employment to any person rejected by External Affairs, it would be 'especially difficult if it is on political grounds', and that nothing further could be done.<sup>175</sup>

Despite Webb falling into line with the Department, other individuals involved in the Scheme were restive. The committee in Jakarta discussed whether rejection by External Affairs meant that the Scheme should cease assisting the Scarfes, who had attempted to bypass the Australian Government by seeking employment directly in Indonesia. A handwritten notation to the 7 July minutes from the Jakarta committee, dated 15 July, advised Webb that:

At the above meeting there was a lot of discussion, mainly between Herb [Feith] and Thel [Thelma Rungkat, née Ashton] about whether the V.G.S. could have anything more, officially, to do with the Scarfes after EA had confirmed their rejection. Officially or unofficially however, Thel is making enquiries on their behalf from her 'mates' in PPK [the English Language Inspectorate].<sup>176</sup>

After the rejection of the Scarfes, applicants would need to be screened by the Australian Government *before* they were forwarded to Jakarta or any placements offered, protecting against future embarrassment.<sup>177</sup> Ultimately, the Scarfes were not able to find work in Indonesia without the blessing of the VGS. They instead went to England shortly after their rejection. Years later, they both found work in India, where they taught at rural schools and practiced similar principles of intercultural understanding, community-based assistance, and nation-building that the Scheme

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<sup>174</sup> A.J. Scarfe to B.A. Ubani, 16.05.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>175</sup> B.A. Ubani to J. Webb, 24.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 22.

<sup>176</sup> Handwritten notation, Minutes of the Djakarta Executive, 15.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 118.

<sup>177</sup> B.A. Ubani to J. Webb, 24.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 22.

claimed as its own – within a framework that substituted Gandhian community development for Indonesian nationalism.<sup>178</sup>

In the small world of student activism, the Scarfe affair continued to resonate after they had left Australia. The Scarfes had written to their local Member of Parliament, Jim Cairns, who was identified with the left-wing of the Labor Party.<sup>179</sup> Cairns raised the matter with the Leader of the Opposition, H. V. Evatt, and with the Minister. While there was no discussion of the Scarfes in Parliament, Richard Casey responded to Cairns' letter, replying that 'we could not, in any circumstances, send abroad at Government expense, and sponsor to a foreign Government for employment in its service, people in whom we did not have the fullest confidence', before finishing with his own assessment of the Scheme: 'we cannot afford to accept any risk that its high reputation might be impaired'.<sup>180</sup> Evatt, meanwhile, used the Scarfe case at a meeting of the University of Sydney ALP Club as an example of the threat to academic freedom that the anti-communist atmosphere of the 1950s had created. This caused the case to ricochet again around the networks of student activists.

The President of NUAUS, David Teplitzky, wrote to Webb that Evatt had 'made some remarks deploring University students' talk of concerns with academic freedom, while in actual fact working on another basis'.<sup>181</sup> Teplitzky then recounted that Evatt had (incorrectly):

alleged that a man and his wife, who wanted to be science teachers, had been rejected on the say-so of information, or as he put it "as the National Student Body with headquarters in Melbourne", on the grounds that the wife had been a member of the

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<sup>178</sup> Their experiences working as teachers in India is told in Allan Scarfe and Wendy Scarfe, *A Mouthful of Petals: The Story of an Indian Village* (London: William Heinemann, 1967).

<sup>179</sup> As an indication of his relationship with the non-Labor left, during his first election campaign, Cairns welcomed the support of the communist-dominated Melbourne University Labour Club (membership of which had caused the Scarfes to be rejected in the first place), despite red-baiting from the sitting anti-communist MP. See John Cain, "Being Young in the Cold War," in *Arguing the Cold War* (Melbourne: Red Rag Publications, 2001).

<sup>180</sup> Department of External Affairs, "Scarfe, Mr and Mrs A," 2.

<sup>181</sup> D. Teplitzky to J. Webb, 24.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

Communist Party six years ago. From remarks that he subsequently made it appeared that Dr. Evatt was incensed about the matter.<sup>182</sup>

The NUAUS President suggested that Webb consult Hansard and prepare an explanatory statement for Evatt and the Sydney ALP Club President. Lest his sympathy be seen to lie with communists, Teplitzky added his own opinion to the situation, suggesting 'attention should be drawn to the actions of the persons concerned who must have raised this matter with their local member, since I believe this clearly proves their unsuitability for going to Indonesia'.<sup>183</sup>

The President of NUAUS was not the only student officer to contact Webb after hearing about the Scarfe case. The President of the University of Western Australia Student Guild, Kim Paterson, advised Webb that a motion to investigate the matter had been passed by the Guild's governing council at its August meeting.<sup>184</sup> A month later, Paterson wrote to the NUAUS President that the Guild Council 'feels very strongly on this matter', and recommended that he approach the Menzies Government to request that the reasons for selection or rejection be made available to the candidates and the VGS National Committee.<sup>185</sup> Webb replied firmly, responding that the Australian Government 'not surprisingly' reserved the right to assess applicants independent of the VGS. He also, perhaps disingenuously, criticised the furore that had erupted over their rejection, suggesting that 'in the absence of any detailed official statement we can only speculate as to the reasons for the decision, as presumably a number of people have done'.<sup>186</sup>

The experience of the Scarfes was exceptional, but reveals what could be invoked in the process for sending graduates to Indonesia. Departmental officials – with the backing of the Minister – stepped in after the committee and Indonesian Government both approved applicants whom they considered to be subversive. The VGS acted as a

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<sup>182</sup> D. Teplitzky to J. Webb, 24.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>183</sup> D. Teplitzky to J. Webb, 24.07.1956, "VGS Papers", item 101.

<sup>184</sup> K. Paterson to J. Webb, 14.09.1956, "VGS Papers", item 28.

<sup>185</sup> K. Paterson to D. Teplitzky, 24.10.1956, "VGS Papers", item 28.

<sup>186</sup> J. Webb to K. Paterson, 10.10.1956, "VGS Papers", item 28.

middle man between idealistic young people and a government that judged suitability for participation through a political lens. It is little wonder that Richard Casey, a fervent anti-communist, would perceive the Cold War at play in the Scheme. Some of his thought processes can be discerned from a contemporaneous diary entry which quoted approvingly US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. The Soviets, according to Dulles, had not given up their aim to 'Communist the world', but instead had shifted emphasis to a 'Trojan horse' stratagem of subversion.<sup>187</sup> Throughout the first half of 1956, when he vetoed the Scarfes, Casey was in part preoccupied by a question of greater significance: whether to resume diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union after the Petrov spying scandal.<sup>188</sup>

At the same time, the VGS experienced pressure from within its student community base to take a stand against what was seen as an attack on academic freedom, leaving it balancing between pressures from above to accept the government's final say and from below to assert independence. The VGS had arrived at a formula for assessing applications which emphasised certain characteristics – motivation, temperament, and zeal – that were difficult to objectively determine, but which could restrict radical applicants and aligned very closely with the middle-class values that were then being promoted by the Australian Government.

The application process intentionally filtered out those whose values or temperament diverged too radically from those espoused by the ASCM. It filtered out, either deliberately or unintentionally, individuals from a communist background or with communist sympathies. The reverse is also true: the Scheme's ASCM boosters sought like-minded individuals to recruit, leaving a space within the organisation for a reflexive anti-communism to establish itself. This would play a role in shaping the interactions that these individuals would have in Indonesia, as they shifted Cold War arenas to the fierce divisions of Indonesian society.

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<sup>187</sup> Richard Casey, *Australian Foreign Minister: The Diaries of R. G. Casey, 1951-60*, ed. Millar (London: Collins, 1972), 231.

<sup>188</sup> Casey, *Australian Foreign Minister: The Diaries of R. G. Casey, 1951-60*, 236.

## **Crossing the Bridge: Australians in Cold War Indonesia**

The above evidence shows that Cold War anxieties influenced the VGS and its activities in Australia. But these same individuals also engaged with, or their actions were influenced by, the Cold War debates within Indonesia around the clash of communism and anti-communist or pro-Western values. The general, and perhaps inevitable, position in which the VGS found itself contributed to this: as the Scheme developed, the relationships that it formed skewed naturally towards anti-communist and pro-Western forces in Indonesia. This created a particular view of Indonesian society, and the remedies for its ills, that affirmed the anti-communist preconceptions that volunteers brought with them. At the same time, the volunteers recognised the precariousness of their own position, and emphasised the Scheme's distinction from 'pushful' foreigners and the 'propaganda work' with which the latter were associated.

### *The Scheme and Cold War politics in Indonesia*

The volunteers placed great value on their difference from other aid organisations and perceived foreign interference in Indonesia. Opposition to being publicly linked to the Colombo Plan – which was expressly aimed at bolstering new nation-states against communism – reveals the vexed nature of their position in the Cold War. Responding to a request that the Scheme be incorporated into Colombo Plan promotional publications, the Jakarta Committee responded that they were 'not against the Colombo Plan as such', but that only publicity of the 'most modest and carefully thought out kind' was of any value. They also noted that one of their departmental liaisons in Canberra 'shares with us a horror of blatant American-and-Russian-type propaganda'.<sup>189</sup> Even promoting the principles of the Scheme within Indonesia was viewed as a hazardous venture, with the potential that the Scheme be considered another power play in the Cold War. Webb echoed the complaints of volunteers that their wage equality with locals wasn't better known, but conceded

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<sup>189</sup> H. Feith to Melbourne Committee, 09.02.1953, "Feith Papers," Box 1.

that any more publicity 'may cause difficulties such as the scheme being seen as some new form of interference backed by powerful propaganda.<sup>190</sup>

This did not mean that the VGS could sit on the sidelines of the Cold War. The VGS operated at a time of heightened concern over communism in Asia, and it is unsurprising that the Scheme engaged with these anxieties within its membership. The Scheme's creators were aware of the connection between aid and the Cold War, even as they distanced themselves from it. In one pamphlet, not intended for general circulation, the Scheme positioned their project within the debates induced by the Cold War among Australians, explaining that:

Although strong Asian nations could threaten our security, it is now felt to be necessary that we help them in their problems lest they turn to Communism for the answers, as China did. A Communist Asia is the greater of two evils. So many feel that 'Aid to Asia' is forced upon us as an antidote to Communism.<sup>191</sup>

The pamphlet explicitly stated the Scheme had different aims than this, but to pursue their objectives the volunteers worked closely with anti-communist Indonesian organisations that shared the sense of Christian and student affinities which underpinned the Scheme. The Indonesian Student Christian Movement, who were the intellectual and spiritual counterparts to the ASCM and had a strongly anti-communist leadership, helped locate suitable accommodation for visitors from Australia. Like its Australian equivalent NUAUS, the Indonesian National Student Union, had severed ties with the International Union of Students due to its pro-communist sympathies.<sup>192</sup> The VGS also maintained connections with anti-communist American philanthropic foundations, which led to questions over its independence and purpose. The volunteers were familiar with American philanthropic foundations from a university setting; one of the chief academic proponents of the Scheme,

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<sup>190</sup> J. Webb to I. Newman, 05.04.1956, "VGS Papers", item 38.

<sup>191</sup> 'Asia, Australia, and Christianity, 1953, "VGS Papers," item 126.

<sup>192</sup> J. Webb to Melbourne Committee, 30.01.1955, "VGS Papers", item 2.

Macmahon Ball, had received significant funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to further his research on Asian nationalism.<sup>193</sup>

Of these foundations, the volunteers had the most interactions with the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, which itself serves to highlight the complexities of Cold War influences on actors in Indonesia at the time. Established to support research into Indonesian society, especially the influence of nationalism and communism, the Modern Indonesia Project was funded by the Ford Foundation after a minor 'red scare' against the Ford Company during the most strident period of the McCarthyist witch-hunts.<sup>194</sup> It was recently described by International Studies scholar Inderjeet Parmar, as 'a program of surveillance (albeit academic) and study of the power structure, political movements, and decision makers in Indonesia'. This, in turn, 'fostered, constructed, developed, and consolidated a nascent modernizing knowledge network' that was aligned with the state apparatus, American academia, and the anti-communism of US foreign policy.<sup>195</sup> But many of the scholars of the Modern Indonesia Project held views on American foreign policy and the appropriateness of Western interventions in Southeast Asia contrary to anti-communist orthodoxies, best exemplified by the key figure in the Modern Indonesia Project's creation, George Kahin. While much of the funding for his research came from ostensibly 'anti-communist' sources, such as the Ford Foundation criticised by Parmar, Kahin personally and professionally held a dissenting view on American foreign policy. This dissent stretched back to his time as a student, when he refused to distance himself from his supervisor, Owen Lattimore, after Lattimore was accused of being partly to blame for the 'loss' of China. His critique of American foreign policy would go on to develop into active participation in the Vietnam War 'teach-ins' of the 1960s.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> James Cotton, "Rockefeller, Carnegie, and the Limits of American Hegemony in the Emergence of Australian International Studies," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12, no. 1 (2012): 174–75, doi:10.1093/irap/lcr017.

<sup>194</sup> John Bresnan, *At Home Abroad: A Memoir of the Ford Foundation in Indonesia 1953 - 1973* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 7–9.

<sup>195</sup> Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, 131.

<sup>196</sup> George Kahin, *Southeast Asia: A Testament* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), chap. 5 and 9.

The volunteer's interactions with the Cold War were not restricted to associating with individuals with decisive views; they also gave their own views on the subject. Writing for an Australian audience, the articles in *Djembatan* show that volunteers were openly derisive of communists and the radical left. The fallout from the campaign targeting the continuing Dutch presence in Indonesia that began in late 1957 in response to the West New Guinea crisis, and which culminated in the expulsion of Dutch citizens and the nationalisation of Dutch businesses, were the subject of several letters admonishing the left. One volunteer, John Gare, explained that the populist phase of the campaign felt like being in the middle of a 'classical communist revolution cunningly superimposed on the West Irian programme', though he was reassured by Indonesian friends that government moves to control industry were temporary 'and not taking over or even yet nationalisation'.<sup>197</sup> Another volunteer, Thelma Rungkat, was even more blunt. Her view was that the 'Commos' used the Dutch 'for hanging on the grievances of ordinary people'. The communists 'were smart enough' to use anti-Dutch sentiment to take over businesses in the capital, Rungkat went on, and 'nearly got away with it completely'. Finishing with confidence, Rungkat declared 'I don't really think the Communists would be so strong it wqs [sic] not that they are so clever at making much of national causes when it suits them'.<sup>198</sup> Beth and Ray Mylius expressed concern at the power struggles between the Islamic political movement *Masyumi* and the communists, proffering that 'many suggest hesitantly that perhaps a more authoritarian kind of government will be required to handle the country's affairs'.<sup>199</sup>

While they were contemptuous of the communists, the volunteers were also quick to understand the resonance of the communist message. In June 1958, volunteer Elaine Wills reported further on the crisis involving West New Guinea. Dismissing the Soviet media tag 'spearhead of Australian and Dutch aggression in South East Asia' given to West New Guinea, Wills nevertheless offered reasons why 'this would not be hard for Java to believe', before listing perceived Australian and Dutch transgressions.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> John Gage, "The Indonesian Situation," *Djembatan*, June 1958, 5.

<sup>198</sup> Gage, "The Indonesian Situation," 8.

<sup>199</sup> Gage, "The Indonesian Situation," 7.

<sup>200</sup> Elaine Wills, "West New Guinea (Irian Barat)," *Djembatan*, June 1958, 8.

Volunteer Harry Whitfield's review of the best-seller *The Ugly American* criticised those who refused to understand the popularity of communist politics: 'Our standard of living is higher than the Russians; but are we offering our standard of living to the Asians? The motivation of a foreign policy is as important as its execution'.<sup>201</sup>

Compared with their expressed views on communism, the position volunteers held on Westernisation were far more mixed. The volunteers were openly contemptuous of the 'expatriates' and 'foreign experts' that they saw as the last vestiges of the colonial order. In the UNESCO-funded edition of *Djembatan*, Betty Feith excoriated and mourned in equal part Westerners who fell into 'the trap' of joining the tenaciously still-existent 'old colonial way of life'.<sup>202</sup> Whitfield was simply excoriating. These foreigners 'lived the expatriate life of drinking, gossiping, and immorality resulting from boredom and the gradual disintegration of exiles with no care for the society around them'.<sup>203</sup> But Betty Feith also acknowledged part of her own role, and that of other volunteers, involved exposing Indonesian minds to Western thought and tradition. Wondering whether language classes were being used by Indonesians as a 'means to an understanding of Western thought and tradition', she expressed sureness that they would 'keep open minds' and if learning English 'gives access to new currents of thought and makes possible interchange of views and values, then surely it is worthwhile'.<sup>204</sup>

Other volunteers were unwilling to concede that missionaries or Western education were negative influences, even when presented with the views of locals. In the conclusion of her report on West New Guinea, Elaine Wills informed her readers that she had tried to offer a balance of her own impressions and the views of the locals, with one exception. She had censored the views of the locals on missionary work, she wrote, 'because I've heard nothing but criticism of it', but 'didn't see a village under

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<sup>201</sup> Harry Whitfield, "Book Review: The Ugly American," *Djembatan*, March 1959.

<sup>202</sup> Betty Feith, "Colonialism Dies Hard," *Djembatan*, September 1959, 18.

<sup>203</sup> Harry Whitfield, "The Old Ways and the New," *Djembatan*, October 1959, 19.

<sup>204</sup> Betty Feith, "English - The First Foreign Language," *Djembatan*, December 1958, 6.

this influence or see the “bad effects” of teaching that “all men are equal” and that “you shouldn’t work on Sunday”!’<sup>205</sup>

The relationship with the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and its officials in Indonesia were a source of wariness and conflicting views – for both sides. Senior figures in the Embassy were sceptical of the Scheme, seeing the close connections that the volunteers were making with suspect radicals as proof it was dangerous. In 1957 the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia wrote to a senior official in the Department of External Affairs, warning of the influence of the ‘sinister creature’, Molly Bondan, on the volunteers. Apart from being ‘anti-white and anti-Australian’, Molly Bondan’s previous work alongside Australian communists during the post-war pro-Indonesian strikes of the 1940s was a major source of concern. The departmental official replied that he was ‘most disturbed’, and had ‘always feared this situation with Volunteer Graduates’, and would recommend that ‘we go slow with the Volunteer Graduate Scheme’.<sup>206</sup> In contrast to these suspicions, less than two years before key VGS figure Jim Webb had been approached to work for the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and manage the Colombo Plan. Despite the VGS wishing to distinguish itself from the Australian Government, volunteers were enthusiastic about the informal contacts and networks that this would promote between the Colombo Plan and the Indonesian civil service.<sup>207</sup>

In the event, rather than Webb, the position of Colombo Plan officer was given to Sam Dimmick. However, this did not weaken the Scheme’s links with either the Colombo Plan or the Embassy. Dimmick was already well known to the VGS: an alumnus of the University of Melbourne, he had been involved in the ASCM and served as President of the Students’ Representative Council.<sup>208</sup> Even though volunteer Hugh O’Neill recalled being welcomed to Jakarta by Dimmick with the stern warning to steer clear

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<sup>205</sup> Wills, “West New Guinea (Irian Barat),” 9.

<sup>206</sup> Quoted in Hardjono and Warner, *In Love with a Nation*, 219–20.

<sup>207</sup> B. Feith to J. Webb, 23.11.1955, “VGS Papers”, item 109.

<sup>208</sup> Charles Coppel, “Dimmick, Samuel Guy McLaren (Sam) (1922–1984),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

of Molly Bondan – a warning ignored without regret – relations between Dimmick and some volunteers were warm enough that correspondence with him could mix personal well wishes, questions regarding official business, and gossip on the latest controversies within the Australian student movement, such as the politically charged debate whether to accept an invite for a student delegation to visit the Peoples' Republic of China.<sup>209</sup>

These references to communism, anti-communism and development do not amount to evidence of any systematic Cold War intervention into Indonesian politics on behalf of the 'Free World'. But they do show that the Cold War played a role in the history of the VGS that is open to debate and further scrutiny, especially with regards to its implications for the legacies of the VGS. One such legacy is that left by Herb Feith, perhaps the Scheme's most celebrated participant. Feith has been rightfully recognised for his commitment to peace, nuclear disarmament, and social justice in Australia and overseas, alongside his prolific academic career as a political scientist. But to present Feith's life as a continuous engagement with progressive politics, or to place his experiences and insights associated with his time involved in the VGS on an unbent path of progressive activism is misleading. As Feith himself conceded, before the mid-1960s he would not have been considered a person of the left 'in any sense', while his immediate response to the anti-communist massacres of 1965-1966 saw him branded an apologist for the violence – by close friends, no less.<sup>210</sup> The dissonance of the 1970s, when Feith promoted radical peace and democratic activism while the thesis of his most famous work, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, was embraced by the New Order regime, is understandable in the context of how Feith came to understand 'Old Order' Indonesian society.<sup>211</sup> The letters Herb Feith sent home, documenting his experiences and views as he understood them in the moment, provide a test case for the role that the Cold War played in these

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<sup>209</sup> Hugh O'Neill, "Volunteer Graduates." In *Indonesians in Victoria from the 1950s*, Annual Indonesia Lecture Series 19 (Clayton.: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), 16; "J. Bayly to S. Dimmick, n.d [1956 or 1957], "VGS Papers", item 3.

<sup>210</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 283-285.

<sup>211</sup> Ken Ward, "Indonesia's Modernisation: Ideology and Practice." In *Showcase State: The Illusion of Indonesia's "Accelerated Modernisation"*, 67-82. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973), 77.

legacies. Feith used his experiences and connections to become a globally-recognised expert on Indonesian affairs, but in gaining the experiences and insights that he did, he was also navigating the conflicts of the Cold War. It is to Feith and these legacies that we can now turn.

### *Engaging with the Cold War: Herb Feith*

Analysis of the experiences of Herb Feith, and of his understanding of Cold War-inflected debates around communism, Christianity, and nationalism in Indonesia, shows that there were far more complex factors at play in the history of the VGS than a simple pro- and anti- Western / pro- and anti- communist dichotomy, but that the Cold War was essential to the understanding that volunteers brought to and took away from their experiences in Indonesia.

During the time that he volunteered in Indonesia, Feith was a deeply committed Christian. This faith forms a key narrative in his biography, *From Vienna to Yogyakarta*.<sup>212</sup> But his Christianity, it may be suggested, also held a political edge that was foundational to Feith's understanding of what he saw and experienced. This Christianity brought with it a conflicted view of what the West had to offer Indonesia, but was also a way to connect with locals and help guide the evidence that he saw and valued. This pattern was established early, with one of Herb Feith's first and most important connections in Indonesia: Tina Franz, the head of the Indonesian Student Christian Movement. Franz was an active nationalist who used the term 'Philippinization' to describe the danger that American influence was having on Indonesian culture, something which Feith relayed to Australian friends and family with approval.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 10.

<sup>213</sup> H. Feith, "Chainletter No.6", 12.08.1951, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

Feith was sceptical of Western influence. In his first travels outside Jakarta, he was impressed by what he perceived as the stability of village life, approvingly quoting his guide's observation that it was due to 'strong religious influence, the community consciousness and the weakness of Western influences'.<sup>214</sup> But Western influence, in moderation, could be a positive. Feith wrote in awestruck terms of the Christian-majority town of Manado in North Sulawesi, which he saw as incorporating the best aspects of Western influence into a robust traditional community. It was unique, he wrote, for it had 'everything worthwhile' that the West 'could offer': Christianity and education, good organization and cleanliness, an 'all-pervading atmosphere of freedom', but at the same time without losing its sense of community. But there was a threat looming, of 'Hollywood-sponsored' disintegration. Christianity and the simple old traditions were strong enough to hold it off, he hoped, but there was the threat that it would become consumerist and celebrity-obsessed like 'most of the "free" and coca-cola-buying world'.<sup>215</sup>

While worrying about the impact of 'free' world values, Feith also perceived communism as a dangerous threat that the Indonesian public was ignoring. While noting the tendency to exaggerate the threat posed by communism, Feith wrote to his family that 'the Communists' tactics are impressive and I'm sure that Indonesians are not nearly aware enough of their danger'.<sup>216</sup>

His antipathy towards communism was more than philosophical. It affected the personal connections – central as they were to the mission of the Scheme – which he made. In another letter home, Feith recounted a night spent with a communist parliamentarian, whom he was introduced to by his landlord and friend, the nationalist-aligned civil servant Mustapha. He recalled the poor impression that the politician made:

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<sup>214</sup> H. Feith, "Chainletter No. 5", 05.08.1951, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

<sup>215</sup> H. Feith to E. Edwards, 01.04.1952, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

<sup>216</sup> H. Feith to D. Anderson, 16.05.1952, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

On Tuesday night Mustapha got a visit from a certain Hutomo Supardan, said to be the brightest of the Communist MPs. Very nicely Mustapha allowed me to argue with him almost the whole night. I don't think he's a very remarkable man. He knows his line well as most Communists do, and gives you neither more nor less. Apart from a couple of "mistakes" about the role of great men in history, he argued in just the same way as Australian Communists do. He's very China-oriented though that doesn't by any means mean that he's less Russian-oriented. Also very keen on immediate building up of heavy industry here in Indonesia – with capital aid, he hopes, from all countries including the West. Rather soft for a Communist, though hard for an Indonesian – but on the whole very much like party people everywhere. Not unpleasant to argue with, but I'd prefer to be elsewhere if he got into power here just the same!<sup>217</sup>

In contrast, Feith recognised an affinity with the liberal-minded technocrats and intellectuals of the pro-Western Socialist Party, which had a strong presence in the Indonesian civil service at that time. His letters to the family show the warmth and connections that he made with pro-Western Indonesians. Apart from often praising Syahrir, the Socialist Party leader, Feith met with many Socialist politicians. In contrast to his views on Hutomo Supardan, he described Subadio, the parliamentary leader of the Socialists as 'a highly intelligent young bloke, as keen and excitable as any University Labor Club person and yet deeply responsible and far-sighted', harking back to his own campus partisanship<sup>218</sup>

In a similar vein, Feith – like other volunteers – felt a warmth and sense of camaraderie towards American and Western scholars in Indonesia. He became very close friends with George Kahin of Cornell University, in time securing Kahin as a doctoral supervisor, and other now-famous American scholars such as Clifford and Hildred Geertz were fondly mentioned to friends and family at home.<sup>219</sup> The connections were close enough between American researchers and the volunteers that Feith's house on *Jalan Halimun* became known as a meeting place for such foreign visitors and volunteer graduates to meet and discuss politics and the state of Indonesian society.<sup>220</sup> This warmth and sense of camaraderie contrasts starkly with

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<sup>217</sup> H. Feith to Family, 16.06.1952, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

<sup>218</sup> H. Feith to Family, 16.03.1952, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

<sup>219</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 192.

<sup>220</sup> Purdey, *From Vienna*, 163.

Feith's treatment of an Indonesianist from the other side of the Iron Curtain, whom he met at an international fair in Jakarta in 1954. In a letter home, Feith made clear that the Cold War divided them. It was a 'strange experience to find oneself face-to-face with a Russian', he confided, 'with not even a language difficulty to overcome'. While he was impressed by his Soviet counterpart's Indonesian language skills, he 'felt the tension' when he inquired about facilities for Indonesian language study in the USSR, and surmised that the 'bloke was obviously politically alert and well-trained'.<sup>221</sup>

Considering the role of the VGS as a program for intercultural understanding predicated on the power of personal connections, these networks connected with and reinforced Western perspectives on Indonesian political issues. That a volunteer such as Feith could be dismissive of local communists and suspicious of Soviet interest in Indonesia, while being admiring of pro-Western Indonesians and warm towards Americans, show that the Scheme acted in a way that contributed to the delegitimation – in however modest a degree – of the position of radical thought, practice, and appeal in Indonesian society.

But elsewhere, the fear of creeping Americanisation is evident across Feith's writings, divorced from his commentary on Western researchers, pro-Western politicians, and Christian-majority communities in Indonesia. In one letter, he wrote that 'in the long run there's no power to stop Hollywood this side of the Iron Curtain – it's not a matter of culture or politics, purely money. Really I fear Hollywood more than ever before'.<sup>222</sup> Feith was also very critical of other aid projects that he saw as falling into the pattern of pushing American or Western values, complaining to his friend Eric Edwards that:

Really you've no idea how complicated and important that question is. Just how to go about giving help that will both do good and be genuinely appreciated? Yes, the psychological and political and sheer practical complications of any form of foreign help

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<sup>221</sup> H. Feith to Family, 05.09.1954, "Feith Papers", Box 2.

<sup>222</sup> H. Feith, "Chainletter No. 11", 22.10.1951, "Feith Papers", Box 1.

to Indonesia are tremendous, and that goes both in the Church and the general sphere. How one should go about offering scholarships abroad, how one should encourage reciprocity in relations between Indonesia and the country willing to help her, how one should publicize “aid”, all these questions involve moral and psychological and political principles that just haven’t been sufficiently thought about. If you knew the mistakes that the Americans, often with the best of intentions behind all their pushfulness, are making in the Church and Mission field as well as the political one.<sup>223</sup>

It is important to note that these critiques were formed with input from his Indonesian colleagues, and were not merely the outcome of Feith’s own thinking on the matter. Rather than being the vector for hegemonic pro-Western ideas, the volunteers appear to utilise both anti-communist and anti-Western discourses that were already present in Indonesian society, but that they approved of: Herb Feith, along with Molly Bondan, organised a discussion group within the Ministry of Information. Feith relayed the outcome of a discussion involving ‘twenty odd’ people from his sub-section, concurring with their despair at American influence and the inability of Indonesia’s revolutionary ideology to sustain itself among adolescents.<sup>224</sup>

Linked to this form of engagement was the keen awareness the volunteers held of their precarious position in the Indonesian political sphere, which required circumspection and the appearance of being apolitical. In his 1954 report to NUAUS, Jim Webb expressed the fear that it would only take one ‘misfit’ to ‘ruin’ the Scheme.<sup>225</sup> When the idea was floated that the Scheme should, like many non-governmental organisations, have a committee of eminent persons to serve as patrons and the public face of the program, the response from the volunteers in Indonesia was unequivocally opposed, responding that it would make them look ‘much less like ordinary people’ and more likely to have a ‘political background’.

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<sup>223</sup> H. Feith to E. Edwards, 20.05.1952, “Feith Papers”, Box 1.

<sup>224</sup> H. Feith to Family, 6.06.1952, “Feith Papers”, Box 1.

<sup>225</sup> J. Webb, “Report to the 1954 NUAUS Council of the Committee for Graduate Employment in Indonesia”, January 1954, “VGS Papers”, item 107.

'Change is always best avoided in these circumstances', Feith wrote on their behalf, 'It confuses Indonesians, if it doesn't actually make them suspicious'.<sup>226</sup>

Volunteers, including Herb Feith, could not stand apart from the debates and personalities of the Cold War. They were politically engaged individuals working in a politicised environment, interacting on a daily basis with other politically engaged individuals. The choices that they made, the experiences that they gained, and the perspectives that they aligned with in Indonesia were all defined in some way by the Cold War.

## **Conclusion**

The Cold War had a decisive influence on how the intercultural connections between Australia and Indonesia developed after Indonesian independence. Within Australia, the VGS operated in an atmosphere of heightened suspicion and scrutiny of political thought and action. The Department of External Affairs acted as a gatekeeper for these non-governmental interactions, asserting the Australian Government's right to examine and reject – on whatever grounds it wished – applicants that it felt were undesirable. While the records indicate that this veto was used only once, for the applications of the Scarfes, it loomed over the administrators of the Scheme as they made the high ideals of intercultural friendship and understanding a reality. Even without the direct pressure that the Australian Government brought to bear on the VGS, the Cold War remained influential. Many individuals involved in the Scheme had anti-communist sympathies, of varying intensity and expression.

The impact of the Cold War on the Scheme within Indonesia followed naturally from the impact of decisions made about the Scheme in Australia, but were also grounded in what they experienced firsthand. Volunteers, a cohort that excluded suspected communist sympathisers and drew directly from anti-communist student organisations, felt an affinity with the non-communist and anti-communist elements

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<sup>226</sup> H. Feith to D. Anderson and A. Frankel, 12.12. 1952, "Feith Papers," Box 2.

of Indonesian society. Likewise, the volunteers engaged with American scholars and visitors who were often in Indonesia as part of the Cold War-inspired boom in Area Studies, or due to opportunities provided by philanthropic foundations. That these first, tentative steps towards intercultural understanding were anti-communist in practice had long-lasting impact, as the volunteers parlayed their experience in Indonesia into expertise on the subject in Australia and the wider world. Underlining this knowledge and this authority can be seen the tendrils of the Cold War, shaping the discourses, ideas, and new networks of knowledge as they arose from these experiences. The Cold War was not alone in its impact. The VGS was defined by its avowed opposition to the White Australia Policy, and the ambiguities around racial, national, and gender identities played a central part in defining the experiences that arose from the volunteers and their service in Indonesia.

#### **4. Identity, White Australia, and the Volunteer Graduate Scheme.**

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The VGS was formed from, and embedded within, a society in which the White Australia Policy reigned supreme. Yet the VGS occupied an unusual position. It was critical of the White Australia Policy and dedicated to breaking down existing barriers between Australia and Asia, but also reliant upon the goodwill of the Australian Government to function. The history of the VGS reveals some of the processes that were occurring in Australian society that affected post-war interest in Asia, the changing understanding of national identity and – very importantly – the interplay between race and gender.

Three main aspects of the relationship between the VGS and the White Australia Policy will be discussed here. The first is the role played by post-war immigration in Australia's engagement with Asia. As will be argued, there are strong connections between Australian experiences arising from the mass migration of people from non-English speaking backgrounds and interest in Asia as expressed through the VGS. The chapter then turns to the role of 'Australian' identity' in the evolution of the Scheme. In this context, evidence is that the VGS – unsurprisingly perhaps – was far from immune to on-going ambiguities and conflicts about what it meant to be 'Australian': indeed, the experiences of migrant applicants to the Scheme, in particular, show the ways in which the realities of a changing and diversifying Australian society were glossed over in the interests of projecting a certain middle-class ideal of Australian society, one that incorporated a lingering connection to British identity.

Finally, this chapter turns its attention to the role of gender in the Scheme. Within the middle-class ideal of Australian identity were racialised and gendered norms that were thrown into stark relief by female participation in the Scheme. As outlined briefly below, gendered anxieties have always been an essential element of how White Australia was understood, from its very foundation as a masculinist attempt to create a 'White Man's Country'. This section centres on how the Scheme negotiated

gender in its opposition to the White Australia Policy, and shows that attitudes regarding the role of women in the organisation complicated its activities and stated aims. Some of the negative attitudes ranged from despair that female applicants would damage the Scheme's reputation and fear over the repercussions of anticipated interracial marriages, through to direct questioning of the loyalty of female Australian volunteers who did marry Indonesian nationals. Conversely, by the end of the 1950s, the VGS was actively challenging the Australian Government on interracial marriages, and had begun viewing these 'international' marriages as a pure distillation of the Scheme's ideals. Through the experience of border crossing from Australia to Indonesia, this chapter shows, some women developed a different understanding of their own position within a society and economy that prioritised the 'male breadwinner' household.

The focus of many scholars of White Australia has been centred on the dominant racist ideology and the historical basis for it. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have argued that it was a representative policy of a 'transnational solidarity' based on the concept of 'whiteness', a racial classification that erased existing distinctions between nationalities and ethnicities and saw the solidification of the ideal of 'White Men's countries' in the settler societies of the United States, South Africa and Australia in the late nineteenth century – something which only unravelled after World War Two.<sup>227</sup> Other historians, particularly those in the field of labour history such as Goodall and Martinez, have looked at the hidden cosmopolitanism of Australia in this period – the contradictory gaps, no matter how small, in the supposedly all-encompassing White Australia. For example, substantial scholarship has gone into studying pearl divers in northern Australia and into compiling transnational histories of Indian 'lascars' who were integral to maintaining Britain's maritime empire, but formally excluded from Australia.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

<sup>228</sup> Julia Martinez, "Indonesians Challenging White Australia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (May 2012): 231–48, doi:10.1080/13639811.2012.683678; Heather Goodall, "Port Politics: Indian Seamen, Australian Unions and Indonesian Independence, 1945-47," *Labour History* 94 (May 2008): 43–68; Martinez and Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier*.

What has not been adequately explored in detail is the discomfort and low-key opposition expressed towards the White Australia Policy, and how the changes that occurred during the post-war period became the seeds of 'White' Australia's unravelling.<sup>229</sup> It is clear from memoir and biographical material that there were many groups active in opposing White Australia by the 1940s, and the participants in these groups played multiple roles which intersected with the promotion of Australian-Indonesian relations, the management of changes from the demographic surge due to post-war mass migration, and concern with the implications of the Cold War.<sup>230</sup> Jim Cairns, a future Deputy Prime Minister, serves as a perfect example of these intersections. Cairns served variously as President of the 'East-West Committee' and patron of the Australian-Indonesian Association of Victoria, as well as in various peace and neutralist groups.<sup>231</sup> Other less well known activists, such as Molly Bondan, represent a link between the anti-White Australia milieu that had developed in Australia into the very specific cause of Indonesia and Australian-Indonesian relations.

These changes in post-war racial attitudes have usually been analysed in three discrete spheres: Australian attitudes to Asia and decolonisation; migration and the transition from assimilation to multiculturalism, and the struggle for rights and recognition for Indigenous Australia. Few attempts have been made to reconcile these spheres, even though at their heart they present contradictory characterisations of Australian society in the 1950s: at once Australia is taken to be both booming and changing beyond recognition in a dynamic process of nation-building, and a deeply conservative society almost wholly reactionary in its policies and attitudes towards the outside world.

Jamie Mackie, a friend of the VGS who published extensively on the Indonesian economy, the Chinese ethnic minority of Indonesia, and Australian-Indonesian

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<sup>229</sup> Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia Since 1901*. (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), 208.

<sup>230</sup> Hardjono and Warner, *In Love with a Nation*; Purdey, *From Vienna*; Kobayashi, *W. Macmahon Ball*.

<sup>231</sup> McKnight, *Australia's Spies and Their Secrets*, 149.

relations, presented an ‘admittedly impressionistic’, but unifying thesis on the historical factors behind changing race relations in Australia. Mackie hypothesised that:

perhaps the acceptance of a diversity of European immigrants and then an increased flow of Asians was an experience Australian society had to undergo before it was ready to tackle the problems of trying to do justice to the Aborigines and of coming to terms with the non-white countries around us with some confidence of succeeding. At least we now know that Australians are not incurably racist in outlook, as some would have us believe.<sup>232</sup>

Taking the VGS as the point at which to look outwards on Australian society is an opportunity to test this hypothesis, but also to understand how and why Mackie – an individual who first rose to prominence during that period – placed such significance on these seemingly anecdotal connections.

### **Migration Booms and Expanding Horizons: Post-War Australia in Flux**

It is easy to contrast the turmoil of post-war Indonesian politics and civil society with the seeming calm of post-war Australia. Whereas Indonesian politics was dominated by debates over ideological orientation, the legacy of imperialism, and the construction of a modern nation-state, Australia’s transition to relative stability – even quiet – in the post-war years appears to confirm the perspective of individuals such as *The Bulletin* journalist Peter Hastings, who derided Australian society after the war in terms of the ‘Lotus Years’, in which the Australian people ‘lived high and ate well and ... were distressingly indifferent to the changing world about us’.<sup>233</sup> This caricature of Australia as a leisured and insular place, even as the reality of decolonisation and a new global order threatened to disturb its collective lethargy, masks the monumental changes that took place within Australian society and its global outlook in this period. It was 1948 when Australian citizenship was first established, replacing British subjecthood.

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<sup>232</sup> James Austin Copland Mackie, “Asian Migration and Australian Racial Attitudes,” *Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (1977): 7.

<sup>233</sup> Peter Hastings, “After the Lotus Years,” *The Bulletin*, 13 January, 1962, 19.

A program of mass migration, which encouraged non-British European migrants, created a cultural and linguistic diversity that belied the continued consensus in favour of the White Australia Policy; this should instead be seen, in the words of the historian Eric Richards, as the 'heroic age' of migration in Australian history.<sup>234</sup> Coupled with this, Australian universities enrolled significant numbers of students from Asia through their role in the Colombo Plan, creating small communities of self-celebrating multiracialism in the heart of Australia's major cities. The election in 1957 of Sam Abraham, a Malayan-born Medical student, to the post of President of the Student Representative Council at the University of Adelaide serves as one anecdotal counterpoint to the homogenously white and mono-cultural image that Australia projected, and which the dominant historiography continued to accept until very recently.<sup>235</sup>

Australian attitudes towards Asia in the post-war years – at both the 'elite' level and the level of popular discourse – have often been characterised as in essence reactionary: that it was the process of decolonisation, plus the subsequent demands of the new system of nation-states and the Cold War, that governed how and why Australians interacted with the governments and populations of Asia. The opening paragraph of *Facing Asia*, a history of the Colombo Plan, is a perfect example of this paradigm:

For most of their history, Australians have seen themselves as a beleaguered white outpost of the British Empire, perched precariously between the hordes of Asia and the edge of the world. They looked north with a mixture of ignorance, wonder and fear, and always through the prism of imperial design and racism. But by the middle of the 20th century the turmoil of the Second World War, communism and decolonisation had ended any possibility that the region could be ignored.<sup>236</sup>

There is no doubt that these external factors were essential ingredients in the growth of these links and the expanding horizons of Australian worldviews. But at the same time, to treat Australian society as completely reactionary and unchanging in the

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<sup>234</sup> Richards, *Destination Australia*, 204.

<sup>235</sup> "Obituary: Datuk Dr Samuel C E Abraham," *Adelaidean*, December 2007, <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/adelaidean/issues/23221/news23255.html>.

<sup>236</sup> Oakman, *Facing Asia*, 1.

post-war years obscures the ways in which changes in the internal dynamic of Australian society affected relations and attitudes with the wider world.

Research into the ways in which changes *within* Australian society affected attitudes and relations with Asia is more limited, but in Mackie's opinion, outlined above, mass migration ended the illusion of cultural homogeneity and paved the way for a society that could embrace diversity.<sup>237</sup> These were experiences that Australian society 'had to undergo', he argued, before even *being capable* of coming to terms with the non-white countries of the Asia Pacific.<sup>238</sup>

Mackie was quoted approvingly in the influential, but now dated, book *Race Relations in Australia: A History*, but has otherwise had a limited impact on the historiography.<sup>239</sup> A more recent argument, put forward in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, focuses especially on the role of universities in changing attitudes towards Asia, and compellingly argues that:

the developing interest by university staff and students in the peoples, languages and politics of Asia during the 1950s, and new forms of cross-cultural sociability between Asian and Australian students on university campuses, directly contributed to a political analysis that discredited the idea of White Australia and sought to unseat one of the fundamental tenets of Australian nationhood'.<sup>240</sup>

This article only briefly discussed the VGS, within the broader context of ASCM activities on campuses in the 1950s.<sup>241</sup> The structure and practice of 'cross-cultural sociability' on university campuses, however, was occurring within an even broader, relatively new field of cross-cultural interactions for Australians in the wider community as well. Migration from non-English speaking countries and the effect of a

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<sup>237</sup> Mackie, "Asian Migration and Australian Racial Attitudes," 3–5.

<sup>238</sup> Mackie, "Asian Migration and Australian Racial Attitudes," 7.

<sup>239</sup> Alexander Yarwood and Michael Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia: A History* (Sydney: Methuen, 1982), 286–87.

<sup>240</sup> Kate Darian-Smith and James Waghorne, "Australian-Asian Sociability, Student Activism, and the University Challenge to White Australia in the 1950s," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 62, no. 2 (June 2016): 204.

<sup>241</sup> Darian-Smith and Waghorne, "Australian-Asian Sociability," 210.

booming population, which brought with it new infrastructure and educational needs, also played a key role in a radical shift in attitudes behind the edifice of White Australia.

These monumental changes can be traced back to the war-time Labor administration of John Curtin and his successor, Ben Chifley. Their administrations were intent not just on winning the war, but also on using the expansion of government powers that had accompanied the war to reconstruct Australian society. Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell announced a new scheme for mass immigration in 1947, pushed by labour and material shortages that threatened government plans for industrial expansion. This program aimed to rapidly add to Australia's population, which stood at just over seven and half million people, and marked a significant departure from the established norm.<sup>242</sup> Migrants from the United Kingdom were still given strong preference, but for the first time immigration from outside the white Anglophone world was genuinely encouraged: 'New Australians' would be sourced from the refugee camps of Europe and from non-English speaking nations with which formal migration deals were signed. The mass migration was considered a success: the millionth migrant was fêted in the press and the community when she arrived in 1955.<sup>243</sup>

One of the reasons that the migration of people previously deemed 'undesirable' became acceptable was the policy of assimilation that accompanied it. All migrants were to 'assimilate' into the dominant Anglophone culture of Australia and become indistinguishable from the wider Australian population. Described encouragingly by the Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell as 'new healthy citizens who are determined to become good Australians by adoption', migrants were not to be left to their own devices in learning to become Australian citizens. Instead, Calwell told the House of Representatives, the Australian people 'must help newcomers to become assimilated.

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<sup>242</sup> John Lack and Templeton, eds., *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration since 1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>243</sup> Sarah Wills, "When Good Neighbours Become Good Friends: The Australian Embrace of Its Millionth Migrant," *Australian Historical Studies* 36, no. 124 (2004): 332-54.

We have been too prone in the past to ostracize those of alien birth and then blame them for segregating themselves and forming foreign communities. It is we, not they, who are generally responsible for this condition of affairs'.<sup>244</sup> The Department of Immigration managed a network of education and social services for migrants, and 'Good Neighbour Councils' connected newly arrived migrants with community and church groups in Australia, who offered to teach migrants the 'Australian Way of Life'.<sup>245</sup>

More recent scholarship has taken a more nuanced view of the government's commitment to assimilation, as well as its success. In her doctoral thesis, Kristy Ann Kokegai argued that the assimilationist policies of the 1950s should be seen as a building block for Australian multiculturalism, rather than as the xenophobic and doctrinaire policy which they were once thought to be. According to Kokegai, 'assimilation became increasingly occupied with the provision of practical settlement assistance and the creation of new Australian citizens', rather than strict absorption into the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture.<sup>246</sup> Gwenda Tavan, a political scientist at La Trobe University, similarly argued that assimilation was a transitional doctrine between the mono-cultural Anglo-Australian past and the multicultural future, which allowed Australians 'to make sense of, contain, and ultimately accept social and cultural change, by gradually, if equivocally, incorporating the reality of an ethnically mixed population into popular conceptions of the Australian nation.'<sup>247</sup> The proliferation of ethnic enclaves, limited resourcing for migrant social services, and the very small number of individuals deported from Australia for not meeting the strict obligations attached to migration have all been pointed to as evidence that the

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<sup>244</sup> "A. A. Calwell: Ministerial Statement on Immigration", 02.08.1945, in Lack and Templeton, *Bold Experiment*, 20.

<sup>245</sup> Jean Martin, *The Migrant Presence: Australian Responses 1947 - 1977*, Studies in Society 2 (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 27–29.

<sup>246</sup> Kristy Ann Kokegai, "Australian Immigration and Migrant Assimilation, 1945 - 1960" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 2012), 1–2.

<sup>247</sup> Gwenda Tavan, "'Good Neighbours': Community Organisations, Migrant Assimilation and Australian Society and Culture, 1950 - 1961," *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 109 (1997): 80, doi:10.1080/10314619708596044.

assimilationist policy acted very differently in practice to the rhetoric on which it was based.<sup>248</sup>

Despite these qualifications, there are two indisputable outcomes of the post-war migration boom. Firstly, it introduced to Australia large numbers of men, women, and children who did not speak English as a first language. Secondly, it necessitated a major expansion in education and community assistance for migrants, officially or semi-officially, to further the aim of integration and help migrants become active participants in the Australian economy and society. A large part of this expansion in education was, naturally enough, a boost in the number of qualified teachers to service a dramatically expanding population, alongside an expansion of access to higher education to further develop citizens with specialist and technical skills. Teacher training was significantly curtailed during the war, as young people enlisted or found war-related employment. A low birth-rate in the 1930s was also beginning to make itself felt from 1948.<sup>249</sup> The *Review of Education in Australia, 1948 -1954*, produced by the Australian Council on Education Research, makes it clear that most state systems were dramatically understaffed and continued functioning only due to the unsustainable reliance on temporary teachers. These temporary teachers were not preferred employees of the education system, with many either underqualified to teach or married women, who were generally obliged by discriminatory rule and convention to work in schools close to their home. All the state governments and the Commonwealth invested significantly in expanding access to teacher training to scale up the potential workforce.<sup>250</sup>

There are direct links between the assimilationist projects of the post-war years and the way that the Scheme operated. Certain skills and interests were fostered in

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<sup>248</sup> See especially Andrew Markus and Margaret Taft, "Postwar Immigration and Assimilation: A Reconceptualisation," *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 2 (3015): 234–51 for a critical review of recent literature.

<sup>249</sup> R.M. McDonell, W.C. Radford, and P.M. Staurengi, *Review of Education in Australia, 1948 - 1954* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1956), 179.

<sup>250</sup> For a full outline of the steps taken in the first half of the 1950s, see *Review of Education in Australia, 1948 - 1954*, esp. Ch. 5.

Australians, not just those undergoing teacher training, through participation in assimilationist projects.

These skills included language instruction as well as managing cultural diversity, both skills that held a new value during the post-war boom. One of the most common experiences that applicants highlighted in support of their participation in the Scheme was experience in assimilating 'New Australians'. Kenneth Milne, previously discussed for his political views, highlighted the two years of experience he had teaching 'English to 'New Australians' (Dutch German Italian)' in his application.<sup>251</sup> Applicant Keith Stodden was able to point to the 'good 100 hrs English tuition' that he had performed on behalf the Department of Immigration.<sup>252</sup> Fay Gilding wrote of the 'wide experience' that she felt prepared her for a term of service in Indonesia, which comprised 'Sunday school + youth work' as well as 'social work among New Australians'.<sup>253</sup>

Lois Griffiths could present more than five years of experience with migrant education to the Scheme as proof of her competence to work in Indonesia. Starting as a Migrant Education Instructor in English at the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre, Griffiths progressed to the position of Chief Instructor at the Greta Commonwealth Immigration Centre in NSW before taking a position teaching English to General Motors Holden factory workers.<sup>254</sup> In 1956, Neale Hunter could turn to the job he held as a teacher of English to Greek migrants to bolster his application.<sup>255</sup> Eight years later another Hunter, Joan Mabel Hunter, could put forward an impressive résumé of work with migrants: teaching English in the Mildura and Sale migrant centres in 1951 and 1952, work in the Commonwealth Office of Education preparing textbooks and study aids for migrant education in 1953 and 1954, and

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<sup>251</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Kenneth Milne", 24.09.55, "VGS Papers", item 81.

<sup>252</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Keith Stodden", 27.08.53, "VGS Papers", item 121.

<sup>253</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Fay Gilding", 07.09.53, "VGS Papers", item 8.

<sup>254</sup> "Application Cover Letter: Lois Griffiths", 23.07.1954, "VGS Papers", item 5; see Glenda Sluga, *Bonegilla - "A Place of No Hope,"* Melbourne University History Monograph Series 5 (Melbourne: History Department, The University of Melbourne, 1988), especially the preface, for a discussion of Bonegilla.

<sup>255</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Neale Hunter", n.d. [1956], "VGS Papers", item 8.

from 1956 onwards private coaching, special classes, and providing migrant education to large organisations including Imperial Chemical Industries, Australian Glass Manufacturers, and the Victorian Railways Union.<sup>256</sup>

These individuals were not just groping for *any* intercultural experiences in their lives. There was direct translation of the skills and techniques learned in Australia's post-war assimilation programs which could then be applied to work in Indonesia. The social web of the VGS, centred as it was in the ASCM, intersected with the social networks of young Student Christians who were involved in the Good Neighbour Councils, which were also endorsed by the ASCM.<sup>257</sup>

These intersections reveal some of the ways that the experience of intercultural understanding in Indonesia was a successor, as Mackie argued, to intercultural interactions arising from post-war migration. For example, Betty Feith's correspondence with Lois Griffiths, a potential applicant to the VGS working at the Bonegilla immigration centre, reveals how Australian experiences with non-English speaking migrants was considered directly equivalent to teaching English overseas. After Betty Feith provided Griffiths with material and information on her work for the English Language Inspectorate in the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Griffiths enthused that:

My fellow instructors here are greatly impressed with the syllabus ... We haven't seen anything that so closely approaches the methods we use for teaching English as a foreign language. I'm taking it up to the C'wealth Office of Education in Sydney - not only will they be interested, but it might ensure greater cooperation from that Office.<sup>258</sup>

This small interaction highlights the links between experiences gained through these assimilationist projects of the post-war years and the VGS. A person involved in

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<sup>256</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Joan Mabel Hunter", 08.12.1962, "VGS Papers", item 8.

<sup>257</sup> Ruth Ribechi, "Just 'A Handshake and a Cup of Tea?': The Good Neighbour Movement in Victoria, 1950-1959" (M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1986).

<sup>258</sup> L. Griffiths to B. Feith, 15.04.55, "VGS Papers", item 8.

migrant education in Australia could look upon the work of English language teachers in Indonesia and see something familiar.

Even though the circumstances surrounding English language instruction in Australia and Indonesia were vastly different, the practices that underpinned such work were something that could be shared, compared, and applied across such starkly differing circumstances. It is the presence of shared experiences that create a direct link between the post-war migration and engagement in Indonesia, where practices that arose to deal with the new problem of managing cultural diversity in Australia are then echoed and mimicked in Indonesia. The uncomfortable practice of performing nonsensical songs like ‘Three Blind Mice’ to teach English to adults in the Australian immigration system and government workers in Indonesia, reflects a deeper connection than merely history rhyming.<sup>259</sup>

This link between the post-war migration boom and Australian engagement with Asia can be extended even further, to the discourses that underlay both the Good Neighbour movement and the VGS itself. Both justified intercultural interaction as an essential element of ‘neighbourliness’ and hospitality, which were in turn presented as essential elements of Australian national identity. The idea of Indonesia as Australia’s ‘nearest neighbour’ – and virtuous Australians demonstrating neighbourly friendship, hospitality, and understanding – was a central ideological impulse behind the VGS.

In the foreword to the first edition of *Djembatan*, the VGS was introduced as a ‘family’ doing their bit for Australia’s neighbours, in a spirit of mateship.<sup>260</sup> In the fourth edition Jim Webb explained the origins of the Scheme as being a corrective to the

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<sup>259</sup> The embarrassing performance of “Three Blind Mice” is mentioned in both Southall, *Indonesia Face to Face*, 175, where it was used in the early years by volunteers in the English Language Inspectorate in Indonesia; and Sluga, *Bonegilla - “A Place of No Hope,”* 8, where dignitaries inspecting the Bonegilla Immigration Centre were treated to such performances.

<sup>260</sup> “Foreword.” *Djembatan*, July 1957, 1

collapse of Western domination of Asia, which had left Australians 'ill-prepared ... to live alongside the newly independent Asian nations'.<sup>261</sup> Thanks to the isolation which had only recently ended, Webb noted, 'only one member of the present Australian Cabinet has ever visited our nearest Asian neighbour and then only for a few days'.<sup>262</sup> The arrival of Asian students as part of the Colombo Plan had created space for 'friendship and understanding' within Australia, but the Scheme would 'enable attitudes of mutual goodwill and respect to develop' beyond this easy isolation of Australia.<sup>263</sup>

David Walker has previously highlighted the significance of 'neighbourly' discourses to the development of Australian national identity, writing that in the decades up to the early 1960s, Australia increasing engagement with Asia meant that 'it was no longer sufficient to express goodwill, it was increasingly necessary to find ways of representing goodwill as an Australian attribute'.<sup>264</sup> What emerged from this need for an improved image in Asia was the adoption of a rhetoric of hospitality associated with the Australian bush but which had the potential to also 'inspire a new and more racially inclusive spirit of regional engagement'.<sup>265</sup> This rhetoric had several benefits. Chief amongst them, it raised practical action to the status of ideological principle. Australians could be lauded for the ways in which their temperament and everyday activities demonstrated the good character and openness of Australian society. To bolster their projects, advocates could point to the friendly treatment of guests and neighbours – without having to engage in lengthy debates about the principles underpinning White Australia. Through this intellectual sleight of hand, Menzies could earnestly declare that 'of course' Australians aren't racist, even as he defended race-based immigration restrictions.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Jim Webb, "A New Approach to Asia," *Djembatan*, June 1958, 2.

<sup>262</sup> Webb, "A New Approach to Asia," 2.

<sup>263</sup> Webb, "A New Approach to Asia," 3.

<sup>264</sup> David Walker, "Conspicuous Hospitality: Cultivating a New Racial Etiquette in Australia, 1930 - 1960," in *Enriched Relations: Public Diplomacy in Australian-Indian Relations* (New Delhi: Readworthy Publications, 2013), 63.

<sup>265</sup> Walker, "Conspicuous Hospitality," 63-64.

<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Walker, "Conspicuous Hospitality," 83.

Walker connected the neighbourliness that was expressed in external affairs with the neighbourliness towards recent migrants encouraged through the 'Good Neighbour Councils'.<sup>267</sup> Within several years, the same organisations that were mobilised to be good neighbours within Australia were giving enthusiastic backing to the VGS and its campaign to be good neighbours to those outside Australia. The Good Neighbour Councils served as community agents for government policy, encouraging the assimilation project through connecting with new migrants and providing services to further their integration. Its objectives were framed around good will and neighbourliness, such as the objective 'By close collaboration and work of all concerned to do everything possible to secure mutual reciprocal understanding and goodwill and practical neighbourliness by Australians and immigrants'.<sup>268</sup> The Good Neighbour movement has mostly been looked upon as a failure. Inadequately supported, inadequately trained, and inadequately informed, the volunteers could do little more than take a superficial 'handshake and cup of tea' approach, as one opponent of assimilation decried.<sup>269</sup>

Nonetheless, these Councils, which could boast 10,000 members in over 100 branches by January 1954, were effective in promoting the benefits of immigration and cross-cultural interaction among Australians.<sup>270</sup> The Good Neighbour movement and the VGS shared more than similar slogans. They both drew in volunteers from the same networks of church groups and voluntary organisations that pre-existed in Australian society. All major Christian denominations, as well as the ASCM separately, gave their enthusiastic backing to the Good Neighbour Councils.<sup>271</sup> Within several years, these same organisations were mobilised to support the establishment of the VGS, by some of their own members.

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<sup>267</sup> Walker, "Conspicuous Hospitality," 71.

<sup>268</sup> Quoted in Ribechi, "Just 'A Handshake and a Cup of Tea'?", 17.

<sup>269</sup> James Jupp, *Arrivals and Departures* (Melbourne: Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1966), 9.

<sup>270</sup> Markus and Taft, "Postwar Immigration and Assimilation: A Reconceptualisation," 247.

<sup>271</sup> See "Appendix B: Member Organisations of the Good Neighbour Council of Victoria, 1950-1951", Ribechi, "Just 'A Handshake and a Cup of Tea'?", 85.

Neighbourliness was not just a discursive tool for promoting the Scheme; neighbourliness was a shield against criticism. When it appeared in 1952 that the government would be challenged in the Commonwealth Parliament over its (not yet finalised) support for the VGS, Herb Feith wrote to the Melbourne Committee to outline his view on the matter. Feith wrote that when he was first made aware that there might be a political problem raised by the government supporting the Scheme, 'my mind immediately went back to all the times I'd told people the WAP [White Australia Policy] was racial, etc. etc.', but still, 'even if political opposition were to go to the length of a question in the House, I wouldn't be perturbed. I think Bob [Robert Menzies] would trounce 'em with goodneighbourly oratory if it got to that'.<sup>272</sup>

'Neighbourly' language was not just used by officials and advocates, the individual attracted to the VGS made the same connection. Many applicants to the Scheme expressed their interest in Indonesia via attitudes of neighbourly goodwill. For example, Lois Griffiths wrote that 'Friendship with numerous Asian students in Australia has increased the conviction I have long held that nothing could be of greater value than cooperation and understanding between Australia and neighbouring countries'.<sup>273</sup> Another applicant wrote that she wanted to take part in the Scheme because she wanted to 'help in bettering Australian relations with our Asian neighbours'.<sup>274</sup> Yet another saw the Scheme as an opportunity to 'live with, and make friendships among, the Indonesian people, and to gain an understanding of our nearest neighbour'.<sup>275</sup> This demonstrates that the Scheme was not just making the connection between neighbourliness and working in Indonesia, it was attracting individuals who already understood practical action and intercultural understanding in that way.

The VGS had tapped into a changing understanding of the world among Australian citizens. This change had been spurred, in part, by the changes within Australian

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<sup>272</sup> H. Feith to D. Anderson and B. Evans, 05.02.1952, "VGS Papers", item 52.

<sup>273</sup> "Lois Griffiths", 29.07.1954, "VGS Papers", item 5.

<sup>274</sup> "Janice McPhee", 22.10.1954, "VGS Papers" item 5.

<sup>275</sup> "Alison Williams", 13.07.1955, "VGS Papers", item 14.

society itself. These changes, however, highlighted a contradiction that the VGS had to face: in creating a bridge of friendship between Indonesia and Australia, a decision had to be made as to who was qualified to call themselves Australian.

### **The VGS and 'Australian' identity**

The VGS, in its position as a conduit for Australian-Indonesian relations, also had to grapple with the question of what defined an 'Australian'. This was a complex question, in which the answers were neither self-evident nor universal. It may seem contradictory for a program whose pioneer and lead organiser was a refugee from continental Europe, but the VGS was at times reluctant to treat migrant Australians as legitimate representatives of Australia in Indonesia. This can be seen in the treatment of applications from 'New Australians' submitted to the Scheme. A formula of naturalisation and identification with Australia was central to how the Scheme handled applications from people not born in Australia. British migrants, close to the Anglophone culture, were eligible after a year's residence in Australia. Non-British migrants were informed that, in general, they must be naturalised before being considered for the VGS.

This formula of naturalisation and identification with Australia was not the complete story. Frederik Louis van Emmerik was an Indies-born migrant who arrived in Australia in late 1952, taking advantage of the Migration Agreement between the Australian and Dutch Governments. His naturalisation was confirmed in October 1958, a more rapid than average progress from 'New Australian' to Australian for the time. Van Emmerik, who had completed a degree in Engineering with Honours at the University of Tasmania in 1956, applied to the VGS in May, 1959. An ASCM member, his stated reasons for applying included that he had realised 'that the Dutch have exploited Indonesia and a wish to do at least something about it'.<sup>276</sup> When asked about his associations with Asian students or Asian affairs, he wrote that at university

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<sup>276</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: Frederik Louis van Emmerik", 06.05.1959, "VGS Papers", item 4.

he had 'always felt closer to Asian students than Australians, possible due to shared language difficulties'.<sup>277</sup>

He was, nevertheless, aware that his 'colonialist' background may be a disqualifying factor, and asked to be told quickly whether or not to pursue other opportunities.<sup>278</sup> A month later, the reply from Melbourne outlined the Scheme's position:

As far as we are concerned, of course, your 'colonialist' past makes no difference, but as each application must pass a long line of Indonesians, it is probable that someone who handles it will have anti-Dutch prejudices sufficiently strong to reject your application, or at least delay it indefinitely. In addition, even if you did go under the Scheme, your Dutch name and background would probably make it much more difficult for you to 'identify' yourself with Indonesians, which is the basic aim of the Scheme. Of course all of us have been taken for a Dutchman initially, but you would undoubtedly find it harder to explain your position than we did.<sup>279</sup>

Replying to his specific request to work in Bandung, the Acting Secretary advised van Emmerik that 'you would almost invariable be regarded as just another Dutchman there to make money out of Indonesia, and very few would believe you were receiving only an Indonesian salary'.<sup>280</sup> It does not appear that van Emmerik's application was progressed any further, while a subsequent meeting between the Chair of the VGS and Indonesian Embassy officials affirmed that such an applicant should be discouraged.<sup>281</sup>

At play in the treatment of this application are distinct ideas of identity. Van Emmerik identified himself as an Australian on his application and was a naturalised citizen. This, in principle, placed him on a level footing with locally-born citizens. More than this, the policy of assimilation encouraged migrants to identify totally with Australia and leave their old allegiances behind. One book aimed at encouraging British

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<sup>277</sup> "Preliminary Questionnaire: F.L. van Emmerik", 06.05.1959, "VGS Papers", item 4.

<sup>278</sup> F.L. van Emmerik to J. Webb, 06.06.1959, "VGS Papers" item 4.

<sup>279</sup> I. Doig to F.L. van Emmerik, 06.06.1959, "VGS Papers", item 4.

<sup>280</sup> I. Doig to F.L. van Emmerik, 06.06.1959, "VGS Papers", item 4.

<sup>281</sup> "Notes on a visit to Sydney and Canberra by D. Anderson on the 15th and 16th of July", "VGS Papers", item 116.

migration to Australia declared that any migrant to Australia must ‘mix well, to adapt himself to new conditions quickly, to forget in large measure many of the things to which he has been used at home, to learn a new mode of speech, to think in terms of new standards’.<sup>282</sup> Van Emmerik was also a member of one of the largest ethnic groups within an increasingly diverse Australia in the 1950s: the Netherlands was the fourth largest provider of migrants to Australia during the early phases of the post-war migration boom, to the extent that the Prime Minister Menzies paid tribute to the contributions of Dutch migrants to Australian society on a visit to the Netherlands in 1955.<sup>283</sup> But he could never represent Australian friendship to Indonesians. Burdened with a ‘very Dutch’ name, his background was presumed to undercut his ability to ‘identify’ with Indonesians or be identified as ‘Australian’. The representation of Australia that the Scheme projected instead looked back to a period uncomplicated by the changing demographics of Australia itself, even as those same changes pushed Australia outward to Asia.

There were also issues around British migrant applicants to the Scheme, although ‘British’ and ‘Australian’ identities were mixed and overlapped for many Australians in the 1950s. This confusion and lack of differentiation can be seen playing out in the VGS. A very revealing choice of categories in an article published in *Djembatan* hints at how identities were in flux for the volunteers. In ‘Teaching in Tondano (Sulawesi)’, Sylvia Graham recounted her experiences in the English Department of a Teacher’s Training College. Graham described how the college had four full-time lecturers, ‘three Britishers and an Indonesian’<sup>284</sup> Graham then moved to clarify that the three ‘Britishers’ were not actually British nationals. Rather, ‘Britishers’ was a wider category which included the two Australians working at the College through the VGS: Sylvia and her future husband, the Adelaide-born Lindsay Cleland.<sup>285</sup> Most applicants who nominated a nationality and born in Australia identified as ‘British’ rather than ‘Australian’, reinforcing a fluid sense of national identity that was not yet distinct

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<sup>282</sup> Irvine Douglas, *Opportunity in Australia* (Birmingham: Templar Press, 1947), 6.

<sup>283</sup> Richards, *Destination Australia*, 212.

<sup>284</sup> Sylvia Graham, “Teaching in Tondano (Sulawesi),” *Djembatan*, November 1957, 11.

<sup>285</sup> “Application: Lindsay Cleland”, n.d., “VGS Papers”, item 26.

from an imperial worldview.<sup>286</sup> The confused role British migrants played as representatives of Australia could even be the subject of jokes in the pages of *Djembatan*: the accent of Welsh-born Ken Thomas, readers were told, ‘intrigues Indonesians even more than an ordinary Australian one does’.<sup>287</sup>

Despite these blurred categories, it was clear in practice that there was a distinction between being ‘British’ and ‘Australian’. Ollie McMichael wrote that the British could not help Indonesia because of the legacy of empire: ‘No country matters more to Indonesia than we do. Britain and Holland – NO – colonial countries. America – NO – imperialist. – Russia – NO – imperialist. If Australia fails – they’ll turn to China’.<sup>288</sup> His concerns were well placed; Ivan Southall makes clear that Australians and Britons were treated differently by Indonesians due to the dispute between the United Kingdom and Indonesia over Malaya, which escalated into armed conflict by the early 1960s. Surveying the behaviour of the ‘ugly’ anti-British mobs that arose during the *konfrontasi* period, Southall notes that ‘the British were unerringly selected for this form of treatment, while all other whites, even “British” subjects, such as Australians and Canadians, were untouched’.<sup>289</sup> When two British migrants applied to participate in the Scheme, they were told that they had not been in Australia long enough to be considered. It was decided that they could not possibly represent an Australia that they had not really experienced, even though they had valuable skills to offer Indonesia. When they applied directly to the Indonesian Government to work outside the VGS, the Indonesian Embassy was told in no uncertain terms that the VGS disclaimed all responsibility for them.

It was Indonesia that had undergone a nationalist revolution, and was engaging in the process of creating a national identity. But the sense of identity that the VGS presented to Indonesia was also grounded in debates around national identity and

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<sup>286</sup> Neville Meaney, “Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography,” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 76–90.

<sup>287</sup> Ken Thomas, “The Indonesian Economy,” *Djembatan*, July 1957, 7.

<sup>288</sup> Quoted in Feith, “An Episode,” 5–6.

<sup>289</sup> Southall, *Indonesia Face to Face*, 148.

participation in society. The VGS was not just trying to find volunteers who could come to identify with their Indonesian counterparts or perform the work. They were also searching for volunteers who conformed to their vision of Australian identity, one which was a simplified projection of the complexities of Australian society and – at least in some respects – had not fully divested itself from older visions of the world underpinned by Empire. These were essential elements of the process of ‘identification’ that was so important to those who ran the VGS, but identification as ‘Australian’ was only one element. As the next section shows, gender was also an important factor in the way that the VGS approached its mission and regarded its participants.

### **Intimacy, Gender, and Race in the Volunteer Graduate Scheme**

While the White Australia Policy and its ideological underpinnings are overwhelmingly characterised by their racialized background, it also drew upon a deeply gendered view of the world. In fact, gender has always been intimately tied to the ideal of a White Australia. As historian Stuart Macintyre noted:

The Australian nation was shaped by fear of invasion and concern for the purity of the race. These anxieties converged on the female body as nationalist men returned obsessively to the safety of their women from alien molestation, while doctrines of racial purity, no matter how scientific, rested ultimately on feminine chastity.<sup>290</sup>

Macintyre continues that women themselves took on a ‘maternalist’ conception of citizenship, ‘which took emancipation from masculine tyranny as a necessary condition of their vital contribution to the nation-state’.<sup>291</sup> The VGS had many female participants, and as will be shown, views within the organisation changed as women voluntarily stepped outside the barriers (or, more precisely, borders) that kept them from ‘alien molestation’.

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<sup>290</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 3rd ed., Cambridge Concise Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149.

<sup>291</sup> Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 149.

This chapter has so far looked at changes in Australian society and senses of identity which encouraged a deeper engagement with Asia, but the limitations of such engagement in the imagination of volunteers can also be seen through the gendered anxieties they expressed. Through the Scheme, men and women were exposed to something different to the male wage earner household then hegemonic in Australian society, and their experiences highlighted differences between gender roles in middle class Australia and Indonesia, providing another challenge to the 'maternalist' model of women's participation in White Australia. Exposure caused anxiety, but also meant that the VGS was an outlet for critical reflection, at times, of gender and work. This section will illuminate some of these issues by looking at two challenges to the Scheme's call for intercultural friendship and engagement triggered by the participation of women: the challenges of intimacy, loyalty, and equality that were brought into stark relief by the interracial marriages that arose from the Scheme; and the questions around maturity, safety, and autonomy brought about by the presence of young 'unaccompanied' women in the Scheme.

### *Intimacy, loyalty, and equality*

The Scheme was based on the principle that personal connection and friendship could be the basis for intercultural understanding. This personal connection, the creators of the VGS were acutely aware, held within it the real possibility of intimate relationships across intercultural boundaries. Rather than something to be celebrated, as it would later be, this initially created alarm – expressed as an anxiety that female volunteers would be a problem for the Scheme, which needed to be managed. In one of his first letters back to Melbourne, Herb Feith sounded a warning, writing that there are:

Too many girls! Weell [sic], well, what is one to say? Isn't it likely that parental attitudes will thin out the numbers considerably? But did you Don stress the "matrimonial" [sic] aspect? It is a problem you know. Two years is a long time to be without someone to whom one's attached back in Australia, and if on the other hand one gets seriously interested in somebody here there's the problem of not being able to go back to

Australia with a colored spouse – quite apart from all the other problems of mixed marriages. (the b.... White Australia Policy).<sup>292</sup>

In this formulation, from a man with relatively progressive credentials, female applicants could not win: they were either ‘attached’ back home, and therefore unlikely to last the minimum two years of service, or they were unattached – and therefore likely to cause headaches. It was irrelevant who they were as individuals or their personal circumstances. To remove any doubt about the gendered nature of these concerns, any ‘problem’ of men becoming attached to Indonesian women seems to have been left entirely out of consideration.

Objections to mixed-race marriages were rarely based explicitly on racial grounds, in keeping with the Australian discourses which rejected concepts of superiority while maintaining separation. Ailsa Zainu’ddin (née Thompson, and known in the ASCM as ‘Tommy’) met and married Zainu’ddin (‘Din’, who was working for the Indonesian Embassy at the time) in Australia. In an oral history interview given in 2006, she described the reactions of her family and friends to news of her marriage to a Muslim Indonesian. Zainu’ddin recalled that her sister was initially troubled by the prospect of her interracial marriage – and having mixed-race children. When asked by the interviewer whether this opposition was what the interviewer described as a ‘standard’ biological racist objection, Zainu’ddin was emphatic that this was not so – rather, it was concern that mixed-race children would be ‘social misfits’ accepted by neither parents’ culture.<sup>293</sup> This construction – not of openly racial opposition, but of social and cultural concerns – can be taken as a reflection of the background of the mostly middle class, mostly Protestant volunteers of the Scheme.

The Department of External Affairs was clearly alarmed by the marriages, and considered any woman who married an Indonesian automatically excluded from the program, and thus unable to claim any of the assistance that the Australian

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<sup>292</sup> H. Feith to B. Evans and D. Anderson, 27.01.1951, “VGS Papers”, item 52.

<sup>293</sup> Ailsa Zainu’ddin, *Ailsa Zainu’ddin interviewed by David Walker in the Australia-Asia Studies Oral History Project*, interview by David Walker, sound recording and transcript, August 31, 2006, 35–37, nla.obj-213768362, NLA.

Government provided to the Scheme. This issue caused a significant crisis when a volunteer, Joan Minogue, reapplied to the program after completing a term of service in Indonesia. In an informal interview with staff at the Australian Embassy in Indonesia, she was asked whether her intention in remaining in Indonesia was to marry an Indonesian. 'Unaware that it may be used against her', Minogue answered in the affirmative, despite being advised that she need not answer the question.<sup>294</sup>

This information was relayed to the section of the Department of External Affairs which managed the Colombo Plan. The Department declined to conduct a formal interview with Minogue, a necessary step in the application process. The matter was taken up by the National Committee, who viewed it as an existential threat to the Scheme and a direct challenge to the Scheme's aims, and warranted a face to face meeting in which the Chair and Secretary of the VGS made representations on behalf of Minogue, a core member of the Scheme. This meeting was minuted in detail, with the arguments and counter-arguments of the VGS and the Department demonstrating the stark division in the treatment of interracial marriage. In the first instance, the Department asserted that loyalty and liability to remain in Indonesia were primary considerations:

It appeared to me that E.A. had no clear cut reason for rejecting Joan except the intention to marry. When pressed, two points emerged, firstly that a person who marries an Indonesian would have divided loyalty between the two countries, and secondly that it was not reasonable for the Australian Government to pay the fares, etc. of a person who was likely not to return who may change citizenship. Reference was made to the educational role returning volunteer graduates have in Australia.<sup>295</sup>

Both assertions pre-supposed a gendered deference to the husband in matters of loyalty and of location, and diminished the value of the possible contributions that women could make to the Scheme. The VGS representatives protested, pointing to the existing policy which provided that graduates who marry during their period of

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<sup>294</sup> "The Case of Joan Minogue", n.d.[1959], "VGS Papers", item 116.

<sup>295</sup> "Notes on visit to Sydney and Canberra by D.S. Anderson on the 15th and 16th July", "VGS Papers", item 116.

service remained active in the program and eligible for repatriation expenses. They were left to feel that:

There is no clear and accurate policy by E.A. Some officers I think, would say that marriage generally need not contradict the aims of the Scheme; [E.A. officer] Truelove on the other hand feels that marriage with Indonesians is undesirable but that nothing can be done to stop persons becoming engaged and marrying in Indonesia, hence the above rules. The discussion about marriage and divided loyalty made me feel that the officers present were very woolly on the aims of the Scheme and the reasons for the Australian Government supporting such a Scheme.

I attempted to make and have accepted the point that in assessing a candidate, total motivation with respect to the aims of the Scheme was the proper criterion and that intention to marry may or may not be relevant. This point was not acceptable; it was felt that the intention to marry would in itself make a person unacceptable.<sup>296</sup>

A final pitch was then made to the officers on the grounds that Joan Minogue would most likely still go to Indonesia without government assistance, and her rejection from the Scheme for the sole reason of marrying an Indonesian would harm the public image of both the Scheme and the Australian Government. Again, the Department refused to yield. Tellingly, the VGS made it clear to the Australian Government that they would continue their opposition to this on principle, continue to associate with Joan Minogue, and even consider funding her without further approval.

Unlike Cold War politics or ethnicity, which had previously excluded individuals from the Scheme, by 1959 the idea of interracial marriage as something bound up in the aims of the Scheme was firmly in place. The minutes of the next meeting of the National Committee reported that the Chair of the VGS, Don Anderson, wrote to the E.A. after the face-to-face meeting affirming three points of principle that the Scheme maintained:

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<sup>296</sup> "Notes on visit to Sydney and Canberra by D.S. Anderson on the 15th and 16th July", "VGS Papers", item 116.

- (a) That we feel that in assessing a candidate, total motivation with respect to the aims of the Scheme is the proper criterion and that intention to marry an Indonesian need not necessarily disqualify a person.
- (b) That the contribution towards the aims of the Scheme that a person marrying an Indonesian can make might, over a period of years, far exceed the efforts of a single person during one term. The three girls who have so far married Indonesians have continued to advance our aims after marriage.
- (c) That the suggestion by E.A. that marriage would give rise to divided loyalties indicates a very limited view of the Scheme. We feel that divided loyalties are inherent in a Scheme such as this for graduates are at the same time Australian citizens and public servants of the Indonesian Government.<sup>297</sup>

Herb Feith's initial anxieties around mixed race intimacy within the VGS were not a permanent feature. Rather, the interracial marriages that came out of the Scheme, four in total, soon became something worthy of celebration, and another opportunity to demonstrate in a practical way the anti-racism of the project. In celebrating 'international' marriages, the women of the VGS also highlighted the positive aspects of the perceived gender egalitarianism of the Indonesian middle-classes they worked alongside and with whom they lived.

Thelma Rungkat (née Ashton), who had married Indonesian civil servant Richard Rungkat, wrote an article for the third edition of *Djembatan* on what it meant to be married to an Indonesian. In it, the gender relations between man and woman are never the source of conflict, but rather a source of pride and mutual respect. But they are also assisted by the servants who customarily perform much of the housework with which contemporary Australian wives were occupied:

Like Australian husbands, Indonesians like a good meal after a hard-working day and the servant who can give him food "just like mother's servant makes" is a jewel to be handled carefully and with deep respect. Such is at present my reward. Fortunately my husband does not demand intricate Indonesian dishes on all occasions – I should never be able to provide it myself – but on many occasions he enjoys Australian food as well. Thus I get a chance to do a little cooking in my beautiful kitchen, complete with gas stove and plenty of fresh air and light – but it is never an obligation on a day when I come home weary from the heat and stuffiness of the office. It is delightful to come

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<sup>297</sup> "National Committee Meeting No.7", 25.07.1959, "VGS Papers," item 116.

home to a clean neat flat with the daily washing and the ironing done, and to be able to rest for a few hours before sitting down with one's husband to a pleasantly served meal and then – joy of joys! – no washing up to be done afterwards.<sup>298</sup>

Far from the orientalist depictions of oppressed and submissive women, Thelma Rungkat highlights the respect that married women received in the workplace. In sharp distinction to the accepted practices in Australia, married women in Indonesia, even pregnant women, continue working:

One of the nice things about family planning in Indonesia is that working wives can plan to go on working up till and after the baby's birth. Three month's leave with full pay is the Indonesian government's way of recognising the dependence of the family on the salary of both partners. This gives one the chance to start the baby off well in life for the first three months, and it is usually possible to find a younger member of one's family connections to act as nursemaid after that time while husband and wife are at work. Working during pregnancy is so accepted that no-one is either surprised or embarrassed and every effort is made to help you feel comfortable during this time at the office or at home – husband, servant, family, friends are all considerate.<sup>299</sup>

This article marks a trend of using the very same mix-gender intimacy which was considered a 'problem' to humanise the Indonesian other, present a conscious rejection of White Australia, and highlight egalitarianism on not just racial but gender lines. By the time that Ivan Southall was collecting information on the Scheme for *Indonesia Face to Face* his interviewees had the language of the American civil rights movement to support mixed race marriages. The volunteers proclaimed that mixed-race marriages were the best way to prevent any more 'Little Rocks' – shorthand for the crisis provoked by the desegregation of Little Rock High School in the United States. The logical outcome of these relationships – mixed-race children – would be the bridge between two cultures such that there would be no more suspicion and animosity bred from ignorance.

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<sup>298</sup> Thelma Rungkat, "Married Life in Indonesia," *Djembatan*, February 1958, 12.

<sup>299</sup> Rungkat, "Married Life in Indonesia," 13.

The relationships themselves were held up as something different, transcending typical power relations and holding out hope for a relationship of full equals. For Thelma Rungkat, the 'international' marriage was taking the equality of nations from the public sphere into the private sphere. She wrote:

"I suppose," she says, "many marriages in Indonesia are contracted now by free choice between the two people concerned, but few are quite so dependent upon the very deep and equal regard of two people as the international marriage, which, even in the marriage laws of the country, is recognized as having a unique equality between the partners concerned. Without mutual support, who would go through all the difficulties and surmount all the obstacles involved with personal, legal and national connections?"<sup>300</sup>

Three decades after her time in Indonesia, Ailsa Zainu'ddin would, tongue in cheek, endorse cross-cultural marriages as a way to safely challenge the expectations of both societies, telling an audience at the Monash Centre for Southeast Asian Studies 'I will put in a plug for cross cultural marriages because it does mean that you can make your own rules and take what you like from either side and you will be excused in what you do by that that you are married to one of 'these strange foreigners'".<sup>301</sup>

This remarkable transition from outright hostility to the 'problem' of interracial marriages to the outright defence of them as being aligned with the aims of the Scheme, and maybe even exceeding non-intimate relations in furthering them, reflects the changing ways in which gender could be used as a front in the opposition to White Australia – as deeply embedded gendered anxieties were overcome. While the Scheme and the Australian Government found their values and discourses aligned in matters of 'neighbourliness', they were at cross-purposes: the VGS were self-described 'cranks' when it came to the White Australia Policy, while the Australian Government used neighbourliness to defend White Australia.<sup>302</sup> When the intimate relations transgressed the racial barriers, with white Australians and non-white

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<sup>300</sup> Southall, *Indonesia Face to Face*, 162–63.

<sup>301</sup> Ailsa Zainu'ddin, ed., *Nearest Southern Neighbour: Some Indonesian Views of Australia and Australians*, Annual Indonesia Lecture Series 5 (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986), 92.

<sup>302</sup> I. Doig, "The Australian Scheme for Graduate Employment in Indonesia", 04.11.1954, "Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia" (1953-1958), 2, S.1433, University of Adelaide Archives.

Indonesians moving from neighbours to a single-family unit, the Australian Government could not support it, to the anger and bafflement of the Scheme's administrators.

*Maturity, safety, autonomy*

Men and women were not treated the same, nor did they share the same experiences or share an understanding of their experiences in Indonesia. Women as a category of independent actors within the Scheme with specific concerns, were rarely discussed by the VGS. Documents, such as the ten-page primer on what to expect in Indonesia were written with no information on problems that women might experience due to their sex in Indonesia.<sup>303</sup> There were misgivings about the safety of women volunteers, which caused significant delays in the applications of several women who intended to teach in the English Language Inspectorate. Joan Minogue and Noela Motum were initially denied approval to participate in the Scheme, as they were unaccompanied and 'immature' (under 21). It was only under the proviso that the women be placed together and with an experienced volunteer that the Department approved their participation in the Scheme.<sup>304</sup> After their acceptance, there were lingering concerns about their safety and ability to integrate into the area to which they were posted. John Gare, writing from the perspective of the Djakarta-based volunteers, advised Webb that the city they were posted to was a 'grim spot', where friends of a 'similar education etc.' would be much harder to come by, white women on bicycles should expect to have 'Belanda!' [Dutch!] called out as they pass, and where dancing is strictly forbidden.<sup>305</sup>

Whether they were in a rural area or in metropolitan Jakarta, women experienced the Scheme differently. Betty Feith wrote on the different, restricted experiences of female volunteers to Indonesia. Women experienced pressure to not leave their

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<sup>303</sup> See "Report by H. Feith to Students and Graduates Interested in the NUAUS Scheme for Graduate Employment in Indonesia", n.d., "VGS Papers", item 28.

<sup>304</sup> This didn't happen, causing some confusion on the docks in Jakarta. See J. Gare to J. Webb, 19.03.1957, "VGS Papers", item 35.

<sup>305</sup> J. Gare to J. Webb, 23.01.1957, "VGS Papers", item 35.

residences alone, especially at night. It was at night that most socialising occurs in Indonesian society, after the end of the work day, leaving some female volunteers trapped in an unfulfilling cycle of having no friends and not being able to make friends due to restrictions on their movements. Feith recounts the experience of one female volunteer who lived in a hostel room:

with uncommunicative young ladies, public servants, in another Ministry who spent almost no time in their room after offices anyway, whose only interest seemed to be clothes, who not only spoke no English but talked to each other very quickly, and who perhaps begrudged the newcomer's presence in an already overcrowded room with large wardrobes shutting out the light and where there was obviously no room to put the Australian's heavy ship luggage! The Australian men could at least wander off on their own but girls were expected to be with other people, especially at night!<sup>306</sup>

But within this discomfort, there were also opportunities. Ailsa Zainu'ddin would later comment 'I went expecting to find that women in Indonesia were more restricted than we were in Australia but I quickly found they already had equal pay and maternity leave, that married women did not have to retire on marriage, which they did here until 1956'.<sup>307</sup>

This offered a different kind of autonomy and security than women could find in Australia. Elsewhere, anyone who picked up the first edition of *Djembatan* could have read Ailsa Zainu'ddin's reassuring article about safety in Indonesia, written under her family name of Thomson. Given the sarcastic title 'It's dangerous to go to Indonesia!', Zainu'ddin confronts the negative perception of Indonesia in Australian society:

If you plan to visit Indonesia, you will be most exceptional if you don't meet sooner or later the people who look aghast and say "But it's dangerous to go to Indonesia." Well-meaning friends will be the bearers of the most diverse rumours all designed to illustrate this theme. "You'll be stabbed in the back by a *betjak* boy in some dark and lonely Djakarta street. If you have to travel by *betjak* at night, don't take your eye off the driver." I was warned. It is plausible enough if you have never been there, but you don't

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<sup>306</sup> Feith, "An Episode," 40–41.

<sup>307</sup> Zainu'ddin, *Nearest Southern Neighbour*, 67.

have to be in Djakarta long to find that although there are many dark streets, there are no lonely ones – ask any courting couple!<sup>308</sup>

Despite the obsession with protection, and the curtailment of autonomy compared to the male volunteers, participating in the Scheme still reflected a kind of freedom that was absent in the lives of many contemporary Australian women. Zainu'ddin finished the article by encouraging people to think of Indonesia as dangerous because of its allure for Australians, who will never want to leave.<sup>309</sup> The back pages of *Djembatan*, where the *Omong-Omong* (gossip) section kept the friends of the Scheme up to date with the activities of volunteers, records the adventures that women were able to take thanks to their presence in Indonesia. Minogue and Motum, one edition reported, were 'in the throes' of learning to ride an old motorbike after holidaying in Bali.<sup>310</sup> These same women were reported in the next edition to be in Djakarta for festivities and to catch up with friends.<sup>311</sup>

## Conclusion

The way that the VGS interacted with the dominant concepts of White Australia reveals the impossibility of separating the internal changes in Australian society from the interactions that Australia had with the outside world, and especially the self-perception of the nation's place in Asia. The Scheme fed upon the dynamics of the post-war boom in migration, taking the structural changes required by the post-war boom in education and adopting the language of neighbourliness – meant to assuage fear of change – to challenge Australian insularity towards Asia. But this should not be taken as an immediate leap from White Australia to acceptance of multiculturalism, a policy which came into its own in the 1970s. The organisers of the Scheme may have been 'cranks' for White Australia, but they were closely tied to a half-way house of assimilationist politics, teaching migrants about the Australian way of life and expecting the volunteers to be sent to Indonesia to be familiar with the dominant Anglo-Australian culture, whether this represented the actual diversity of

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<sup>308</sup> Ailsa Thomson, "It's Dangerous to Go to Indonesia!," *Djembatan*, July 1957, 3.

<sup>309</sup> Thomson, "It's Dangerous to Go to Indonesia!," 4.

<sup>310</sup> "Omong-Omong," *Djembatan*, February 1958, 14.

<sup>311</sup> "Omong-Omong," *Djembatan*, June 1958, 15.

Australian society or not. Dutch-born applicants could not have their background scrubbed, and there remained lingering attachments to the idea of a wider 'Britisher' identity, which suggests that national identity was not as fixed as the volunteers would have no doubt wanted.

Challenging White Australia meant putting Australians into an unfamiliar social context, which provoked an appraisal of the role of gender and intimacy. The 'cranks' were not immune to reflexively wanting to protect and shelter women, and restrict the kind of friendship and understanding to be offered through the Scheme to a non-intimate, preferably masculine kind. Thankfully – from a twenty-first century standpoint – the Scheme's participants worked hard to defend interracial marriage as a new avenue for understanding and intercultural friendship, one which could have a far greater impact than short terms of service for the Indonesian Government. Interracial marriage, in short, became a point of distinction between the ideological neighbourliness of the Australian Government, which supported the Scheme but defended White Australia, and the Scheme itself, which saw familial bonds as the natural extension of such neighbourliness.

## **Conclusion**

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When Herb Feith took the stage in 1995, he focused on the singular importance that Molly Bondan had on his own life and, by extension, the VGS and everything that followed on from its brief existence. She had spent nearly a year, Feith realised in hindsight, testing him in their correspondence before agreeing to vouch for his bona fides with the Indonesian government. If he had failed to impress her then, the door may never have been opened for the other volunteers who followed. When he visited Bondan a decade later, when their disagreements over Sukarno were perhaps most acute, Feith was sure that he was at least one of her targets when she spoke of 'what our foreign critics fail to understand'. In many ways, this reflects the contingent nature of the whole Scheme: all the hopes and plans percolating inside young activists like Feith could have easily come to nothing – the fate of many previously untested and idealistic proposals. At the crucial moment, though, Molly Bondan vouched for Herb Feith's sincerity in wanting to help the Indonesian Republic, and that was enough.

The simplicity of the Scheme's core ideals belied the complexity of the situation with which these individuals were faced. Bridging the divide between Australia, insular and self-professedly white, and Indonesia, long the subject of colonial domination and advocate of Afro-Asian solidarity, was as daunting then as it seems to contemporary eyes. Faced with an irreconcilable divergence between what they hoped to achieve and what was possible in the circumstances with which they were presented, the VGS was neither a definitive success nor an outright failure. Even so, it became a vehicle through which experience was gained and lessons drawn for understanding and interacting across cultures. But to fully appreciate the VGS and its legacy, this understanding of the VGS requires the Scheme to be situated in its historical context. It is this historical perspective that this dissertation has set out to provide.

The first chapter examined some of the factors that made the VGS feasible at the outset of the 1950s. The fate of the Scheme may very well have rested on Molly

Bondan's assessment of Feith's character, but this chapter demonstrated that there were several factors at play in the formation of the VGS and its transformation from general principle into a workable aid program. A sense of unrealised potential of Australian-Indonesian relations, amid the 'disruptions' caused by World War Two and its aftermath encouraged the search for interactions such as those imagined by the VGS. Bondan would have been familiar with this, as a stand out activist within Australia during the 'honeymoon' period in her own right. This was a general sentiment that found fertile ground in the ASCM. This organisation – well versed in 'practical action', political as well as religious – provided a shared ideological background, a national infrastructure, and a network of influence to deliver a project of this size. The VGS only took shape, however, when the concept of 'embedded technical assistance' was taken up by a group of student activists, including Herb Feith, in Melbourne.

The second chapter laid out the historical progress of the VGS, its composition, and whether the VGS was drawn from the 'Chifley-admiring intellectual sub-culture of worldmindedness and political renewal' with which Feith identified himself. From 1950 to 1953, as the second chapter showed, the Scheme was faced with an ambivalent Australian government and the need to legitimate its own aims. After achieving that legitimacy, from 1953 until the end of the decade the Scheme reached its high point in terms of activity and reach. As the decade closed, however, the dark clouds that they saw as hanging over the Indonesian economic and political landscape were proving a greater obstacle to the Scheme than its administrators had supposed, and they were openly debating what role, if any, the VGS could have in the future. In terms of composition, this chapter showed that the Scheme never met its optimistic – some might say grandiose – expectations. Even so the Scheme had demonstrated many strengths. The volunteer cohort was relatively gender balanced, with a large number of teachers. Geographically, their common experiences were centred on two cities: Melbourne, where the largest number of volunteers had attended university, and Jakarta, where the largest number of volunteers were posted. Finally, this chapter turned to the idea of a Chifley admiring sub-culture. While this was an accurate description of Feith and his own politics at the time – an

ardent Labor supporter well-read in liberal and moderate socialist thinking – this chapter outlined the ways in which evidence from the Scheme point to a much broader engagement with ‘worldmindedness’ and Indonesian nationalism than might be expected from something constrained by a particular sub-culture.

This pluralism extended only so far, something which was taken up in detail in the latter two chapters. The third chapter explored the role of the Cold War in the history of VGS, in Australia and Indonesia. Rather than having little impact on the VGS, as has sometimes been argued, this chapter argued that the Cold War, in fact, to a significant extent shaped and hemmed in the Scheme. In Australia, this occurred most clearly through the selection process, which restricted radical participation in the Scheme and in one instance involved the vetoing of successful applicants by the anti-communist Minister for External Affairs, Richard Casey. The influence of the Cold War on the VGS was more insidious inside Indonesia itself, colouring the worldview, experiences, and connections that the volunteers brought to and took away from their service.

The final chapter of this thesis focused on the place of identity and White Australia in the Scheme. This chapter demonstrated how White Australia was not just a fixed pillar of Australian government policy that the volunteers were taking a stand against. Integral to ‘White Australia’ were an array of dynamic national, ethnic, and gender identities that in turn influenced and shaped the Scheme and the experiences borne from it. This chapter focused on three roles for White Australia and identity in the Scheme. It first turned to the role that the mass immigration of non-English speaking Europeans after World War Two played in the Scheme’s appeal, showing how individuals connected their own experiences of change in post-war society to the Scheme’s declared ideals. It then looked at the problematic role of nationality in the Scheme, showing how one Australian citizen unable to participate because of ‘Dutch-sounding’ name, the rules for ‘New Australians’ wishing to participate in the Scheme unclear, and lingering cross-over identification with ‘Britishers’ and Britishness among some participants – and most applicants.

The final aspect that the chapter examined was the role of gender in the Scheme. This section established how the VGS negotiated gender as part of its lived opposition to White Australia. The attitudes regarding mixed-race marriage and intimacy moved from fear that this would threaten the Scheme's success to outright lobbying and promotion of 'international' marriages as a pure distillation of the ideals of the VGS. Contemporaneously, the experiences that women volunteers had in Indonesia spurred the articulation of different perspectives on the gendered norms of White Australia.

This thesis, as the title suggests, has placed the VGS in a historical perspective. But the Scheme's relevance extends beyond empirical scrutiny of this single organisation, to what it can tell us about the creation of knowledge and anti-racist activism in Australia. Placing the VGS in its historical context reveals the extent to which so much of our knowledge has been conditioned and structured by the historical context in which it was gained.

No one is more revealing in this instance than Herb Feith himself. In *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy*, Feith marked a clear division of political actors in Indonesia between 'administrators' and 'solidarity-makers' – cutting across ideological distinctions to group those he saw as rational, liberal, and committed to the democratic rule of law against those he saw as committed to an emotional, revolutionary, or illiberal politics. Elements of the political elite with whom he identified, such as Hatta and the Socialist Party, were lionised in their struggles against demagoguery. This was a model of Indonesian politics gained from his experiences under the Scheme, but is now considered incomplete. Discussions of the influence of Islamic forces on Indonesian politics are particularly subdued in his writings from this time, something that he was challenged on at the very conference at which he paid tribute to Molly Bondan. The framework Feith adopted was grounded in his personal experiences and biases as a liberal socialist, a Student Christian, and a bureaucrat working in a government agency populated by secular nationalists and other assorted 'administrators'. Perhaps without realising it, an

almost sectarian view was put forward that influenced generations of thinking on Indonesian politics and society. Tracing the context for the experiences and information that comes together in the form of 'expert knowledge' in no way diminishes the rigour or value of such knowledge, but historians must feel comfortable critiquing knowledge and situating knowledge in its social context.

The lessons to be drawn from the VGS for anti-racist activism in Australia are mixed, but ultimately hopeful. The 1950s are a period, as historian Anna Haebich has noted, with 'a peculiar mix of contrasts – rapid change and conformity, exhilaration and fear' – that resonate with the global climate today. Even if Australia is a more multicultural and open society than it was halfway through the twentieth century, the need to 'build bridges' across cultural divides seems as pressing now as then. The same can be said of Australian attitudes towards Indonesia, which have improved little since the 1950s.<sup>312</sup>

This thesis has contextualised the VGS within its specific historical time and place. By necessity this involved discussions regarding anti-communist screening, ethnic-based discrimination, and the role of gender in the Scheme's operations which might be uncomfortable for anyone attempting to idolise the VGS. But these are elements of its historical context. If lessons are to be drawn from history, then the history of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme demonstrates that what seems fanciful, novel, even impossible, can have long lasting and positive impacts. There are many limitations imposed on those seeking to change something as deeply ingrained as the race- and ethnic-based ordering of societies, but new opportunities to confront and question this rise and fall. As the VGS shows, idealists who believe in practical action wield a potent weapon in their struggle.

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<sup>312</sup> Jewel Topsfield, "Research Finds Many Australians Negative and Ill-Informed about Indonesia," *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/research-finds-many-australians-negative-and-illinformed-about-indonesia-20160814-gqs6z3.html>.

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### **Dissertations**

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