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## IHSS Research Seminar Program 2024

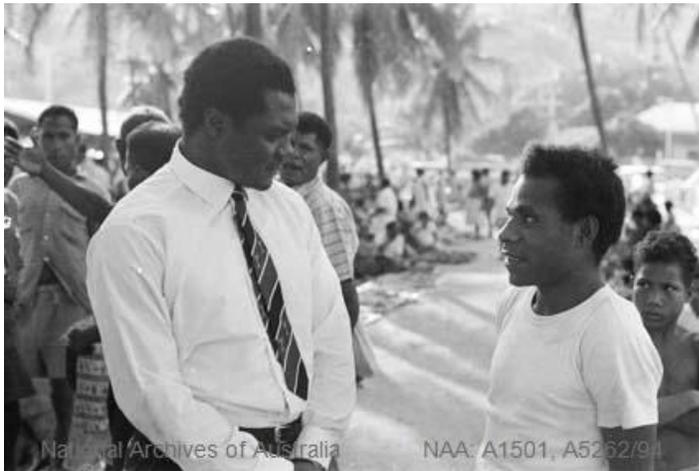
# “A visitor from another planet”: Tom Mboya’s Australia, 1964

**Dr Jon Piccini (NSAH)**

Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Nell Musgrove (NSAH) & Dr. Sarah Bendall (IHSS)

**Tuesday 13 August, 12-1pm AEST**

To be held in room 460.3.01 and online via Teams



**Image:** The Honourable Thomas J Mboya, Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs in the Government of Kenya, and Mrs Mboya were guests of the Australian Federal Government. They visited the Territory of Papua and New Guinea [photographic image]. 1 photographic negative: b&w, acetate. NAA: A1501, A5262/94.

**Abstract:** Kenyan politician and trade unionist Tom Mboya visited Australia and the-then Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG) in September 1964. Mboya was Oxford-educated, well-tailored, and spoke eloquently on the need for moderation as decolonisation

unfolded. He seemed to personify a future for Africa that was liberal and pro-Western. Mboya was, however, not so easily characterised, variously labelled a democrat and a dictator, moderate and radical, nationalist and sellout. One reporter dubbed him “a visitor from another planet”.

In my talk I want to explore how Mboya’s visit was received in Australia. This requires thinking beyond the logo map of a ‘nation for a continent’: in 1964, Papuans were Australian citizens (of a sort), while Aboriginal people continued to be denied full citizenship, not to mention real equality. Mboya was keenly aware of this. Drawing on Commonwealth government records, his own personal papers and voluminous commentary, I show how Mboya’s Australian visit was read in diverse ways and served equally dissimilar purposes. “The moderate Mr Mboya”, as one editorial put it, sat alongside the radical. By embracing his polyvalent persona, Mboya could serve multiple and sometimes-conflicting agendas, while pursuing his own brand of South-South dialogue.

**Bio:** Jon Piccini is Senior Lecturer in History at ACU, and has written two books, *Transnational Protest, Australia and the 1960s* (2016) and *Human Rights in Twentieth Century Australia* (2019). He is currently writing a history of Australia’s experiences of decolonisation, tentatively titled *The Forgotten Empire*.